



Project-Based Learning for Business Communications

Learn, practice, perform!

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Introduction

This document will introduce the concepts of project-based, blended learning and how CAMD is bringing this delivery method to Business Communications skills training in China. We will provide some background of the company - CAMD - and some background information about what project-based, blended learning is.

CanadAsia Management Development Ltd. (CAMD)

CAMD offers highly effective, outcome-focused, practical cross-cultural soft skills management solutions that enhance and improve the core competitiveness of Asian and Western organizations.

We do this through launching customized training programs and consulting services. All CAMD customer solutions provide excellent value and measurable business results. We assist corporate clients to identify needs, plan, design, implement and manage cross-cultural team performance improvement strategies and business effectiveness solutions.

At CAMD, our services are customized to the specific business needs of our clients. We believe it is very important to provide real value and show our customers the return on investment from working with us.

We are a people company. People are the most important part of our business, beginning with our employees and ending with our customers. Everyone is important in this business.

We are a solutions provider and we will be honest with the customer, even if it means turning work down that doesn't fit our scope. We will 'stick close to the knitting' and grow in directions that are both supported by market need and that are complementary to our existing core competencies.

CAMD business scope includes all types of business, management, and communication consulting focused on multinational and local organizations. We assist corporate clients to identify needs, plan, design, implement and manage cross-cultural team performance improvement solutions.

CAMD provides a systematic management development service for various companies and organizations. One of our core strengths includes project-based corporate training programs - mainly a blended model designed to improve English language, workplace communication skills, other soft skills and business consulting projects that cover organizational strategic development, organizational structuring, organizational culture construction, team building, managing change, building a learning organization, etc.



What is Blended Learning?

Blended learning -- generally defined as learning programs that include multiple methods of delivery, such as **instructor-led classes, on-line instruction, on-the-job activities, and supplemental reading etc.** – is seen as the most effective and cost-efficient form of training by a significant majority of corporations.

In 2006 it is estimated that blended learning will comprise 29.4% of all US and European corporate training and 22% of training budgets. Blended learning is becoming an integral part of the training landscape and has become the training method ranked as the most effective with a growing number of organizations.

Numerous studies have shown that providing several linked options for learners, in addition to classroom training, increased what they learned. In 2002, Harvard Business School faculty DeLacey and Leonard reported that students not only learned more when online sessions were added to traditional courses, but student interaction and satisfaction improved as well.

Thomson and NETg released a 2003 white paper that reported speedier performance on real world tasks by people who learned through a blended strategy—faster than those studying through pure e-learning or traditional classroom methods alone.

What makes blended learning so successful is that it's three-dimensional. Blended learning involves a balanced combination of dynamic classroom techniques, modern e-learning and practical, supervised application of production skill activities that provides measurable results.

A 'blend' is an integrated strategy for delivering training. Blending involves a planned combination of approaches, such as participation in a classroom; self-guided computer based learning; reference to textbooks; simulated work tasks; participation in seminars, workshops, and online communities. Options for blended learning go beyond the classroom. They're formal and informal, technology and people-based, independent and convivial, and directive and discovery-oriented. Learners can be assisted through workshops, coaching sessions, support groups, online classes and various performance support tools.

The table below presents the possibilities of what can constitute a blended learning approach:

<p>Live face-to-face (formal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor-led classroom • Workshops • Coaching/mentoring • On-the-job (OTJ) training 	<p>Live face-to-face (informal)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collegial connections • Work teams • Role modelling
<p>Virtual collaboration/synchronous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live e-learning classes • E-mentoring • Telephone support 	<p>Virtual collaboration/asynchronous</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Online bulletin boards • Listservs • Online communities
<p>Self-paced learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web learning modules • Online resource links • Simulations • Scenarios • Video and audio CD/DVDs • Online self-assessments and testing 	<p>Performance support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help systems • Print job aids • Knowledge databases • Documentation • Performance/decision support tools



Using Blended Learning – The Trainer

The prospect of introducing an online component into your training program can seem quite complex at first. Even teachers who have computer skills that are adequate for word processing and emailing find that they also need to learn new skills when they start training with computer based learning products.

So, where do you start? The first thing to do is to sort out your expectations, and write them down. Your expectations will relate to why you want to introduce computer based learning into your class, for example:

- the availability of interesting resources online
- improved cost-effectiveness (not only for program providers, but also for students) that may result from going online
- the hope that going online will help students overcome fears about computers and develop a range of new skills
- the wish to conduct classes that are more learner-centred, self-paced and self-directed, with the teacher in the role of facilitator
- the expectation that online delivery will increase flexibility for both the trainer and the students.

Whatever your reasons, the main point is to be clear about what you expect out of using computers and the internet in the learning program. Clear expectations will give you a good basis for planning what you do and for monitoring your progress.

What About Project-Based Learning?

At CAMD, project-based learning is pretty much what it sounds like. We design the learning around specific projects that relate to the tasks the learners are required to undertake on their jobs. This has several benefits:

- makes the learning more interesting for the learners and the trainer
- allows the learner and trainer to easily assess learning progress
- encourages the learner to further develop organizational skills of project management and time management (learn by doing)
- gives the learner practical experience in setting goals and making plans
- enables better problem-solving and decision-making during the learning process
- encourages teambuilding and team communication development
- results in tangible and measurable learning outcomes
- facilitates easier 'on-the-job' skills transfer from the learning to the work environment

Perhaps a good way to help understand how this might work can be demonstrated in the following example. The learners require specific business writing skills identified as: meeting minutes, reports and proposals. The program deliverables suggested are as follows:

The learners will be working in an integrated and gradually more complex fashion that builds on their existing business writing and reading skills and also develops new ones. A significant amount of the work done by the learners will be in the form of self-learning (outside of



workshop time) that is coached and facilitated by the trainer. This will be done through telephone and email support.

In addition to improving professional English language skills (grammar and vocabulary), the learners will:

- 1) **Learn how to write an effective covering email for sending attachments** (i.e. circulating meeting minutes, distributing reports and submitting proposals). This is important to help the learner develop professional document presentation skills. Many documents are circulated or distributed by email and the effectiveness of the covering email sets the first impression for the reader.
- 2) **Learn to read the way the audience reads.** To become a better writer, the learners must first understand how various documents will be read by their audiences. This will help the learners to gain insight into how to highlight the important parts of a message for targeting a reader's attention. It also helps the writers develop critical proof-reading skills which are essential in editing their own writing. The reading module will focus on cover emails, meeting minutes, reports and proposals.
- 3) **Participate in meeting exercises for taking and circulating meeting minutes.** CAMD will cover all meeting basics so that the learners understand the various roles in meetings. The learners will also understand how to create and follow a meeting agenda. Meeting agenda's, when used correctly, form a very practical foundation for recording meeting minutes. The learners will identify which information in meetings is important to record and which is not. They will also learn different recording and distribution strategies and how to correct errors and omissions. Various colleagues (and perhaps supervisors) will be invited to participate in some of the meetings. The main focus of the meetings will be to choose the topic, outline the process and set the framework for completing the report and the proposal modules of the learning project. During the report and proposal writing modules, regular progress meetings will also be held and the learner will take the minutes for submission to company designates.
- 4) **Research, prepare and produce a self-researched, planned and polished, formal long report.** The learners will choose a topic related to their work, and then manage it as a project with deadlines and critical benchmarks. They will be coached through the various stages of producing a professional report. An important criterion of this report is that it must lead to a recommendation for a proposal (action).
- 5) **Based on the recommendations from the report that was created, the learner will write and submit a formal proposal.** The proposal will outline all of the key elements required to successfully compete for securing sponsorship, funding and resource allocation for a project related to their company's business.

As you can see from the above outline of deliverables, CAMD has linked the learning activities in a practical and integrated fashion that involves blending the learning and delivering it in a project-based fashion.

By effectively using blended learning in a project-based format, CAMD can integrate the trainer while personalizing the course and fine tuning the training so as to respect learners' prior learning. This approach saves cost, saves time and makes the learning directly relevant to the learner. This results in higher return on investment in a way that is very hard for traditional training approaches to match.

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