



# CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE LANGUAGE LAB A: A Project Management Challenge

## Case Study

*This case was written by **Scott Andrews**, International Case Tutor and Senior Management Consultant with SMART Partners. It is intended to be used as a basis for group discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a management situation.*

*It was derived from published materials and personal experience, incorporating secondary research conducted by Scott Andrews*

## THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE LANGUAGE LAB: CASE A

Stuart Anderson received his call to visit the Director – he knew another project was on its way. As a project manager for Cardiff University’s Centre for Lifelong Learning he was used to the call to Ray Edward’s office. Ray was the Centre’s director and the more recently appointed Executive Director of the Confucius Institute. Once in the office it wasn’t long before a new project mandate was handed over – this time to develop a new ground floor language lab to complement the 24-seater lab that was housed on the Centre’s second floor. In the few minutes that Stuart spent with Ray he discovered that the Confucius Institute had successfully been awarded the funds it had applied for several months earlier and so was now in a position to establish the new 14-seater lab.

As project manager Stuart would be responsible for establishing a project plan for the development of the lab, taking it all the way through installation up to the lab’s launch. He quickly went to the PA’s office to book a follow-up meeting with Ray so that he could gather as much information as possible. At this next meeting the Centre’s Finance Manager would join them so Stuart could identify how many funds he had to work with and what planning had already been undertaken.

With news of the project still fresh in his mind Stuart went straight back to his office to start thinking through the questions he’d need to raise in their next meeting – this was going to be a tricky challenge – he had already been informed there was a time limit to this project. He knew there’d only be one chance to raise all the questions before he was expected to develop the first draft Project Plan so he knew he had to get all the answers to help him get started.

## THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE LANGUAGE LAB: CASE B

Cardiff Confucius Institute was established with much fanfare in 2008 as a partnership between Cardiff University and Xiamen University. The Institute, which was to be accommodated within the University's Centre for Lifelong Learning, was set up with funding from Hanban, the Chinese Government authority charged with responsibility for managing the funds for over 300 Confucius Institutes world-wide. This would be only the second such institute in Wales and, as such, there were many guests invited to the launch ceremony, representing Cardiff Council (Cardiff City was twinned with Xiamen City), the British Council Wales, The Chamber for Commerce and Institute of Directors, Cilt Cymru (the National Body for Language Excellence in Wales) and of course, the Welsh Assembly Government, (which would later prove to be an important ally in the University's future funding bids to China).

The newly appointed Secretary of State for Wales made his maiden trip from Westminster to Wales in his new role especially to be the guest of honour at the launch ceremony along with representatives from the Chinese Embassy.

Several months later a second set of important dignitaries gathered to officially inaugurate the recently refurbished Confucius Suite of classrooms. Whilst there hadn't been sufficient funds to set up a new language lab at this point, one room from the suite had been specifically designed and wired in such a way as to allow it to be developed for such a facility in the future. About midway through the second year of its embryonic life, the Confucius Institute had boldly bid for further funding to develop this room into a lab using figures provided by the Centre's Technical Manager, Adam Kelly based on his previous experience of developing the first language lab several years earlier. Adam had been under pressure to provide figures in order to avoid missing a closing deadline for bids and so he had contacted Octavia, the company with whom the Centre had worked on the first installation and had forwarded these figures directly to the Finance Manager in time for the bid to be submitted. At the time, it had been estimated that the total cost of converting the room into a second language lab would be £17,000.

By May 2009, news of the Institute's successful bid had been shared across the Centre and the role of developing the project had been lingering for a few days with Stuart; he was concerned about the relatively low budget for the project. He decided to convene a

meeting with Adam to discuss how the previous lab had been developed, and in doing so he discovered that Adam had some concerns of his own. Adam showed Stuart the initial plan for the layout of the room and immediately pointed out that if the room was going to fit 14 terminals then it would need to house significantly smaller desks than the previous lab and this would reduce the space that students could use to lay out their books and materials. He was also concerned about the heat that might be generated in the room as it was a windowless facility and there had already been some murmurings among students and tutors that these rooms were simply too hot in the summer months.

Stuart decided to visit the room for himself and as soon as he opened the door of the empty room he became aware that it was hot in there – and so far there had been no computers in use and no people studying in the room. He decided he would need to talk to the University's Estates Division to establish what the options were. He was also encouraged by Adam to talk to the University's Information Services Division (INSRV) as they had played a key last-minute role in helping to properly establish the first lab.

His meeting with Ray and the Finance Manager had been helpful. Not only had he been informed of the relatively low funding availability but he had also been informed that the funds had to be spent before the end of the year or else the Chinese authorities may recall them and the project would then have to be abandoned. Furthermore he discovered that whilst the room would be principally for the use of Chinese language development, it would still be available as a secondary resource for the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) staff to use for other language classes. This team of three included two European Language Co-ordinating Lecturers and a schedule co-ordinator – collectively known as the MFL team. Prof Wang, the Academic Director of Cardiff Confucius Institute had also asked if she could be informed of the lab's progress.

Time was already starting to ebb away so in order to collect his thoughts, Stuart decided to make three lists to get started:

1. A list tasks to undertake
2. A list of issues that would need addressing
3. A list of the people already involved or who needed to be involved (the stakeholders)

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### Confucius Language Lab - Initial Action Log

Owner: Stuart Anderson

Date	Stakeholder Meetings	Outcomes
31 <sup>st</sup> May 09	Telephone meeting with Paul Peters, Marketing Manager from Octavia	Paul identified that there were three current language lab packages available, none of which were the same as that used by the existing 2 <sup>nd</sup> floor lab. A slightly re-patched upgraded version of this UniLab package was available but these days most people were ordering the much more technologically enhanced Web based system known as WebProLab. Paul suggested the old UniLab package might soon become obsolete and encouraged Stuart to consider the newer packages. However, the costs for these newer packages were significantly greater than the original budgeted estimate. Even if Stuart went for the less expensive upgraded UniLab version, the all-inclusive installation cost would be at least £18,000. The other two versions would cost £23,000 and £27,000
6 <sup>th</sup> June 09	Meeting of Language Lab Team Working party (which included the three Modern Foreign Language (MFL) team members, Adam and Peter Dobson (the project development manager from INSRV)	<p>The MFL team requested that the Lab incorporated the latest online WebProLab package, stating it would be pointless to install outdated technology. However, Peter reminded Stuart that any installation of a previously untested piece of hardware would require a full 'New Project Review' to be firstly undertaken on behalf of the Uni by INSRV. A request for such a review would be received at one of the INSRV board's bi-monthly meetings and could take from 6-12 months to be initiated. Whilst the UniLab package represented hardware already know to the University, the WebProLab package would require a Review.</p> <p>Peter also informed the team that any new installation of this nature would require a new server to be established along with a 1GIG switch which would cost between £1,000 and £2,000. This switch could take up to 8 weeks to order.</p>
9 <sup>th</sup> June 09	Meeting with James Johnson from the University's Estates Division	During this meeting James undertook and assessment of the room to consider its appropriateness for computer installation. He determined that the addition of these 14 student units and a teacher's unit would generate approximately 14KW of additional heat in the already hot, windowless room. Stuart suggested Air Con and enquired about the costs, but was informed it was against University policy to install Air Con except under exceptional occasions where no alternative

		airflow system could be developed. James agreed to weigh up the different options and report back
26 <sup>th</sup> June 09	2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting with James Johnson	After several trips with other Estates advisors to the designated room, the Estates team agreed that this room represented an 'exceptional occasion' and therefore was granted the option of Air Con installation at an additional cost of £6,000
26 <sup>th</sup> June 09	Booking of extra point installation	During this 2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting it was incidentally noted that whilst the room had already been wired for the installation of 14 units plus the teachers unit, one of the network connection points was already in use to house the computer responsible for the existing main projector and that if this was to be kept then an additional network socket was required at an extra cost of £100
30 June 09	Sourcing of new computers	During a visit to INSRV, Stuart noticed a small integral computer and monitor in use in the building's entrance area. He enquired about the nature of this device and after discussing this as a space-saving option with Adam, it was agreed that Adam would identify a budget for such a system. Within 24 hours Adam returned with a quote for the very modern slimline systems at a cost £2,000 greater than the original quote based on the Centre's current, rather bulky computer systems.
01 July 09	Ordering of computer desks	Stuart asked Adam to go ahead with the initial order for the necessary computer desks for the new lab and after numerous attempts Adam was informed that the company that had provided the original quote had now gone out of business. University policy required Adam to ensure only University approved suppliers were contacted. Two further suppliers were identified both of which were only able to offer quotes significantly higher than the original quote – Quote 1 was for a set of desks that would cost an additional £600 but would take at least 2-3 months to deliver, whilst Quote 2 was for a set of desks that could be delivered within 5-7 working days but would cost an additional £1000

Following a review of this Initial Action Log, Stuart was aware that he would be required to make recommendations with a revised budget to the Director. Given the time that had been taken to undertake these actions and the need to ensure the project was completed before the end of the calendar year, Stuart was keen to present a revised plan to Ray at the earliest opportunity.

## THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE LANGUAGE LAB: CASE D:

### INTERNAL MEMO

From: Dr Ray Edwards

To: Stuart Anderson

Date: 15 July 2009

Ref: Confucius Language Lab

Dear Stuart

Thank you for presenting your revised plan to me at our meeting last week. Having reviewed the issues presented, the revised costs that significantly exceed the existing budget and the need to get this project completed before the end of the calendar year I agree to the following:

1. That you proceed to get the Air Con fitted as quickly as possible and that the Centre will fund this from external funds allocated to building maintenance.
2. That, as you suggested, you proceed to order the installation of the UniLab package and advise Octavia that we will be seeking further funding in a future round of project bids to support the overhaul and upgrade of both language labs to the new WebProLab system in due course, securing estimates for the future installation if possible.
3. That you proceed to order the new desks as a matter of urgency and the slimline integrated computer systems
4. That you notify INSRV and request they order and install the 1Gig Switch and server.

Finally, please note that the alternative option would have been to cancel the project but to do so would have risked significant embarrassment with the Chinese funding authorities and would have potentially harmed future funding bids. With this in mind it is imperative that the project be completed on time within the calendar year as discussed.

The additional cost incurred by these activities should be discussed with the Finance Manager and with Prof Wang and it should, wherever possible be identified and clawed back from within the other Confucius Institute Projects for this calendar year. I will write to the Finance Manager and Prof Wang to inform them of this decision.

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## THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE LANGUAGE LAB: CASE E

Stuart proceeded to make the necessary arrangements and the tables were ordered and delivered, INSRV fitted the 1Gig switch and set up the server, whilst Adam ordered the Slimline computer systems in time for Octavia's scheduled installation date of the week commencing 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2009

During the first day of the Octavia UniLab installation the Octavia engineer, Arthur Wallis noted that the very modern systems were not fitted with internal analogue sockets but rather with very modern DVI sockets. The UniLab installation required analogue sockets and so it was suggested that adaptors be ordered that might enable a connection to be made between the existing analogue cabling from the UniLab system to the new DVI sockets in the back of each of the integral monitors.

If the new adaptors could not be sourced and supplied by Thursday then the engineer would be required to schedule a second installation visit at a cost to the centre of an additional £700. Adam identified that such adaptors could be sourced and shipped within 48 hours at a cost of £21 per adaptor. The Executive and Academic Directors were away from the office attending a conference in China and were therefore unavailable for consultation. Stuart, balancing the need to keep costs under control and the need to ensure installation was completed by the end of the calendar year decided to take executive action and order the adaptors for immediate delivery. These arrived on the Thursday of the same week.

Three hours later Arthur called a meeting with Adam and Stuart and explained that the adaptors simply would not work and only permitted a one way exchange of digital media information, whilst the language lab required two way media interaction. He concluded that either the computers would have to be exchanged for older-type systems that still included the analogue type sockets on the monitors or that Octavia would have to go back to its primary supplier in Canada which was still experimenting with the development of new cabling for DVI installations. Any future refit would require the costs of new cabling to be met and would represent a significant delay given that the technology behind the new cables had only just been developed to trial stage.

Adam explained that given that the backs of each new terminal had been removed and its cabling had been handled, then the systems would not be covered for a 'return as unused item' to the supplier. Stuart was unsure how to proceed.



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Arthur returned to the Confucius Institute with the new technology cables that had recently arrived from Canada following further testing. After a significant delay of five months and intense negotiating with Octavia over the additional costs of the 2<sup>nd</sup> installation, it was agreed that these costs would be shared equally between the Institute and Octavia. The cabling was duly installed and the lab tested.

The Language lab was formally opened by a visiting delegation of individuals from the Chinese funding authorities in September 2010. Further discussions with the installation engineer identified that the added benefit of uninstalling the UniLab system to replace with the WebProLab package was negligible and so the decision to upgrade with future funding was postponed in favour of no further action. However, it was agreed with the MFL Team that there would be an annual review of the two labs on an ongoing basis.

The project almost complete, Stuart's final task was to complete his End Project Report.