Limitations with Using Role Play for Experiential Learning

Ida Franzén

Tutor: Johan Blomkvist
Examiner: Stefan Holmlid
Copyright

The publishers will keep this document online on the Internet – or its possible replacement – for a period of 25 years starting from the date of publication barring exceptional circumstances.

The online availability of the document implies permanent permission for anyone to read, to download, or to print out single copies for his/her own use and to use it unchanged for non-commercial research and educational purpose. Subsequent transfers of copyright cannot revoke this permission. All other uses of the document are conditional upon the consent of the copyright owner. The publisher has taken technical and administrative measures to assure authenticity, security and accessibility.

According to intellectual property law the author has the right to be mentioned when his/her work is accessed as described above and to be protected against infringement.

For additional information about the Linköping University Electronic Press and its procedures for publication and for assurance of document integrity, please refer to its www home page: http://www.ep.liu.se/.
Abstract

Among researchers within the design area, role play is often spoken about in a positive manner. This study aims to discover the limitations with role play as a tool for experiential learning. This is done by evaluating a prototype of an early-stage concept of a role play-tool. The tool is aimed for Swedish SMEs to raise awareness and create curiosity of guanxi, which is a vital part of Chinese business culture. The tool is compared to another experiential-based tool, Experience Map, with the same purpose but based on real scenarios rather than simulated scenarios.

Prototype testing with intended users identified the difficulty of giving instructions on cultural behaviour as one limitation. This limitation is especially difficult in settings where the participants have no previous knowledge within the area, which is the case for this study. Another limitation is the challenge of giving enough instructions for the players to act on, without interrupting the exploration aspect of the tool. Besides, the target group seem to prefer more hands-on tools that are more relevant for their specific business and less time-consuming. The main difference between the tools is that the experience map which is based on real scenarios, creates a greater interest among participants and a higher level of the participants’ willingness to use it.

Keywords: Role Play, Experiential Learning, Cross-Cultural Business, Prototype Testing
Acknowledgement

This master thesis is written by Ida Franzén, engineering student within Design and Product Development at Linköping university. The project was inquired by Usify AB, a Swedish design consultancy. Firstly, I would like to thank Cao Linqi, my project partner, for a well-executed project and for sharing her first-hand knowledge of China. Many thanks to our supervisor Johan Blomkvist and my examiner Stefan Holmlid for guidance, and to Bjarte Bugge at Usify for giving us the opportunity and support to do this project. I would also like to send my thanks and appreciation to all companies that have contributed with time, knowledge and feedback during the project. Last but not least, thanks to Cecilia Skalk, my opponent that have given me feedback during my work.

Linköping, June 2019

Ida Franzén
# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction** ........................................................................................................ 10
   1.1 Thesis Background ......................................................................................... 10
   1.2 Objective ........................................................................................................ 11
   1.3 Delimitations ................................................................................................. 11
   1.4 Reader’s Guide .............................................................................................. 12

2. **Theoretical Framework** ...................................................................................... 13
   2.1 Design thinking .............................................................................................. 13
      2.1.1 Role Play ............................................................................................... 13
      2.1.2 Customer Journey ............................................................................... 13
   2.2 Experiential learning ..................................................................................... 14
   2.3 Cross-cultural Business .................................................................................. 15
      2.3.1 Chinese Business Culture .................................................................... 15

3. **Pre-Study** ........................................................................................................... 17
   3.1 Currently Existing Prototypes ......................................................................... 17
      3.1.1 Common aim for prototypes .................................................................. 17
      3.1.2 Prototype A – Role Play ........................................................................ 17
      3.1.3 Prototype B – Experience Map ............................................................... 20

4. **Method** ............................................................................................................... 22
   4.1 Prototype Testing ............................................................................................ 22
      4.1.1 Test Participants ..................................................................................... 22
      4.1.2 General Test Procedure ......................................................................... 23
   4.2 Data Collecting and Analysing ...................................................................... 24

5. **Results** .............................................................................................................. 25
   5.1 Test Result Prototype A (Role Play) .............................................................. 25
   5.2 Test Result Prototype B (Experience Map) ................................................... 26

6. **Discussion** ........................................................................................................ 27
   6.1 Role Play ....................................................................................................... 27
6.2 Experience Map ................................................................. 27
6.3 Method discussion ............................................................ 28
6.4 Answers to Research Questions ........................................... 29
7 Conclusion ............................................................................. 31
  7.1 Future Studies ................................................................. 31
8 References ............................................................................. 32
Nomenclature
SME – Small to medium sized companies
Guanxi – Chinese concept of how to build and use relations to get through life
1 Introduction

Role play is a tool used broadly within different areas, of which design and teaching are two examples. By simulating a scenario and let persons step into the role of someone else, role play can for example give insights about the interaction between a product and its intended user. The tool is also good for active, experiential learning. Role play is often spoken about in a positive manner and one of the benefits is the fact that the simulated scenario lets the user learn from experience while avoiding risks that might be linked to a real life situation. Also, the active way of learning tends to engage the participant and thereby give deeper understanding (Schwartz, 2012).

Cross-cultural collaborations are often challenged by cultural differences (Ghauri & Fang, 2001). This may for example lead to situations where a company is having problems making business in a new country, even though the company’s product is well suited for the market. The more cultural differences there are, the more difficulties typically arise. In order to reach a state of successful collaboration, knowledge and understanding of other people and their culture is of big importance (Fan & Zigang, 2004; Hofstede, 1980). Finding new ways of learning about different cultures are therefore more and more interesting in a globalized world.

1.1 Thesis Background

Since 1978, when China started opening up their economy to the rest of the world, the western companies’ interest for China has increased (Ghauri & Fang, 2001). One of the reasons to why China is attractive is the country’s huge and still growing market. With 1,4 billion consumers, the Chinese market has a big economic potential for companies. Sweden’s ranking as number three on the Global Innovation Index 2018 and the country’s global reputation of being innovative, makes the interest mutual (Cornell University, INSEAD, & WIPO, 2018). Besides, companies such as Ericsson, IKEA and Volvo have contributed to Swedish products being generally regarded as high quality in China.

Studies show that cultural differences is the greatest barrier when it comes to doing global business and many collaborations have failed due to cultural barriers (Fan & Zigang, 2004). Chinese and Swedish culture are different in many ways, for example when it comes to politics and culture. One of the main differences between Chinese and Swedish culture is the Chinese concept of guanxi, relationship building (Fan & Zigang, 2004). Having some knowledge about guanxi is the key to succeed in China (Osland, 1990). Considering Guanxi is complex and can vary depending on location and situation, the best way to learn it is to experience it.

Usify, a Swedish design consultancy firm, has watched the westerners’ interest for the Chinese market grow as well as observed several unsuccessful efforts of trying to initiate collaboration with Chinese companies. Those observations have led to the idea of applying design thinking to the area by developing design tools with the purpose to facilitate for Swedish companies to expand to China. The development of tools to create awareness of guanxi is now at a conceptual stage and before developing them any further, two prototypes are in this study tested with intended users in order to discover the potential of the tools.

The experiential aspect of role play creates a deeper understanding (Schwartz, 2012). Combined
with the ability to let practitioners act without consequences, make role play potentially interesting and valuable as a tool to discover guanxi. Role play has been used before to teach managers about business cultures. Sceptics mean that cultures are too complex to be taught by letting practitioners play roles with cultures they are not at all familiar with (2009). This thesis aims to discover limitations with using role play for experiential learning when learning about cultures.

1.2 Objective

The purpose of this work is to evaluate concepts for two tools. The tools have been developed with the purpose to facilitate for Swedish small to medium-sized enterprises, SMEs, to do business with Chinese companies by creating awareness of guanxi. The evaluation should support the decision-making regarding whether to develop those tools any further and if so, suggest directions for future development of the tool.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are the limitations with using role play for experiential learning?
RQ 2: What differences are there using experiential learning tools based on real scenarios compared to tools based on fictive scenarios?

1.3 Delimitations

Since the concept being tested, aims at Swedish companies, the study is limited to testing only with Swedish SME’s. Due to the resources given, the test participants are limited to companies within Linköping.
1.4 Reader’s Guide

The thesis is structured as described below.

Chapter 1 – Introduction
In the first chapter the background to the study is explained. The research questions are presented as well as the objective and delimitations.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework
Relevant theory within the research scope is presented in chapter 2, to give the reader a better understanding for the study.

Chapter 3 – Pre-Study
This chapter presents the prototypes that are being tested and evaluated. Those are a result of the work leading up to this thesis

Chapter 4 - Method
In chapter 4 the methods used to reach the results, are described and justified.

Chapter 5 – Results
The results from the tests for each prototype are presented separately.

Chapter 6 – Discussion
The results are discussed and compared to previous studies presented in the theoretical framework in chapter 2.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion
In the seventh and final chapter the study is concluded, and the research questions are answered. Finally, suggestions for further studies are presented.
2 Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, theory relevant to the study is presented.

2.1 Design thinking

Design thinking is an established mindset among designers which encourages the practitioner to focus on understanding the user and her needs. This is done by having an open mind and by using acknowledged methods such as role play and customer journey mapping. Design Thinking decreases risks, increases knowledge and generates innovative solutions. Its focus on empathy and understanding is considered to be a powerful tool to achieve good collaboration (IDEO, 2019).

2.1.1 Role Play

Role play is a tool where the participants step into the character of someone else and engage in scenarios to gain behavioural and cognitive insights (The University of Tennessee, 2018). It is used within many disciplines, such as teaching and design. Designers use it to discover the interaction between a product and its intended users (Belova, Feierabend, & Eilks, 2010; Van Boeijen, Daalhuizen, Zijlstra, & van der Schoor, 2013). In literature intended for teaching and pedagogics, role play is often referred to as a classroom-based experiential learning activity. Previous studies have shown that role play is especially good for higher order learning and for its ability to promote self-reflection, awareness and empathy (The University of Tennessee, 2018).

As mentioned earlier this kind of activity is very engaging. But role play can also bring a feeling of discomfort to the practitioner which should be considered when creating and facilitating the activity (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). When creating role plays, the material provided needs to be well balanced. Armstrong (2009) means that too much material may overload and restrict the students, while as too little material may result to uncertainty. Wurdinger (2005) illuminates the importance of creating a setting relevant to the practitioner, in order to attain focus and interest and thereby reach a greater deal of self-learning. He claims the learning may be lost if the practitioner lacks interest. In order to keep up the interest of the practitioners and keep them engaged, the teacher should not give direct instructions and take charge of the problem solving during the activity. Meaning, rather than give the learners the answers if they get stuck, the teacher should only give more material for the students to use to find a solution. (Wurdinger, 2005)

Role play can be time consuming in comparison to other learning activities, since it takes time for the practitioners to get involved with their role and the scenario (The University of Tennessee, 2018), and to try out different actions until reaching the goal. But the learning outcome is often greater than the time spent. One should neither underestimate the learning outcome that follows some time after activity completion. (Wurdinger, 2005)

2.1.2 Customer Journey

Customer journey mapping is a service design technique used to map the stages of a customer’s experience when using a product or a service. It can be used at any stage of a design process to give the designer a structured way of analysing and defining all stages of an experience from a
user perspective and identify user needs and pain points. The mapping follows a timeline and often includes information about the user’s actions, touchpoints, experience, thoughts, feelings and opportunities with the service, see example in Figure 1. It is a good way for designers to gain deeper understanding and insights about the customer’s experience as well as discover lack of knowledge. (Van Boeijen, Daalhuizen, Zijlstra, & Van der Schoor, 2013)

Figure 1. An example of a customer journey map, mapping men’s experience of going through an IVF treatment with their partner. Illustration: (Voorend, 2016)

2.2 Experiential learning

Experiential learning can simply be described as “learning by doing”. Experiential teaching immerses the learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience (Schwartz, 2012; Wurdinger, 2005). Wurdinger (2005) also writes that the learner plays a critical role and the takeaway from experiential learning varies depending on how the individual chooses to solve the problem. Activities based on experiential learning allows the learner to make mistakes without being penalized (Schwartz, 2012). In difference from ordinary learning, the learning from experiential activities may not take place in the classroom and there is no defined learning outcome. The student will rather have to identify the required knowledge to be able to acquire the knowledge themselves (Schwartz, 2012). Previous studies have shown that experimental learning generates active and mentally participating learners which is more efficient and beneficial than passive learning, such as lectures (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Kilgour, Reynaud, Northcote, & Shields, 2015).

Wurdinger (2005) explains there are two kinds of experiences; primary and secondary experiences. Primary experiences are experiences that are direct to the student, such as fieldwork or sports. Secondary experiences are the learning outcome that for example is received by reading or reflecting about primary experiences. Discussing secondary experiences
can be difficult without having primary experience, which implies that primary experiences should be offered before secondary experiences. An example could be to first read a book and afterwards discuss the book.

2.3 Cross-cultural Business

Cultural differences is one of the greatest barriers when it comes to doing global business (Fan & Zigang, 2004). By studying other cultures and gaining knowledge about what is important for other people, the chances to handle international collaborations increase (Hofstede, 1980).

2.3.1 Chinese Business Culture

One fundamental part of the Chinese business culture is guanxi. Guanxi is a Chinese term for relationship (Chen & Chen, 2004). I China businesses are built on guanxi, personal relations, rather than legal regulations and contracts. Guanxi is not just about adding new contacts on LinkedIn or shaking someone’s hand at a conference. Guanxi is about building up a network of trustworthy connections that you trust and vouch for; something you must work for, for a long time. This network of people will help you out when in trouble, promote your business and help you reach your goals. Guanxi takes a lot of time and effort as it needs continuous upkeeping (George & Yan, 2017; Ngoma, 2016). This is crucial and something foreign companies have to understand when going to China (Ngoma, 2016; Osland, 1990). Guanxi is found in private life as well as in business and works differently in different parts of the country.

To be successful you do not necessarily have to know people with the right competence, but you must know someone, that knows someone, that knows someone etc (Nystrand, 2012). To keep guanxi with people, it is important not to by-pass those middlemen. Guanxi is built on trust, which usually is built by having business dinners. An important part of the trust building is jiu wenhua, “liquor culture”, meaning drinking large quantities of Baijiu, Chinese liquor, at business dinners (Nothhaft, 2018). The idea is to get them drunk because a drunk is speaking the truth.

To build guanxi, a guanxi base needs to be identified. This is done by personal interaction. According to Chen & Chen (2004) there are three different kinds of bases. The first kind of guanxi base is built on common social identities such as birthplace, university and workplace. Notice that he ages of the individuals does not affect the common identities, nor does it matter if the individuals attended the same university during different years. The second type of guanxi base is established in a third party. For this kind of guanxi base there is no need to have common social identities. It is rather based on a friend in common, with whom both parties have guanxi. The third kind of guanxi base is not at all based on connections but a base initiated in common interests. It could be an interest in future exchange or collaboration.

The way Chinese build relations is similar to how westerners build relations. The difference mainly concerns the importance of the connections and how they are used. The importance of guanxi, is believed to has its origin in the history of the country. China is a developing country with a one-party political system. The country has gone through lots of changes during the last decades, meaning there has been many uncertainties regarding legal structure and governmental structure. This insecurity has led to the importance of relying on people rather than the government (Xin & Pearce, 1996)(Ngoma, 2016; Xin & Pearce, 1996). Even though some
sources say guanxi is decreasing in importance, studies indicate that guanxi is still of high value and have a positive effect on companies’ performance and economy (from Ngoma (Ai 2006; Luo 2007; Quer et al. 2010; Cheng and Tang 2012)).

Lastly, there are many important aspects to guanxi and Chinese culture, such as losing face, toasting, table seating rules and gift giving, that are not brought up in this thesis. Also, not to forget is that each person and situation is unique, making it difficult to play by any exact rules.
3 Pre-Study

This chapter presents the two prototypes, A (a role play) and B (an experience map), which are the result of the work that has led up to this study. It is necessary to be familiar with the prototypes in order to understand the following chapters. The initial version of each prototype (A1 and B2) is followed up by an improved version (A2 and B2). The improvements are based on user feedback. The descriptions below focus on the second versions of the prototypes followed by an explanation of the changes made between version 1 and 2.

3.1 Currently Existing Prototypes

The process of developing the design tools is at a very early stage, so the purpose of conducting tests is to test the conceptual idea rather than visual appearance. The low-fidelity paper prototypes used for the testing give something tangible to test with the intended users. A low-fidelity prototype encourages the users to suggest improvements more than what a high-fidelity prototype does (Pierzchala, 2018).

The conceptual tools being tested are two different types of experience-based learning exercises, of which one is a role play and the other one is an experience map. The two concepts have been developed based on research consisting of a literature study and interviews conducted with Swedish and Chinese business people with experience of collaboration between the two countries. Below, the prototypes of the tools are described.

3.1.1 Common aim for prototypes

Both tools are aimed at Swedish companies with no or limited knowledge about Chinese culture. The purpose of the tools is to create awareness and interest of guanxi as the first step towards deeper knowledge. The exercises are designed to be facilitated by someone with knowledge about Chinese business culture. The motivation for this is that the facilitator can better guide the participants through the exercise, add another dimension to the discussion and answer some of their questions afterwards.

3.1.2 Prototype A – Role Play

Prototype A is a role play exercise where the participants are to play different roles based on the information given on their character cards. There are 13 character-cards with information about the characters’ network and business-related interests. An example of a character card is presented in Figure 2 (see full version in Appendix A).
One of the characters, Anna, initiates the game while the others only act when being called for. Anna has a given goal and can, by reaching out to characters in her given network, find her path to the goal. Figure 3 depicts the social network and the two possible paths to reach contact with the person that can fulfil Anna’s needs. At the start of the exercise the information visible in Figure 3 is only known by the facilitator. During the course of the role play the path is mapped out and marked with the time and cost it takes to build relations with other characters. Each contact is marked as successful (green) or unsuccessful (red), see Figure 4. The idea is to gradually visualise the network to the participants and show that it can be time consuming and costly to build up a network in China since trust is not built during one occasion.
When Anna finds the character that matches her needs, she is instructed to organise a dinner and invite relevant people. The other participants are encouraged to discuss the issue with her.

All character-cards that are not the main characters, are designed so that they either can be played by a participant or be read out loud without anyone playing it. This makes the exercise possible to use with anything between 2 and 13 participants.
Improvements to Prototype A1

The mapping of the effort it takes to build new relations (in terms of time and cost), is an attribute that was not part of the first version of the prototype but added to the second version, prototype A2.

3.1.3 Prototype B – Experience Map

The second tool is inspired by the established design tool customer journey mapping. It consists of a chart (Figure 5) with questions that the practitioner answers verbally, with an experience of their own choice in mind. The questions regard feelings, activities and other parameters that are relevant for guanxi. After reflecting and answering the questions, the theory behind the questions is presented to the practitioner. The theory brings up different cultural aspects that can be of importance in business-related activities. For example, one of the questions is “Were you and the Chinese businessperson you met, at the same level of hierarchy?”. The theory behind the question above has its origin in the difference between Swedish flat organisations and Chinese hierarchal organisations. It is important to understand that even though the Swedish person and the Chinese person have the same titles, they might not have the same power to make decisions. Also, because of cultural reasons, Chinese people are not likely to indicate if they cannot make the decision, but they might instead fall back to using vague answers. See prototype in full quality in Appendix B.

Experience Map

![Experience Map](image)

*Figure 5. Prototype B2, Experience Map. The top row consists of questions for the practitioner to answer. The second and third row show examples while as the bottom row presents the theory behind the questions.*
Improvements to Prototype B1

The theory presented on the bottom row in Figure 5, is an improvement based on the feedback on prototype B1.
4 Method

The testing of the prototypes, A and B, follows the flow shown in Figure 6. After testing the first version of each prototype (A1 and B1) a few times, the researchers have a general idea of how the prototype is perceived by the users. Rather than continuously confirm those insights, recurrent feedback is translated into improvements, of which the easy applicable ones are applied in order to see how the perception changed. Those changes constitute the second versions of the prototypes, A2 and B2 (as is presented in chapter 3). When all tests are conducted, a final analysis is carried out.

Figure 6. Illustration of the testing process.

4.1 Prototype Testing

To capture a general idea of the prototypes, qualitative tests are conducted. The procedures used for testing role play and experience map are very similar while the target test audience differ somewhat. Therefore, the testing of the 2 tools are done during separate testing sessions (TS), 5 sessions for the role play tool and 4 for the experience map (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Testing session</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Prototype tested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A1 Role Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tct. Number of participants:</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Table showing the test sessions and participants.

4.1.1 Test Participants

The prototypes are tested and evaluated by letting a sample of people, similar to the intended users, test the prototype. The chosen participants represent Swedish companies with an interest of China. By choosing participants that match the intended users and have different levels of experience, the chance to get a broader variety of feedback increases (Graneheim & Lundman,
In total there are 18 participants. 8 of them have experience of doing business in China in forms of delegation trips or collaboration, whereas the rest have no experience but rather an interest of doing business with China.

The experience map exercise requires participants with experience, as the name indicates. The roleplay exercise on the other hand is tested by participants both with and without experience. The inclusion of participants with experience was chosen to facilitate constructive feedback on the value and correctness of the tool. Since the role play prototype is quite extensive, it was first tested with a group of students to make sure the exercise worked as the researchers expected it to work (TS1). It was also tested with a person with much experience and knowledge within the area to make sure the exercise is not misleading (TS2). The remaining testing was intended to be carried out through a workshop with roughly ten participants. But since it was difficult to gather participants for one specific occasion the workshop was completed with only five participants (testing session 3). Complementary testing was therefore added in order to get feedback from more users (TS5, TS6).

4.1.2 General Test Procedure

The exercise is started by giving the participants a brief introduction to the concept of guanxi. After the introduction, instructions for the tool in question are presented. The experience map is explained by giving the examples on the top rows of the chart, while the roleplay is explained by sharing the belonging instructions (Appendix C). By following written instructions, the researchers make sure all necessary information was given for all tests.

After presenting the instructions, participants testing the roleplay are given a couple of minutes to study their character cards and when ready, they are asked to use the tool accordingly. The experience map on the other hand, is facilitated by the facilitator who asks the questions that are presented on the prototype.

While using the prototypes, the participants are asked to think aloud, which gives the researcher an opportunity to take part of the thoughts of the participants (Osvalder, Rose, & Karlsson, 2015). During the process of using the prototypes, the researchers observe and listen to the participants while taking notes. After completion of the exercise, the participants are asked to verbally answer some open questions regarding insights, limitations and improvements related to the tool (see Appendix D).

In the very end of the session, the participants are asked to fill in a short questionnaire to answer how willing they would be to use the tool again and motivate their answer. The reason to use a questionnaire was to increase the chance of receiving honest answers by letting the participants be anonymous. But since most of the tests ended up being done individually or in pairs, the aspect of anonymity was lost. The questionnaire was therefore only used when testing prototype A1 and B1. For the later testing sessions, when testing prototype A2 and B2, the questions were brought up in the discussion/interview instead. This is taken into account in the analysis since there is a risk of dishonest answers. However, the feedback provided in the questionnaires is still valuable and give us an idea of what opportunities come with the tool, but the feedback should not be given the same weight as if it was anonymous.

To avoid distraction, the tests were conducted in calm environments, either in the office of the
participants or in the office of Usify. The tests were facilitated by the designers of the tools.

4.2 Data Collecting and Analysing

Data is collected during and after the testing by listening while the participants think aloud, observing their actions, conducting semi-structured interviews and taking notes. Besides, the tests were audio-recorded to make repeated listening possible.

The semi-structured interviews are suitable since they take each test and its outcome into consideration (Osvalder et al., 2015). Observations are used to answer questions that are difficult to ask or collect information that the participant is not aware of (Osvalder et al., 2015). The method is used to confirm or contradict what participants say which makes it a good complement to the interviews (Adato, 2011). There are two observers in order to get a broader perspective (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Each occasion was followed by a reflective dialogue between the observing facilitators. By using appropriate data collection methods, collecting the right amount of data and collecting data from different sources, the data can be verified and thereby more credible (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Since the testing is of the qualitative kind, a qualitative analysis method is applied. The method chosen is similar to Qualitative Content Analysis but not as structured. The analysis focuses on identifying broad patterns that can answer the research question. The process of analysing the qualitative data starts by listening to the recordings from the tests. The listening is an opportunity for the tester to get an overall picture and start looking for patterns (Bathia, 2018). While listening complementary notes are taken. The notes are read through several times and the content is sorted into different areas; insights received from using the tool; ideas for improvement and contexts where the tool could be useful. Patterns in terms of meaning, within the different content areas, are identified and condensed. Those condensed patterns of feedback constitute a general picture of what the target group think about the concept. The conclusions are then based on information that repeatedly has been collected and information that can be confirmed by different data sources.
5 Results

In this chapter, results from the prototype testing and belonging result analysis are presented.

5.1 Test Result Prototype A (Role Play)

The preparatory testing sessions (TS1, TS2) gave the researcher the feedback that the exercise is fun, engaging, giving insights about how time consuming guanxi can be. The feedback given during the first testing sessions with companies (TS3, TS5) clearly showed that the researchers had given the participants the wrong expectations on the tool. The participants were told they would learn about guanxi, which was the initial goal with developing the tools. But the first prototypes for role play and experience map rather triggered lots of questions regarding guanxi, of which not many were answered. This led to two changes to the first version of the prototype; firstly, the description of the purpose was clarified by telling the participants the exercise creates awareness. Secondly, a concluding, theoretical summary was added at the end of the testing session in order to add value to the exercise by answering questions and thereby increase the users’ level of satisfaction. This summary took shape of a concluding discussion where the knowledgeable facilitators shared relevant knowledge.

The willingness to use a role play exercise varied. Some participants were very eager to get started while as others hesitated. But observations confirm the theory that role play is an engaging activity resulting in a high degree of participation. The general picture is that all participants were actively and happily playing their roles once the exercise had started. During one of the tests (TS1), the participants picked up their smartphones, on their own initiative, to use as token when calling another character. The fact of engagement was true to all participants, irrespective of age and gender, even for those participants that hesitated in the beginning (TS3).

At the end of the exercise, when the participants were asked to organise a dinner and decide who to invite, lively discussions occurred for those tests that involved a group of participants (TS1, TS3). The challenge was extended when the participants added new aspects to the discussion, and thoughts that had not struck them before were discussed. For the individual testing sessions, there was no such discussion, but the participant rather reflected shortly and then presented their answer. The task itself, made the participants think twice before inviting people to the dinner (TS1, TS3 TS5, TS6). Participants with no previous experience or knowledge were just as involved in the discussions as the other participants (TS3).

For those tests where the participants had different levels of knowledge about guanxi (TS3), participants with knowledge tended to share this knowledge with participants without knowledge, in order to be able to have a dialogue.

Several participants mentioned that the role play exercise gave them insights about how complex and time-consuming network building can be (TS1, TS2, TS3). A few of them even claimed this insight was so strong it almost has a deterrent effect (TS3). The participant in TS2 gave the feedback that the exercise made him realise what has to be done in order to succeed in China and TS5 explained that the exercise had made her realise the importance of dinners.

Considering it was difficult to play the roles without having deeper knowledge of how Chinese behave, several participants suggested to give more knowledge before the exercise. They also
expressed their wish to improvise more than they were able to (TS1, TS3), considering the limited information about the roles. Several participants expressed they would like more scenarios for the role play (TS1, TS5). For the existing scenario, some participants pointed out that they would have preferred to get more information about the setting and the characters’ interests (TS3).

5.2 Test Result Prototype B (Experience Map)

Just as for the role play exercise, the lack of knowledge gain was pointed out during the first testing session of the experience map prototype (TS4). When testing the first version of the prototype, B1, the participant reflected on his experience and when the exercise was completed, he asked for feedback on his story. This was not part of the exercise at that stage, but the facilitators immediately realised there must be some concluding feedback. For the second version, prototype B2, the theory behind the questions was therefore presented in the end of the exercise, to give the participants an idea of whether their experience was successful or not. This was appreciated during the later testing sessions and the participants could reflect further upon their experience and draw their own conclusions (TS8, TS9).

The test raised some questions about the participants’ willingness to allow for the extra time needed for a self-learning exercise. When testing the updated prototype B2, some participants were impatient and asked questions that were irrelevant to the testing, in order to get answers that could help their own business (TS8). This behaviour may indicate the participants do not appreciate self-learning exercises but prefer to get taught.

Some participants declared this exercise is intuitive, easy and quick to use, which they explained is a determining factor as to whether they will use it or not (TS4, TS9). Other participants primarily valued the structured way of reflecting that the exercise gives them (TS8, TS9). Most participants showed an interest for this exercise and participants who were confused by previous experiences in China, announced the exercise as helpful to them (TS9). Participants also expressed it would be good to use the tool together with colleagues that share joined the same activity but might have a different experience (TS4).

The participants had no problems understanding the instructions or carrying out the exercise (TS4, TS7, TS8, TS9). Another feedback from this exercise is that the practitioner gets to verbalise his/her reflections so that they become more explicit and thereby lead to more concrete and operational actions (TS4). The same participant also expressed he thought the exercise was fun to use.

When it comes to improvements, some participants requested a broader spectrum of aspects to be brought into the exercise (TS7). One participant mentioned that the experience map exercise encourages the practitioner to judge his/her experience based on the few parameters that are included in the exercise (TS8). While as in real life, there are many more factors that affect the success of an activity, the participant pointed out. Another idea was that the exercise could have a second use by reflecting on the counterpart’s experience as well (TS7).
6 Discussion

6.1 Role Play

In this study, the role play exercise is seen as a tool for experiential learning based on a fictive scenario.

One key finding from the study was that the role play exercise was engaging and encourages the participants to discuss challenges that come up during the exercise. This finding well corresponds with the theory and results from previous studies. The insight that participants help teaching each other is promising and shows the possibility to use the tool as a framework for discussion and self-learning. This could possibly be the best way to use it since the tools itself trigger questions and participants with knowledge can share it with others. Even for participants without knowledge of guanxi, the tool has shown good promise for initiating the process of reflecting. The role play gives an idea of what situations business people can end up in and the participants then get a chance to get prepared before it happens in real life.

Some of the feedback concerned the lack of knowledge-gain. Since the role play exercise is meant to be part of a toolbox and thereby combined with other tools that can provide more information about guanxi, this tool only implies to serve the purpose of creating awareness and curiosity. This kind of feedback will therefore not be used to improve this tool but can be used as a direction for designing future complementing tools. The fact that the participants asked for recommendations for their own businesses indicates the tool did create an interest of learning more. It may also indicate the intended users prefer to get answers straight away rather than look for answers themselves. If so, more hands-on tools might suit the target group better than role play.

At this stage of development, the role play exercise does not give much room for improvising or taking initiatives and the main character, “Anna”, cannot really fail. It is more about just following the instructions and try out your options until you succeed, which means the process of the exercise will almost look the same every time. This is one of the main difficulties with developing the exercise. To be able to give the participants more room for improvisation they need more instructions, but it is difficult to give instructions without generalising too much. However, the feedback concerning having more scenarios indicate there is an interest which means the tool has potential for further development.

6.2 Experience Map

The initial level of interest from the participants were clearly higher for the experience map exercise. There are three possible explanations for this. Firstly, the role play exercise is based on a fictive scenario, while as the experience map exercise is based on real and personal scenarios. The target group, business people, are often busy and therefore value their time highly. Therefore, working with experiences that are directly relevant to their own business is more interesting and useful to them, or at least they think so. The simulated experience also gives them useful insights, but it may not be as directly relevant to the company. Secondly, it appears from the testing, as if it is more difficult for the participants to be motivated to do the role play exercise where they have to act and simulate a scenario. The reason for this may be
that it takes more time and effort to do the role play exercise and get the insights. Thirdly, the experience map exercise can be useful in a long run since it can be used over and over again for different experiences. The role play on the other hand is no purpose to use many times since there is only one scenario with similar outcomes every time.

The feedback in general and the request of giving a broader spectrum of perspectives into the exercise indicates a real interest for the tool even though it needs to be improved and developed further.

6.3 Method discussion

For this study only insights received during and straight after the activity are considered. For experiential learning, a big part of the learning outcome appears first after the participant has processed the impressions for some time. The collecting of learning outcomes should therefore have taken those insights into account as well to cover the whole picture. This could be done by conducting additional interviews some days after the testing.

The participants match the intended users well and contribute to a rich variation when it comes to age, gender, profession and experience.

The testing was initially meant to be done in a group of approximately ten participants but was instead executed with an average of two participants. This change may have led to smaller discussions and less input compared to if the test would have been executed as planned.

When it comes to the observations, it is as mentioned in the method chapter, important to observe with different perspectives. By using two observers, with different educational backgrounds, a dimension of variety is added to the study.

The idea of using the questionnaire was that the participants, in a workshop context, would be able to anonymously give their feedback. But since most of the tests were done in pairs or groups of three, the aspect of anonymity was lost. This is taken into account in the analysis. There is a risk of exaggeratedly positive answers because the participants may have wanted to be nice. However, the feedback given in the questionnaires is still valuable and give us an idea of what opportunities come with the tool, but the feedback should not be given the same weight as if they were anonymous.

Using a prototype is necessary to communicate the concept. The low-fi prototypes used for the testing consist of digital printouts which make the tools look neat and complete even though they are at an early stage of development. A rough, handmade prototype could possibly have better communicated the room for improvements and feedback.

Even though it normally is good to test concepts with intended users, I am not convinced that is true to our case. Too many participants seemed to have difficulties understanding that the purpose was to give feedback on conceptual ideas. Instead they were busy making their time worthwhile by trying to learn about Chinese business culture. Maybe for this stage, the testing would have been better off if it was done with ordinary people eager to test new ideas. On the other hand, there are types of feedback that is hard to get right without using test participants with characteristics matching the target audience, so in those cases it was of great importance
to get feedback from potential users. Those cases include feedback related to time consuming, the “game” aspect and relevance of content.

6.4 Answers to Research Questions

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are the limitations with using role play for experiential learning?

This study evaluated experience-based exercises as tools to create awareness and trigger questions about the Chinese concept of guanxi. The study has identified the following limitations and possibilities:

When it comes to the simulated experience-based exercise, there is one main difficulty that limits the learning outcome; the difficulty of creating an exercise with a balance of improvising and clear instructions. To make it a role play and increase the intensity of learning, you want to leave some room for improvising. It is very difficult for the participants to improvise culturally correctly without having the cultural knowledge though. If you on the other hand first let the participants study the culture and then, based on that knowledge, play the roles in different scenarios, the participants might be able to discover how Chinese would behave in different situations. Giving instructions that cover all scenarios is practically impossible though, since there are many parameters affecting the cultural behaviour. This insight makes role play unsuitable, or at least difficult, for discovering new cultures.

Even though the role play does not perfectly mirror real actions of the Chinese and therefore is difficult for teaching guanxi, the simulated scenario is a great opportunity to find learning objectives.

For the real experience-based exercise, the limitations are that the learning outcome is limited to the areas that are relevant to the participant’s experiences. The benefit on the other hand is that the participant makes strong connections between the knowledge and his/her experience which often trigger an interest for learning more.

RQ 2: What differences are there using experiential learning tools based on real scenarios, compared to tools based on fictive scenarios?

The main difference is that the exercise based on a real, personal experiences feels more relevant to the participant and therefore lead to a higher degree of willingness to use it. While as the other exercise, that simulates an experience, triggers a feeling of irrelevance and time-wasting.

Also, the real experience-based exercise is more concrete than the simulated experience-based exercise, which seems to suit the target group better.

Both exercises highly engage the participants but in different ways. The real experience-based exercise engages the participants by relating to their personal experiences while as the simulated experience-based exercise engages the participants by demanding active participants.
7 Conclusion

The authors believe that the purpose of the tool, too create awareness of guanxi and to trigger questions, was achieved. This was obvious when observing participants with no knowledge or experience of China being highly involved in the discussion and asking relevant questions. With that said, the author wants to point out that this awareness does not include all aspects of guanxi, but some of them.

7.1 Future Studies

Since role-play is truly engaging, it has got good potential when it comes to teaching. For the simulated experience-based exercise, the authors therefore suggest investigating the possibilities to create a scenario with lots of information about the setting and characters. This might guide the participants better and still teach them through experience. One idea is to include more parameters such as guanxi-points or similar, as an indicator of failure and success.

Another suggestion is to discover how the exercises most efficiently are combined with the theory. Tests can for example be done by first doing the role play, then present the theory and finish by doing the role play again to see if the new knowledge affects the actions of the participants.
8 References


Appendix A - Two examples of character cards, front and back page.

LI NA  WANG CHAO

LI Na
Ming’s colleague, 
works with distribution

Wang Chao
Ming’s colleague

(When played by player) Do not read out loud, just make action 
according to the character instruction.

You work with distribution and think Anna’s product sounds interesting. You don’t have the power to make that decision though, so you ask your far relative Li Hai, the CEO of the company, if he is interested. If he is, introduce him to Anna.

(When not played by player) Read out loud:

Li Na is interested since she works with distribution. She doesn’t have the power to make that decision though, so she asks her far relative Li Hai, the CEO of the company, if he is interested.

Contact info:
Li Hai - Relative to Li Na & CEO of a distribution company

(When played by player) Do not read out loud, just make action 
according to the character instruction.

You own a factory but only take large scale orders. However, your wife Wang Li knows people who take small scale orders. Contact your wife.

(When not played by player) Read out loud:

I own a factory but only take large scale orders. However, my wife Wang Li knows people who take small scale orders. I'll ask her.

Contact info:
Wang Li - Wang Chao’s wife
## Experience Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>The purpose of the activity</th>
<th>Is the purpose achieved?</th>
<th>Private or business activity? Who have you met (managers or family members)?</th>
<th>Building relations on personal level or organizational level?</th>
<th>How much information exchanged? Private or business info?</th>
<th>Who paid for the activity?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have been invited to a wedding of my business partner’s son</td>
<td>Rural area of Beijing</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>Private, Met the family member</td>
<td>personal level</td>
<td>Mostly private</td>
<td>My business partner paid for everything (lunch, travel...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend whole weekend by myself in Shanghai during business trip</td>
<td>Shanghai</td>
<td>Get around and explore culture</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td>No relationship is built.</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>Me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business works differently in different parts of China.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chinese people mix private life and business life. You need to be prepared to spend your free time to participate in private events without talking about business in order to build Guanxi.

A personal relation is important for trust building which is vital for building business contact.

If people pay for your activity, it means they value you.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How’s your emotion &amp; why?</th>
<th>Any gestures of trust building?</th>
<th>Do you think both parties are in the same power hierarchy (e.g. for decision making)? Why?</th>
<th>Your thoughts on how good the activity is for Guanxi building (high dot: successful, low dot: fail)</th>
<th>Why do you think so?</th>
<th>Do you have any confusions? If so, what is it?</th>
<th>Things you think can be improved next time/ future opportunities for building Guanxi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy it, but still don’t know why he invited me. To me we’re not that close...</td>
<td>I think so. He introduced me to all his guests in the wedding place.</td>
<td>It’s hard to tell.</td>
<td>I think we’re closer than before but to me this is not a legit event for business relationship building.</td>
<td>Why am I invited to this private event? Is this how Chinese people build Guanxi?</td>
<td>I want to know how can I behave better in this kind of situation next time. If my culture expert told me it’s a good event for building Guanxi.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exciting but confused a lot.</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>It could be a good activity to build Guanxi I suppose. However it didn’t happen... but since it’s weekend so it doesn’t matter to me.</td>
<td>What can be good Guanxi building activity and do Chinese people use weekend to build Guanxi?</td>
<td>I’m going to ask a culture expert about my confusion and see if this is a good opportunity to build Guanxi.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In China, in order to build trust, you need to spend time with your business partner to show respect and to show you’re committed. It means you don’t only care about money. 

Make sure the person you talk to is in the same hierarchy with you. Don’t be fooled by title. (E.g. what ability the person has to make decisions.)

You might need to change the wording after you know the theory behind the questions.
Appendix C

Role Play Instructions

In this exercise, you will be playing different characters. You will find the instructions for how to act on the persona cards. This exercise is meant to help you to have a better understanding about Guanxi using role play. Here's how-to instruction:

- There are 13 personas with belonging instructions. Each participant grabs one persona to play. There need to be at least 3 players to play Anna, Ming & Jun. For the characters that does not have a player; place the persona cards on the table with the information facing down. When you want to interact with the character, flip the card around and read the official information. If there are more than 13 participants, the participants without a persona card can observe the other players and help them if needed.
- Anna will start the game. The other players only act when they're being cued. The players can only contact people who they find on the relevant persona card. You cannot just point out people and want to talk to them.
- For each step in Anna's process of finding the right connections at least one of the participants is responsible for mapping her new network. This is done by using the base map (please see instruction on the map) and the green/yellow/red name tags.

Now, enter the story: Anna is the CEO of a Swedish company that owns an innovative product. She now wants to go to China to produce the product in small scale and distribute it on the Chinese market. Anna has gone to China to find the right connections. Now Anna initiates the game. The game ends when Anna reached her goal.
Appendix D

Questions asked after testing of prototype

1. What insights did you get from using this tool?
2. What limitations can you see with this tool?
3. How likely are you to use this tool again? Why/Why not?
4. What possible improvements can you see for this tool?