

LEVEL 4 ASSESSMENT SPECIFICATION

Assessment 1

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Lecturer:	Emma Roberts	Internal Verifier:	Vic Saunders
Assignment Title:	Group Presentation with supporting material (max 4 in a group)	Word count (or equivalent):	5 mins each plus 1,500 words supporting material
Submission deadline:	Monday 24th August 2026 (23.55/ 11.55pm British Summer Time BST)	Return date of provisional marks & written feedback:	21st September 2026
Submission method:	All written assessments, where practical and possible, must be submitted via Turnitin unless otherwise instructed by the Lecturer. (Please DO NOT put this assessment specification into Turnitin or it will match many similarities with other students' submissions.) Alternative submission method (if applicable): Late submission of the assessment will result in a late penalty mark: Work which is submitted up to 1 week late will be capped at 40% for the first attempt and will be awarded a mark of 0% for re-assessment. Late submission penalties may be lifted only if there is an approved extenuating circumstances claim. Work submitted more than 1 week late will be considered as a non-submission and will not be marked. The work may be considered as a submission for reassessment if offered by an Examining Board or if there is an approved extenuating circumstances claim.		
Academic honesty / referencing:	Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your submission you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, cited or quoted in order to complete this assessment.		

TABLE OF CONTENT

NO	TOPIC	PAGE
1	Setting Up the Problem — Fatihah 1.0 Introduction 1.1 Complex and Wicked Problems 1.2 The Problem Across Malaysian Companies 1.3 A Second Dimension: Technology and Connectivity Barriers 2.0 Design Thinking 2.1 Individual Reflection using Gibbs	
2	The Group in Motion — Amisha 3.0 Decision-making 4.0 Leadership challenges	
3	Responding & Evaluating the Process — Ardini 5.0 Skills used 6.0 Interdisciplinary/collective decision-making	
4	Culture, Ethics & Closing — Mabel 7.0 Individual differences / cultural evidence 8.0 Ethics 9.0 Conclusion	
5	References	

Presentation video link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tbHINv3Fr9-b5PvWNw4ie835IM3EmEIv/view?usp=drivesdk>

Title: “The significance of the global team in effective problem solving” - Language and Communication Barriers in High-Stakes Decision-Making within Global Teams

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Complex and Wicked Problems

In doing all businesses or being in any organisations, there will be a point when problems, no matter how minuscule or large in scale, may arise. However, not all problems faced by the organisations are of the same kind. A complex problem, albeit difficult, if given enough time, effort and expertise, may be solved. Wicked problems, in the other hand, resist this kind of solution altogether. Rittel and Webber (1973) had termed ‘wicked problems’ to describe issues that have no definitive formulation, no stopping rule where the problem can be declared solved and no test to check whether a solution is true or false, only if it is better or worse than the available alternatives. Wicked problems also cannot be approached through the usual trial-and-error cycles that are able to tame complex problems, and each solution is a ‘one-shot operation’, as mentioned by Rittel and Webber (1973) with consequences that cannot simply be undone.

Thus, this report applies that framework to a specific real-world case: **Language and communication barriers in high-stakes decision-making within global teams**. This is a wicked problem and not just a complex one because of three reasons. First, it has no single definitive formulation, since a ‘communication barrier’ might just mean a literal language gap between the speakers, a difference in working pace or a difference in the way of how concerns are being raised in meetings. Second, it has no stopping rule to it, for example, an organisation can just invest heavily in translators, cultural training and better infrastructure for communication, and yet the underlying risk of misunderstanding, being misunderstood or dropped connectivity in a genuinely urgent and high-pressure decision never fully disappears. Third, the last reason is because high-stake decisions remove the ‘safety net’ that makes trial and error acceptable. For example if there is a miscommunication on a product specification or a decision being interrupted mid-call by a lost connection, it cannot simply be corrected after when a product that is discussed has gone into production or if an urgent deadline has passed.

1.2 The Problem Across Malaysian Companies

In Malaysia, we have multiple sectors enveloping our economy, and each of them is exposed to global communications in different ways. The examples will be taken from two companies that are not minor players in Malaysia but are genuine pillars of the national economy. The scale of these organisations is what makes the said wicked problem's argument credible: a communication breakdown at any one of the high-stakes decision-making in these firms might ripple not only to the business but to the economy as well.

The first exemplary sector is Perodua in automotive manufacturing. Perodua is considered Malaysia's largest car manufacturer, holding roughly 38 to 42 percent of the national new-vehicle market throughout the year of 2025 until 2026, and they are consistently outselling other car brands, even another top national car brand, Proton (Vig, 2026). Its Bezza and Myvi models have repeatedly been ranked as Malaysia's best-selling cars which makes Perodua a mass-market seller rather than a niche manufacturer. The importance of communication and language matters here because of their ongoing collaboration with Daihatsu in Japan. Any breakdown of communication has the potential to affect the cars millions of Malaysians are using. Since 1994, Perodua has operated a joint venture with Japan's Daihatsu Motor Co. where most of the core designs, engineering and technical documentation of the car models are provided by Daihatsu in Japan (Wong, 2022). Employees from this company have been describing that genuine and ongoing communication difficulty even with English as a shared corporate language and specifically cited that Japanese technical documentation and communication style is sometimes a persistent barrier (Jobstreet, 2026).



Image 1: Working at Perodua Reviews on Jobstreet

Source: (Jobstreet, 2026)

This is not a problem that Perodua can simply resolve through translation alone. That is why Perodua sends Malaysian staff to do on-the-job training at Daihatsu's plants in Japan even after more than three decades into the partnership. Direct and sustained exposure to the actual language is important to close the gap (Daihatsu, 2026)

The next Malaysian company example would be Petronas. Petronas is one of the biggest leaders in the national oil and gas sector and one of Malaysia's most internationally significant enterprises that coordinates technology partnerships with foreign firms across continents. A miscommunication or communication failure in Petronas-led projects would cause consequences extending to national energy security in Malaysia. Petronas draws the same wicked problem but at a larger and more dispersed scale as Petronas coordinates major international projects involving multiple foreign partners at the same time. That is why to manage this issue, Petronas has been establishing regular Chief Executive Council meetings that bring together top leaders to discuss what the individual communication challenges are that might otherwise stay hidden if not addressed (Culture Partners, 2026). This proves the 'no stopping rule' characteristic of wicked problem (Rittel and Webber, 1973) where rather than just treating cross-partner communication as solvable during onboarding, Petronas has built a recurring solution around the issue, acknowledging that some risks like this never fully disappear no matter how frequently you look into it.

Altogether, these cases demonstrate underlying communication barriers that cannot just be reduced to a simple language gap that can be solvable via translation because English functions as the shared corporate language, but none has relied only on English proficiency alone in managing a global team. This surfaces a dimension of the problem easy to overlook: for a large share of the Malaysian employees, English itself is not their first language. Malay, Mandarin, and Tamil are commonly their true mother tongue, which means companies in Malaysia asks most of its workforce to conduct high-stakes communication in a second or third language, English, let alone other languages. A Malaysian employee working under time pressure is at bigger risk of a nuance or urgency being lost, not from any lack of competence, but because precise argument is measurably harder to construct quickly in a non-native language.

1.3 A Second Dimension: Technology and Connectivity Barriers

On another note, language isn't the only source of communication breakdown; the tools used to communicate between speakers can also fail consequentially. In the digitalisation age, video conferencing like Microsoft Teams and Google Meet are often the default choice especially for cross-border and high-stakes discussion. And yet, sometimes Malaysian business connectivity remains uneven across cities. In Kuala Lumpur, you may get 5G data connection, however in Kuching, Sarawak in the island of Borneo, they are still stuck using 4G data network at most areas. Malaysian Small Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that often uses video calls and cloud systems together on standard shared broadband has been reporting real, measurable losses from dropped calls and unstable connections, even as the digital economy grows rapidly (BigBand, 2026). A high-stakes decision that requires quick input from these is vulnerable not only to a language or cultural misunderstanding but to the call itself knowing that it might be freezing or dropping at any peak moment. This strengthens the ideology of wicked-problem argument: even a team with no language barrier at all can still see a decision derail simply by a lost connection. This would mean that technology and language are two independent, compounding sources of the same underlying risk and not just a single problem with a single fix.

2.0. Design Thinking

Since this wicked problem cannot be solved merely through a single top-down instruction, Design Thinking is the most appropriate methodological response to it. Design Thinking has five iterative stages which are Empathise, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test. (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2011)

We take an example from the Perodua company. Using Empathise, Perodua sends engineers and technicians directly to Daihatsu in Japan rather than merely reading manuals which reflects a genuine attempt to understand the partner's working firsthand. Using Define, the problem was narrowed from a vague sense of 'language difficulty' to something more precise: employee accounts identify Japanese technical documentation and communication style specifically as the recurring barrier found in Jobstreet, 2026. Using Ideate, several responses could've been generated like full translation of all documentation. Using Prototype, the on-the-job training placements represent a resource-intensive middle path between these options. Using Test, the length and durability of the partnership is the evidence, and it has been going on for three decades. Perodua too has progressed toward developing its own vehicle models with growing independence, suggesting the immersive approach measurably built local capability over time (Paultan.org, 2020).

This is the perfect example of why Design Thinking suit Wicked Problems as its iterative structure accepts different approaches rather than resisting it.

2.1 Individual Reflection using Gibbs



Diagram 1: GIBBS Reflective Cycle

For my personal reflection on this topic, since I am working in a civil engineering consultancy in Kuching, Sarawak, I have applied this to my own real experience of exhibiting in an International Engineering Exhibition a couple of years ago where our booth received visitors from Dubai and India seeking potential collaboration. Because our team is based in Kuching, Sarawak, where Malay and the local Sarawakian dialect are our everyday languages.

As conversations unfolded, I noticed several colleagues were struggling to converse in English, stuttering and needing a lot of repetition to make themselves understood by the clients. I personally felt a little embarrassed and worried that we appeared less competitive than the other exhibiting booths and I found myself wishing I had prepared for this before we arrived. What struck me the most, thinking about it afterwards, was realising this wasn't really about ability at all but it was that our everyday working language, which was shaped by Sarawak's Malay and local dialect. It had simply never been tested against a genuinely international audience before. That exposure was uncomfortable, but it was also clarifying. Without it, I don't think we would have recognised how unprepared our frontliners actually were.

It has changed how I think about readiness now where I believe that competence at home doesn't guarantee confidence abroad. Since then, I've seen my company responding more meaningfully, sending weaker English speakers to seminars and introducing regular "full English day" practice, a commitment which will be contributing in the future.

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