# Brain Staff Consultants Inc.

Streamlining communication with staff in remote locations and anticipating potential to improve educational outcomes using Blackboard Collaborate™



Brain Staff Consultants Inc.
(From the left) Mr. Satoshi Shioyama, Mr. Kiyohito Mori, Ms. Naoko Miura and Mr. Kimihiro Sato

**Company:**
Brain Staff
Consultants Inc.

📍 **Location:**
Shimanouchi, Chuo-ku,
Osaka-shi, Osaka Prefecture
2F, Jikei Building, 1-10-15

🏢 **Established:**
August 1988

👥 **Number of employees**
**(As of 2017)**
30 people
＋ 25 instructors

📑 **Business details:**
Application Division
Network Division
Education Division
Web Design Division

🌐 **Website**
http://www.bsc.to/

The Jikei Group of Colleges provides professional education in 70 educational institutions across the country and has a mission "to contribute to society through vocational education". The group has trained people in more than 500 occupations and produced more than 240,000 graduates since the Specialised Training Colleges Act was implemented in 1976. One of the group companies, Brain Staff Consultants Inc. (BSC), provides IT support to the group.
The Education Division at BSC provides computer skills training to students and teachers, recommends new training systems starting with e-learning, and provides I.T support to all the colleges. As a result, they install promising IT tools quickly and, having verified them in-house first, will recommend that they are utilised in the group. The distance learning / web-conferencing system, Blackboard Collaborate, was installed in 2016 as part of this strategy. It is currently being proactively used for internal communication and they are also verifying its use in the colleges.

## Expected to be the tool that resolves internal communication issues

Mr. Kiyohito Mori, Deputy Director of the Education Division, spoke about their objectives for installing Blackboard Collaborate.

"BSC searched for several years for a tool that could communicate in real time with students for e-learning and remote lectures. Blackboard Collaborate has a rich set of functions and can be used with a browser without the need for plug-ins. Furthermore, because it can also be linked to Moodle, the Learning Management System (LMS) our company uses, we first installed it in-house and then decided to verify how user-friendly it was. It is used as a staff communication tool in the Education Division at BSC where members of the Education Division are divided between the Osaka HQ and the Tokyo office. BSC provides PC skills training to approximately 3,000 students in 13 colleges within the group and our contracted instructors provide lessons at each site. One of the issues was difficulty in communicating day-to-day because members and instructors were scattered across various sites."

"In the past, we communicated using the schedule management system, by e-mail and telephone, etc., but we frequently felt frustrated as things that we could have easily conveyed had we explained them while looking at a computer screen were not conveyed very well. Furthermore, we were also aware of the importance of communication using facial expressions. If we installed Blackboard Collaborate, we could make video calls and also discuss matters while sharing PC screens, so we expected that this would probably make communication smoother", said Mr. Mori.

BSC installed a TV conferencing system and used free internet telephony software, but it was not satisfactory as a communication tool. Mr. Kimihiro Sato from the Network Division explains below.

"We had to go to the room where the TV conferencing system was installed to use it. All BSC staff work with PCs regularly, so it would be handy if this could be carried out on a PC, regardless of location. Furthermore, the internet telephony software had limitations and the communication quality was unstable, so it wasn't really practical. So we hoped that Blackboard Collaborate was the solution that could overcome the issues we had with our existing tool."

## Evaluation of various functions for smooth communication

Mr. Mori listed the following 3 points as the functions he felt were particularly effective as a result of actually utilising Blackboard Collaborate as a communication tool in-house.

①**Sharing applications and desktop**
"It's easy to check operating procedures and share images, etc., and we can proceed more efficiently with meetings and developing teaching materials."

②**Session recording function**
"Meetings can be logged and members who did not attend can watch the recording later."

③**Integration with LMS (Moodle)**
"We can pass on the management of Moodle users without any changes by setting up a room in Blackboard Collaborate (Classroom) in a Moodle Course. As a result, if they just go on Moodle, it is possible for them to use it immediately."
Mr. Mori said "I'm grateful that I can create as many rooms as I like. If we create rooms for each Division, we should be able to use it more for daily communication within the division."

Ms. Naoko Miura, who is responsible for PC skills training in the Education Division, is the member of staff who uses Blackboard Collaborate the most in-house.

"I use it to contact instructors when there are any problems in the classroom. Also, it's difficult to gather all the instructors for training, so I also do this on Blackboard Collaborate. I feel that creating teaching materials is particularly useful. I am often asked by instructors who are located in classrooms as much as an hour and a half away by train, to edit videos etc., but I can get on with my work while giving individual instructions and reports. In the past, we mainly communicated by telephone and, sometimes, I also actually went to the classrooms. I also used internet telephony software, but sometimes the sound would disconnect mid-call, the sound quality was poor, and I felt stressed. I am grateful that both the sound quality and images with Blackboard Collaborate are stable and we can communicate effectively. Also, it's easy to understand each other if we can talk to each other while looking at each other's facial expressions and work progresses smoothly."

"Collaborate is not just a simple communication tool but it provides enhanced functions as a tool for education."

Mr. Kiyohito Mori
Education Division

# Blackboard

Mr. Satoshi Shioyama, a learning designer affiliated with the Network Division, gives the following evaluation in anticipation of the future.

"I think that, in the future, education in Japan will also see e-learning spread further. Communication is important when providing e-learning. I think that being able to provide this smoothly is an excellent feature of Blackboard Collaborate. I also think the fact that it can be operated intuitively and that anyone can use it easily, are important points for an educational tool."

Mr. Sato gives his evaluation from the viewpoint of the Network Division.

"The fact that it is easy to link it to Moodle is at the top of my list. Also, I think that even among tools used for WebRTC, Blackboard Collaborate has extremely high quality, stable sound and images."

＊WebRTC: standard that enables real-time communication (video chat, voice chat, file sharing, etc.) between browsers without plug-ins

## Using Blackboard Collaborate for distance learning

BSC is currently testing communication between staff members in the distance learning department for childcare and students.

"We are at the stage of gathering information about the advantages and issues while getting the teachers and students to use it freely. Blackboard Collaborate can be linked to Moodle so it is easy to access via Moodle in the same way as before and, as teachers and students are familiar with Moodle, they just have to remember how to use Collaborate and they can use it without any additional burdens. We only started the trial 3 months ago but we are also surprised by how much it is being utilised" says Mr. Mori.

Students in the distance learning department usually study using teaching materials at home, regularly submit reports to teachers via the LMS, and the teachers correct these and give feedback via the LMS. Teachers and students only had the opportunity to meet face-to-face a few times a year and there were issues about communication. Therefore, by utilising Blackboard Collaborate, the following initiatives were introduced.

*Initiatives carried out by the distance learning department and evaluation by teachers:*

- **Classroom (All years / once a month)**
  "We usually only understood the student situation from messages because they were only taught a few times a year. So we decided to have a classroom on Blackboard Collaborate once a month. As a result, we are now able to understand how focused they were on the training from the students' reactions to the questions from their faces, expressions, and appearance, etc., and also whether there had been any change to their daily lives, and we were able to respond promptly to any students that we felt seemed to be acting strangely. We recognised the importance of non-verbal communication again."

- **New student interviews (Year 1 / May)**
  "Once orientation for new students ends at the start of April, there are no further opportunities to meet until the date of the interview lesson in July. So when we held interviews with new students using Collaborate in May, they could share any anxieties about the initial period when starting college and we could keep them motivated."

"I am grateful that both the sound quality and images with Collaborate are stable and we can communicate without any stress."

Computer Training
Ms. Naoko Miura



# Blackboard®

- **Trainee interviews (Year 3 / Before and after training)**

  "Year 3 students undertake childcare training. They have to create a training plan in consultation with faculty staff and, in the past, they were given guidance by having their reports corrected. However, students lost confidence when they saw their plans corrected in red ink, and also, often came all the way into college due to their anxiety to get instructions. Therefore, it is possible for them to actually improve "the red corrections" by conducting interviews with them while sharing their corrected plans on Collaborate and we were able to make students understand without becoming anxious".

## Student voice

"Actions such as forming sentences and sending messages are really exhausting. As a result, I gave up in the end as I was unable to explain what I wanted to say, but it was great to be able to talk face-to-face."

"It's easy to understand because I can get actual instructions while sharing documents. It helped as I am a little intimidated by making phone calls."

"It was fun to be able to meet my teachers and classmates once a month. I wanted to join in even if the time changed. I'd definitely like you to carry on with the Classroom."

## A full-scale introduction to educational activities

Below, Mr. Mori explains his thoughts for the future based on this kind of educational environment.

"E-learning tools have a dull image but I really understood that, by using Blackboard Collaborate, communication became smoother and it was linked to improvements in educational outcomes. In the future I would like to investigate a full-scale introduction to educational activities mainly for distance learning. I would also like to test its use in remote classrooms for group education."

> *"Collaborate is not just a simple communication tool but it provides enhanced functions as an educational tool. It can be used online and is also easy to handle. Because it is possible to create multiple rooms based on objectives and participants, it is also easy to manage when there are a large number of users. I think there are huge benefits from installing Blackboard Collaborate if an organisation uses an LMS."*
>
> Kiyohito Mori, Deputy Director, Education Division

Blackboard Distributor in Japan

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