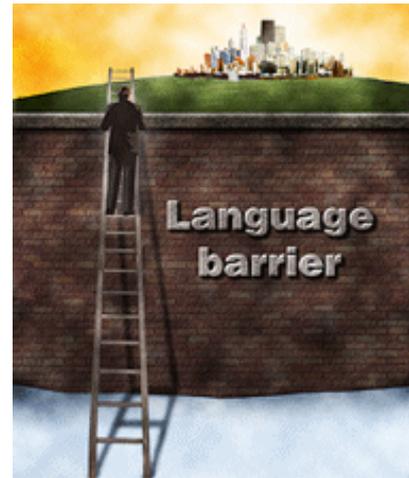


Are you fair to Transferee Employees?

by Zerelde Uys

The Language Transferee: "A person who transfers daily from his/her natural language environment to a different one in order to make a living and is expected to cope as a mother-tongue user."

You are just about ready to jump a bridge for lack of understanding why some employees are just not coping at work. You have sent them for training, you have tightened the reins to have more checks and balances built in for tighter control.... you have even considered retrenchment! ... even for yourself.



I recently received two such plights. The first company is in the logistics business and good drivers are their main challenge. The second had to do property evaluations according to municipal requirements for certificate issue, and employed matriculants on a contract basis.

Both companies felt disheartened about their efforts to recruit and train the right people. The second had even ended the contract with a first group and recruited a second in the hope of employing better quality workers. Training efforts were increased - but to no avail! Both companies thought to increase the minimum required levels of schooling in their recruitment policy...

I asked to see the documentation that employees needed to interact with. I also studied some excerpts from their training material and came up with the following:

1. Readability Index

We use Gunning's Fog Index to determine the readability levels of documents. It is a handy yardstick as guide to determine understanding of the reader. The Index provides an indication of the number of formal learning years needed to comfortably interact with the written text. If the copy tests 13 or more, it is beyond the danger line of reading difficulty. This writing will be at a tertiary level of complexity and the reader is likely to find it heavy going even though he is paying close attention. Copy with a Fog Index of 13 or more therefore runs the danger of being ignored or misunderstood.

The logistics company's delivery procedure and evaluation test for recruitment needed the reader to have a formal learning experience of at least Grade 11 and 12 (in English and assumed on-standard education provision) for comfortable understanding. (FOG 11/12). The accident procedure and quality inspection process (FOG 13/15) was just too complex for the majority of readers, and a given that a non-mother-tongue user of English will have little understanding.

The RI for five selections of paragraphs from the second company's Field Guide reflected an average of 14. It also contained a lot of technical vocabulary and required a high degree of mastering spatial relational concepts by the reader.

Comfortable interaction with the information in this type of manual could be expected of an undergraduate candidate who has also been reasonably exposed to the technical knowledge component as well as the required mathematical discipline involved.

The Field Data Collection form seems to be relatively easy to understand and use. Success would obviously be determined by the extent of interactional learning done to truly understand and use the tool.

The Logistics company's forms were functional and not difficult to use, but re-visiting font-size, shading of emphasised areas and sorting of sub-categories could be helpful for easier reader- and user access.

2. The Training experience

Because training is meant to improve workplace application, I would offer the following pointers to ensure quality of delivery.

Evaluate the current material and system to ensure easiest access to information. Although it might seem impossible to down-write some of the technical information, it would be helpful to re-visit the format of introducing such information. Visuals, demonstrations and useful tools and resources usually provide better access to complex information.

Factors impacting efficiency could be:

- The method of training. Lecture-style or Learning Facilitation?
- The right mix between knowledge transfer and skills application within the parameters of the desired value system.
- The length of training sessions, compression of delivery time and allowance for consolidation.
- Adult learning principles applied and learner intrinsic motivation struck.
- Appropriate resources or tools to use as a referencing system when troubleshooting in practice.

3. A Fair work environment for Transferees

1. Establish the level of English Literacy and Numeracy of those who need to interact with the information. (Our standardised ELSA)
2. Define the recruitment policy regarding Literacy and Numeracy requirements in relation to the Key Performance Indicators of the job requirements.
3. Evaluate the Readability Index of all documentation that the employee needs to work with and down-write to appropriate levels.
4. Consider the viability of bridging opportunities for current employees.
5. Ensure that Training interventions and resources used are suited for the purpose and audience.
6. For any learning to be of true value to all stake-holders, it is also important to have a coaching and mentoring system in place to detect and correct inappropriate application in the early stages.

ELSA ascertains and verifies COPE-skills of an employee. (Cognition and Proficiency in English) This helps the employer to determine the “literacy” comfort zone of his/her workforce which, in turn, enables the employer to make training manuals, in-house publications, standing orders, IR procedures, memos, etc., user-friendly. Often it seems impossible to down-write some of the technical information, but it would be helpful to re-visit the format of introducing such information. Visuals, demonstrations and useful tools and resources usually provide better access to such information.