

Overview of the Leadership in Action project:

Over the summer, I worked on a 7-week project with the Kokoro laboratory at Kyoto University. My overarching goal was to foster greater awareness and understanding of existential risks and their implication within Japanese society. To do this, I needed to conduct research in Japan and create a presentation based on the data. Additionally, another objective was to make long-term connections and network with the laboratory in Kyoto, which was successful. However, the other goal, to deliver a presentation based on research about Existential risks, was not as successful. This was due to the time of year and the ethics committees in both York and Kyoto being misaligned with opening times. Rather than being disheartened by the fact that I couldn't collect data while I was out there, I left with everything ready to go, and the lab in Kyoto kindly volunteered to get the word out about my research when both universities have given ethical approval.

What went well?

I have established long-lasting connections with the laboratory at Kyoto University, which was instrumental in achieving my networking objectives. The kindness and warm welcome extended to me by the lab members allowed me to ask for help when needed and created a sense of camaraderie. Furthermore, I successfully expanded my network beyond the confines of the laboratory. I also made the most of my time in Japan, ensuring that every moment was maximised for personal and professional growth. Another objective was to learn more Japanese, and even though I still have far to go, I was able to go out of my comfort zone and try to use what I had learned.



What I would do differently next time?

The main reason why I wasn't able to reach my goal of completing the presentation was due to misalignments in terms of opening times for the ethics committees at York and Kyoto. I wasn't able to collect any data while in Japan. It was challenging to come to terms with the fact that it was genuinely out of my control. But from this experience, I have learnt that even if things don't go to plan, there are also steps to be taken (even if they are smaller) to achieve the specified objective. For example, before leaving, I made sure to have the translated online experiment ready, and posters that would be put around campus finished. Instead of not knowing what to do with my time, I decided I needed to make the most out of it

and travelled to Tokyo, Hiroshima, Enoshima and Osaka alone. This was out of my comfort zone, as I had to use the little Japanese I knew to explore a country I had no experience in.

If I could do this project again, I would have applied for ethical approval from both universities a few months before leaving for Japan. But for future plans, I should reference back to my time in Japan and know that I should make the most out of situations if either “bad” or “good”.



What leadership skills I exhibited?

When answering this question, I think the first thought that comes to mind is the resilience and determination to achieve, even though that may seem counterintuitive as I couldn't accomplish the main goal while I was in Japan. I am continuing to work on the project and wish to achieve it despite all the barriers of location, language difference and time zones. Additionally, I displayed collaboration and teamwork skills with the laboratory and the importance of communication and understanding cultural differences.



What I still need to develop:

Social and cultural intelligence and awareness. This is something that I will always strive to improve. Despite going to many celebrations such as Gozan no Okuribi (left) and the Gion Festival (right), and trying to learn the language. I still fell short on some occasions, such as only realising after one month of living there that it is considered rude to walk and eat, which I then immediately stopped doing.



In conclusion, this project pushed me beyond my comfort zone while providing enough support to rise to the occasion. I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the Laidlaw Foundation, the Laidlaw team in York, my supervisor Prof. Rob Jenkins, Prof. Yoshi Ueda and everyone in both of the laboratories in Kyoto and York who made it possible for me to do this Leadership-In-Action. Without their help and guidance, this project would not have been possible, and I am eternally grateful for the time and support they have given me.

