


Business Partner B1+1

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Business Partner B1+		
Author:	Iwonna Dubicka, Margaret O’Keefe, Bob Dignen, Mike Hogan & Lizzie Wright (2018)	
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In general, many business employers state that there is a lack of employees who possess the necessary soft skills (e.g., the ability to communicate effectively and build relationships), which complement required hard skills (technical and specialized knowledge) (Anthony & Garner, 2016, p. 60). *Business Partner B1+* (2018) by Iwonna Dubicka, Margaret O’Keefe, Bob Dignen, Mike Hogan, and Lizzie Wright focuses on the learning of soft skills rooted in sociocultural and pragmatic contexts—interpersonal rapport and relationship building. This focus is in line with a view of second language acquisition theory which stresses the importance of communicative competence (Canale, 1983).

Business Partner B1+ (2018) is an eight-unit coursebook targeted at the “B1+ intermediate independent user” as designated by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2018; Dubicka, O’Keefe, Dignen, Hogan, & Wright, 2018). Other levels ranging from B1 to C1 will be published as part of the Business Partner series (Pearson, 2018). The coursebook focuses on providing learners with the practical language and soft skill training needed to succeed in the business world. Learners can access a variety of materials which provide authentic content (such as extracts from Financial Times), real-life video content, and interpersonal communication training to improve interpersonal skills, soft skills, and practical skills for working across cultures. In addition, the coursebook has been designed so that each unit can be worked upon independently and is flexible with learner needs.

There are eight thematic units in *Business Partner B1+*: (i) Organisation, (ii) Brands, (iii) Job Hunting, (iv) Business Strategy, (v) Logistics, (vi) Entrepreneurs, (vii) Working Abroad, and (viii) Leadership. There are reference pages at the end of the coursebook to address pronunciation and grammar, in addition to extra student materials, video scripts, audio scripts, and a glossary.

One of the main aims of *Business Partner B1+* is to give learners the opportunity to develop the soft skills required to build relationships with new coworkers and/or acquaintances. An

aspect that has been included in each of the eight units is the importance of understanding cultural styles and personalities, which may be different to those of the learners, and developing effective communication across cultures. Learners have ample opportunity through tasks, activities, and projects to build their intercultural and pragmatic competence, develop strategies and skills in establishing cross-cultural relationships, and navigate potential miscommunications in the workplace (such as approaching a worker who has not fulfilled their job expectations) (Dubicka, O’Keefe, Dignen, Hogan, & Wright, 2018).

While effective communication is important, *Business Partner B1+* also recognizes the need for learners to improve their knowledge of the English language as it is used in a business and personal context. To this end, the coursebook addresses functional language, vocabulary, and grammar in each unit. Language is not viewed as decontextualized sentence and word-level constructions; instead, there is an emphasis on considering both form (grammar and vocabulary) and function (engagement in social processes) in the business environment (Derewianka, 2012, p. 142). Furthermore, learners are exposed to varied accents, such as Japanese, German, and English (American and U.K. varieties) throughout the videos and listening audio tracks in each unit to help normalize the reality of English as an international language (Canagarajah, 2005).

Another aim of the coursebook is to provide learners with the opportunity to experience diverse business situations that they may potentially encounter in the future – or present – workplace. The authors recognize that activities should not only be limited to traditional print literacy, but they should also address digital and visual literacies (i.e., 21st century skills; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). For these purposes, *Business Partner B1+* incorporates video and audio components utilizing space and body language, as well as online research in order to engage learners multimodally (Dubicka et al., 2018). Digital literacy is further embraced and encouraged in the materials through the use of video scripts, for example, and visual literacy through the examination of website design and branding strategies. A major strength of the coursebook is that the incorporation of technology supports pedagogical aims and objectives and is not just an add-on to pass time in the classroom (Dubicka et al., 2018).

The four skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening are incorporated throughout each unit of the coursebook. The reading texts are authentic and listening is incorporated through audio and multimodal video clips, which educators and students can access through an online link and code provided in the coursebook. There is also an online *MyEnglishLab* for learners to work on extra unit activities and make use of lexical/grammatical resources (such as an online business glossary and additional grammar exercises). The videos accessed online incorporate real-life interviews with business professionals and a dramatized communications skills storyline. Moreover, the videos targeting communication skills serve to exemplify communication styles from varying cultures and personalities.

Cultural awareness is a key element in *Business Partner B1+*. In most units, there is a focus on how cultural backgrounds and personalities influence communication styles. For instance, the coursebook contains an example on how Japanese culture uses an indirect approach to facing a work issue, whereas American culture is more direct. This cultural awareness is noted as a key strategy in negotiating, problem-solving, and decision-making. This awareness could be particularly useful to those learners who are finding it difficult to adapt to a new culture or workplace environment.

An additional strength of *Business Partner BI+* is that the writing activities provide learners with a model text and the opportunity to practice business writing skills. The purpose of the writing tasks is to familiarize learners with the genres typically used in a business setting (e.g., business reports, formal/informal emails, budgeting plans, etc.), which can assist them in understanding the textual unity, cohesion, and structure required in a given context (Humphrey, Doga & Feez, 2012).

Finally, the coursebook requires students to engage in higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, evaluating, and synthesizing (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Learners are encouraged to think critically, analyze, and take a holistic perspective before addressing a problem or incorporating a strategy. The inclusion of higher-order thinking skills means that learners are better equipped with problem-solving skills they can use in their day-to-day lives and future professions (Richards, 2006).

Although some of the activities on *MyEnglishLab* digital resource may have a lower cognitive demand (such as click and select or gap-fill activities), the incorporation of additional online activities and skill resources assists learners in building knowledge. One small incorporation that could be implemented on *MyEnglishLab* would be to include an element allowing learners to engage in an online collaborative knowledge creation process (e.g., a blog or discussion board; Harasim, 2012). This would permit learners to interact, engage and learn from each other using English as they would similarly do in a real-life business or personal scenario.

Overall, *Business Partner BI+* is an excellent resource which will be valuable to learners who wish to improve their functional language knowledge in English, soft skills, and intercultural awareness for business purposes. In addition, educators who teach a post-secondary business course will benefit from the professional skills development the coursebook provides. Furthermore, the incorporation of multimodal representations of language and use of higher-order thinking skills offers learners a refreshing and stimulating approach to engaging with business course materials.

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