

Why Unilever Adopted the Cogent Bespoke Blended Learning Model



Virtual bespoke training to solve major, multi-site logistical and professional resourcing issues - supporting equality and inclusivity

The challenge

In 2014, Unilever UK, Ireland and Europe's Process Safety Operations needed to overcome major logistical and resourcing problems - to deliver multiple training events across numerous sites, which were inclusive and equally accessible for all. That's why they became innovative, early adopters of Cogent Skills' bespoke Blended Learning Model for their Operations and Process Safety Management training across UK, Ireland and Europe.

The major logistical problems included getting multiple employees - who were located across fifty sites and in different countries, to commit to attending single, central location training events. Resourcing issues included the lack of in-house audio-visual specialists.

Training barriers were made even more challenging, as employees needed to gain authorisation to be offsite for several days – taking them away from performing their day job, plus the cost of travel, accommodation, venue hire and not to mention the disruption to that individual's work / home life balance!

In addition to these logistics and costs problems, the COVID-19 global pandemic 'work from home' directive would've made it more difficult to deliver face to face training.

For Unilever however, as their virtual delivery model had already been solidly embedded for 6 years, this meant that they were not affected by the imposed remote working restrictions and their operational training operated in 'business as usual' mode.

“ We have fifty manufacturing sites across Europe, eight of which are COMAH/ SEVESO III sites and five of those being Upper Tier sites – which have some significant hazards. We wanted to extend our own Process Safety Management training to all fifty of our sites regardless of whether they're a COMAH site or not and this posed some major logistical problems.

This is why we approached Cogent Skills to collaborate with us to develop virtual content, which combined Unilever specific training content in with Cogent's PSM training – as their courses include exclusive PSM framework training standards content which is recognised by the HSE and has been developed by the UK Process Safety Management Competence Programme Board.”

Malcolm Sarstedt

Process Safety Operations Manager, Unilever UK, Ireland and Europe

The solution

Inclusivity and logistical issues were the core business drivers; however, Unilever's business case to adopt this advanced learning approach was strengthened by substantial value-added corporate benefits, which cemented the senior leadership decision to adopt **Bespoke Blended Learning across** UK, Ireland and Europe. These benefits included the fact that they could:

- **Develop a bespoke training plan.** Unilever and Cogent Skills agreed the interactive training plan, relevant virtual platforms and key discussion points, along with a pre-training schedule and participant completion of OECD benchmarking assessments before the courses. This meant that the expert industry instructors understood the level of participant knowledge beforehand, were confident that the participants were well prepared and knew the exact messages that senior management wanted to cascade to their audiences.
- **Develop a blended learning approach.** Cogent Skills were able to create bespoke learning experience that would combine bespoke knowledge videos with trainer lead activities to create the Blended learning programme that is delivered remotely for Unilever, giving the delegates the best experience of gaining the knowledge and having access to industry experts. It was important that the trainers were still actively part of the courses so they could host discussions, answer questions and share best practice.
- **Combine their own specific corporate messaging and process safety procedure directions.** The exclusive corporate content and messaging for multiple site staff, was signed off by senior leadership and incorporated into the industry developed PSM framework training standards content, which included up-to-date regulatory competence and compliance requirements. These PSM standards, developed by the UK Process Safety Management Competence Programme Board, are benchmarked to comply to relevant COMAH / Seveso III regulations.
- **Produce professional corporate training films.** Unilever and Cogent Skills agreed on industry specific case study blended learning videos which could be incorporated into their own set piece presentations. This included their own specific corporate messaging and process safety procedure directions, plus industry recognised case studies along with the incorporation of their own case study videos – everything relevant to Unilever's business needs.
- **Receive corporate branded materials and training workbooks.** All training materials were Unilever branded, this investment demonstrated the business' commitment to taking the training seriously - for whole company acceptance and adoption.

“ Blended learning is certainly the way forward for Unilever. In terms of actual training and delivery, it is remarkably effective. Senior leaders can be extremely critical – but not in the case of working with Cogent Skills, in fact I would say that it has been an overwhelming success – with senior leadership and Vice Presidents who've attended the training, have given exceptionally good, positive feedback. ”

Malcolm Sarstedt

Process Safety Operations
Manager, Unilever UK, Ireland
and Europe

The impact

From senior leadership's acceptance of and positive feedback for the bespoke virtual blended learning as a viable training option, through to time and cost savings plus legacy corporate branded training films and materials, **Bespoke Blended Learning** has delivered the following positive outcomes for the business:

- **Budget Savings.** Cogent provided professional training and logistics management - reducing external resourcing costs. Virtual training reduced the cost of onsite attendance – including staff time offsite, travel, accommodation, venue hire and administrative organisation.
- **Corporate Film Production and Branded Materials.** Management provided the messaging content, then Cogent developed a programme of professional slides decks and produced professional, voice overed videos. This resulted in exceptional corporate training films - which can be used for many years to come.
- **Equality and Inclusivity of Engagement.** Providing equal training and communications opportunities for all workforce levels - especially those located in hard-to-reach places.
- **Improvement of Operational Integrity.** By delivering best practice training and industry framework standards content – which is benchmarked to comply to relevant COMAH / Seveso III regulatory requirements, the training has helped to improve operational safety and reduce the risk of a Major Accident Hazard to people and the environment.
- **Continued Use Across the Business.** Due to the bespoke Blended Learning success, Unilever UK, Ireland and Europe use this delivery mode for all Operational and Process Safety Management training.
- **Productivity Improvements.** The virtual option continues to save travel and offsite time, along with the improvement of staff's work / home life balance.
- **Solving of Logistics Problems.** Going remote removed Unilever's problem of getting staff from their fifty sites to all attend a training event at ONE central location
- **Suitability for Remote Workers or Emergency 'Stay at Home' orders.** An unexpected benefit of the Bespoke Blended Learning was the onset of COVID-19, which did not affect or have impact on Unilever's operational training.

The Timeline

2012

Unilever UK, Ireland and Europe become a founding member of the UK Process Safety Management Competence Programme Board – facilitated by Cogent Skills.

2013

Business Case development for the implementation of Cogent Skills' Bespoke Blended Learning Model.

2014

Senior Leadership approval to implement Bespoke Blended Learning Model for Operations and Process Safety Management across Unilever UK, Ireland and Europe.

2014

Development and delivery of virtual 1-Day **Process Safety Leadership training** – to Leaders from 50 Unilever sites.

2019

Development and delivery of virtual 3-Day **Process Safety Management training** – delivered across 6 half days, Europe wide.

2015 - 2020

Delivery continuation of virtual bespoke blended learning

2020 - 2021

Virtual blended learning unaffected by global COVID-19 pandemic.

2022

Under development. New virtual bespoke blended learning – Industrial Boiler Safety Course.

The solutions used

Bespoke Blended Learning
Process Safety Leadership Training
Process Safety Site Competent Person Training

“Bespoke learning means that we can combine our own systems training messages with industry specific case studies and up-to-date regulatory competence and compliance standards, whilst providing the equal opportunity of delivering learning at times and via platforms which were accessible to all of our employees.”

Malcolm Sarstedt

Process Safety Operations Manager, Unilever UK, Ireland and Europe

**Want to explore your Bespoke Blended Learning opportunities?
Contact us!**

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