

The world at your fingertips: Experiencing of global virtual teams by running X-Culture in a management classroom

Understanding how to communicate with people from different cultures is vital to students' success. We will share how we use X-Culture, a global virtual student collaboration project, in a face-to-face upper-level undergraduate management classroom. We will also simulate a role play exercise where participants will be asked to take on a role from different cultures and develop a team charter. We will discuss perceptual biases or cultural stereotypes that may have been reinforced or proven false during the activity. We will also share key learning assignments which may be useful with this, or any cross-cultural team experience.

Cross-cultural, role-play, exercise

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Introduction

Global events over the last few years have heightened the need for students to develop skills working in a virtual environment. In addition, the cultural landscape has become increasingly more complex. Understanding how to communicate with people from different cultures is vital to students' success as they leave our programs and begin working professionally. Therefore, as a project required for a Cross-Cultural Management course, we have included as a core element, participation in X-Culture.

X-Culture is a global virtual student collaboration project where primarily upper-level undergraduate business students from universities around the world are placed on a team and together work virtually on a project for a real company that includes global perspectives for entering new markets. A typical 2-month session will include on average 6000 students from over 80 universities that represent over 40 countries worldwide.

In this session, we will share how we use and assess X-Culture in a face-to-face course in a management classroom. We will also simulate a role play exercise where participants will be asked to take on a role from different cultures and work on a team charter – which is a required element of the X-Culture project. Through the debrief we will discuss perceptual biases or cultural stereotypes that may have been reinforced or proven false during the activity. We will also share and review key learning assignments around this activity that we have developed, which may be useful with this, or any cross-cultural team experience students may encounter.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

The placement of students on teams, consisting of team members from different cultures, to work on a real business problem provides students with the opportunity to engage in experiential learning in a virtual environment. The theoretical foundation of experiential learning depicts learning as a recurring cycle of experiencing, reflecting thinking and acting (Kolb, 2015). By completing the cycle, deeper learning is achieved. Therefore, the way our role play exercise is performed and the manner in which it is debriefed and assessed follow the experiential learning cycle.

The use of virtual teams and a review of resources available to management educators was published in *Management Teaching Review* (Larson et. al, 2017) on the impetus of helping students develop virtual work skills as it is increasingly needed in the workplace. Using asynchronous and synchronous technology tools, many of the challenges faced when working in different geographic locations can be reduced. By collaborating with different cultures, students are also able to develop cultural intelligence. Cultural intelligence is needed in the business world and as we work to develop future leaders, practice in the area of communicating across cultural boundaries can hopefully help to reduce cultural collisions in the future (Middleton, 2014).

Evidence on effectiveness of global virtual student projects indicate that these experiences have been shown to “reduce perceived differences and prejudice toward different cultural groups, improve self-efficacy and perceived ability to perform tasks in collaboration with people from other cultures” (Taras et. al, 2013, p. 413).

Learning Objectives

Our learning objectives for this session mirror those from our classroom. Upon participating in our session, participants will have: (1) identified perceptual distortions and cultural biases; (2) understood and experienced (virtual) team dynamics; (3) developed greater competence in cross-cultural communication.

Exercise Overview

Opening discussion – ask participants to identify any cultural stereotypes or bias they may currently possess. For example, Germans are always serious, Italians are never on time, etc.

Introduce the X-Culture Project and participation requirements for students.

Assign participants to a team of 3 – 6 people (dependent on attendance) and ask that each person role play to represent a different culture. Review handouts that summarize cultural characteristics from the culture assigned to each participant and encourage them to make notes of what may be relevant to playing a team member from this culture. In addition, participants will be asked to anticipate what they may experience from other group members based on their assigned culture.

Review the handout on developing a Team Charter (Appendix A) in anticipation for working on X-Culture as a team and provide time for completion.

Debrief team charter activity – focusing on what was anticipated versus what was experienced.

Review the PAA assignment that is used in class to address this learning. Invite open dialogue for the use and application in this and other cross-cultural team experiences.

Session Description

0.00-10.00: Introduce X-culture project – overview, basic info, how to plan for it, etc. Explain intended use in the management classroom (for instance we use it in a cross-cultural management course, it could have application in other courses, such as international business, etc.).

10.00-40.00: Conduct the exercise – role play assigned countries and perform the exercise of developing a team charter.

40.00-60.00: Debrief – general student feedback, outcomes. Explain what happens next, differences in using in an 8-week vs. 15/16 week course. Review appendices – Appendix A: Team Charter handout, Appendix B: Personal Application Assignment (PAA), and Appendix C: excerpts from past syllabus which include grading criteria and link to X-culture website for additional information. (20 minutes)

References

Larson, B., Leung, O., & Mullane, K. (2017). Tools for teaching virtual teams: a comparative resource review. *Management Teaching Review*, 2(4), 333-347.

Kolb, D. A. (2015). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Second Edition. Pearson Education, Inc.

Middleton, J. (2014). *Cultural intelligence: CQ: The competitive edge for leaders crossing borders*. A&C Black.

Taras, V., Caprar, D. V., Rottig, D., Sarala, R. M., Zakaria, N., Zhao, F., ... & Huang, V. Z. (2013). A global classroom? Evaluating the effectiveness of global virtual collaboration as a teaching tool in management education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 12(3), 414-435.

Appendix A

TEAM CHARTER HANDOUT

Why Create a Team Charter?

There are reportedly five stages of team development: forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning. During the forming stage, teams tend to communicate in indirect polite ways rather than more directly. The storming stage, characterized by conflict, may consume excessive amounts of time and energy. In this stage it is important to listen well for differing expectations. In the norming stage teams formulate (or enact) roles and standards. This stage is characterized by agreement on procedures, reduction in role ambiguity, and increased unity of the team. These developments generally are precursors to the performing stage, during which teams achieve their goals, are highly task oriented, and focus on performance and production. When the task has been completed, the team adjourns.

A team charter helps achieve the ultimate goals of the team by establishing procedures and roles to quickly advance to the performing stage. It does this by giving team members the opportunity at the beginning of the project to discuss, argue and ultimately agree to the goals, team member roles and procedures the team will use. A team charter template often covers three major sections: 1) identifying expectations; 2) establishing team procedures; and 3) specifying performance appraisal methods for team members.

Team Charter Assignment

For the first week of X-Culture your team is required to discuss and create a team charter using this template. Make your charter **as specific as possible**. That is, specify each task as detailed as possible, specify the person(s) responsible for each specific task, and the exact time for completion or submission of each task.

At the end of the team contract each member is expected to agree (sign) to the charter. This demonstrates agreement but it is important to point out that the charter is not a legal document but rather a tool for the team to utilize to show agreement about the issues mentioned already (e.g., goals). It is enforceable only in the context of your team project.

TEAM CHARTER for Team#:

GOALS

What are your goals as a team for the project? (Answer below being as specific as possible. e.g., win the competition; get passing grade, etc. Remember the team must agree to every and all goals that are finally recorded here.)

Team's Answer:

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COMMUNICATION

How will you communicate (Zoom, phone, text, e-mail, social media, etc....)?

Team's Answer:

How *often* will you communicate?

Team's Answer:

LEADERSHIP/DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

What will be the decision-making policy of the team (e.g., by consensus? by majority vote? etc.)

Will the team elect/appoint a leader?

Team's Answer:

ROLES/TASKS

Who will be responsible for what activities? (Note, most effective when based on expertise)

Team's Answer:

PROCESS FOR DEALING WITH WHAT IF'S/RESOLVING CONFLICT

How will we resolve team conflicts? (Conflicts can be task or personal related; if either type arises, how will the team respond? e.g., by calling a Zoom meeting to discuss or emailing the team about the conflict, etc.)

Team's Answer:

ACCOUNTABILITY

What is the expected level of individual attendance, punctuality, and participation at team meetings (attend all, some, etc.)? Expected level of responsibility for fulfilling team assignments, timelines, and deadlines?

Team's Answer:

How will you hold each other accountable (e.g., weekly peer evaluations lower if a team member slacks)? Describe, as a group, to handle infractions of any of the obligations of this team charter.

What will the team do if the infractions continue? (e.g., vote to kick out?)

Team's Answer:

Please indicate here your agreement with the final team charter.

1) _____ date _____

2) _____ date _____

3) _____ date _____

4) _____ date _____

5) _____ date _____

6) _____ date _____

Appendix B

Personal Application Assignment #2
X-Culture Project

The topic of this assignment is the X-Culture Project. Write a paper (minimum length is 3 pages, typed, double spaced) that answers the following questions. Include a cover page and use the headings provided (A, B, C, D) in the body of your paper. Point allocations are indicated below.

A. Experiencing¹ (10 points)

Objectively describe your overall X-culture team experience. From where did your team members reside? How did you get organized? What project did you decide to work on?

B. Reflecting (10 points)

Refer to the Appendix in the textbook that provides Details of National Culture Models. Select your home country, as well as two other countries from which your team members reside. Identify 3 cultural dimension scores that are included in either Exhibit A3 Hofstede Model or Exhibit A6 GLOBE Model for each country. Include the results in a table.

An example is provided below. Note you may select any country and any dimension.

Country	Power Distance (Globe)	Humane Orientation (GLOBE)	Indulgence (Hofstede)
USA (home country)	4.88	4.17	68
Brazil	5.33	3.66	59
India	5.47	4.57	26

C. Thinking (40 points)

Based on what you have discovered in the **previous section** about yourself, and the two countries you selected, **what are important differences and what are the commonalities?**

Now consider what you have **experienced** in working with the individuals from these two countries. **Do your experiences support or challenge your research? Provide specific examples.**

D. Acting (16 points)

Overall, what did you learn from the X-Culture Project? What actions will you take to be more effective the next time you are placed on a multi-cultural virtual team?

Note: Grammar/Writing will be assessed according to the Writing Rubric (24 points)

¹ Section titles based upon The Kolb Experiential Learning Cycle <https://youtu.be/v74nRbWSNqk>.

Appendix C

Excerpt from Course Syllabus – used in BUS 360 Cross-Cultural Management

X-Culture Personal Application Assignment = 15% of course grade (see PAA#2 for instructions)

X-Culture Project Work = 15% of course grade (description below)

The students in this course will have an opportunity to gain first-hand experience in international business collaboration and business consulting. X-Culture is a large-scale international experiential learning project. Each semester, over 4,000 students from 120 universities in 40 countries participate in the project. You will be working in an international team of 5-6 people for about eight weeks. Every semester, we select several companies that present their real-life international business challenges. Your team will have to select one of those challenges and suggest your solution. For more on the project, visit www.X-Culture.org.

To ensure that all students come properly prepared, all students must review X-Culture resource documents and take a standard pre-project training and pass a Readiness Test. The test will be sent via email with a personalized link. Students must receive a score of 80% or above to take part in the project. If a student fails the test, there is one more chance to re-take it and pass.

After passing the Readiness Test, students will receive the names and contacts of the other team members. Students will then have two months to develop a business proposal for a real-life client organization. Every semester, X-Culture selects several companies that present their real-

life international business challenges. Each team will have to select one of those challenges and suggest a solution. The detailed list of tasks to be completed for each challenge is provided in the Challenge Instructions on the X-culture website.

After the project is over, students will receive an X-Culture Global Business certificate, which have been shown to have a “you’re hired” effect on prospective employers. Furthermore, members of the best teams will be invited to attend the Academy of International Business Conference (www.x-culture.org/meetings/). There, students will meet in person their teammates, present their work, and have a chance to participate in the many conference networking and presentation events.

Grading: The project will involve a series of tasks that you and your team must complete. Although you will work in a team, your grade will be largely determined by your **INDIVIDUAL** performance. X-Culture is an exercise, not a test. This means that your effort and diligence matter more than your knowledge (we have exams to test your knowledge). As long as you complete each task fully and on time, submit your weekly progress updates, and your team members give you high weekly peer evaluations, you will get an excellent grade.

1. Pre-Project Training Completion – Readiness Test Score. 80% or higher required to pass. Grade is determined by your score out of a total of 100 points.
2. Weekly progress reports. Submitted individually by each student, must be completed fully and before the deadline. Grade is determined by the percentage of complete submissions. If you complete all weekly progress reports, this will equate to 100 points.

3. Peer evaluations. Reported weekly and post-project on a 1 – 5 scale. Consists of evaluations by the other team members in terms of effort, intellectual contribution, help with writing the report, coordinating team efforts, other comments). Grade will be determined on the average peer evaluation scores as follows : 4.0-5.0=100 3.0-3.4=80 3.5-3.9=90 2.99-2.5=70, 2.4-2.0=60 points.

Your final team report will be rated by a group of assigned professors. You will receive their comments and scores on the various areas of your report. The reports that earn the highest scores will be recognized by X-Culture and students from these teams will be invited to participate in an upcoming X-Culture conference. After the project ends, you will receive a Post-Project Survey. This survey must be completed to receive a grade for the X-Culture project and a final grade for the course.

To plan time to work on this project, here are rough estimates of the hours necessary for each task:

Task, Students	Approx. Combined Hours
<i>Before the project starts:</i>	
Pre-project review of the materials	1-3
Readiness Test	1
<i>During the project:</i>	
Correspondence with teammates, per week	1-2
Research and report write up, per week	1-2
Other unexpected tasks and issues that need to be addressed	1-2
<i>After the project:</i>	
Post-project survey	1
TOTAL over the entire semester	20-40 hours