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## **Blended Learning Model Sets the Stage for Seamless Project Management**

*By Kathleen King, PMP, Managing Principal, Kittim Consulting*

When the curtain rises to a packed house on opening night, the actors onstage have already spent weeks, if not months, carefully rehearsing every detail. Lines are memorized; cues are identified; and seamless transitions are in place.

The cumulative effect should be a perfectly scripted show that goes off without a hitch.

During live performances, however, slip-ups occasionally happen. A line is flubbed. A cue is missed. A transition does not occur. And the audience may never even realize it.

With thorough planning and rigorous practice schedules in place, trained actors continue to move in synch – even in the face of unanticipated circumstances – so the show can keep playing out, all the way to a standing ovation.

The same guiding principle holds true for today’s Project Managers. Those who fail to practice are more prone to stumble. Those who have assembled their teams, anticipated the scenarios that could arise during a project, and rehearsed the team response are more likely to continue moving in synch when real-world obstacles arise – and when it matters the most.

But with so many variables outside of a Project Manager’s control, how does he or she prepare to navigate missed cues or absent transitions to keep the show going on time, within budget, and to the level of quality that is expected?

That’s when the right kind of project-management training can be of tremendous value. But, buyer, beware – not all project-management training is the same. The format is just as important as the content.

Textbooks offer theory-based guidance. Classroom instruction is helpful, but its long-term value can diminish in the face of a project-related crisis. Internet-based coursework is convenient, but it often requires a self-guidance that does not mirror real-world, team-based environments.

Instead of seeking a universal format to train Project Managers, many companies are turning to a “blended-learning model” that combines the best parts of **classroom** instruction, **e-learning** and

**computer simulation** so participants are prepared to steer even the most complex situations. Scenarios and training techniques can be adapted to any industry and for any scale of project.

- **Raise your hand!** Pool your core Project Management team into a traditional classroom or teleconference environment to initiate the blended-learning process. An experienced instructor scales the subject matter – from beginner to mid-level to experienced – to address the core fundamentals participants can expect to master throughout the course. The classroom environment also facilitates dialog among a project team and provides an objective, third-party resource to answer questions at the onset of training that participants can utilize immediately on the job.
- **A click away!** Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK) based e-learning exercises are then completed individually in an efficient timeframe. PMBOK is an internationally recognized standard that provides the fundamentals of project management for a wide range of projects, including construction, software, engineering and automotive. The classroom instructor checks in with each participant during the e-learning phase to evaluate progress and offer initial hands-on coaching.
- **Simulation helps you take flight!** The blended-learning format culminates with project-management simulation that is facilitated by a classroom instructor and SimulTrain, a computer-based simulator that has trained more than 85,000 project managers in more than 50 countries. SimulTrain replicates the obstacles managers are likely to encounter throughout a project. Extreme situations also force quick decisions as the system simulates urgent phone calls, voicemails and e-mails participants would encounter. Participants immediately see how their decisions can positively or negatively affect project outcomes – from delayed deliverables to improved team morale.

Through combined instruction formats, the blended-learning model encourages participants to focus on the real-world, execution phase of a project without ignoring the importance of planning. Its customization to any industry and scalability to any assignment or level of Project Manager means your team will be well prepared when all eyes are on them.

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