

FINAL REPORT

Material: Soft skills topics and job application techniques
Student Group: Tibetan University Students, Chennai
Date: 11 – 13 December 2009

1.0 Overview

Overall, the programme appeared to be successful with students showing enthusiasm. They seemed to be receptive to the ideas shared with them and most of them participated in discussions and presented their ideas. In most group situations, there are always students who are stronger and more vocal than others. This was the case in this programme also. Detailed information will be presented below, along with a topic by topic analysis, which will include not only student feedback but also a review/debrief by the workshop team.

2.0 Report

2.1 Introduction

This report is a follow up of the “*Business English Communications Skills*” Programme that was held in Chennai for a group of Tibetan university students. The report aims to provide an overall summary of the course, as well as provide feedback and analysis of the programme.

2.2 Objective of Programme

The initial objective of the programme was to follow up on the ENVISION workshop that was held in February 2009. In addition it was to prepare students for the transition from university to professional life. Along with discussing issues they may come across, the programme also aimed to talk about preparation of job applications, which included writing CVs, cover letters and looking at appropriate job advertisements to apply for. Another objective was to encourage the students to think freely, spontaneously and ‘outside the box’.

2.3 Methodology of Programme

The workshop was a 3-day programme, with the first day being an introduction and follow up of the ENVISION workshop that was held in February 2009. The following 2 days were the “*Business English Communications Skills*” programme.

The methodology aimed to provide a combination of theoretical and practical learning. Half of the session was knowledge sharing, which included a presentation and clips, and the other part tried to involve the students in practical activities such as role plays, games and team activities.

2.4 Analysis of Programme

As mentioned above, students appeared to be positive and enthusiastic about the programme. Following are some areas that were highlighted:

- **Learning skills** - Most students seemed to grasp the concepts discussed. We encouraged them to ask many questions if they were unsure, which some did. There were a few areas that some participants could not comprehend as well as others. These were noted in their feedback forms and will be discussed below in the feedback section.
- **Presentation /Communication Skills** - A large part of the students showed strong presentation and communication skills, which was evident during discussions and group debates. It was through the role play activities and other similar sessions that encouraged students to speak more freely and confidently.
- **Group Interaction Skills** - The group dynamics looked to become stronger as the workshop progressed. Initially there was a self-imposed segregation of male and female by the students, which seems to be a common cultural issue with the Tibetan students. However, they were made to integrate as soon as the workshop started.
Most students generally seemed confident, however the dynamics and ‘spark’ developed as the sessions progressed. I was advised by one participant that many of the Tibetan students studying in Chennai tend to be more conservative than other cities, so this may have been a factor. By the end of the programme though, students looked to have strong interaction skills, with activities held playing a large part in this.

2.5 Areas of Improvement

In the short period of the programme, the students appeared to have made a good improvement on their ‘soft skills’ and have the potential to develop even further. Students should also continue enhancing their oral skills.

2.6 Challenges

Overall the programme seemed to run smoothly, however there were a couple of issues faced that made the programme challenging, which will be discussed in detail in the feedback section. These included time constraints, infrastructure (venue and technology), student commitment, and student comprehension of the programme objectives.

2.7 Student Feedback and ENVISION/trainer Debrief

We conducted a feedback session with the students and overall they seemed to be very happy and satisfied, feeling that they had learnt a lot. They raised some points, some of which we, the team, also agreed with. These, incorporated with the outcomes of the team’s debrief session, are described below.

It is also important to keep in mind that each student has a different objective and need, thus resulting in conflicting comments. Another point I personally feel is that although it is important to make such opportunities available to all Tibetan students, it is equally important to make it effective for the ones that are actually serious and motivated about such programmes.

	TOPIC	COMMENTS
General	Overall programme	Students were positive, appreciative and felt the programme beneficial. The general feeling of the team was also the same.
	Programme title	After the debrief session, it was felt that this may need to be reviewed, as part of the programme focused on job application processes and the other were on Business English/soft skills topics.
	Programme objective/briefing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would link in with comments on ‘programme objective’. • In addition, students need to be briefed about the programme prior to commencement to ensure attendance of ‘serious’ participants. A suggestion was that 1 or 2 ENVISION members could go down earlier.
	Programme audience	This programme was originally targeted for 3 rd Year students. However some students from other years attended and a few of those felt it was less suitable for them at the stage they’re at. This may have been avoided if registration was strict and briefing given at the start.
	Registration	A general feeling by the whole team was that this, along with attendance, needs to be strict and monitored carefully (for the reasons mentioned above). This would involve perhaps setting a refundable fee and certificate to ensure commitment from students.
	Duration of course	Some were happy but many students wanted it to be longer.
	Timing	A few students found it difficult to juggle the course with their prior university commitments. A suggestion may be to conduct these workshops during university holidays.
	Programme schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would have to be reviewed as part of preparation. The general feeling that there was too much to cover in a small amount of time, especially with the students wanting more. This, along with the late arrival of participants, resulted in delayed schedules at times. • A suggestion for lunch provision for small groups to maintain timing.
	Logistics/Venue	The venue on the first day was perfect but moving venues on the second and third day made it harder for the students to commute to, and was also not a conducive environment for training.
	Language medium	This needs to be determined. I understand the need to speak Tibetan and although we don’t want to deliver an ultimatum to speak English, if it’s to be called an ‘English’ communication skills programme then it should be in English especially as that is the international business language. However, I understand that sometimes comprehension might not be there so it would have to be reinforced in Tibetan, or, as suggested by ENVISION, the programme would be bilingual.
	Participation/speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students wanted more speakers but this was not a workshop like in Feb 2009. There were budget and time constraints. • Some students felt there should have been more involvement of participants but again, it was a timing issue. • Some students didn’t want additional comments by many speakers but others did, resulting in differing opinions.
	Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally students were happy with most of the topics. • A couple of students felt not enough time was spent on a topic and others felt it was too long. • Some students wanted politics and religion discussed however this was not the objective of the workshop – this goes back to proper student briefing prior to commencement. • Some students wanted career counselling, which could either be included if time permitted or have a separate workshop for this.
	Activities/games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More games had time allowed and better processing of activities. • Discussed better integration of ENVISION team.
	Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a team, we all agreed that this could be improved.
Recapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful on Day 2 but should have happened on all days. 	

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TOPIC		COMMENTS
DAY 1 – 11/12/2009 <i>Led by the ENVISION team</i>	Self-introduction by team	• Successful
	Partner introduction	• Successful
	Warm up games	• Successful
	Feedback on GVYT	• Successful, although 1 student felt there was too much information.
	GTPN	• Successful, although there were some preparation and technical issues with the ppt.
	Discussion issues	• Done through role plays and generally positive as it broke the ice and brought out their creativity as well as issues. • One comment from ENVISION was that it didn't bring out the topic as much as they could have due to concentration on the role play.
TOPIC		COMMENTS
DAY 2 – 12/12/2009 <i>Led by Rohini Mehta</i>	Partner presentation on each other's careers	• Successful
	Video clip – Tibetan boy achieving excellence	• Successful and relevant to students
	Topic: Change (transition to professional world);	• Good topic and content, using 'Who moved my Cheese'. • It was felt by one of the ENVISION members that the reading part was not successful but the idea to get students to read was to work on 'English skills' even if some have difficulty. This would push the weaker ones and try to give them confidence. • Role plays would have been good but restricted by time constraints.
	Teamwork; Activity: Human Machine game	• Successful activity and great student creativity. • There could have been more processing.
	Leadership;	• Good transition from teamwork to leadership. • Most students were happy but some said it was difficult to action as they were not confident.
	Topic: Preparation for Job Applications: CV writing; Choosing job advertisements; Cover letters;	• Generally a successful session though there were debates about some information presented on CVs. • Suggestion of preparing 2 versions of CVs for the Indian and international market
	Topic: Email writing;	• Successful
	Group Activity: Games/Sports session	• Originally meant to be a team sports session (to build on the concept of teamwork) but was changed to indoor games due to logistics.
TOPIC		COMMENTS
DAY 3 – 13/12/2009 <i>Led by Rohini Mehta</i>	Topic: Cross cultural sensitivity;	• Successful role plays and good comprehension by students. • It was felt by one of the ENVISION members that this topic could have been left out. However, with the world becoming more global, and especially with the Tibetan community's integration in the India and international community, it is an important topic to be included in this kind of programmes. Out of the 32 feedback forms only 2 commented that they found this 'least' useful. Had time permitted, this could have been discussed further, thus showing its value.
	Business Etiquette;	• This linked in with cross culture and was generally successful.
	Corporate vs. Organisational culture;	• This was not very successful and is one topic that probably could have been excluded, due to the complexity of it and time constraint.
	Ethics + Integrity;	• Apart from a couple, nearly all agreed that this was important, even if sometimes difficult to implement.
	Topic: Customer Service; Activity: Role plays	• Successful role plays. • There could have been more processing of role plays.
	Topic: Interview techniques; Activity: Mock interviews	• The initial idea was to do a 'mock' interview, however I changed this on the day to a 'panel' format due to time. Although this still seemed to be useful, it probably wasn't as effective as the 'mock' interview scenario, and as suggested by an ENVISION member, working on the whole body language of the interviewee.
	Group Debates;	• Due to lack of time we were only able to hold one impromptu debate with audience participation, which the students seemed to enjoy. The aim was to make them have fun and think spontaneously about something other than the serious topics they are used to discussing.

3.0 Next Step

All students seem keen to follow up with additional workshops and training programmes.