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Primary Production and Shaping

Doing Projects in a Foreign Language – Communications Management, Issues and Strategies

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Abstract

The Qinghai Salt Lake Industry Co. Ltd. (QSLIC) smelter project involves a Chinese state-owned client, a Canadian engineering company, their American technology partner, several Chinese design institutes and international vendors. Proper technical communication plays an important role during the development of a project in a foreign language and across cultures. Using the QSLIC project as an example, this paper presents the role of Communications Manager and personal qualifications required, as well as technical communications management, issues and strategies, lessons learnt while doing smelter projects in China and Chinese business culture and etiquette.

Introduction

QSLIC

QSLIC, a Chinese state-owned enterprise, whose business is founded on access to extensive chloride-based mineral resources present in the Qarhan salt lake, located approximately 40 kilometers northeast of Golmud in the province of Qinghai. Already China's largest potash producer, QSLIC recognized the economic potential of using the magnesium chloride brine by-product from the potash process as a raw material for the production of commercial magnesium metal and alloys. Importantly, QSLIC's raw material is a chloride, so that chlorine gas is a by-product from the magnesium production process. This availability of chlorine inspired QSLIC to develop a synergistic integrated flow sheet for an industrial complex, the heart of which would be an electrolytic magnesium smelter.

The proposed industrial complex includes eight process plants as well as a utilities facility and produces saleable products of magnesium and magnesium alloys, polyvinyl chloride and polypropylene, calcium chloride and soda ash, the most economically important of these being the magnesium metal products and polyvinyl chloride (PVC). This industrial complex is known as the QSLIC Phase 3 expansion and it is envisioned that a further expansion (Phase 4) of the entire complex will follow the successful start-up of Phase 3.

Hatch

Hatch is providing engineering, equipment custom design and project implementation for QSLIC. Hatch started to work for QSLIC by performing basic engineering for the proposed 100,000-tpa primary magnesium plant. Afterwards, QSLIC engaged Hatch to continue with detailed process technology design and support.

Furthermore, QSLIC has separately awarded Hatch with larger contracts for the calcium carbide (CaC_2) smelter project providing furnace technology and engineering design associated with adjacent process plants that are part of this same integrated facility.

American technology partner

During the course of the design, Hatch partnered with Carbide Industries LLC (C.I.) of Louisville, Kentucky, USA. Carbide Industries' operation provides the foundation for the scale-up and its experience with a proven operation is essential to the success of the CaC_2 furnace technology.

Design Institutes (D.I.)

Generally speaking, there is one Chinese D.I. in charge of design coordination for each plant of the whole QSLIC industrial complex. In Mg smelter and CaC_2 smelter projects, there are also several Chinese D.I. performing engineering in utilities and other areas.

Vendors

The vendors involved in QSLIC project are worldwide.

The present document describes the role of the communications manager employed by the engineering firm.

Role of Communications Manager

Within Hatch, the Communications Manager reports directly to the Program Director. Broadly, this role is responsible for all technical translation, technical interpreting and communications services for the suite of projects being executed for QSLIC by Hatch. This includes dealing with the client, local design institutes and vendors, which is shown in Figure 1.

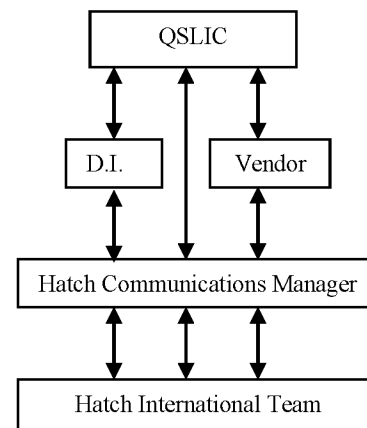


Figure 1 Role of Communications Manager in QSLIC Project

This position requires firstly, a detailed technical understanding of the subject matter which is gained through careful study of the project technical documents (drawings, technical reports, specifications, data sheets, etc.) along with in depth briefings with the design team. The role often requires off-line explanation to external parties about the detail of the technical subject matter and

either direct response or coordination of a response to queries that will arise.

Functional management capability is also necessary to develop comprehensive communications procedures and execute them through a careful coordination between Hatch, client, local design institute and vendor organizations.

Finally, interpersonal skills are required to assist, and at times guide, the various project managers and their leadership teams in development of productive and positive relationships with the various external Chinese parties.

Communications Management

The communications manager develops procedures and forms the team, including acting as hiring manager to staff technical translators and external contract translation companies. Additionally, the communications manager establishes training for all project team members in the use of the Communications team on the project. Directing the work of some 4-5 technical translators and 2-3 external translation companies, the communications managers detailed responsibilities include:

- Receive verbal or written communications to/from International Project Team for translation and forwarding to intended recipient(s).
- Manage and coordinate all translation services. Maintain translation log of items to be translated as per assigned priorities.
- Manage and coordinate all interpreting services for meetings and teleconferences via on-phone or live attendance.
- Manage and coordinate all interpreting services for site visits, vendor shop inspections and other such in-country activities.
- Personally provide interpreting services at key client face-to-face meetings in varying locations (Golmud, Xining, Tianjin, Shanghai, Beijing).
- Develop and maintain procedures outlining workflows and quality management steps for:
 - Translation of messages to/from the International Project Team received verbally or by email
 - translation of documents
 - translation of data from the design tools
 - provision of interpreting services.
- With the Project Systems Manager, specify requirements and coordinate administration of Hatch Execution Technologies used for Communications Services.
- With the Project Systems Manager, identify and implement 3rd party software required for the execution of Communication Services.
- With Hatch Corporate Learning Center, sponsor the development and delivery of Chinese cultural training for international team members.
- Assemble and train a team of in-house translation specialists and interpreters to facilitate requirements in these areas and act as coaches for international team members in matters of Chinese culture and customs.
- Contract external translation services based on evaluation of competencies and negotiation of rates.
- Review and approve external translation services invoices for final approval by the Project Manager.
- Establish budgets and manage man-hours and costs for all Communications services (either provided by internal resources or external service companies).
- Refer matters of a serious nature (especially related to difficult Client concerns and questions) to the Project Manager for agreement on handling.
- Effectively Report on the progress for Communication Services activities. Work with the Project Manager to resolve translation issues that impact on the successful delivery of the project

Communications Issues & Strategies

There are multiple communication issues related to both communications in strictest sense and significant differences in business culture. Table 1 describes these issues and strategies to mitigate their impact.

Table 1 Communications Issues and Strategies in QSLIC Project

Issues	Strategies
Complicated China business culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications team present Chinese cultural training material to international team members. • Interpreters attend business meetings and provide cultural context to comments and behaviors.
Difficulty in accurate translation of technical documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain help from in-house Chinese-speaking engineers in different disciplines worldwide. • Build a Project Dictionary for team use. • Check the translation for every document. • Get Chinese-speaking engineers to review technical document translation.
Large translation workload (reports,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Translation Log to keep track of all translation request. • Hire competent and responsible

memos, minutes, correspondence etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> translators. Contract external translation services to help for peak workloads. Schedules need to consider translation duration.
Various and frequent Requests from client, D.I. and vendors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Request List and follow up. Set notification to remind responsible person.
Battery limit with Chinese D.I.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responsibility matrix need to be detailed explained at the beginning of the project to avoid possible confusions, and further modified and detailed as project goes on.
Understanding Chinese design standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get Chinese Standard translated and circulated to the project team. Obtain Chinese Standard Supplement document for further explanation. Communicate during weekly teleconference and face-to-face meeting with D.I. to obtain local interpretation of codes, norms, rules and regulations. Meet with China Government Authority to evaluate the design.
Different understanding of engineering level of details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand China engineering standard and definition. Consult local experienced engineers. Explain Hatch's traditional project execution Strategy to Client.
Complicated procurement bidding procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get experienced local procurement support. Understand Client's procurement procedures.
Different project procedures between Hatch and China Client	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translate Hatch procedure and explain to the Client. Understand Client's project approval and decision making procedure.
Confidentiality issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sign Confidentiality Agreement with Client, D.I., review committee, vendors and explain the importance of IP. Use invited bidding instead of public bidding.

Chinese Business Culture and Etiquette

China is famously known as a country of etiquette and ceremonies. The unique character of the Chinese is built on a strong sense of pride in their ancient history and culture. Understanding the basic Chinese cultural, ethical and business values is paramount to any organization wanting to conduct business in today's rapidly progressing China [1].

Guanxi

Thousands of years ago Confucius talked about "reciprocity", Yi, the root of Guanxi. In literal terms, this central concept in Chinese culture means "relationships" or "connections". Guanxi is a network of elaborate relationships promoting trust and cooperation. For centuries, Guanxi was the main way of accomplishing everyday tasks [1]. Establishing a sincere, supportive relationship based on mutual respect is a fundamental aspect of Chinese culture. In the world of business, possessing the right guanxi is crucial to ensure minimum difficulties and frustrations that are often encountered. Chinese business relationships inevitably becomes a social relationship after a while.

A key role of the communications manager is to guide top managers to ensure that they build the correct relationship with their Chinese counterparts.

Mianzi

An important issue that should be considered throughout business interactions with the Chinese is the concept of 'mianzi' or 'face'. Face is a mark of personal pride and forms the basis of an individual's reputation and social status. In Chinese business culture "saving face", "losing face", "giving face" and "repairing face" are vital for successful business. Causing someone to lose face through public humiliation or inappropriate allocation of respect to individuals within the organization can seriously damage business discussions and relationship. On the other hand, praising someone in moderation before their colleagues is a form of 'giving face' and can earn respect, loyalty and aid negotiations [1].

The communications manager should be present during key meetings to provide insights and guide the international team in the appropriate behavior.

Seniority

Seniority is very important to the Chinese especially if you are dealing with a State owned or government body [2]. The importance of seniority goes through all Chinese culture. Instead of addressing the other party as Mr. Wang, it is always appropriate to address the other party by his designation or title, i.e. Wang Director or Wang Engineer. Senior members generally lead the negotiations and will direct the discussion. The appropriate respect must be given according to rank and seniority. For example, when giving out business cards or brochures, make sure the most senior person is started with before moving down the line. If gifts are being bought, buy better gifts for the senior managers instead of buying similar gifts across the board. Similarly, sitting positions in a meeting room or a dining table is accorded to rank, importance and seniority.

The communications manager should provide advice before a first meeting with Chinese business contacts to avoid making the wrong move.

Chinese Meeting Etiquette [3]

Arrive on time. Arriving late is considered rude. If you do arrive late, apologizing for your tardiness is a must.

After handshakes and the exchange of business cards, guests take their seats. Business cards are always exchanged on first meeting a new contact. Cards are held in both hands when exchanging and then introduce in detail. It is recommended to have your card printed in Chinese on the reverse and always offer it Chinese-side up. Treat the card with great respect as the card is the man.

The seating is typically arranged by rank and status. If the meeting is held around a large conference table, all the Chinese delegation may sit on one side of the table and foreigners on the other. This is especially true for formal meetings and negotiations.

Meetings usually begin with small talk to help both sides feel more comfortable. After a few moments of small talk, there is a short welcoming speech from the host (normally from the most senior person) followed by discussion of the meeting's topic.

During any conversation, the Chinese will often nod their heads or make affirmative utterances. These are signals that they are listening to what is being said and understand what is being said. These are not agreements to what is being said.

Do not interrupt during the meeting. Chinese meetings are highly structured and interjecting beyond a quick remark is considered rude. Wait to speak when it's your turn.

Respect should be shown to age, seniority, the history and traditions of China, political sensitivities, the company, the region etc. Stand up when a senior person enters the room, offer the seat of honor and be attentive.

Chinese negotiations are process-oriented and time-consuming. They want to determine if relationships can develop to a stage where both parties are comfortable doing business with the other. Relationship between people means more than the business itself. It is rare that the Chinese will deal with people they don't know or trust. Establishing a proper introduction with your counterparts is vital before entering into business.

When hosting guests from China for a business meeting, set out water, coffee, tea, fruit or other refreshments in the room. Make it seem like you have put effort into making them feel welcome and comfortable.

As a courtesy, when the meeting is over, walk your guests to their vehicles, taxi, or at least to the main door of the office building.

Chinese Dining Etiquette [4]

The seating arrangements at a banquet are very complicated and linked to perceptions of rank and status. If you are invited, normally you will be shown where to sit. However if you are the host it is probably best to get some local advice on the best seating plan if you want to avoid insulting anybody.

The meal is usually coming to an end when the fruit is served and the hot towels given out.

Alcohol will invariably be consumed in quite large quantities during a formal banquet — mainly either beer or local clear alcohols which can be very strong. Drinking alcohol is very

important to develop Guanxi. However, you may use a medical reason to decline.

Eat well to demonstrate that you are enjoying the food and appreciate the hospitality of the host.

Make toasts to your guests, by standing up, turning to your guest, and saying a few sentences that will honor him/her (ex. I am honored to be working with you, and look forward to many more successful projects together). When making a toast, hold lower your cup against the more senior guests' to show respect. Toast more to the most important guests.

Dress Codes

Appearance is important within Chinese business circles. Successful people are expected to look successful. Wealth is admired, so wear good quality clothes, watches etc.

In China, many men wear suits and ties and women tend to wear skirts and blouses of a modest cut. It is advisable to have business attire with you when visiting.

Be aware of the variety of the Chinese climate, which varies from sub-tropical to freezing. Make sure you check the weather conditions before you travel and check the climatic zone of the city you are visiting.

Gift Giving

Gift giving is an everyday part of Chinese business culture. Giving and receiving gifts helps to cement Guanxi.

Gifts are rarely opened in front of the giver.

Gifts could be foreign cigarettes, cognac, fine whisky, quality wine etc. Do not give clocks, cut flowers, or white objects; these objects carry association with death. Red and gold are the best wrapping paper.

Key Learnings

Here are some Chinese Project Paradigms from our Program Director:

1. Relationships make things work
2. Focus on outcomes not specific procedures or forecasts
3. Control behaviors not numbers
4. Expect role and scope changes as project matures
5. Patience and perseverance in all communications
6. Maintain a long term vision (build long-term goals and objectives in your proposal)

Tips for Working with Chinese Clients

Here are some communication tips for working with Chinese

Clients:

- You have no status until you have earned it
 - Hard work and persistence is highly valued
 - Never lose your temper, always be in control
 - Never refute outright what another says (Note: as they are considered impolite. Instead of saying “no”, answer “maybe” or “I’ll think about it.” It’s important that do not make people “lose face” in public)
 - It is difficult for the Chinese to say “no” directly. Anything other than a direct “yes” could mean “no”. Be circumspect and reflect on seeming agreements reached. Has an agreement actually been reached?
 - Expect to get back exactly what you give
 - Respect status, traditions and cultural sensitivities.
 - Group/team always more important than the individual
 - When working with new clients and new cultures, no work should be started without formal approval from the client. And be sure to know what is “formal approval” for the client.
 - Learning a little Chinese goes a long way. While it’s not necessary to master Chinese, learning to say a few phrases will help break the ice.
 - Do not assume comprehension. It is often useful to go over the same point several times from different angles in order to aid comprehension.
- Try to provide short but full sentences when addressing complicated technical terms, thus enabling the translators to follow.
 - At meetings and teleconferences, do not to speak to the interpreter at the same time when the client is speaking to him or her. Allow a pause to ensure that they are ready to proceed.
 - Leave enough time for translators (normally 1 - 2 hours for one A4 page) when planning your documentation preparation and issue schedule. Allow enough allow time to get documents translated.

Conclusions

Communications play a very important role in international project development. In a broader sense, the communications manager need to deliver accurate information to each party involved in an efficient way. The communications manager requires strong technical background knowledge and general local business culture and etiquette and interpersonal skills.

References

- [1] Doing business in China, www.communicaid.com
- [2] Business Culture and Etiquette in China, <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/>
- [3] Chinese meetings, <http://www.worldbusinessculture.com/>
- [4] Successful Entertaining in China, <http://www.worldbusinessculture.com/>

Tips for Working With Interpreters and Translators

The use of translation and interpretation are common services used by project in a foreign language. They are essential in order to adequately communicate and relay information with our client, other parties within China, and between teams in Canada.

- When shifting topics of conversation, announce what topic you are now discussing to avoid confusion.
- To the greatest extent, provide background data or information to the interpreter prior to your meeting. Discuss the goals and proposed outcomes from the meeting. This will raise efficiency and save time.
- When speaking through an interpreter, pause after one point is completed, thus allowing the interpreter to convey your meaning as clearly, and orderly as possible. Do not try to convey too much information at once.