Fall 2003

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Growing High Potential Leaders in the Organization

By Chris Choi

This article discusses the growing role that specialized programs aimed at developing high-potential managers ("Hi-Po") are playing in global companies today. Based on findings from a recent benchmarking effort conducted by EducAsia, this article characterizes some of the common approaches leading global companies are taking in designing and implementing such programs effectively in their organizations.

Emergence of Hi-Po Programs

Developing future leaders in the organization is a continuous, long-term investment that companies are finding to be critical to their long-term success and competitiveness. And although the development of all professionals in an organization is an important task, greater focus is being placed by many companies on nurturing select groups of 'high-potential' managers through specialized "Hi-Po" development programs. Hi-Po programs are typically designed to provide high-touch, accelerated development opportunities for targeted individuals who have been identified as strong candidates for long-term leadership roles in their companies. The proliferation of these Hi-Po development programs is a reflection of a rapidly changing and increasingly competitive global business environment. Smart organizations are realizing that they must do everything they can to: (1) identify and retain their highest performers, and to (2) prepare these Hi-Po individuals as best they can with the complex skills and experience to step in and meet daunting leadership challenges. One of the greatest obstacles facing companies today is the lack of skilled global leaders. As Alfred Seien, former CEO of Gilette said, "The controlling factor in the company's growth is the rate at which we can add talented, globally-focused individuals to our management team." Hi-Po programs are aimed at helping companies achieve these objectives.

The importance of retaining your best, highest-potential individuals is undisputed. The cost of losing and having to replace top performers is immeasurable. And the damage is even greater when these employees leave to join a competitor. Providing specialized, continuous development opportunities for high-performing individuals in a company is an important factor in winning their
long-term commitment and motivation. In this day and age, if a company is unwilling to invest in developing its highest potential employees, it risks losing these employees to a company that is.

In addition to merely retaining its Hi-Po employees, many companies realize that they must also do more to equip these individuals with the diverse skills and experience needed to lead in today’s environment. With continuous changes spurred by information technology and globalization, leaders in global companies face responsibilities that are more challenging and complex than ever. Companies must ensure not only that they find their best people to take on these roles, but also that these people have been armed with the broad skills and perspectives needed to rise to the challenge. Hi-Po programs are designed with this in mind.

Benchmarking and Learning from Global Organizations

In conjunction with one of our clients — a global manufacturing company headquartered in Asia, EducAsia recently conducted a week-long benchmarking trip in the U.S. The purpose of the trip was to examine how various global companies are developing their future leaders. The trip involved meetings with a number of leading U.S. companies renowned for management development — including GE, IBM, FedEx, and Microsoft. The following reflects findings from our benchmarking trip as well as from additional research and discussions.

Key themes:

Nearly all companies we visited articulated a strong belief in the importance of developing their high-potential managers and future leaders. And although the approaches that companies are taking in their 'Hi-Po' development efforts vary, some unifying themes emerge, including:

Hi-Po programs are highly selective, and include rigorous selection processes that deeply involve HR and senior management.

In the companies we met, participants in Hi-Po programs are typically selected based on input from annual performance reviews, and through open discussions and debate involving HR and members of the senior management team (or supervisors best informed to make selection decisions). Selection decisions are typically based on an assessment of each candidate’s past perfor-
mance, alignment with company values, and potential for senior leadership in the company. Because these programs are designed to provide specialized development tracks, they are typically quite selective. At Microsoft, for example, only 100 individuals are selected out of a pool of over 500 GMs and VPs to participate in the company’s two-year Corporate Bench Partner Program, a Hi-Po program designed to develop the company’s next generation of senior executives.

Hi-Po programs are often directed towards the 'next-generation' of senior executives across the company, but can also target different groups of employees as well.

Since Hi-Po programs are often linked directly to succession planning within companies, many Hi-Po programs target individuals who are expected to rise to executive levels within the next 2-5 years. However, companies also are creating and using Hi-Po programs to target more junior levels of the organization (with a focus on longer-term development and retention of 'rising stars'), as well as for specific functional groups or divisions (to develop leaders and experts in specialized functions). For example, in addition to having 'Hi-Po' programs in place for senior managers and executives, GE also has over 7 different Hi-Po programs targeted at entry-level employees in specific functional areas — including HR, Marketing, Information Management, Financial Management, and Sales. Participants in these programs tend to be recruited directly into these 'fast-track' programs based on their outstanding academic achievements and/or work experiences. Amidst the escalating 'war for talent' in the marketplace, these programs enable GE to attract the best entry-level talent to the company and develop them as long-term leaders in each of these areas.

Programs are centered around developing clearly defined skills closely tied to core company values and internal competency models.

Hi-Po programs vary in the competencies they seek to build, depending on the company, the target audience, and the program objectives. However, target competencies of the programs are typically consistent with core management or professional competencies and organization values held by the company.

Many Hi-Po programs incorporate a very holistic approach to skill development.

Companies are making greater use of a blend of interventions — including on-the-job experience, mentoring and coaching, and formal training — as a more integrated approach to development. Some companies have realized that past efforts have been too focused on a single development approach (e.g., formal
training), or that their development initiatives need to be less piecemeal, and more fully integrated and synergistic. Therefore, throughout the Hi-Po programs we have observed, participants are provided with a healthy mix of formal training activities, structured mentoring and coaching opportunities, and on the job experience. Microsoft uses an "E-E-R" philosophy — integrating "Education", "Experience", and "Relationships" — in its blended approach to developing managers. During Microsoft’s two-year Corporate Bench Program, participants undergo a structured regimen that consists of mandatory, formal training classes, discussion sessions with assigned mentors and coaches, problem-solving sessions as part of peer learning groups, and networking sessions with senior executives.

Training and education within Hi-Po programs are emphasizing a changing mix of activities, with greater emphasis on 'action-learning', and collaborative team-based learning.

- Action-Learning. Reflecting the growing importance of having managers learn through solving actual business problems, "Action-learning" is being increasingly used to develop Hi-Po individuals and managers. GE has been a leader in its use of action-learning to train rising managers. Across a number of its management development programs, GE incorporates action-learning projects in which participants assess actual business problems (e.g., building the brand of a specific GE businesses in Europe) faced by specific GE businesses over a 2-3 month period. At the end of the project, teams are expected to provide recommendations or put forward hypotheses requiring further study for senior management. The projects provide participants with exciting, live projects in which they can learn and apply valuable skills and gain new perspectives on GE’s business, while the company gains fresh insights into important business problems it faces.

- Collaborative and team-based learning. In addition, companies are making greater use of collaborative or team-oriented learning activities, reflecting the growing importance of the team as a driving unit for decision-making and performance. IBM has been shifting its leadership development focus away from self/individual learning towards group and organizational-oriented learning. This is reflected in a growing use of team-based activities as part of IBM’s management learning programs. As this continues, traditional, classroom-based lectures and individual-focused learning may continue to give way to group-oriented learning. In addition, 'global' group-based learning is gaining recognition as an important learning form. Companies seeking to build more global perspectives among their managers are finding ways to include greater interaction and
collaboration across geographies in their learning programs. GE’s special management development programs often include team-oriented learning projects involving participants from around the world. These global learning experiences are providing powerful forums for sharing of knowledge, experiences, and best practices among managers across different geographies in the organization.

Online and "Blended" learning are being used to deliver training more continuously and on a more global scale.

Although 'blended learning' has been gaining recognition at a broad level in the training field, online and blended learning are also beginning to play a more prominent role specifically in Hi-Po and management development efforts. By using technology and online learning as part of development programs, companies are able to reduce the amount of time and frequency with which all-too-busy managers must spend in a classroom away from their office. In addition, blending of online learning into management training is enabling companies to deploy training that involves collaboration and knowledge sharing across a more global audience of participants. Face-to-face activities will always play a critical role in the training of managers, but by using a blended learning model, companies can better extend, enhance, and build upon the learning that takes place in the classroom. In this way, valuable classroom time can be focused on more advanced levels of interaction, learning, and networking among participants. In recent years, IBM has been actively blending online learning across its various management development programs. In its "Basic Blue" program for new IBM managers, 75% of the program is delivered through online learning (including simulated problem-solving, and online collaboration and teamwork), and 25% through concentrated classroom-based sessions. IBM claims it is now able to deliver 5x more content and save over $16 million per year by implementing the new blended format for this program. In addition, the formula seems to be yielding performance results. IBM has reported that first-year business enhancements due to leadership skill improvement from the program have averaged $450,000 per participant.

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To learn more about EducAsia’s benchmarking experience, or for further information or help on designing management development programs for your organization, please contact EducAsia at info@educasiainc.com.
Implementing Effective Blended Learning: A Case Study

By Sunyim Rhee

Blended Learning is a learning approach that combines different delivery methods, such as web-based instruction, classroom-based instruction, peer support and community support. It sounds deceptively simple: mix online learning together with other forms of training. But there is confusion on exactly what constitutes "Blended Learning." Some people interpret it as simply combining online learning with face-to-face training, while others emphasize the more complex ways that technology-based learning can be delivered in combination with other delivery methods for supporting and facilitating learning.

Opinions also vary on the usefulness and scope of blended learning. But one certainty is that blended learning is not a new concept. Professionals in the training field have long mixed varying types of delivery and media forms to provide integrated learning experiences. One fundamental objective of blended learning is to leverage and preserve the unique benefits and characteristics of traditional classroom-based training, but to incorporate alternative delivery forms as well to overcome time and physical location limitations, provide enhanced learner-centered experiences, and increase cost efficiencies of training.

For example, training can be designed to consist of integrated online and offline classes. The online classes can enable participants to learn with greater flexibility in their schedule and location, while offline classes enable participants to meet in person and learn in concentrated sessions. Together, online and offline learning can present an integrated, synergistic learning experience for learners. As part of a single program, online and offline learning experiences can each focus on particular activities and aspects of learning well suited for that specific medium of delivery. For example, online learning experiences may focus on providing students with access to rich learning resources and interactive tools that they can explore at their own pace. In addition, through email and online collaboration tools, online learning may provide learners with continuous access to personal mentoring from instructors, and a forum for collaboration with classmates located anywhere without having to convene at a single location at a fixed time. Meanwhile, classroom-based (offline) learning sessions
during the program can focus on delivering more advanced instruction, and facilitating more intensive dialogue, debate, and discussion among participants in a face-to-face environment.

EducAsia utilizes online learning to deliver its programs. However, wherever possible, we try to incorporate offline learning experiences as part of our programs to maximize effectiveness. Various models we have used include:

- Online learning combined with regularly scheduled classroom-based instruction to deepen students’ understanding of what they have learned
- Online learning capped by a final, classroom-based session for synthesizing what students have learned
- Online learning combined with team activities to enable more collaborative learning
- Online learning mixed with offline discussions to strengthen student networking and community

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Self paced learning</td>
<td>Team activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborated Learning (team based)</td>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>Instructo-led Wrap-up session</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Does blended learning imply that we can simply combine any forms of training together to deliver training more effectively? Some open questions may still remain: What are the best ways to blend delivery types? When do you use blended learning? What kinds of conditions are necessary for blended learning to work effectively?
We can uncover answers to some of these questions in examining an actual case example. The following describes how one of our clients, a global auto company headquartered in Asia designed and implemented blended learning to increase the effectiveness of its management development program for high-potential employees.

**Developing global managers at a major auto manufacturing company: A blended learning case**

1. **Background**

In 2002, a leading auto company launched a new education program designed to help develop high-performing junior managers into future global leaders. The program was originally conducted entirely through on-site classes at local universities. After the first year of the program, the company realized that program participants are extremely busy, and find it difficult to take time away from their businesses to attend dedicated training sessions. However, the company believed strongly that the need for continuous education of these individuals was greater than ever. As a result, the company decided to implement a blended learning approach to reduce the schedule and location constraints on learners, while still delivering an engaging and effective learning experience.

2. **Blended Program Framework**

The company’s global management development program includes roughly 200 select participants. The first 3 months of the program are designed to provide participants with a foundation of core business skills and acumen in areas including finance/accounting, strategy, organizational management, technology management, and manufacturing management. This part of the program is now delivered through online learning experiences combined with periodic offline discussion and instruction sessions. During this 3-month experience, learners complete a business skills-evaluation process that entails multiple-choice exams and a series of case assignments evaluated by course instructors. Based on this evaluation, participants are screened and divided into one of 5 specialized program tracks focused on the areas mentioned above. The remainder of the program (specialized program tracks) is conducted through weekly classroom-based sessions at various local universities.
Table 2 - Blended learning framework: auto company case

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Online learning focused on helping participants develop core business skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>Offline session to evaluate and measure student learning so far, and to introduce students to the next phase of the learning process (problem-based learning)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>Online learning focused on strengthening students' problem-solving skills. For this phase, participants are assigned into one of 5 fields, and practice solving a hypothetical business case problem in their field area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Specialized offline classes (conducted weekly at universities)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Characteristics of the blended program

Uses online learning to provide pre-requisite 'foundation skills' for broader program

Online learning experiences are used to deliver training for requisite foundation skills. Online learning is coupled with offline sessions that are focused on synthesis and class discussion. The purpose of this blended experience is to bring all students to a common level of understanding of core business skills prior to conducting more specialized classroom-intensive training.

Uses online learning to evaluate and screen participants for next level of training

Evaluation processes linked to the overall program are incorporated during and following the online learning experiences to ensure higher levels of participant motivation and effort. Participants must achieve minimum grade levels on their tests and assignments during the blended program in order to qualify for participation in the next stage of specialized offline training at the universities.

Supplements online learning with regularly scheduled offline sessions

During the 3-month online learning experience, participants meet together in regularly scheduled face-face offline discussion and instruction sessions. The offline sessions provide online learning participants with opportunities to interact with their classmates in a personal, face-to-face environment, and address issues that have come up during the course. This also helps to strengthen rela-
tionships among learners, which in turn fosters a more engaging and collaborative learning community in the online courses.

Incorporates deadlines and highly structured learning schedules

To ensure learner progress, participants are required to begin and complete online coursework by certain dates according to a fixed schedule. Although learners have the flexibility to do their online coursework at any time during the day and week, they must submit assignments by designated deadlines. Also, participation by learners in the online discussions and the knowledge sharing forums are required and are considered as part of student evaluations. This ensures more robust, ongoing collaboration and interaction throughout the online learning experience.

Uses an orientation session to familiarize participants with the online learning experience

Before the online learning experience begins, an offline orientation session is conducted. The orientation session provides participants with a shared understanding of the overall program objectives, as well as the specific objectives of the online learning experience, and tips for how to study and manage their time in their online learning. Since many of the participants in the program are new to this type of online and blended learning, a detailed orientation session provides them with a valuable understanding of the role of the online learning experience in the context of the overall program objectives.

Provides consistent and personal support to learners throughout

Consistent support and a personal 'touch' are provided throughout the program to encourage participant progress. Support efforts include e-mails, phone calls, and even mobile phone text messages to students initiated by the course operating team and instructors. We found that more personalized methods of support and encouragement seem to more effectively mobilize participant progress. The ongoing communication efforts are designed to make participants feel cared for and fully supported in their learning. The course operating team continuously monitors the learning activities of all learners on regular basis. Participants who fall behind schedule are provided with additional tutoring and time-management advice to help them catch up. In addition, continuous communication between the course operating team (at Educasia) and the company’s HR team are critical to ensuring a coordinated approach to supporting learners.
Uses balanced and objective tools for evaluation

Objective evaluation tools such as multiple-choice tests are used together with more subjective assessments (evaluation of problem-based task assignments) to provide a balanced picture of how well students understand course concepts. Tests and evaluation processes are designed with the goal of measuring how effectively participants gain knowledge and skills needed from the program.

4. Key takeaways from the blended learning experience

Define the distinct roles that both online and offline learning will play, and create linkages between each

Simply blending online and offline learning does not a blended learning model make. The specific objectives of each learning form, as well as the linkages and synergies between the different forms must be taken into consideration to achieve overall program success. In doing so, we must take into account the unique properties and advantages each delivery mechanism offers, in order to determine the specific role each should play as part of the overall program. For example, online learning may be best suited for providing more concept-based and foundation-level training, or for facilitating problem-based learning experiences that entail extended reflection, collaboration, and analysis by students. Likewise, classroom-based instruction may be best reserved for delivering instruction on more complex concepts and issues, or fostering more intensive debate, discussion, and role-playing among participants. In addition, linkages should be made across the various learning forms in terms of content, evaluation, and discussion issues in order to deliver an integrated and synergistic learning experience.

Offline sessions can play a valuable role during online learning experiences

Although some training, if appropriately designed, can be successfully delivered completely online, having at least some form of face-to-face interaction during the experience can be very beneficial. Especially for students who are new to learning online, students may feel a bit isolated or less motivated during their online learning experience. Occasional offline sessions can help to stimulate online learning activity and interaction among participants. By providing a forum for participants to meet each other in person and forge personal connections, participants can be more excited about collaborating and learning together with their class online.
The specific objectives of the online and offline aspects of the blended program should be clearly presented to learners

The mix of offline and online learning experiences can sometimes confuse learners, which can result in decreased learner motivation and focus. It is very important that the participants of a blended learning program understand how each aspect of the program will be conducted and evaluated, and how each will contribute to achieving the overall program objectives.

The length and content of the program should take into account participants’ schedules and availability

For corporate learners, last-minute projects and business travel can come up on a moment’s notice, and can significantly impact learning progress. These practical issues should be considered in designing a blended program. In the case of our global auto client, blended courses were scheduled so that participants could complete their work by spending chunks of time each day throughout the week. If a learner is particularly busy one week, he or she can find time to catch up during the weekend or in the following week. Taking a balanced, realistic approach to designing the learning schedule, will help avoid burnout by participants, and can help account for unexpected participant schedule changes.

Regular monitoring, analysis, and reporting of student progress can yield valuable results

Keeping close track on student progress throughout a blended learning program is essential. This will help ensure that individual student problems are identified early by the HR team and the course provider so that the appropriate intervention can be taken, rather than finding out too late. In addition, reminding learners on a regular basis of their progress to date and their progress vis a vis that of their classmates can also be a powerful motivator for students.

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Student Spotlight

In this section, we spotlight the experiences of Seyoun Park, a recent EducAsia student. Mr. Park is a general manager at Pohang Iron & Steel (POSCO), one of the world's largest steel manufacturers. Along with 25 classmates, Mr. Park participated in two management and leadership courses developed by Cardean University and conducted by EducAsia (Managerial Problem Solving, and Managing the Formal Organization), as part of POSCO's "e-Leaders Academy" training program for high-potential managers. Each of EducAsia's courses was delivered primarily online over 6 weeks, and was facilitated by expert instructors. Each course also included a series of classroom-based lecture and discussion sessions throughout the course period. EducAsia Review ("ER") sat down with Mr. Park to get his perspectives on his first EducAsia course experiences.

ER: Please introduce yourself
Mr. Park: I have worked in the human resource/labor management department of POSCO for almost 20 years. Recently, I participated in POSCO's "e-Leaders Academy", which is a one-year program for high-potential managers, which consists of training in Business Communication, IT, Leadership, and other business skill areas.

ER: What is the most distinguishing characteristic of EducAsia’s courses?
Mr. Park: The most exciting aspect of the courses was that I played the role of a consultant and I was assigned to address real business problems in the context of relevant business situations. The experience helped me to learn systematic approaches to solving organizational issues faced by the companies in the courses. There were also tools and learning resources in the course that helped me to analyze the organizational issues. In particular, the 'root-cause analysis' tools will be very helpful for me to apply to real business problems.

ER: What is your biggest challenge in completing the courses?
Mr. Park: Using English in communicating with others was the biggest challenge for me. The courses require students to actively communicate with others to share knowledge and experiences, and students are forced to think and constantly explain "why?" or "why not?"
ER: What impressed you the most about your learning experience?

Mr. Park: I worked together closely with my teammates to solve the projects in the courses. Since teamwork is a critical factor in determining the success of each project, I was lucky to have been part of a team that consisted of experienced and committed members. Some days we studied and had discussions that lasted until midnight. We submitted our assignments to our instructors anxious and nervous to receive their feedback. The team discussions were a unique part of the learning experience, and will not soon be forgotten.

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Upcoming Programs: October and November 2003

This section highlights the upcoming courses that EducAsia will be delivering. The courses listed below are ‘open enrollment’ classes, meaning that companies are welcome to sponsor one or more individuals from their organizations to join alongside participants from other companies.

The courses below are either 2-weeks or 5-weeks in duration. Each course is led by an expert instructor. Students will participate as part of a class consisting of other global professionals. Learning and collaboration takes place online and through email.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Management and Leadership</th>
<th>Motivating Employee Performance (October 20)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Helps professionals and managers learn approaches to better motivate their employees as well as analyze and address employee performance issues. Participants will gain a better understanding of their own leadership styles and how they can best use their strengths to motivate employees. This course is designed for mid to upper-level managers who are in charge of teams and/or direct reports.</td>
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<th>Principles of Great, Enduring Companies (November 3)</th>
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<td>Helps participants understand the unifying features that make companies successful — including the principles and mechanisms adhered to by leading companies that have thrived and endured over long periods of time. Participants will examine how these principles and mechanisms are at work in real-world companies. This course is designed for senior managers and executives of an organization.</td>
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<th>Strategy and Business Planning</th>
<th>Competitive Advantage and Strategic Positioning (October 29)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Presents concepts and methods for identifying a firm’s core competencies, determining how industry trends will affect profitability, and developing a corresponding competitive strategy. By understanding concepts presented in this course, managers can become better equipped to turn business potential into a competitive market advantage. This course is designed for professionals and managers involved in making strategic positioning decisions for their businesses.</td>
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<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Promotion Strategy (November 3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Helps managers understand techniques for communicating with customers and promoting products in the marketplace. By mastering the principles presented in this course, managers can sharpen their ability to reach the right customer with the right message using the right tools. This course is designed for professionals and managers involved in determining how to promote products in the market and communicate with customers.</td>
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<th>Global Communications</th>
<th>Negotiating For Business Success (October 20)</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Helps managers learn strategies and techniques that enable them to be more effective negotiators. Participants develop approaches for identifying and assessing negotiation situations, and preparing for and participating in negotiations. This course is designed for managers and advanced professionals involved in negotiating with partners, suppliers, customers, and internal parties.</td>
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<th>Writing Essentials (November 3)</th>
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<td>Helps managers learn to create (English-based) documents that are easy to read, understand, and remember. Participants will learn to identify needs of their audience and convey messages clearly and concisely, as well as manage other writers to help them create clear, concise documents. This course is designed for professionals seeking to write and communicate more effectively (in English).</td>
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EducAsia also has a full range of additional courses that can be delivered to meet the needs of individual companies. To find out more about the upcoming open enrollment classes or other courses available for your organization, please contact us at info@educasiainc.com, or visit www.educasiainc.com.
About EducAsia

EducAsia delivers business and management training aimed at building the global competencies and performance of organizations and professionals. Our learning approach combines expert interactive content with personal, faculty-led instruction to deliver high-impact, collaborative learning experiences that build real-world skills.

Incorporated in the U.S. in 2000, EducAsia has offices in Korea and Singapore. EducAsia has trained thousands of professionals in nearly 40 countries across a growing list of global clients. Our programs focus on building competencies in areas such as Management and Leadership, Strategy and Business Planning, Marketing, Financial Management, Operations, and Communication.

In partnership with:

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