Life-long Learning in Business and Industry

Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Language and Intercultural Communication

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Using Information Communication Technology (ICT) for conducting intercultural joint research project

Abstract
This paper reports on an Action Learning Project, funded by the University Grant Committee (UGC, ALP8750011), to introduce appropriate information communication technology (ICT) into a Professional Communication Skills course. The study aims to improve the teaching and learning of business and management communication by (a) allowing students to share information and consequently improved their learning through a co-operative learning strategy, (b) enhancing their persuasive communication and interviewing skills, and (c) gaining direct exposure to Hong Kong business professionals and US business major students through collaboration on semester projects.

Both quantitative and qualitative measurements were used to measure the effectiveness of the Project. Questionnaire was administered to both Hong Kong and US participants to capture the overall impressions on long-distance joint intercultural research project. Qualitative measurements employed include selected focus group discussion, debriefings, and student comments on long-distance intercultural e-mail communication.

Theoretical base of the action research project
The underlying theory of this two-year Action Learning Project is based on the five-stage Action Research Spiral model (see for example, Kember & Kelly, 1993; Lewin, 1946/1988) to reflect the action learning process. In the following I will describe how the project activities were facilitated through the use of ICT during the course of the project.

There is a growing recognition that information technology and telecommunication-based communication represent “the wave of the future”. Although ICT has been incorporated into teaching for various purposes, application and use of this hardware was not often interwoven in the content courses. Consequently,
students did not have a practical theory base or related experience in applying telecommunication technology such as e-mail, tele-conferencing, discussion groups, Internet data banks and Web sites. The problem underlying this project was the lack of opportunity to expose students to the use of ICT, which would have better equipped them for their future careers. Therefore, the project was further designed to add realism and raise student motivation and involvement by incorporating the use of telecommunication technology.

The plan related to how to integrate e-mail and other information technologies into the fabric of the three semester-long projects: Fast-Food Restaurant Project or Intercultural Communication Project and Industry Analysis Project.

The action phase focused on monitoring the flow of telecommunication technology and on the possibility of providing feedback to students through e-mail and in-class discussions. Making sure that students adhered to schedules in posting central file messages in the list server was an essential part of this phase. The schedule of class activities was altered so that it was possible to include appropriate discussions on the ongoing process of information exchange via e-mail and central file.

The observation phase was employed to capture the impressions of the researchers and representative student groups. Multiple evaluation procedures were used to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the project from differing perspectives and at various times during the course of the project. The evaluation aimed at uncovering general and specific impressions, problems, and suggestions for improvement. Mechanisms used for evaluating the learning process included student to student peer evaluations (i.e., peer critiques, debriefing, and questionnaires) and researcher student evaluations (i.e., focus group discussion, debriefing, and feedback).

At the end of the first year, ten student representatives were invited to participate in a focus group discussion that lasted for two and half hours. In the second year, two additional measurements were employed to reflect students’ feedback from the first year. To detect the difficulties encountered by students
and provide prompt feedback, debriefing was conducted at the middle of semester A of the second year and the results were taken into consideration for the design of the semester B project. In addition, both Hong Kong and US students were required to fill out questionnaires at the end of the second year.

This is the period in which to digest and process the experience after the pace and pressure of the semester and to reflect critically on successes and failures.

**Project-based design and the use of ICT**

Project-based design was adopted to facilitate and enhance learning efficacy. Three semester-long projects were employed to focus on the practical application in organizational, marketing, and intercultural communication theory. In Year-1, these projects-based assignments were conducted solely in Hong Kong. In Year-2, to build intercultural competency of students, Hong Kong students were paired with US students for two projects; namely, Fast-Food Restaurant Project and Industry Analysis Project. Descriptions of these semester-based projects are discussed in the following.

**Fast-food Restaurant Project**

In Year-1, the Fast-Food Restaurant Project was conducted in Hong Kong. Students formed groups of three or four. Each task group had to: (1) identify and interview one manager/supervisor and at least two full-time employees of any fast food restaurant; (2) observe the restaurant operation during the peak hours and note conflicts among staff and/or customers; and (3) prepare a written report in which students compared their interview data with the observation data as well as data from other peer groups. In Year-2, 25 students jointly conducted the fast-food restaurant project with American university business major undergraduate and graduate students. Throughout the semester, project participants researched and exchanged information with their US counterparts. At the end of collaboration, Hong Kong participants reported on the business practices (by contrasting typical fast-food restaurant operation and evaluating its transferability) and customer and employee behavior between Hong Kong and San Francisco. For the use of ICT, each task group conducted library search and field research (including interviews and survey questionnaires) and then exchanged information with their assigned counterparts through e-mail. In addition, each task force group negotiated the deadlines of the information exchange and clarified their exchanged information.

**Industry Analysis Project (IAP)**

In Year-1, the IAP project was conducted in Hong Kong. Based on a model developed by Michael E. Porter (1979), each task-force group (consisting of 5
to 6 persons) conducted field research and wrote a business report on a chosen industry.

In Year-2, eight task-force groups of Hong Kong and US students were formed to examine the market potentiality of California and Greater China (i.e., Hong Kong and Guangdong) for designated products (i.e., mobile phone, digital camera, coffee maker, iTV). During the course of the project, both US and Hong Kong participants exchanged information regarding their chosen industry. At the end of the project, both US and Hong Kong task-force groups negotiated the percentage of funding (US$100 million provided by headquarters) that each regional market should be allocated for product development.

For the use of ICT, each task-force group exchanged information in regard to the secondary data (i.e., annual reports and World Wide Web information) and field research data (i.e., survey questionnaires, telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews). The task-force groups also needed to use ICT to clarify exchanged information and negotiate deadlines and fund allocation.

Evaluation of effectiveness

To assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the Action Learning Project, both quantitative and qualitative measurements were employed. From the quantitative perspective, the questionnaire data captured participants' impressions on overall effectiveness of the telecommunication system and on long-distance joint intercultural research project, whereas qualitative data provided more in-depth analyses on the success and failure of the project. In this section, I will first report on the quantitative questionnaire results; and then describe the mechanisms used to collect qualitative data (i.e., focus group discussion and debriefing). Lastly, I will provide a list reflecting student reactions towards the joint intercultural research project.

Questionnaire and Participants' Ratings

The questionnaire data provided additional texture and insights in comparing San Francisco and Hong Kong task-force groups on semester project collaboration. The focus of the questionnaire was on: (a) overall effectiveness of the e-mail communication system; (b) difficulties encountered in working with their group members and with their counterparts; (c) attitudes toward their counterparts; (d) the negotiation of funds allocations as well as decision making; and (e) their perceived relationship with counterparts.

Overall Effectiveness. Participants were required to assess overall effectiveness of the e-mail communication system in regard to the perceptions of accuracy, usability, and importance of receiving and responding to e-mail promptly. Figure 1 compares the mean scores of the seven sub-statements between US and Hong Kong students.
The findings reveal that both Hong Kong and US students considered the overall effectiveness of the e-mail communication system was moderate ($X = 3.13; 4.5$). Although e-mail communication was seen as a necessity in day-to-day communication channels, the result seems inconclusive (see also Mak, 1995; Sharma & Garratt, 1995). The view of one US student indicates the realization of both the value of e-mail communication and the problems: “Overall I think this project was very interesting. I think we should be doing more intercultural e-mail communications in the future when we’re doing business but it’s not as easy as it seems. I’m glad that I got an early glimpse.”

As for the usability of received information from their counterparts, US students rated usability higher than did Hong Kong students ($X = 4.08; 2.69$). The discrepancy in perceiving the usability of exchanged information between US and Hong Kong student groups may result from the perception difference in information exchange. To most US students, the exchanged information was seen as a reference assisting them to make better decisions. In this case, information exchanged is considered a “process”; thus the form of the exchanged information does not need to be complete. In contrast, over 90 percent of the Hong Kong students expected their US counterparts to provide complete, semi-finished reports (products). This perception gap toward information exchange is likely to have caused the lower rating of the information usability by Hong Kong student groups.

Of the seven sub-statements, the major difference lies in the importance of getting a prompt response and the pressure to respond promptly. US students rated 5.16 indicating the importance of getting a prompt response, and this result was consistent with their feeling of being pressured to respond promptly ($X = 4.84$). As compared to US students, Hong Kong students rated much lower on both items ($X = 3.51; 3.16$) indicating that the importance of getting a prompt response and pressure to respond to e-mail messages were not their primary concern. However, the results of these two statements contradicted with the qualitative data in which 95 percent of the Hong Kong students reported that they became agitated during the course of the joint research project because of the slow response from their US counterparts.
Figure 1: A Comparison of Mean Scores of Overall Effectiveness between Hong Kong and US Counterparts.

Another major difference is the importance of receiving grammatically correct information. The results show that it is more important for Hong Kong groups (X = 4.18) to receive grammatically correct information than US groups (X = 2.96). The importance of receiving grammatically correct information of the Hong Kong groups are likely to explain the low rating for their perceived usability of exchanged information. It is hypothesised that Hong Kong students want to receive information that they can directly transfer to their reports without further rewriting. Consequently, the printed information provided should be complete and grammatically correct.

**Difficulties Encountered.** The second section of questionnaire asked participants to assess the degree of difficulty they encountered with their own project group members and with their counterparts. The mean scores of the US and Hong Kong groups in collaborating with their own project group as compared to their counterparts was 2.28 versus 3.47 and 3.88 versus 5.20 respectively. The result showed that Hong Kong students encountered more difficulty in collaborating with their US counterparts than their own project group members (X = 5.2; 3.47) in completing the project.

**Attitudes Towards Counterparts During the Course of Project.** The high rating of the Hong Kong student groups on their perceived difficulties in interacting with US students was consistent with their overall attitudes toward their US counterparts at the beginning, middle, and end of the project. The Hong Kong student groups rated 4.69 on a 7-point Likert scale at the beginning of the project (3.27 vs. 4.69). The rating decreased to 3.08 at the middle of the
project indicating that the attitudes of the Hong Kong student groups had changed drastically. Although at the end of the project, the mean score increased to 3.27, the result of the favourable attitudes towards their US counterparts was much lower than at the beginning of the project. In contrast, the US students rated more positively toward their Hong Kong counterparts. Their ratings started with 5.28 showing favourable attitudes, moved down to 4.72 in the middle, and to 4.92 at the end.

In allocating funding, the results showed that 86 percent of US participants considered the negotiation of funding allocation between the two regions fair whereas only 67 percent of Hong Kong participants agreed with the funding allocation. Those individuals who agreed that the funding allocation was fair from Hong Kong and US task force groups reported that the process of negotiating funding allocation was inspiring and that both parties could reach mutual agreement after a few e-mail exchanges.

In comparison with nine percent of US students who disagreed with the fairness of funding allocation, 27 percent of the Hong Kong participants reported that they did not reach agreement with their US counterparts. The reasons for not being able to reach mutual agreements were that:

1. insufficient information exchange from US counterparts did not allow them to accurately assess the competitiveness of the product markets in both regions;
2. the US counterparts failed to provide evidence to support their request;
3. there was no discussion or negotiation on funding allocation between both parties. The US counterparts insisted on their own recommendation, according to Hong Kong participants.

The Perceived Relationships with Counterparts. All the participants were asked to characterise their relationships with their counterparts. About 78 percent of US students characterised their relationships with their Hong Kong counterparts as professional whereas only 18.9 percent of Hong Kong students considered their relationship with US counterparts professional. One third of Hong Kong students described their relationship as friendship. The result revealed a sizeable perception difference between US and Hong Kong students in a working relationship.

The difference of the perceived relationships in the course of the project reflects Confucian-heritage culture (CHC) of Hong Kong participants that strengthening interpersonal relations is more important than working / professional relations (see also Bond, 1991; Bond & Hwang, 1986; Bond & Lee, 1981). US students became aware of cultural problems in communication, especially in the use of humour, as shown by comments such as “Miscommunication arose due to cultural differences. Tried a sarcastic joke to generate good-fellowship. It bombed. Tried capitalising on phrases in “high-context” language. This, too,
bombed,” and “It was a valuable learning process. Our group members have been pretty upset about the miscommunication even when we tried to explain every single detail (we thought!) . . . I was amazed at the number of differences between the US and Hong Kong groups, even I shouldn’t have had any problem with the Chinese (HK) culture.” The same was true of some Hong Kong students as indicated by the following comment: "Actually, I don’t think e-mails are effective in making decisions. Miscommunication arises because of misunderstandings. Maybe we are from different cultural backgrounds, we can’t understand each other fully. The most obvious example was that our US counterparts said that we couldn’t understand their sense of humour. We in turn think they are impolite. So, in my point of view, face-to-face communication is more effective and better because we can interpret the meaning more accurately as people communicate verbally and non-verbally.”

**Qualitative Measurement**

Three measurements employed to capture the qualitative data include: focus group discussion, debriefing, and selected comments from US and Hong Kong students evaluating overall impressions of the long distance intercultural e-mail communication project.

**Selected Focus Group Discussion.** At the end of the first year, ten student representatives were invited to participate at focus group discussion. Four topic areas were identified for discussion: (a) teamwork and small-group communication; (b) use of telecommunication technology; (c) use of language; and (d) reflections on overall learning. In the following, the findings of the four sub-topic areas centred on the focus group discussion will be discussed.

**Teamwork and small-group communication** is the first major topic area in the focus group discussion. The focus was to understand the importance of teamwork, investigate students’ attitudes toward team work, and compare the decision-making strategies used by different task-force groups in the course of the project. Eight out of ten representative discussants noted their attitude and strategy toward teamwork and small group communication changes between semesters A and B. In semester A, students used maintenance-relational strategy when working with their project members, as compared to semester B in which teamwork strategy was altered to cope with the more demanding semester project, the Industry Analysis Project.

According to the discussants, although maintaining group harmony was their primary concern, they realised that the maintenance-relational teamwork strategy did not lead to group effectiveness. Consequently, they needed to adjust their teamwork strategy in order to enhance group effectiveness. Compared with semester A, students changed their teamwork strategy from maintenance-relational orientation behaviour to task-orientated behavioural style in semester B. Although in semester B their attitude towards teamwork was task-oriented,
consciously the majority of the students still tried hard to avoid conflicts even though they needed to voice differing opinions from time to time. Most importantly, group members learned to analyse and choose among alternatives before finalising their decisions.

Use of information technology is the second topic area. The use of ICT is the second topic area. This topic involves the effect of using list server technology on the communication process and the situations in which other telecommunication technologies were used (i.e., mobile phones, Internet Chatting Queue [ICQ]). Although the use of telecommunication technology expedited the information exchange, students’ feedback on its use was mixed (for similar feedback in other studies see for example, Mak, 1995; Sharma & Garratt, 1995). Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents did not consider the list server communication channel an effective tool to enhance their communication process and information exchange. Instead, students preferred using mobile phones or ICQ when communicating with their peers in Hong Kong and using ICQ when communicating with the US counterparts.

It is hypothesised that the results for such an unfavourable response might be due to the following reasons: language use, speed and immediate feedback, and technological problems. Compared with face-to-face communication or mobile phone communication, sending messages through the list server or e-mail did not allow students to use their native language, Cantonese. This phenomenon reflects students’ attitudes towards language use in the Hong Kong tertiary environment (see also Du-Babcok, 1999). Speed and immediate feedback is another factor contributing to the unfavourable use of the list server. The list server technology available for use at that time did not permit the use of the attachment. Instead, students had to convert the information into text file. The incompatible technology slowed down their communication processes and thus increased their workload. Students also experienced inconvenience caused by different software programmes.

An unexpected finding related to telecommunication technology was the use of mobile phones and ICQ. In Year-1, the use of mobile phones was very popular as all personnel involved in the project were in Hong Kong. The use of mobile phones allowed them to use their native language in discussing the issues and to receive immediate responses. In Year-2, mobile phones remained a popular communication tool when communicating with personnel in Hong Kong, while ICQ became the dominant communication channel when contacting counterparts in US. The use of ICQ to contact group members was higher in Year-2 than in Year-1.

Use of language is the third focus group discussion topic. This topic concerned the use of first- and second-languages and the comparative impact on the effectiveness of the oral and written communication. The focus of this area centred on the usefulness of using English or Cantonese as an inhibiting,
facilitating, or neutral factor; problems of communicating with interviewees and with peers; and suggested ways of improving communication.

The Cantonese students unanimously chose to communicate in Cantonese in the focus group discussion meeting although almost all of the students preferred to use English for report writing. These preferences reflect the uniqueness of the Hong Kong bilingual language environment; that is, Cantonese for oral communication and English for written communication. In Hong Kong, the norms prescribing language use are complex and contradictory. Hong Kong bilingual Chinese engage primarily in Cantonese language conversation as 95 percent of their colleagues or peers are Cantonese-speaking Chinese. However, for the major language use of business, government and law in the workplace English is the preferred medium of written exchange.

Reflection on overall learning was the fourth topic area. Three major areas identified by all the discussants were: (1) difficulty in arranging interviews; (2) not knowing how to handle small-group communication effectively; and (3) not having sufficient time to reflect on what they had achieved.

Although more than 90 percent of project groups found it difficult to arrange interviews with senior members of companies, all students succeeded in finding expatriate and local Chinese personnel for their interviews. Discussants reported that this process taught them how to approach and convince business people to grant interviews.

The second major area identified was that students did not know how to handle small-group communication effectively. Influenced by Confucian ethics, Hong Kong Chinese in a collective society consider group harmony critical and essential when working in a team. As mentioned earlier, to avoid confronting other group members, 90 percent of participants adopted maintenance-relational behaviour of teamwork strategy when collaborating with their group members in semester A. However, a drastic strategy change toward teamwork took place in semester B as students realised that the “heavy duty” project work required substantial involvement of time and effort among group members. Consequently, the small group communication function switched from maintenance-relational behaviour to task-oriented behaviour.

The third area was that the students felt that they did not have sufficient time to reflect on their learning. Although students agreed that the learning objectives were achieved, they felt that the learning was “heavy”. Students felt that they constantly competed with deadlines.

Debriefing. Debriefing was employed in order to increase the communication efficacy between researchers and students and allow students to self-reflect on their learning. The purposes of the debriefing were to: (a) reflect on students’ experience in working as a team in completing the semester project; (b) critically evaluate their own behaviour and discover differences among that of
the group members; (c) examine how teamwork contributed to their learning and what they could have done better; and (d) make learning through group collaboration more effective.

In conducting debriefing, ten discussion groups (made up of 5 to 6 persons per group) were formed. One member from each discussion group was appointed as the moderator. The debriefing discussion was centred on: (a) project management (individual and group tasks); (b) assessment of individual contributions; (c) interpersonal relations and communication; and (d) experience learned from engaging in the project.

Project management was the first discussion topic. On average, the majority of individual students spent 10 to 15 hours (the minimum was 6 hours and maximum 20 hours) per week on managing their semester projects. Ninety percent (90%) of students reported that the division of labour was evenly distributed and that teamwork allowed them to complement each other’s talents by maximising each individual’s speciality. While the number of hours spent working with their group members increased, more than 80 percent of the participants reported that they could better manage their time so that their individual activities did not interfere with the progress of group work. In all, they learned how to work as a team and utilise an individual’s speciality to ensure the quality of the project.

Assessment of contribution was the second topic area. Surprisingly, all of the students considered that they had contributed to the overall group success. But when asked about their perception of their role in the group, less than 15 percent of students considered themselves co-ordinators or group leaders. A very interesting phenomenon was that students were reluctant to use the word “leader” even when they served as co-ordinators throughout the whole project. This phenomenon reflects the Chinese collectivism concept (Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1991); that is, students did not want to be singled out or to be different from their peers.

Interpersonal relations and communication was the third topic area. Although 80 percent of respondents agreed that teamwork was essential for accomplishing a large-scale project, 40 percent reported that they preferred individual work. Students who liked to work intensively preferred individual tasks. Working individually allowed them to work at their own pace and manage time more efficiently.

When asked the five most important aspects in completing the project, the following were the most frequently mentioned: task accomplishment, commitment, efficiency, harmonious relationships, and group spirit. While students found task accomplishment and strong commitment were crucial, maintaining a harmonious group working environment was not neglected.
Experience learned from engaging in the project was the fourth topic area. The five most frequently mentioned experiences were: (a) learned to work with team members efficiently and effectively; (b) gained knowledge of information technology; (c) learned to manage time better; (d) learned to be flexible; and (e) learned the importance of effective communication.

In all, the overall impressions of the intercultural e-mail communication, as expressed in the focus groups and in the questionnaire, were generally positive. Both the use of technology and cross-cultural elements were noted as valuable by both Hong Kong and US students. As noted by one of the Hong Kong participants that "...overall, it was a valuable experience to cooperate with overseas students in a professional manner, even though misunderstanding might arise during e-mail communications." To further elaborate, Table 1 highlights selected comments from both US and Hong Kong students on their overall impression of the long distance intercultural e-mail communication project.

Implications

The outcomes of this project have resulted in the important gains in relation to learning and teaching. The learning experience of students has been enhanced in four ways:

The use of telecommunication technology enhanced the learning efficiency of the students by helping them share information and consequently improved their learning through a co-operative learning strategy.

Students gained direct exposure to an intercultural experience by collaborating on two projects with US business major undergraduates; consequently, this exposure provided Hong Kong students with a valuable opportunity to develop their intercultural communication skills.

The experience of arranging and conducting interviews with both expatriate and local managers enhanced students' persuasive communication and interviewing skills.

Through team work collaboration, it enhanced students' ability to work effectively in small groups, improving the quality of the outcomes while still endeavouring to maintain good relationships with their peers.

As for the quality of teaching, there are three major implications. These are in the areas of interdisciplinary integration, intercultural communication competency, and contact with the business community.

Firstly, in regard to interdisciplinary integration, the projects have been shown to relate theory to practice effectively in a number of areas, e.g., organisational communication, intercultural communication, and to relate communication studies to business and management.
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<th>Comments from US Students</th>
<th>Comments from Hong Kong Students</th>
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<td>1. Miscommunication arose due to cultural differences. Tried a sarcastic joke to generate good-fellowship. It bombed. Tried capitalizing phrases in “high-context” language. This, too, bombed.</td>
<td>1. In my opinion, long distance intercultural e-mails and decision-makings require good organization skills, communication skills and good planning... Particularly in dealing with first language English speakers in different cultures, we have to pay special attention to our language use and have to be aware of how we organize our messages effectively.</td>
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<td>2. I thought overall it was a good project; it was a good experience to work with overseas students and will prove helpful in the future. I also gained knowledge of a new market.</td>
<td>2. Timing is a key aspect that we have to be aware of when having long distance communications. We cannot expect prompt replies from other parties due to the time differences and the different cultural concepts of “time”. Therefore, we need to be open-minded and plan earlier to allow ample time for both parties in making decisions. Moreover, I think it is very important to specify a deadline if there is a time constraint and specifically, the response we need from them. This can help to avoid unnecessary exchange of e-mails so as to speed up the process of communication.</td>
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<td>3. This was my first project that required long distance communication. Initially I thought it was going to be difficult and complicated. But it turned out to be extremely friendly and a real eye-opener to me. I enjoyed working with the Hong Kong group</td>
<td>3. Actually, I don’t think e-mails are effective in making decisions. Miscommunication arises because of misunderstandings... The most obvious example was that our US counterparts said that we couldn’t understand their sense of humor. We in turn think they are impolite. So, in my point of view, face-to-face communication is more effective and better because we can interpret the meaning more accurately as people communicate verbally and nonverbally.</td>
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Second, the experience gained in intercultural communication is of particular note and is of direct relevance to many jobs in Hong Kong. The Action Learning Project provided students with hands-on experience in intercultural communication that allowed them to put classroom-learned theories into practice.

Lastly, the direct contact with the business community is beneficial to students; that is, in the projects students were drawn to consider more carefully the principles of communication which operate in various situations they took part. As a result, students were able to shorten their adaptation period in their future career development.

In all, it is important that the quality of teaching can be enhanced through the interdisciplinary integration, development of intercultural communication skills, and direct contact with the real business world.

**Conclusion and recommendation**

The Project can be considered to have achieved its aims; that are, effectively introduce ICT into a *Professional Communication Skills* course, to increase student learning and motivation, and to broaden students exposures by including intercultural and business elements. To ensure the smooth running of the joint intercultural marketing project through ICT, recommendations are listed below:

Make sure the e-mail project is not over complicated -- by breaking the project down to sub-parts.

Assign students forces and pair students directly with their overseas partners.

Build milestones into the project so that students communicate regularly and not just at the end of project.

Have built-in assessment points during the project.

Regularly monitor groups so that dysfunctional groups can be identified early.

Teach students how to solve the problems when intercultural misunderstandings arise.

The longitudinal nature of the study, consisting of two cycles of the five-stage Action Learning Model, has meant that a lot of time and effort has been invested. However, this has been worthwhile, as it has allowed time for a variety of evaluation procedures to be employed, refinement of the model, and involvement of two cohorts of students. As a result, much better informed decisions can be made regarding the future development of this *Professional Communication Skills* course and of similar ones.
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