

Title:

**International Business Communication/Performance
in English – the changes over 30 years and the training
implications**

Who are we

My name is Ivan Kearns and I founded Nations 33 years ago in 1978.

Nations area of expertise is English immersion training for its corporate clients throughout Europe. Participant profiles are executives and senior professionals.

Why are we here

Because of our unbroken experience of more than 30 years providing immersion training for our clients we want to present to you what we see as the major changes in the needs and requirements of participants going on immersion training today.

Our presentation today deals with

- ➔ how participants' training needs on immersion training programmes have changed over 30 years and especially over the past 10 years, and where they are at now and for the foreseeable future,
- ➔ how this impacts their expectations – their demands – their requirements
- ➔ and has led to the need for what we call “as close to reality based training” where the participant is a key player in his or her training - Participants are protagonists and they don't want to waste time

Being able to perform and communicate successfully in English in a professional environment – that is what corporate clients and participants expect following a training programme in English – no more, no less.

So what has changed in terms of training objectives over the past 30 years and especially the past 10 years in a globalised world? And how should training programmes reflect this?

Our presentation, the key points of which are on our website – www.nationsireland.com – is divided into 3 parts

- 1. The context which has brought the changes about**
- 2. Implications in terms of training response so as to deal with the real international business communication needs of participants**
- 3. Client/participant feedback and how Nations has adapted to these new requirements**

1. Context can be summarised as: More for Less

Less time – more pressure to perform in English

Why? Globalisation + Technological change + Economic crisis

Before: It was sufficient to speak English reasonably well

Now and in future our clients need to be able to perform successfully under pressure in English

Result: Serious and immense implications for how English immersion training programmes need to be structured or engineered

2. Implications

Participants, highly experienced professionals who must operate in a globalised world are key players in their own training

– They are protagonists

They want to benchmark themselves against their peers from different countries, both native and non-native speakers of English to see for themselves where they have difficulties in real business communication, to get immediate feedback and input and then repeat the benchmarking process.

This is the reason why we fundamentally reengineered the structure of our immersion programme 10 years ago, moving from a classical 1 to 1 format to a programme that is based on

“getting as close to reality as possible”.

We called this **The Nations Total English Programme**

It was very interesting as in the following year 2002 year I attended the Encode conference in Munich where Nigel Holden delivered a key note presentation dealing with

what Business Communication is really about, namely,

- ✓ *Getting and keeping customers*
- ✓ *Sharing know-how, values and experience*
- ✓ *Opening and maintaining networks*
- ✓ *Making sense of situations*
- ✓ *Securing the good will of the stakeholders*

as well as his observations, perhaps something that might be a bit **controversial**, that international business communication happens through networks rather than across cultures.

This was interesting and conformed to the feedback we were getting from executives on our immersion programmes. I will come back to this in a moment.

3. Client/Participant

So now to the **third part** of my presentation – client feedback and what our participants are telling us – and I am talking here only about Nations area of expertise, namely English immersion training for international business communication.

➔ Participants often don't want to be on English immersion training programmes!

They need English now – urgently – but because of time pressures both professionally and privately they don't want to have to travel, but it is the only way to achieve quickly the performance improvement they need.

**This changes
their expectations,
their demands and
their requirements.**

➔ They don't want to waste any time during their training

This has big implications for how the training programme needs to be engineered and delivered.

Their training day must be structured so as to correspond to a real life business day often of 10/12 hours.

They want and need to improve their communication skills in English,

but if their time is not maximised they would prefer to be at home

➔ Participants want to influence actively their programme, focus and concentrate on what is important for them during 1 to 1 training.

Busy professionals tell us that they don't want to waste time working with other participants in group training who have very different needs and agendas.

But also

➔ It's not only English they want to learn - it's how to be more successful communicating in English in their jobs

They want to perform better in English, not simply learn English.

They are under pressure to deliver at a high level in English at work. They want to benchmark themselves against other professionals.

How? This they do in targeted group workshops dealing with areas such as confcalls, negotiations, presentations, sharing professional experiences, etc.

So the programme is neither 1 to 1 nor group nor some 1 to 1 and then group but an ongoing back and forth between 1 to 1 and clearly focused and recorded workshops for participant, peer and trainer feedback.

This feedback loop continues throughout their training.

➔ Participants don't really want to be told how to behave "interculturally" during their immersion training

They are experienced, successful executives and professionals. They want to network and exchange experiences with other fellow professionals from different countries –

the training programme needs to provide for this.

Trainers need to be able to facilitate this exchange and ensure that the communication difficulties encountered during these discussions are understood, dealt with and eliminated.

This feedback supports Professor Holden's observation that -

international business communication happens through networks rather than across cultures.

Michael Woodford, Ex CEO of Olympus recently fired for too much straight talking, was quoted in June this year in The Financial Times as saying **cultural differences in business are “*massively overstated*”,** and describes his mandate as **“*do what you do in Europe, and do that around the world*”.**

In the same article Craig Naylor, CEO of Nippon Sheet Glass, is quoted as saying *“We are not a Japanese company with operations overseas. We are an international company with a headquarters in Japan”.*

People must be themselves - if not they will be perceived as being false.

Executives on our programmes deal with other senior executives from different countries/cultures, they get to know each other, and they network.

People do business with people they know!

People do business with people they trust!

This does not mean that preparation and awareness for working in a new country/culture is not important, it is, but participants do not see it as a relevant part of English communication training.

➔ Participants want to test themselves on what they have worked on in their 1 to 1 sessions against other professionals – not just against trainers.

They want to win!

Senior executives and business professionals are very competitive. They want to know how they can perform successfully against their peers. **Facilitating tough discussions and potential conflicts are all part of the trainers' job.**

In the same Financial Times article Mr Woodford says *“Harmony and consensus have their place and time but scrutiny and challenging – devil’s advocate, whatever*

you want to call it – leads to better decision making, you have to be able to confront”.

This can't be done working alone with a trainer in a classroom.

- ➔ They need to have a real test, uncontrolled and with other professionals not trainers, that measures their performance skills under pressure in English. Recorded group work is essential for this.

The above are some of the reasons why what we at Nations call “*as close to reality based training*” has become essential. Why the participant as a key player is more and more important. Why training organisations and trainers must understand and respond to the major commitment clients and participants make when they go on training programmes.

One of Professor Holden's essential elements of business communication is "*getting and keeping customers*". Training organisations and the trainers within them must do this as well. Training organisations and their trainers must be close to their clients if they want to deliver long-term value.

To sum up and coming back to the title of our presentation:

International Business Communication/Performance in English – the changes over 30 years and the training implications

The context has changed – less time more pressure

As a result participants' expectations, needs and requirements in terms of the structure of immersion programmes have changed and must be taken into account

Thank you