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## Capitalizing on a Cross-Cultural Experiential Model - China, Singapore, and the U.S.: Albion in China Role-Play Negotiation Simulation Implemented in Singapore

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CAPITALIZING ON A CROSS-CULTURAL  
EXPERIENTIAL MODEL—CHINA,  
SINGAPORE, AND THE U.S.: ALBION IN CHINA  
ROLE-PLAY NEGOTIATION SIMULATION  
IMPLEMENTED IN SINGAPORE

INTRODUCTION

Given that the educational landscape is transitioning to student-centered learning, our study builds on language, cultural and communication differences.<sup>1</sup> These interdependencies are explored through the use of Duke CIBER's *Albion in China International Role-Play Simulation*, which was implemented at Nanyang Business School of Nanyang Technological University [NTU]. The theoretical and practical aspects of language and culture are linked through the verbal and nonverbal communications in the Singaporean *Special Session*, which was the only one where each group spoke in their respective languages, with an interpreter as the facilitator.

The Singapore experience was an opportunity to conduct large scale research relating to the simulations, which the Duke CIBER has been developing since 1996. Emerging from this experience is a clearer understanding of language, communication and cultural synergies.

Immediately following the Albion role-play exercise, NTU students responded to an on-line questionnaire. The response rate was 25%, with

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127 respondents out of the 500. Students were asked to rate the exercise in 23 categories using a five-point Likert scale. An examination of these responses illustrates the following: Listening skills, problem solving, thinking independently and integrating and synthesizing business objectives were rated the highest in the rating category of “Fully met my expectations for this exercise.” Albion was a very different experience for these students. For most, it was a positive experience, and for some, a truly memorable one. The entire negotiation session was video-taped for evaluation purposes. Portions of the video may be viewed on the Duke CIBER website: <http://faculty.fuqua.duke.edu/ciber/index.html>.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

In his most recent edition of *International Business*, Hill [2003] cites the following three important themes for exploring cultural differences, both within and across countries.

##### *The Importance of Cross-Cultural Literacy*

The recognition of cultural norms and value systems embracing all aspects of an international firm’s operations: How deals are negotiated; appropriate incentive pay; structure of the organization; name of the product; promotional strategies; relationship between management and labor; etc.

##### *The Linkage between Culture and Ethics in Decision Making*

The notion of culturally-bounded ethical principles may be inappropriate when applied to business ethics. For example, the “When in Rome” approach to business ethics may in fact be unethical and/or illegal for foreign firms. What is common practice in one country may not be ethical or legal in another.

##### *The Relationship between Culture and National Competitive Advantage*

This issue is more of a macro-environmental perspective in that the relationship between the external environment, industry, and firm are considered as drivers of competitive advantage. For example, does the culture foster innovative, cost-efficient competitors? Does the culture support a developed educational system, individualism versus collectivism, social stratification, values that stress the virtue of hard work, a major linguistic group, social harmony, or a market-driven production system?

While all three of these major areas are central to the study of international business, central to this simulation and our study is the notion of

cross-cultural literacy. The interdependencies among language, communication and culture are realized through the *ALBION IN CHINA INTERNATIONAL ROLE-PLAY* simulation, as discussed in the following section.

#### ALBION IN CHINA

This international negotiation exercise promotes and facilitates a deeper understanding and sensitivity by participants to cross-cultural differences. The simulation underscores the importance of not only recognizing these differences but also acting accordingly.

Singapore is an amalgamation of Chinese, Indian, and Malaysian cultures. This unique cultural combination enriched the experience for all. Participants fully immersed themselves into the simulation. The link between theory and practice of language, communication and culture was emphasized in the *Special Session*, as the Americans only spoke English and the Chinese only spoke Mandarin, with a translator as the facilitator between the groups. Other than this *Special Session* which was video-taped, the other negotiating groups [with more than 400 participants], conducted the negotiation primarily in English. For all groups, verbal and nonverbal communications were expressed throughout the vertical and horizontal negotiation exercise. To understand fully the concept of role-play negotiations, a brief description follows.

#### *Brief History Of International Role-Play Negotiation Simulations*

One of the obligations of the Centers for International Business Education and Research [CIBERs] is to develop international instructional materials. In 1996, the Duke CIBER chose to focus on developing cross-cultural negotiation materials, and has an ongoing initiative to research new simulations and revise or update existing ones. Currently, there are simulations for Chile, China, France, India, Japan, Netherlands, Korea, Malaysia, Russia, and Thailand.

The purpose of a role-play exercise is to familiarize the participants, with the political, social, and cultural complexities involved in business negotiations across different cultures and countries, in order to level the playing field. Also, it develops practical, interactive skills which facilitate the participants' understanding of the international business environment.

The structure of these experiential exercises is as follows:

- I. INTRODUCTORY SESSION
- II. SESSION I—TEAM STRATEGY MEETING (VERTICAL NEGOTIATION)
- III. SESSION II—ACTUAL NEGOTIATION SESSION (HORIZONTAL NEGOTIATION)
- IV. DEBRIEFING SESSION—RETURN FOR DISCUSSION

#### *Simulation Structure*

The participants are given roles, companies, and countries to represent in each of the above-mentioned sessions. They must study the information about their characters, companies and culture prior to the commencement of the exercise. Each group is comprised of two teams: one Chinese and one U.S. Each team has three roles and at least one Process Observer (P.O.). Class size dictates how many P.O.s there are per team. With uneven numbers, the P.O. roles make up the difference. Each team is made up of three negotiators from the same country, and each group is made up of two teams, each team representing a different country within that group. Optimally, there should be one P.O. per team, but at a minimum, there should be one P.O. per group. As an example, with 30 participants, 3 negotiators per team, 6 negotiators per group, there would be a total of 8 teams (4 Chinese and 4 U.S. teams), 4 negotiation groups, and a total of 6 P.O.s. An essential and autonomous role, the P.O. should not be replaced with a negotiator role. In fact, the P.O. never acts as a negotiator. With respect to the roles, gender does not matter. Men can play female roles and vice-versa. Each one of the classes at NTU was subdivided accordingly.

The roles are distributed to the participants in advance, so that everyone may prepare their characters. Each participant receives one role. Initially, only the P.O.s understand the entire picture. This is important to the negotiation. The more familiar that everyone is with their roles and characters, the more enriching the learning experience is for all participants.

The general instructions for the simulation exercise are as follow: The exercise is:

- FICTIONAL but realistic negotiation situation.
- REALISTIC business scenarios and characters based on real business situations.
- FACT and FICTION—Company's and individual's names have been changed to enhance the learning exercise.

Participants need to:

- ACT within specific constraints and guidelines while working toward certain business objectives.
- ADAPT to cultural, company, and character information provided in the simulation.
- FOCUS and appreciate the experience, i.e. the process, regardless of the outcome, by focusing on behavioral and attitudinal skills.

Remember that:

- NO ONE correct solution or process exists.
- LISTEN actively and attentively.
- ADAPT communication skills to the context of a different culture.
- FRAME disagreements in a way that does not end dialogue.
- KEEP an open mind.
- REALIZE that achieving one's goals is not always possible.

#### CRITICAL THINKING SKILLS

Through the simulation exercises, the following critical thinking skills may be fostered:

- I. CROSS-CULTURAL SENSITIVITY
- II. ACTIVE LISTENING
- III. ADAPTING COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO A CULTURAL CONTEXT
- IV. GOAL ACHIEVEMENT MAY REQUIRE CREATIVE, NEW, SURPRISING APPROACHES

#### *Sessions I and II*

During Session I, the participants meet for the vertical negotiation, where each team [1] decides their strategy on issues; [2] assigns individual responsibilities; and [3] crafts a negotiation document. During Session II, the horizontal negotiation takes place between representatives of the two firms and their respective countries. Here the guidelines are as follows: [1] obtain as much agreement as possible; [2] pay attention to cultural norms as well as content; [3] return to the discussion area with *whatever* result was achieved.

*Debriefing Session*

During the Debriefing Session, a multitude of questions may be posed to stimulate the discussion. Examples of questions include:

- Was any agreement reached? What was it?
- Were any negotiation frameworks implemented, such as BATNA (Best Alternative To A Negotiated Agreement), reservation price, zone of possible agreement, expanding the pie, etc.?
- What actions or behaviors did you observe?
- What are some examples of helpful or facilitative participants?
- What assumptions did you make about the other team's strategy? Was the other team's strategy considered?
- Were issues ranked in terms of importance or difficulty, and was the order of discussion during the negotiation session determined based on this hierarchy?
- Did you have to resolve any conflict within your own team?
- Were behaviors consistent with character roles? What stereotypical behaviors were identified with the cultures represented in this exercise? What was learned about these cultures from both sides?
- What was unexpectedly difficult/easy about the negotiation?
- Were there any surprises?
- Were there changes in perception about the opposite culture?

## SINGAPORE IMPLEMENTATION

Immediately following the Albion role-play exercise, NTU students responded to an on-line questionnaire. Response rate was 25%, with 127 respondents out of the 500. Students were asked to rate the exercise in 23 categories using a five-point Likert scale.

The results are summarized in four exhibits, located in the appendix:

EXHIBIT A: LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEARNING  
INSTRUMENT

EXHIBIT B: RESULTS SUMMARY

EXHIBIT C: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

EXHIBIT D: SIMULATION/VIDEO EXPERIENCE COMMENTS

## RESULTS

An examination of these responses illustrates the following: Listening skills, group dynamics, problem solving, and thinking independently were rated the highest for “Meeting Expectations.”

### *Analysis of Albion in China Responses to the Questionnaire*

**Listening Skills:** The highest average from the expectations list was for listening skills [3.539]. Perhaps the students were not expecting too much when they started, so their expectations were easily met. Note that not many [four] listed this skill as the most useful in the final questions portion.

**Cognitive Skills:** The next six highest rankings on the expectations list were all cognitive skills: [1] group dynamics, [2] problem solving, [3] thinking independently, [4] formulating strategies, [5] critical thinking, and [6] thinking creatively. It appears that the students recognized that this exercise was far more than a language skills exercise. These cognitive skills were also mentioned as the most useful: thinking on your feet [17], learning strategies [14], critical thinking [6], group dynamics [5] and thinking creatively or independently [6].

**Cross-Cultural Issues:** Cross-cultural issues were mentioned by 42.5% [54] of the students; 33% [42] as the most useful and 9.5% [12] as the least useful. Because this exercise was characterized as an *international role-play*, and strong elements of cross-cultural communications were emphasized, the expectations for this were quite high. We should note the mixed response, however. In the expectations fulfilled portion of the questionnaire, the ratings were not very high [3.19 or eleventh overall]. This is perhaps more consistent with the mixed response because of the high expectations that the students had. The higher the expectations, the harder it is to fulfil them.

**Experience:** After the cross-cultural issues, the highest category of usefulness was the experience of participating in the negotiation simulation [39]. However, the realism of the experience was disputed; some [6] said it was realistic, while others [8] said that it was not realistic. It appears that the students value the opportunity to participate and learn from the experiential exercise.

**Uncertainty:** Many students found the uncertainty of the negotiation exercise frustrating. Not enough information regarding how to conduct negotiations [14], difficulties in role-playing [14], technical terms were too difficult [6] and the subject not being relevant [5] were all listed as least useful parts of the simulation. This may reflect the uncertainty of many of

the students, all of whom come from a Confucian-heritage school system where knowledge resides with the teacher, questions always have a right answer and ambiguity is not tolerated well. They have just started educational reforms in Singapore which have yet to affect these students deeply. For many, university classes such as this one, this is the first time that students have encountered experiential teaching methods such as these. Some students obviously adapt easily, others not so quickly. In the pre-session orientation, many of the tutors also expressed uncertainty regarding the lack of technical knowledge and/or difficulty with the technical terms. This may have been inadvertently communicated by the tutors to the students. The tutors themselves are also uncomfortable with this student-centered teaching pedagogy.

**Process Observers [P.O.s] Do Not Participate:** This perception from nine participants may have also come from the tutors' lack of knowledge and understanding of the key role of the P.O.s. In addition, the students' hesitation in fully realizing the different nature of this role may have contributed to this observation. Those students who perceived that P.O.s did not contribute, may have been in larger tutorial groups where the P.O.s had to double up, as there were too many students in one group. Most tutorial groups had 17–18 students, a few had 19 or 20 and had insufficient time or opportunity to contribute. On the other hand, "Evaluating the Performance of Others" was ranked ninth on the expectations questionnaire [3.19], indicating that many had a chance to participate in this way, and their expectations were largely met.

**Two Teams Speaking the Same Language:** Most of the teams were structured such that the same language was spoken on both sides. Only the *Special Session* was conducted in English and Chinese [Mandarin], with a translator. It appears that those students in the single language modules felt that the dual language would have been more beneficial.

In fact, two students responded that the least useful part of the simulation was the fact that the two teams were both speaking the same language and this detracted from the usefulness of the experience. As both of these students either knew about or participated in the dual language negotiation, and understood the usefulness and realistic nature of this special session, their comments are meaningful. One of the students in the debriefing session, who was in the English only team, mentioned that he felt as though, because he was speaking English instead of Chinese, it was awkward for him to use the oral and body language of a culture he knew well. "If I had been speaking Chinese, I would have done it differently." Overall, *Albion in*

*China* was a different yet positive and memorable experience for these students.

#### *Negotiation Simulation Applications*

The International negotiation role-play exercises serve a variety of purposes. They have been implemented in the following areas:

- CIBER-FDIBs [FACULTY DEVELOPMENT INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS]
- INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS CONFERENCES
- CROSS-CULTURAL SENSITIVITY EXERCISES
- INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION TRAINING
- STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS
- COURSES IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT, ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR, and NEGOTIATION

#### CONCLUSION

Initially the cornerstone for new course design and development, this project incorporates topics such as *cross-cultural case studies*, the Singaporean implementation versus the implementation in other countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Malawi, Zambia, France and the U.S.; *interdisciplinary programs* across disciplines, colleges, and universities, (for example the collaboration between NTU and Duke University for purposes of implementing the Albion in China simulation given the unique cultural blend, with ensuing research possibilities); and *strategies for teaching business language*, where the negotiation simulation provides an experiential framework for process-based learning. Distance learning may be cultivated through strategic partnerships across academic and professional organizations that capitalize on such negotiation exercises. The language, communication and cultural learning opportunities are diverse and rich.

The learning goals of the role-play negotiation simulation remain universal, while its implementation continuously evolves. Participants explored, enriched, and in some cases excelled at critical thinking skills and a global mindset. They developed and managed cross-cultural negotiation strategies for real-world situations on global and local scales. Perhaps most notably, this was a new paradigm of learning. Not only were students at the center of collaborative learning, but the focus was on the process, rather than the traditional outcome.

APPENDIX

EXHIBIT A  
LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY LEARNING INSTRUMENT

Which team and what role did you have in the simulation? Please mark an X in the list below.

U.S. Team		China Team	
Jim O’Connell		Yu Xing Wen	
Ellen Fischer		Kao Chan	
Tony Pastorelli		Wu Li	
Process observer		Process observer	

As the stated purpose of the course is “to prepare students for communication challenges they are likely to meet in rapidly evolving business environments,” how well do you feel that *this* simulation contributed to your learning outcomes in the following areas?

Please rate each category on the scale below.

- [1] Did not meet my expectations for this exercise
- [2] Met a few of my expectations for this exercise
- [3] Met some of my expectations for this exercise
- [4] Met many of my expectations for this exercise
- [5] Fully met my expectations for this exercise

Language Proficiency	1	2	3	4	5
Extemporaneous speaking					
Formal language skills					
Turn-taking					
Language of negotiation					
Listening skills					
Sending body language					
Interpreting body language					
Written communication skills					
• Organization					
• Coherence					
• Relevance					
• Grammaticality					
Gaining confidence					

<b>Cognitive Skills</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Thinking independently					
Thinking creatively					
Problem solving					
Group dynamics					
Formulating strategies					
Analyzing business situations					
Integrating and synthesizing business objectives					
Evaluating performance (self)					
Evaluating performance (others)					
Cross-cultural communication issues					
Critical thinking					

From a learning standpoint, what was the most useful part of this exercise and why?

From a learning standpoint, what was the least useful part of this exercise and why?

#### EXHIBIT B RESULTS SUMMARY

<b>Language Proficiency</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Extemporaneous speaking	126	3.03	14
Formal language skills	127	2.90	22
Turn-taking	127	2.98	18
Language of negotiation	125	3.016	16
Listening skills	126	3.539	1
Sending body language	126	2.92	20
Interpreting body language	127	2.91	21

<b>Language Proficiency (Cont.)</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Written Communication Skills			
• Organization	122	3.03	14
• Coherence	122	2.967	19
• Relevance	122	3.08	13
• Grammaticality	120	2.853	23
Gaining confidence	119	3.30	8
<b>Cognitive Skills</b>			
Thinking independently	127	3.37	4
Thinking creatively	127	3.31	7
Problem solving	127	3.409	3
Group dynamics	125	3.496	2
Formulating strategies	126	3.34	5
Analyzing business situations	127	3.29	9
Integrating and synthesizing business objectives	126	3.158	12
Evaluating performance [self]	126	3	17
Evaluating performance [others]	127	3.29	9
Cross-cultural communication issues	126	3.19	11
Critical thinking	126	3.325	6

**EXHIBIT C**  
**QUALITATIVE FINDINGS**

Qualitative findings taken from 127 respondents to on-line survey

<b>Category</b>	<b>Useful</b>	<b>Not Useful</b>
Cross cultural issues	42	12
Experience of negotiation	39	
Fast thinking, thinking on your feet	17	
Learning strategies	14	
Makes me think critically	6	
Group dynamics	5	1
Experience was realistic	6	
Experience was not realistic		8
Think creatively, independently, outside the box	6	1

<b>Category</b>	<b>Useful</b>	<b>Not Useful</b>
Learn listening strategies	4	
Learn tact	2	
Makes me think critically	6	
Evaluating issues critically	2	
Learn persuasion skills	2	
Learn language of negotiation	2	
Learn to speak 'properly'	1	
Observing others	1	
Speaking confidently	1	
Learning to adapt	1	
Learn negotiation under pressure	1	
Learning to stand on own position	1	
Evaluating own performance	1	1
Learning how to translate (for process observer of bilingual team)	1	
Not enough information on how to do negotiations		14
Difficult to play roles		14
Process Observers do not participate		9
Technical terms too difficult		6
Subject not relevant		5
Not enough time		6
Too much time		1
Too much time wasted		1
Didn't learn writing skills		3
Boring learned nothing		2
Don't like compromise		2
Not professional		2
Too informal		1
Not enough individualism		1
Issues too complex		1
Internal disputes		1
Notes not useful		2
Body language not paid attention to		3
Not enough monitoring by an expert		1
Non-cultural aspect not clear		1
Two teams speaking the same language (should each speak own language)		2

EXHIBIT D  
SIMULATION/VIDEO EXPERIENCE COMMENTS

TR—translator/interpreter

YXW—Yu Sing Wen

KC—Kao Chan

TP—Tony Pastorelli

JOC—Jim O’Connell

EF—Ellen Fischer

The students were asked to give answers to the following five questions. Below are some of their comments, along with the roles that they played.

**1. How did you feel about the Albion in China simulation?**

‘enriching and fun’ TR

‘I learned lots’ ‘the role-playing involved in the simulation had put me through a real feel for negotiation’ YXW

‘fun and very interesting’ KC

‘structured enough to give the students a feel of what the character to be portrayed should be like, but not stifle them into conforming to the personalities given in the case’ ‘room for creativity and autonomy’ ‘students are allowed to unleash their ability and creativity to the max’ ‘The simulation definitely brought about a great leap in my learning curve. There’s a great difference between reading something and thinking that you know how to do it, and actually doing it.’ TP

‘personally rewarding experience’ ‘did not expect negotiations to be that taxing and difficult’ ‘opened my eyes to the difficulties involved in conducting cross-cultural negotiations’ JOC

‘a feeling of reality in it’ ‘I felt fully immersed in my role’ ‘The clothes we had to wear, the arrangement of the tables, as well as the Chinese team actually speaking Chinese was a big factor to this all.’ EF

**2. Was it useful to you in critical thinking skills, listening skills, problems solving skills and/or language skills?**

‘Yes, definitely.’ ‘taught me to analyse where the central direction of the discussion is going, forces me to listen attentively’ TR

'Yes...especially for the language skills' YXW

'extremely useful for me in terms of all those skills' 'we have to listen, analyse and think on the spot' KC

'Yep, definitely' 'we had to put ourselves in the shoes of the Chinese team, so that we can anticipate what their demands will be, and their reactions to our proposals.' 'a lot of thinking on our feet and spontaneity was involved' 'Listening skills was [sic] especially important to 'read between the lines'' 'Problem solving skills were needed when...not only satisfying/reaching a compromise, but also within the group, among team members.' 'Language skills were crucial in bringing our ideas clearly and concisely.' 'we had to imagine how would true blue Americans behave if they were in this situation.' TP

'certainly taught me how to think critically' and 'listen very carefully' 'taught me to never lose my cool no matter how frustrating it was' 'I had to think how to phrase my sentences so that they were logical and coherent.' JOC

'They definitely helped sharpen my skills in this area. The situation was ever changing' 'I had to be on my toes all the time' EF

### **3. What was the most useful part of the simulation?**

'translation. It forces me to think on my feet, consider the cultural differences between the two parties' 'portraying any negative responses or requests in a diplomatic way' TR

'the language skills' YXW

'the spontaneous part is really value added' KC

'to keep a poker face so that our distress and worries will not be apparent to others' TP

'that we had placed ourselves in the shoes of the participants. So it provided the 'reality' required' 'We were all professionally dressed and this helped to integrate us more fully into the roles.' JOC

'teaching me the technique of thinking and collecting my thoughts on the spot' EF

**4. What advice would you give to instructors to make it more useful the next time?**

'The simulation will be more engaging and interesting if participants actually dress and speak as their respective roles as it does affect how we think, speak and act.' TR

'We can have more of such simulation' KC

'Give students just as much autonomy as like what we had. Just a minimal set of instructions highlighting important points. Leave the rest to the students to discover and develop on their own.' TP

**5. Any other comments you have?**

'Two way communication presentation (negotiation etc.) is more interesting and engaging than one way communication presentations (PowerPoint presentation) whereby the presenter just stood and talked.' TR

'It is the filming that added to the fun' KC

'I feel that the industry and issues discussed in this case study are rather hard for a business student to fully comprehend and to have interest in the topics' YXW

'Subsequent batches of business communications students should have a try at the Albion simulation, or something similar. Preparing for it may be quite tedious and require quite a bit of work, but the learning opportunities it brings along is definitely more than the work involved.' 'because the simulation was video taped, it left a deeper impression in my mind. This exercise will definitely be something that I will recall when I think of my undergraduate days.' TP

'a truly wonderful experience for me. I will not forget it.' JOC

'I think the most important aspect was making the individual teams speak in the language they are supposed to use. It made us immerse ourselves more easily' EF