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Planning a Sino-British Collaborative Workshop: Negotiating Preferences and Achieving Synergy

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1 Possible answers

1.1 Why were the British members upset when they received the Chinese version of the programme draft? What elements of the programme had been changed? Which aspects of the revised programme were likely to be problematic for them, and why? The table below may help you to structure your insights.

Issue	Product/Practice	Perspective
a) Who takes an active part?		
Many of the Chinese speakers were managers with little hands-on involvement in the projects	The British members wanted people who had been working on the projects to give the presentations. This was partly because they would be able to speak with more conviction, knowledge and understanding, and thus represent the project better, and partly because they felt this would be 'fairer'. For example, Marie emailed a Chinese stakeholder saying: "The teams and I feel that it is very important for the projects not only to send 'leaders' but also to include the staff who have been doing so much work and who have an intimate inside understanding of the issues."	This British attitude is partly a reflection of a low power distance perspective.

<p>Day 1 project reports were all allocated to Chinese project members</p>	<p>The British members felt that the people chosen to present on their projects should be evenly divided between British and Chinese members, in order for it to be a 'fair' representation of the collaborative endeavour. For example, one project manager commented as follows in an email to Marie: "I think it is important to clarify that the presentations are joint ones on Day 1." So Marie fed back to the Chinese organizer as follows: "The projects need to give jointly prepared presentations and thus both UK and Chinese speakers should be named. The teams can decide how they actually give the presentation (i.e. whether one of them or both of them)."</p>	<p>Fairness</p>
<p>b) What is the nature of the interaction in the workshop?</p>		
<p>Most of the discussion and sharing sessions had been dropped and replaced with presentations</p>	<p>This was a major concern to the British members. One commented as follows: "We seem to have next to no opportunity to discuss our work within and across teams. And no time it seems to spend with our Chinese partners to discuss the conclusion of this phase of the project, and discuss the work we are proposing for the next phase. All of this was to be an important part of the workshop."</p>	<p>This attitude reflects a co-constructionist perspective on learning</p>

c) Should there be a free-time activity?		
Visit to the Summer Palace will take away precious time from discussion	Nearly all the British attending the workshop had already visited the Summer Palace and had established good relations with their Chinese partners, and so they wanted to make the most of the workshop opportunity to discuss their projects. Marie explained to the Chinese organizer as follows: "We would very much like to have the opportunity for informal demonstration and discussion of project courseware. The different projects have not seen each other's materials, and they would very much like to get informal feedback from both Chinese and British team members. One or two people who have not visited Beijing before (e.g. some members from the other delegation) may prefer to visit the Summer Palace, but the project teams want to have the informal discussions."	This attitude reflects a more task-oriented perspective, especially given the stage of the project.

Table 1. British response to Chinese version of the programme

1.2 Why do you think the Chinese members revised the programme in this way? What might have been problematic for them in the British initial draft, and why? What do you think they were trying to achieve in their revised version? The table below may help you to structure your insights.

Issue	Product/Practice	Perspective
a) Who takes an active part?		
Day 1 needs to be formal, with speeches from senior people	The Chinese organizers believed that formality helps demonstrate the importance of an event, so if the event is to have maximum impact, it needs to be as formal as possible. This is reflected in the seniority of the speakers, the number of speeches by different leaders, and the physical arrangement of the venue (e.g. use of large, expensive tables and decoration with banners, flowering pot plants etc.)	This attitude is partly a reflection of their high power distance perspective.

b) What is the nature of the interaction in the workshop?		
Too much time is devoted to discussions	Discussion in groups can detract from the formality and hence importance of the event. It can also take up a large amount of time while achieving proportionately little. For example, one Chinese member commented as follows on their project meetings: "We spent much time discussing. They [i.e. the British members] tended to set no bounds for discussion and there were no limits on the topic. But the problem was that such discussion would lead to ideas on many aspects and it would be difficult to reach an agreement at last."	This attitude reflects a knowledge transfer perspective on learning
c) Should there be a free-time activity?		
No social activities have been arranged	The social activities, including the visit to the Summer Palace, were included to show warm hospitality. The Chinese organizer explained this as follows: "[Name of Chinese stakeholder] instructed us to put the visit to the Summer Palace on the draft agenda on the assumption that you people will like it and to show our hospitality." The evening events were also added for this purpose.	This attitude reflects a relationship-oriented perspective, which applies irrespective of the stage of the project.

Table 2. Reasons for Chinese members' programme revisions

1.3 What do you think the final programme looked like? How could both the British and Chinese aspirations for the workshop best be achieved? Please make a suggestion by drawing up an alternative programme.

The final, jointly agreed programme is shown in Table 3.

Day One: Opening Ceremony, Summary Reports on Progress of Projects		
<i>Chairs:</i> [Name 1 and Name 2] Stakeholder representatives from two divisions		
09.00	Welcome Chair introduces honoured participants and guests	[Name], MoE Dept Y, Senior programme officer
09.10	Address	[Name], MoE Dept Y, Assistant Director
09.20	Address	[Name], Senior member of Dept B, HEFCE
09.30	Address	[Name], Head of Dept A, HEFCE
09.40	Address	President, Chinese university hosting the workshop
09.50	Sino-UK Project summary by the person in charge of the China side of the project	[Name], Head of Dept X, MoE
10.30	Tea break	
10.50	Sino-UK Project summary by the person in charge of the UK side of the project	Marie, British programme manager
11.20	Reports on various projects	Chair: [Name], Head of Dept X, MoE
11.20	Beijing Normal University–University of Manchester Cooperation <i>International Cooperative Learning: Common Language or Culture Barrier.</i> <i>The Design and Development of Master’s Level eLearning Materials for Educational Psychology and General Pedagogy</i>	[Name], Chinese sub-project leader, DEFT project [Name], British project manager, DEFT project
11.50	Lunch	

14.00	Beijing Foreign Studies University–University of Nottingham Cooperation	[Name], Chinese project director, Secondary eELT project [Name], British project member, Secondary eELT project
14.30	The Tsinghua University–University of Cambridge Cooperation. <i>The Mode, Research, Development and Application of Online Learning – Cambridge–Tsinghua Collaboration on Chinese University Teacher Training in English-CUTE</i>	[Name], Chinese project director, CUTE project [Name], British project director, CUTE project
15.00	Tea break	
15.20	Beijing Normal University–University of Nottingham Cooperation	[Name], Chinese project director, Secondary eELT project [Name], British project manager, Secondary eELT project
15.50	Open discussion: communication of achievements and experiences between project groups	
16.50	Response from HEFCE	[Name], Head of Dept A, HEFCE
17.00	Concluding speech	[Name], Head of Dept X, MoE
17.10	Dinner	
19.00	Entertainment/party	
Day Two: Discussion of Academic Issues <i>Chair: Marie, British programme manager</i>		
Discussion Theme 1: Theory and Practice of Resource Development		
09.00	UK Representation	
09.00	<i>Applying Social Constructionist Principles to the Design of eLearning Materials</i>	[Name], British sub-project leader, DEfT project
09.40	<i>Online Learning: A Holistic Approach</i>	[Name], British project director, Tertiary eELT project
10.20	Tea break	
10.40	Chinese Representation	
10.40	<i>Designing Blended Learning Focused on Knowledge Category and Learning Activities: Case Studies from Beijing Normal University</i>	[Name], Chinese project director, DEfT project

11.20	<i>Anatomizing VLE Learning</i>	[Name], Chinese project director, Secondary eELT project
12.00	Lunch	
14.00	<i>Report on the Pilot F</i>	[Name] British project member, DEfT project [Name] British project member, DEfT project
14.40	Informal discussions	
16.00	Demonstration of project courseware	
17.30	Dinner	
Day Three: Discussion of Academic Issues, Publication of Results Chair: Chinese Steering Committee Member		
	Discussion Theme 2: Report on Research and Evaluation	
09.00	UK Representation	
09.00	<i>Comparing Perceptions of Effective Environments for Learning</i>	[Name], British associate project member
09.40	<i>Reflection on Practice: the CUTE Project Experience</i>	[Name], British project member, CUTE project [Name], Chinese project member, CUTE project
10.20	Tea break	
10.40	Chinese Representation	
10.40	<i>Tertiary-level Web-based English Language Education in China: Tensions and Implications</i>	[Name], Chinese project member, Tertiary eELT project [Name], Chinese project member, Tertiary eELT project [Name], Chinese project member, Tertiary eELT project
11.20	<i>A Framework of Research Development in the Sino-UK eLearning Project for Higher Education</i>	[Name], Chinese Steering Committee Member
12.00	Lunch	
14.00	<i>Web-Based Reflective and Collaborative Learning as a New Approach of Teacher Professional Development: Analysis of a</i>	[Name], Chinese project manager, DEfT and

	<i>Tentative eLearning Program within the Collaborative Project Between Beijing Normal University and its UK Partners</i>	Secondary eELT projects
14.40	Discussion Theme 3: Intellectual Property in Online Education	
14.40	UK Representation	[Name], British associate project member responsible for IP issues
15.20	Tea break	
15.40	Discussion Theme 4: Publication and Dissemination of Results	
15.40	UK Representation	[Name], British project member, responsible for leading dissemination plans in UK
16.20	Summary Speech by Chinese and UK Representatives	
16.20	Chinese Representation	
16.40	UK Representation	
17.00	Close of workshop	
17.10	Dinner	
18.30	Depart for the Lao She Tea House	
19.50	Start of show	
21.20	End of show	
22:00	Return to the hotel	

Table 3. Confirmed agenda

As can be seen, the British members accepted the need to have a good number of speeches by key leaders at the beginning of the workshop, and also went along with the limited amount of time allocated to discussion. The project reports on Day 1 were presented by both Chinese and British members, and the presentations on other days were carefully balanced. The trip to the Summer Palace was cancelled, but two evening social events took place. Everyone was satisfied with this and the workshop went extremely well. Participants were a bit tense on Day 1, but after that it was a very productive event. Marie commented as follows in an email to a British Council representative in Beijing: "Days 2 and 3 went extremely well. Everyone relaxed significantly without the MoE presence and we had a lot of very fruitful discussion and exchange. So despite all the stress, everyone in the end felt it had been very worthwhile." So British members' fears that the large number of presentations would prevent discussion were unfounded; they were able to incorporate discussion into the structured framework in ways that enabled everyone to feel comfortable.

2 Further reading for the lecturer

DiStefano, J. & Maznevski, M. (2000). "Creating value with diverse teams in global management". In: *Organizational Dynamics*, 29:1 45–63.

Feng, A., Byram, M. & Fleming, M. (Eds) (2009). *Becoming Interculturally Competent through Education and Training*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Guilherme, M., Glaser, E. & Méndez-García, M. d. C. (Eds) (2010). *The Intercultural Dynamics of Multicultural Working*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Maznevski, M. & Chudoba, K. (2000). "Bridging space over time: global virtual team dynamics and effectiveness". In: *Organization Science*, 11:5, 473–492.

Moran, P. (2001). *Teaching Culture. Perspectives in Practice*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Spencer-Oatey, H. (Ed.) (2007). *e-Learning Initiatives in China: Pedagogy, Policy and Culture*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Varner, I. & Beamer, L. (2011). *Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace. 5th ed.* Boston: McGraw Hill.