

July 20, 2011

Volume 6, Issue 33

Borderless Business Communication: *GlobalEnglish Supports Effective Global Communication*

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Introduction

Today, many of the boundaries that separate us within organizations – be they cultural, geographic, generational or organizational – are increasingly open and fluid. Our workforce is changing, becoming overall younger, more transitory and more dispersed. With the advent of highly flexible internal communications, social networking, knowledge portals and mobile devices, employees can communicate and interact instantly across great distances. These technologies are forcing increased transparency (*whether your organization is ready for it or not*), and they are enabling unprecedented interconnectedness and mobility. In short, the workplace is increasingly *borderless*¹.

Against the backdrop of this borderless workplace, organizations are also evolving their priorities. For instance, globalization and expansion into new markets are now top of mind among business leaders. Thirty-six percent of respondents in our recent Bersin & Associates *TalentWatch*² study cite these as one of their top two priorities and 37 percent cited the “need to accelerate innovation” as one of their top priorities for the coming year. Nearly one-third of all organizations are also dealing with substantial changes in their markets – which include a shift toward green energy issues, new

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¹ For more information, *Enterprise Learning and Talent Management 2011: Predictions for the Coming Year - Building the Borderless Workplace*, Bersin & Associates / Josh Bersin, November 2010. Available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.

² For more information, *TalentWatch® First Quarter 2011: Global Growth Creates a New War for Talent*, Bersin & Associates / Josh Bersin, March 2011. Available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.



KEY POINT

Today's masters of the borderless workplace take full ownership of their responsibility for encouraging effective communication and collaboration – as both corporate values and as continuous, enterprisewide processes.

mobile or Internet technologies, government regulation, and *globalization*.

Rather than resist, today's high-performing, global organizations are leveraging these trends to drive significant competitive advantage. Companies (such as AP Moller Maersk) are able to fill their leadership pipelines³ from anywhere in the world in which they operate or (like CapGemini) are able to leverage key talent regardless of native language. Many others (including the likes of Emerson and Caterpillar) achieve significant improvement in business process efficiency by removing language barriers between business units.

Today's masters of the borderless workplace take full ownership of their responsibility for encouraging effective communication and collaboration – as both corporate values and as continuous, enterprisewide processes. Their executive leaders seek out ways to drive the greatest returns from every interaction among employees, teams, partners and customers. They focus their HR, and learning and development (L&D) efforts on supporting empowerment and knowledge-sharing, and in developing collaborative leaders. They use social networking for targeted recruiting; and they leverage *communities of practice*⁴ to drive innovation and cross-department collaboration⁵. Lastly, they put on-demand tools in the hands of their far-flung workforce, providing instant access to knowledge that is essential to completing projects, closing sales and resolving customer needs.

³ "Leadership pipeline" refers to an organization's ongoing need to have a pool of talent that is readily available to fill positions at all levels of management (as well as other key positions) as the company grows. At each level, different competencies, knowledge and experiences are required, and (to keep the pipeline filled) the organization must have programs designed to develop appropriate skills sets. (Also known as the "leadership bench.")

⁴ For more information, please read the following two reports: (1) *Developing Communities of Practice: Best Practices and Lessons Learned from the Defense Acquisition University*, Bersin & Associates / Chris Howard, May 2007; and, (2) *The Corporate Learning Factbook® 2011: Benchmarks, Trends and Analysis of the U.S. Training Market*, Bersin & Associates / Karen O'Leonard, January 2011, available for purchase at www.bersin.com/factbook. Both reports are available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.

⁵ For more information, *Rethinking Recruiting: Modernizing the Way We Hire*, Bersin & Associates / Steven Goldberg and Katherine Jones, March 9, 2011. Available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.





KEY POINT

Nearly one-third of all organizations are also dealing with substantial changes in their markets – which include a shift toward green energy issues, new mobile or Internet technologies, government regulation, and *globalization*.

In this report, we highlight the need for an enterprise approach to developing and supporting effective business communication as a critical success factor for operating in a borderless workplace. We also profile GlobalEnglish, a global provider of on-demand business communication performance support and related learning services. The company's concept of Enterprise Fluency™ provides a useful means of differentiating between those organizations that are successful at strategically enabling global operations through effective "cross-border" business communication from those that are not.

Effective, Efficient Business Communication

Before we go much further, it would be helpful to establish some foundations. For instance, what do we mean by "effective business communication?"

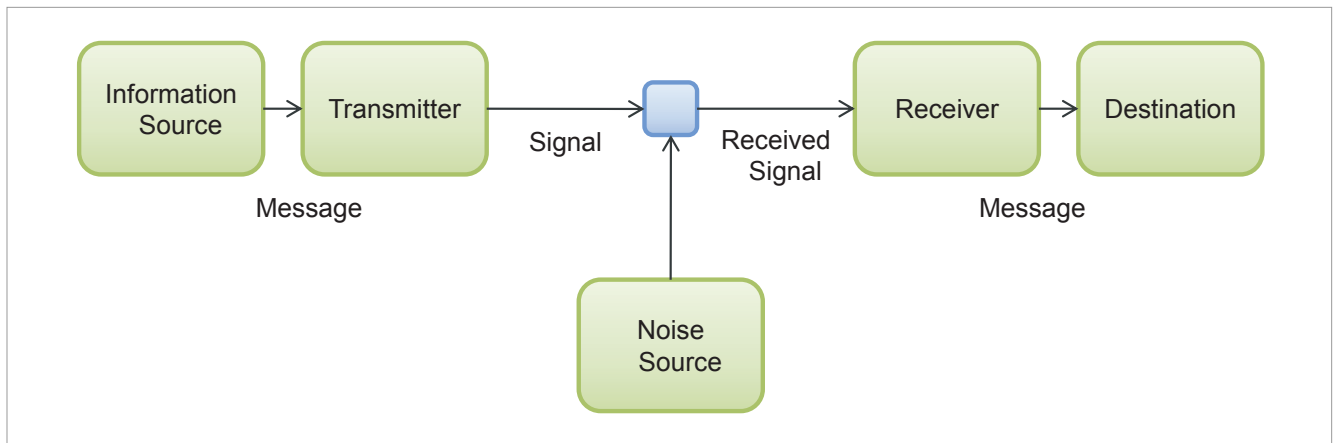
In 1948, mathematician Claude Shannon⁶ first launched the field of information theory, popularizing concepts, such as the "message," information channels, feedback loops and signal-to-noise ratio, to capture whether or not communication was successful. In the most basic sense, communication is effective when one party is able to correctly send its intended message to another and that message is then correctly understood. Or, as Shannon puts it,

"The fundamental problem of communication is that of reproducing at one point, either exactly or approximately, a message selected at another point."

⁶ Source: "A Mathematical Theory of Communication," *Bell System Technical Journal* / C.E. Shannon, October, 1948.



Figure 1: Shannon's Communication Loop



Source: C. Shannon, 1948.⁷



KEY POINT

Communication is most efficient when the maximum amount of your message is delivered and understood successfully with the minimum cost.

Communication is, therefore, most efficient when the maximum amount of your message is delivered and understood successfully with the minimum cost (e.g., resources, time, et al).

In business, effective communication adds certain contexts. These contexts can range from something as simple as how to write an effective email in order to ensure that a business task is correctly assigned, to something as complex as how to negotiate a successful multimillion dollar business deal with a team of individuals from a culture different than your own. Effective business communication, therefore, implies not just that you successfully delivered your message and it was understood – it also includes some sense that the business purpose within the given context was also achieved.

Case in Point: AP Moller – Maersk Group

AP Moller – Maersk Group (also known as “Maersk”) is a global shipping, energy, logistics and manufacturing conglomerate, located in 130 countries with more than 100,000 employees. The company’s headquarters is based in Denmark where one might assume the common organizational language is Danish, but this is not the case. Although Maersk allows for intra-national (local)

⁷ Source: “A Mathematical Theory of Communication,” *Bell System Technical Journal* / C.E. Shannon, October, 1948.



Case in Point: AP Moller – Maersk Group (cont'd)



KEY POINT

Effective business communication requires that the intended message was successfully delivered and understood, as well as some sense that the business purpose behind the message was also achieved.

communications within each home office, the accepted means of business communications across all geographic regions is English. Although it is the “home” language, representatives at Maersk describe Danish as a language that is globally obscure and difficult to learn. English became the natural default because of its global spread and the ability to attract those from outside of Denmark into the company.

Maersk believes a strategic approach to supporting cross-boundary communications has positively impacted the organization, even at an employee level. For example, the company runs a facility in Angola, at which Dutch shipping pilots at the facility already spoke English. “Maritime English” is the common and accepted language for shipping pilots. The employee development program at the Angola facility requires performance support in English proficiency. This strategic project enables a broader set of English skills for employees, so that they can go beyond simple instructions to engage in actual conversations.

Individual employees at Maersk are realizing the business benefits and efficiencies of open, cross-boundary communications by using a common language. For many, the prospect of moving across geographies to another country can be a scary proposition. Proficiently speaking the same language within the same organization, regardless of location, helps to mitigate this fear. Employees become more mobile geographically.

Further, managers see increased ease of mobility throughout the organization, both horizontally and vertically. Effective use of a common language is providing opportunities for global career paths within the organization. For instance, Maersk noted those who use “Danglish” (a form of pidgin correspondence using English vocabulary with Danish grammar) are often passed over for promotion to regional leadership. Given the importance of English proficiency as part of the overall interview process at the corporate office, candidates for regional heads are interviewed

Case in Point: AP Moller – Maersk Group (cont'd)

in English. At the same time, high-potential employees⁸ within the organization are now also trained in English as a cost-effective way to develop potential superstars who can grow with and later lead the company.

Maersk sees other business benefits, as well. Corporate communications and messaging achieve their purposes faster and more efficiently throughout the organization. For example, the company administers an annual engagement survey that captures measures, such as management effectiveness, successful application of corporate values and current priority business concerns for employees at-large. Use of a common language by those who administer the survey to those who respond to it eliminates the need for translation and avoids the issue of context.

An HR partner at Maersk has noted that enforcing a common language leads to more successful business meetings and collaboration. It provides both parties with a clear understanding of the subject matter. Managers better understand the context of employee interactions and their goals are easier to sell because the use of a common language provides trust. Messages during meetings do not need to be translated or retold based on differences in language. For example, Maersk uses the WebEx® virtual meeting platform. Prior to its language proficiency efforts, those who participated in virtual global meetings experienced extraordinarily long meeting times. The need to repeat what was being said caused one-hour meetings to double in duration. Since the company adopted a common language, all employees are now able to manage verbal communication as it is given and received, conversations are straightforward, and virtual meeting times are minimized – thus allowing everyone to focus on the message and get back to their day jobs. ☞

⁸ A “high-potential employee” is an employee who has been identified as having the potential, ability and aspiration for successive leadership positions within the company. Often, these employees are provided with focused development as part of a succession plan and are referred to as “HiPos.”

Barriers to Effective and Efficient Business Communication

Despite the fact that we start learning to communicate during infancy, the reasons for communication failure are many. It is not surprising that academics have been studying this topic for most of recorded history.

Figure 2 highlights just a few of the many possible barriers.

Figure 2: Barriers to Effective and Efficient Communication

Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of fluency or proficiency • Lack of sufficient vocabulary • Differences in accent or pronunciation • Poor or unclear word choice
Physical or Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proximity • Physical impediments • Noise or other distractions • Threats to safety or other basic needs
Psychological	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stubborn mental models • Emotions • Inhibitions • Denial • Substitutions • Passive aggressiveness • Dishonesty
Systemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of feedback • Poor or inactive listening • Misinterpretation • Mixed signals (e.g., verbal and nonverbal messages do not match) • Poor choice of communication medium for the message • Too much at once
Cultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness • Bias or chauvinism • Competing values
Organizational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structural impediments • Process or policy inefficiencies, or unintended consequences • Lack of leadership / sponsorship

Source: Bersin & Associates, 2011.

Overcoming Communication Barriers

At the risk of gross oversimplification, improving global business communication begins with approaching it as both a critical and solvable problem – and then devoting time, attention and resources to both structural and interventional solutions. The following are a few examples sorted by type of barrier.

Language

In order for communication to happen, both sides must be able to understand the message. Between people, this requirement means that both sides must speak a common language.⁹ Organizations can hire for language; however, effective sourcing and recruiting are only a small part of the solution. In the world of global business, English is the *de facto* standard language. In addition, only seven percent of those employees believe that their English skills are sufficient to successfully conduct business.¹⁰

Ultimately, the organization must be prepared to frequently assess and monitor ongoing proficiency for all of its employees over time, and then to provide both training and performance support where and when needed. GlobalEnglish, the solution provider profiled as part of this study, is a prime example of what we mean. The company offers a SaaS-based¹¹ business English performance support platform – providing employees with the tools and on-demand support necessary to use business English at a level higher than their actual skills, and then to



ANALYSIS

According to a GlobalEnglish study, only seven percent of non-native English-speaking employees believe that their English skills are sufficient to successfully conduct business.

⁹ Technologies do exist today to perfectly translate written text from one language to another. However, it is fair to say that such technologies are still immature, often producing errors and failing to grasp subtleties of meaning. In short, they are not yet relevant for most business communication situations and needs.

¹⁰ Source: *The Globalization of English Report*, GlobalEnglish Corporation, 2010, http://www.globalenglish.com/m/why_globalenglish/globalization_of_english/.

¹¹ “Software as a Service” (or SaaS) refers to the business of selling software over the Internet as a web service. In this business model, the software vendor charges an annual “rental” fee and can predict recurring revenues far more reliably than with the licensed software model. As SaaS becomes proven and the delivery strategies more refined, most analysts agree that more and more enterprise software will be sold in this way. For more information, please see the report, *Adaptive Talent and Learning Platforms: How Software as a Service Is Changing the Markets for Talent and Learning Systems*, Bersin & Associates / David Mallon, February 2010. Available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.



KEY POINT

According to World Economic Forum data, in China, 84 percent of businesses report difficulty in finding employees with the skills they need; 81 percent of companies report similar difficulty in India, 65 percent in Europe and 56 percent in the U.S.

develop ongoing proficiency over time. We will discuss GlobalEnglish's approach in more detail later in this report.

Communication Skills

Maximizing the communication taking place also means ensuring that all involved are competent in key related skills, such as writing, listening, advocacy, facilitation and negotiation. Like language proficiency, these skills can be hired. However, just as with language skills, most organizations find that they have to fill the majority of needs in these skills through internal development and performance support. The skills gaps of new hires are often significant.

Lack of Skilled Talent

Both developed and developing countries face a talent crisis over the coming decades – one which has the potential to severely limit future growth. No level of person or skill is immune, nor is any part of the world. Emerging economies may be producing large numbers of college graduates, but companies are finding that not many of the graduates are directly hireable. According to World Economic Forum data¹², in China, 84 percent of businesses report difficulty in finding employees with the skills they need; 81 percent of companies report similar difficulty in India, 65 percent in Europe and 56 percent in the U.S.

High on the list of what makes these prospects unemployable is language. The educational systems of all countries do not often provide sufficient focus skills (such as communication and other soft skills) that are necessary to succeed in a borderless world. According to a McKinsey Global Institute study, "... only

¹² Source: *Global Talent Risk – Seven Responses*, World Economic Forum (in collaboration with The Boston Consulting Group), 2011, <http://www.weforum.org/reports/global-talent-risks-report-2011>.





KEY POINT

Companies are winning in the borderless workplace because they make these kinds of heavy investments in career planning and professional development at all levels and at all stages in the employee lifecycle.

13 percent of university graduates from emerging or 'low-wage' countries are suitable for employment in multinational companies, and the #1 reason cited is lack of English skills."¹³

Given the shortage of prepared talent, hiring companies have to be prepared to hire for potential and then fill in the gaps. For example, large India-based business services provider, Infosys, has chosen to supply the top universities in India with a customized curriculum through which graduates progress over the course of their last two years of study.¹⁴ This curriculum is the only way in which Infosys could even hope to find the 80,000 people it typically hires in a given year out of the millions of college graduates entering the workforce each cycle. Companies, such as Infosys, are winning in the borderless workplace because they make these kinds of heavy investments in career planning and professional development at all levels and at all stages in the employee lifecycle.¹⁵

An enterprise approach to further develop the global communication skills of talent can be a valuable strategy for retention. According to an article published recently in *Harvard Business Review*, the best talent in the emerging economies has now, for the first time, options.¹⁶ A side-effect of the borderless workplace is that your company's external borders are also increasingly porous. Your employees can pick and choose from


¹³ Source: *The Emerging Global Labor Market: Part II—The Supply of Offshore Talent in Services*, McKinsey & Company, June 2005, http://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/publications/emerginggloballabormarket/Part2/executive_summary.asp.

¹⁴ For more information, *Organizational Learning Agility: The Learning Organization at Infosys Is the Engine Powering Its Business Success*, Bersin & Associates / David Mallon, August 2010. Available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.

¹⁵ For more information, please read these two reports: (1) *Modern-Day Career Management: Key Trends, Models and Case Studies*, Bersin & Associates / Kim Lamoureux, July 2009; and, (2) *HR Factbook 2011®: Benchmarks and Trends in HR Spending, Staffing and Resource Allocations*, Bersin & Associates / Karen O'Leonard, June 2011, available for purchase at www.bersin.com/hrfactbook. Both reports are available to research members at www.bersin.com/library.

¹⁶ Source: "Winning the Race for Talent in Emerging Markets: New research shows how to attract and retain the best employees in developing economies," *Harvard Business Review* / Douglas A. Ready, Linda A. Hill and Jay A. Conger, November 2008.



many competing companies. They are more likely to stay with companies that offer a comprehensive approach to development, including stretch assignments, continual training and development, and competitive pay. 



KEY POINT

In today's increasingly virtual organizations, companies must give their online communications and collaboration spaces at least the same level of diligence and planning as they would give to the design of their brick-and-mortar offices.

Physical Spaces

When communicators are all local, thought should be given to the physical space and its role in collaboration. Within a given office, architects have long known that the physical space is a major factor in how and when individuals will interact. If employees are walled off in their own offices or hidden behind high cube walls, communication is impeded. But, if everyone works in the same common space, frequent collaboration becomes more likely. Likewise, if the boss's workspace is also easily accessible, the chances that key upwards feedback will occur are significantly increased.

For most organizations, however, employees are not all local. They are spread out across more than one location – frequently around the world. In these cases, virtual channels (e.g., email, instant messenger, and telephony conferencing tools) and collaboration spaces (e.g., web-based project management applications, web conferencing, and content sharing systems such as Microsoft SharePoint) become equally as important factors in support of successful communication, and they, therefore, deserve at least the same level of diligence and planning as is given to brick-and-mortar offices.

Organization Structures

The structure of the organization itself also matters. The field of *organization development* (OD) brings a long history of research into how best to define the roles and relationships between roles within the organization in order to maximize the performance of the group, including getting employees to talk with one another. A central and abiding goal in choosing a specific organization structure (*or choosing to reorganize later*) is ensuring that the most efficient and effective communication takes place at the best time and in the most impactful manner. One famous example of a strategic approach to organization design is the Toyota Production System – based on the concepts of Kaizen and on research introduced by Edward Deming after World War II. Kaizen encourages employees at all levels to participate and





KEY POINT

There are many elements to language proficiency. It is important to distinguish between different aspects of language when approaching the problem of business communication.

to share feedback as to how to improve processes. Any employee on the car production line can stop the line if an error is spotted. The system encourages all employees to take an active role in identifying inefficiencies and improving processes – and, perhaps, most importantly – to share feedback upwards whenever circumstances warrant.

Technology

Of course, in our borderless organizations of today, technology can be both an essential enabler of effective communication and a source of one of the largest obstacles – information overload (*making the need for communications support even more crucial!*). Telecommunications extends the distance across which we can converse. Email makes business correspondence a near-instant endeavor. Social media transform our business networks (e.g., yesterday’s Rolodex) into a visible, accessible extension of our collective intelligence. Enterprise business applications (such as ERP¹⁷, CRM¹⁸ and content management systems) allow us to successfully work with far more information at one time than any one human could process – and to do so over time without forgetting in ways by which no one human’s memory could manage. When compared to more structural changes, investments in technology to support enterprise collaboration can often be implemented faster and continue to show return for longer periods of time.

The Cornerstone of Communication: Language

Given how indispensable it is to communication, we should spend some additional time with the issue of *language*. Mastering a common language is not simply a matter of being able to pronounce the words or to know the best word in a given situation. There are many elements to language proficiency. It is important to distinguish between different aspects of language when approaching the problem of business communication. For instance, an employee in your office in France might appear to speak English reasonably well in phone conversations, but then require two or three hours to comprehend and compose a response to your email request. Did you know that you were losing that

¹⁷ “Enterprise resource planning” is a category of enterprise software that typically integrates financials, HR, manufacturing, order processing and customer relationship management in an integrated solution.

¹⁸ “CRM,” which stands for “customer relationship management,” is the corporate customer database system.





KEY POINT

Language proficiency alone does not guarantee successful business communication.

time to language inefficiency? According to a GlobalEnglish study, non-native English speaking employees gain on average one hour each week due to improved English language skills.¹⁹

One example framework that we can use to understand the many elements that comprise mastery of language is provided by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages²⁰. First, they distinguish between language proficiency and language performance. According to their guidelines²¹, proficiency is a “metric against which to measure learners’ functional competency; that is, their ability to accomplish linguistic tasks representing a variety of levels.”

When it comes to language performance (in writing or speaking), they distinguish between how well a speaker communicates in the language in terms of:

- Comprehensibility;
- Comprehension;
- Language control;
- Vocabulary use;
- Communication strategies; and,
- Cultural awareness.

Strategies for overcoming language barriers to business communication should (*as with the other solution areas described in the previous section*) incorporate both structural and interventional approaches. They should focus on both individual proficiency and organizational capability. Keep in mind that all of the aspects of language listed above are required to be truly proficient, but proficiency is not – itself – a guarantee of successful communication.

¹⁹ Source: *The Globalization of English Report*, GlobalEnglish Corporation, 2010, http://www.globalenglish.com/m/why_globalenglish/globalization_of_english/.

²⁰ Source: www.actfl.org.

²¹ Source: http://lauder.wharton.upenn.edu/pdf/OPI_Guidelines.pdf.





KEY POINT


Performance support of a common business language promotes speed to proficiency and gains in organizational capability, such as execution of mission through brand promise.

Case in Point: Capgemini

Capgemini is a global provider of business consulting and services. The company is headquartered in Paris, operates in more than 40 countries, and employs nearly 110,000 people in North America, Europe, South America and Asia-Pacific. Capgemini is realigning to deliver on the company's updated brand promise and new "right-shoring" objective to "deliver the right resource, at the right time, to the right place, at the right cost."

Individuals in Capgemini's offices in Italy were unable to tap into the larger corporate network or participate in the larger company projects. As the first language for most in this geography was Italian, they were unable to operate effectively within the larger corporate network, much less execute on the aforementioned new brand promise for "right-shoring." Lack of a common language was a barrier to organizational effectiveness and agility. The CEO of this region needed a solution.

Through the help of a partner, Capgemini developed a competency map that focused on the need to address business English as a performance gap. By providing performance support in business English, the company was able to realize immediate gains and is now measuring improvements in key competency outcomes. These measures include how many Italian employees are involved in larger company projects, and whether or not those employees are, in fact, responding faster to business communications, such as email and phone. As a result of this effort, Capgemini is realizing increases in productivity and reductions in costs, all while expanding its business to a larger audience.

Bottom Line: Performance support of a common business language (a structured intervention) promotes speed to proficiency and gains in organizational capability, such as execution of mission through brand promise. 



KEY POINT

Since most organizations choose to assess their current state as a benchmark before deploying a solution, GlobalEnglish also offers an adaptive, web-based assessment that uncovers the full language proficiency needs of the organization.

GlobalEnglish: Enabling Enterprise Fluency™

In summary, supporting the type of effective business communication necessary to thrive in the borderless workplace requires a holistic strategy that incorporates:

1. Structural solutions that optimize the organization's physical and virtual spaces;
2. Organizational solutions that optimize process flows throughout the company; and,
3. Performance solutions that both train and support the ongoing mastery of a common language.

GlobalEnglish is a solution provider founded in 1997 to address just these sorts of needs for large, global companies. It currently serves more than 500 companies worldwide in more than 169 countries. Core to the company's offering is a unique, on-demand business English performance support platform – which guides end-users in the day-to-day use of business English for tasks, such as writing email and composing business documents. It also provides developmental content to build mastery over time.

Building onto this platform, the company provides its clients with several complementary services, including a rich interactive learning environment, a wide variety of learning materials, personalized instruction and feedback, access to live teachers and coaches, and productivity tools – as well as deployment and continuing service to the organization. Users have access to ongoing performance support, including language reference tools and resources.

Since most organizations choose to assess their current state as a benchmark before deploying a solution, GlobalEnglish also offers an adaptive, web-based assessment that uncovers the full language proficiency needs of the organization. This assessment can offer a way to quickly screen and diagnose employees' competence in business English, and also provides a cumulative snapshot into a company's overall business English score.

Enterprise Fluency™ – Far More Than Language Proficiency

What we have referred to as borderless communication until now is the underpinning for what GlobalEnglish calls, “Enterprise Fluency™.” Enterprise Fluency™ is the effectiveness and ease with which global teams can communicate and collaborate with each other, and the resulting success with which a company can operate across country borders. In this sense, it is the optimal state of global business performance.

What does it mean to be *enterprise fluent*? We approach the answer to that question by close examination of the word “fluency.” The term is derived from the word, “fluid’.” (See Figure 3.)



KEY POINT

Fluency in terms of communications is about the ease with which information moves between communicators.

Figure 3: Definition of “Fluent”

1. (of a person) able to express oneself easily and articulately
2. (of a person) able to speak or write a particular foreign language easily and accurately
3. (of a foreign language) spoken accurately and with facility
4. **(of speech, language, movement, or style) smoothly graceful and easy**
5. **able to flow freely**

Source: <http://oxforddictionaries.com>, 2011.

Fluency in terms of communications is about the ease with which information moves between communicators. In this light, while textbook language proficiency is helpful (*and should be developed!*), it is not necessarily sufficient. Many fluent, native speakers are illiterate, may not have broad vocabularies and lack mastery of the formal rules of their native tongues. Yet they can effortlessly communicate their intended messages accurately and without impediment.

In the context of the borderless workplace, there is a valuable lesson to be had here. While fluency typically only conjures notions of linguistics, Enterprise Fluency™ is a concept with a much larger meaning and importance, its definition being,



"... The communication, collaboration and operational proficiency global companies require to successfully compete in today's economy."²²

Consider these sorts of questions.

- How fluid (*read: effortless, smooth, flowing, accurate*) is your employee communications with global customers, suppliers, partners or other employees?
- What is the impact of effective global communications on your operational effectiveness?
- How can you ensure *borderless collaboration without effective communication skills*?
- How *successful* are your operations without *borderless collaboration and fluid communications* across your enterprise?
- How do you achieve business goals without successful business operations?
- How do you increase the *enterprise fluency* of your organization?

Enterprise Fluency™ as a way to describe the smooth, effortless, fluid flow of communication across the organization becomes the ideal descriptor and differentiator when comparing organizations that have mastered how to leverage and encourage the open flows of information to achieve common business goals at the heart of the borderless workplace.

Case in Point: Emerson

Emerson is a leading global manufacturing and technology company. They employ over 127,000 employees in over 240 manufacturing locations covering North America, Latin America, Europe, Asia-Pac, the Middle East, and Africa. Like all global conglomerates, Emerson had quarterly reporting deadlines for the finance heads in each regional office. Although English as a


²² Source: GlobalEnglish, <http://www.globalenglish.com/>.

Case in Point: Emerson (cont'd)

common language is used in most of its offices, it is not yet used in all.

The former CFO for the Latin America region consistently received late finance reports from the Brazil office. When he looked into the problem, it turned out that the finance head for the Brazil office was the only employee in the office who spoke English. This communication issue involved more than just the need for a common language. In this case, the open flow of communication was constricted through a single conduit. Specifically, English-based corporate communications were being funneled back and forth through the Brazil finance head, who in addition to his "day job," was often left to his side job as "translator."

Emerson worked with a partner to provide performance support in business English for the Brazil office. As expected, the Emerson office in Brazil is now submitting its quarterly finance reports on a timely basis to the CFO for Latin America.

Bottom Line: proficiency in a common business language such as English is support of borderless collaboration is best achieved by taking an organization-wide approach. 



KEY POINT

The instancy, interconnectedness and mobility of the borderless world demand a strategic approach to business communication.

Conclusion: Advancing Enterprise Fluency™ in Global Organizations

Effective business communication has always been a key success factor in any organization's overall ability to perform, especially so in global organizations for which we know that diverse and dispersed global workforces require a common language. That said, the instancy, interconnectedness and mobility of the borderless world demands a much more strategic approach to business communication. Simply defining processes, implementing collaboration tools and technologies, and hiring for competence in a common language is not enough. Furthermore, believing that effective communication (or improving such) is solely the responsibility of each individual is not just misguided, it is – as was evidenced by the Emerson case in point – potentially quite costly.



KEY POINT

The masters of the borderless world are rethinking their perspectives, processes and approaches to best support the natural flow of organizational knowledge, whenever and wherever such support is needed.

The traditional content, technology and formal processes (currently in use) which support business communications do not always fit into the knowledge pathways that take place in the organization itself – nor do they always manifest themselves at the speed of business today. *In other words, what it takes for the organization to be Enterprise Fluent™ has changed.* So, in response, the masters of the borderless world are rethinking their perspectives, processes and approaches to best support the natural flow of organizational knowledge, whenever and wherever such support is needed, so that they can effectively collaborate and operate to reach business objectives.



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- **Tools** – Comprehensive tools for HR and L&D professionals, including tools for benchmarking, vendor and system selection, program design, program implementation, change management and measurement;
- **Analyst Support** – Via telephone or email, our advisory services are supported by expert industry analysts who conduct our research;
- **Strategic Advisory Services** – Expert support for custom-tailored projects;
- **Member Roundtables®** – A place where you can connect with other peers and industry leaders to discuss and learn about the latest industry trends and best practices; and,
- **IMPACT® Conference: *The Business Of Talent*** – Attendance at special sessions of our annual, best-practices IMPACT® conference.
- **Workshops** – Bersin & Associates analysts and advisors conduct onsite workshops on a wide range of topics to educate, inform and inspire HR and L&D professionals and leaders.

For more information about our membership program, please visit us at www.bersin.com/membership.

