
プロジェクト報告

Navigating Intercultural Difficulties in International Business Communication through a COIL Project

Eriko Katsumata¹⁾

COIL Project

This project involved conducting a study among the participants of a program on intercultural communication and cultural understanding in business between a university in Germany (University A) and a university in Japan (University B) in 2020. A collaborative online international learning (COIL) project was planned between University A students and University B students of intercultural communication in business courses. To reinforce the aspects of intercultural communication and a successful global team, University A and University B students collaborated to conduct a mutually beneficial “culture coach consulting” project.

This collaboration focused on the impact of intercultural communication and international business ventures, and on solving the cultural challenges arising in international business. University A students asked questions to their University B counterparts on business-based culture and communication. University B students were responsible for posing questions to their University A counterparts on German business culture and communication. To deepen the discussion, the former selected a Japanese product and asked how and why it would or would not work in the German market and which cultural aspects would need to be adapted. This interaction was a two-way exchange, and both sides were able to acquire cultural and business information through online communication, based on their respective challenges.

1) Associate Professor at Aoyama Gakuin University

COIL Project Overview

Date	Content
2020, Aug. 8	Beginning of communication about the collaboration via email Subject : Prepared a draft on learning objectives and activities, and discussed online interaction
Aug. 26	Online meeting with University A staff Subject : Project preparation
Sept. 29	Online meeting with Dr. Ralf Mayer, founder and executive consultant of San-Ten Consulting ²⁾ Theme : Guest lecture content
Sept. 30	Online meeting with University A staff Subject : Project preparation
Oct. 7	Online meeting with University A staff Subject : Project preparation
Oct. 8	Dr. Mayer's guest lecture Theme : Intercultural Difficulties in International Business Communication between Germany and Japan
Nov. 2	A Japanese professor, who specializes in intercultural communication, gave a lecture to University A students as a guest lecturer Theme : Intercultural Communication and Japanese Communication
Nov. 2-13	Interaction between University A and University B students
2021, Feb. 17, 18, and 22	Qualitative data analysis advisory by Ms. Tomoko Saso from Qualitative Data Analysis - Lab Saso ³⁾ Theme : Using KH Coder and NVivo to analyze student reports

Overview of the Project Results

Thirty-eight University A students and 24 University B students participated in the project. They were divided into six groups, focusing on the interaction between University A and University B students and communication among the latter, thus examining University B students' reports and questionnaires, which were analyzed

2) San-Ten Consulting is a management consulting firm based in Tokyo, Japan, specializing in market entry support and innovation sourcing in the B2B business of chemicals and materials (<https://www.san-ten.com/>). Permission received over email on August 2 to include the name.

3) Permission received over email on November 18 include the name (www.qdaa.info).

using KH Coder and NVivo.

Consequently, both sets of students were able to gain significant knowledge from this collaboration and intercultural communication. They learned to:

1. Deepen their self-awareness by asking and answering questions on Japanese/German business, culture, and communication.
2. Improve team communication, performance, and end results.
3. Facilitate effective interactions in their future work.
4. Learn business-focused intercultural communication and reflect on its challenges and benefits.

Conclusion

After reading on German business communication (Mayer, 2019) to deepen their knowledge and learn about the differences between Japanese and German business communication and the experiences shared by the German guest speaker, University B students experienced actual communication. The main outcome was that the students realized the difference between knowledge and practice regarding the extent of learning. It was a great experience for both sets of students in terms of identifying the important aspects in creating and leading a virtual global team, based on their project learnings.

Reference

Mayer, R. (2019). How to enter the Japanese market: A basic guide for the chemicals and materials industry. *San-Ten Consulting*, 1–6.