

Brenntag Holding GmbH

Design and rollout of an international training project as part of the introduction of the new Brenntag Behavior Model

COMPANY

Brenntag is the global market leader in chemical distribution. The German-based international company manages complex supply chains for both chemical manufacturers and consumers by simplifying market access to thousands of products and services. It combines a global network with outstanding local execution. Therefore, Brenntag is the industry's most effective and preferred channel to the market for partners – really living its philosophy: "ConnectingChemistry."

Brenntag operates a global network with more than 550 locations in 74 countries. With its global workforce of about 15,000 employees, the company generated sales of EUR 10.5 billion (USD 11.6 billion) in 2016.

PROJECT TARGETS

At a global level, Brenntag is divided into different regions that to some extent use region-specific leadership and HR tools. The project was set up for the EMEA region (Europe, Middle East, Africa). Initially, the aim was the development of a competence model, which then formed the basis for feedback guidelines that are used during the annual review meetings between superiors and employees.

It was important for the development of the competence model that it could be integrated into any existing EMEA appraisal schemes in the various countries. For this reason the Brenntag values that are already well-established at a global level were used as a higher-level structure, which led to a "Behavior Model" that operationalizes and describes the different Brenntag values with specific behaviors. Following the joint development of the competence model and the completion of a pilot phase, a training concept was drawn up to support the regional rollout of the model.

The aim of the concept was defined as follows:

1. Drawing up a common standard to train managers in the use and process design of the new Behavior Model and the "Behavior Dialog" based on it
2. Ensuring sufficient flexibility in the local implementation of the training to be able to flexibly react to the managers' requirements and levels of qualification

FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS

The following general conditions had to be taken into consideration for the implementation of the project:

1. The new EMEA Behavior Dialog is positioned as a new dialog format, which supports the aspect of performance management in the EMEA region as part of the global talent management process.
2. The EMEA Behavior Dialog was introduced at the same time as the People Performance Dialog. The People Performance Dialog forms the general global standard of the employee appraisal at Brenntag. In this appraisal the central topic areas (performance feedback, goal achievement, development plan, etc.) are summarized.
3. In the EMEA region, feedback on behavior is now given according to the common standard of the Behavior Dialog.
4. After the complete IT implementation of the tools, end users will no longer notice that the meeting format is based on two different sources; from a user point of view this will be an integrated format.

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5. The managers to be trained in the different EMEA regions have very different levels of training and experience with regard to the implementation of annual employee appraisals and feedback meetings. While in some countries, established and coordinated formats are already in place, in other countries this is a new process. The key challenge in the project was that there were very different preconditions for the introduction of the new meeting formats in the different EMEA countries. In some countries it was sufficient to inform managers of the new format as this only involved a change in guidelines and criteria rather than the introduction of a new process. In other countries the managers required more intensive support as the process was completely new to them.

SOLUTION

In this case, the solution was a very detailed training concept, which is based on so-called training nuggets. These training nuggets are thematic training modules for which Profil M defined very detailed individual training manuals, work materials, handouts, and content-related key messages. Each training nugget consisted of a short and a long version. The short version only included the communication of key messages, while the long version also included intensive pre-defined exercises. The individual EMEA countries were able to freely combine the different nuggets with the very detailed training materials and customize the training sessions in such a way that they met the managers' requirements precisely.

Only the 90-minute introductory module (which was typically implemented by the local HR manager) was defined as the absolute minimum standard, for the other nuggets the focal areas could be freely selected. If, for example, the specific focus was to be on the topic of feedback, this nugget could be used in its three-hour long version, which involved practical feedback meeting exercises using the new guidelines. If the topic of setting goals was already well-established in the region or if this methodology is currently not yet relevant for all managers, this module could be left out completely, for example. The following table shows the different nuggets and the corresponding implementation period:

Nugget	Duration – short version (BASICS)	Duration – exercises (EXERCISES)	Duration – long version (BASICS + EXERCISES)
1. Introduction	90 minutes (nugget 1)		
2. Appraising performance	75 minutes (nugget 2a)	135 minutes (nugget 2b)	210 minutes
3. Conducting good feedback meetings	90 minutes (nugget 3a)	90 minutes (nugget 3b)	180 minutes
4. Setting and achieving goals	60 minutes (nugget 4a)	45 minutes (nugget 4b)	105 minutes
5. Developing employees	60 minutes (nugget 5a)	90 minutes (nugget 5b)	150 minutes

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The detailed trainer manual as well as all training materials were translated to the relevant national languages so that managers could be trained in their mother tongue. If necessary, Profil M held briefing sessions with the local trainers.

Ahead of the rollout, pilot training sessions were implemented in different countries to test the new model and to get a feeling for the relevant training priorities of participants.

IMPLEMENTATION

Profil M initially supported the conceptual preparation of the Behavior Model itself. Following the internal coordination and the adoption of the model by the Board of Management, guidelines were drawn up that were based on the model. These guidelines give managers great freedom to convey specific and role-based feedback on the individual aspects of the model. After the development of the guidelines and the incorporation of feedback from the EMEA HR community, a pilot phase was organized, during which a total of 100 persons across the EMEA region tested the new guidelines. Here it was ensured that a sufficient number of different functional areas, countries, and hierarchy levels were included

to enable a reliable assessment of the perception of the new guidelines by the organization. As part of this pilot introduction, a one-day training session for managers using the guidelines was offered, though this training session was not yet based on the “nugget” philosophy and instead included all important questions concerning the preparation and application of the new guidelines. Based on the experiences made during the pilot phase, the final versions of the Behavior Model, Behavior Dialog, and the detailed training concept were drawn up.

Profil M implemented all training sessions for Germany and the EMEA Holding. For all other countries, documents were provided and corresponding briefing processes were organized.

The flexible training approach with a focus on actual requirements was very well received in the organization. It was interesting that the topic of employee development in particular (in which on-the-job development activities were discussed above all) was perceived as a genuine added value by many managers, even beyond the pure application of the new tool.