

**Co-creation as a “Crew”: How Do Faculty Cultivate Creativity and Innovation  
Amid Study Abroad Experiences**

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### **Abstract**

With the growth of faculty-led study abroad programs and the interest in business students to further develop their intercultural competencies, the time is ripe for a discussion of how faculty can cultivate creativity and innovation amid the short-term nature of such programs, while offering specific opportunities for the students to develop themselves personally and collectively, as a Crew. In this roundtable session, special attention will be paid to the construction of a “Crew Mentality” as a cultural mechanism for successful delivery of these programs to maximize the positive benefits and minimize the potential negative consequences. The main objective of this session is to provoke discussion about the value of faculty-led study abroad opportunities while overcoming fears or dispelling myths about what it’s like to be a faculty member who leads such a program.

*Keywords:* study-abroad, creativity, group level, culture

## **Co-creation as a “Crew”: How Do Faculty Cultivate Creativity and Innovation Amid Study Abroad Experiences**

*The “Crew” of 21 students and their lone faculty member descended from a long train ride from Stuttgart to Berlin, arriving three hours later than expected. Despite the longstanding reputation of promptness, this time the German train failed to deliver a timely arrival. The Crew was expected to arrive at 2:00 PM, enabling enough time for the eager students to get checked in at the hotel, freshen up and change out of their travel clothes into professional attire, and make their way using public transit to arrive for a time-certain guided tour of the German Parliament at 6:00 PM. The only problem is the bus company booked for the Crew’s transfer from the main train station to the hotel on the other side of Berlin had departed the train station after the requisite 90-minute wait had elapsed. The Crew was stuck in a place unfamiliar to them, tired after a long train ride, and frustrated by the sight of an absent bus to transfer them onward. This was a challenge, a problem, an unfamiliar and novel situation that delighted the faculty member leading this group. How would the Crew respond? How would individual Crewmembers respond?*

This story—and the resulting solution—is one of many I’ve been fortunate to experience and witness while leading groups of business students to Europe and South Africa in the past decade. These types of short-term, faculty-led study abroad opportunities have been written about from the standpoint of the growing popularity of such programs for experiential learning (Di Gregorio, 2015), the impacts on students’ cultural awareness and global citizenship (McKeown, 2009; Mule, et al., 2018; Mullens & Cuper, 2012), and the importance of active faculty engagement on the various measures of success of the programs, including participation rates (Paus & Robinson, 2008). In this provocative roundtable session, we will discuss how to

create a “*Crew Mentality*” amid a short-term, faculty-led study abroad program to both maximize the positive aspects (e.g., increased global perspective development from Whatley et al., 2021) and minimize the potential negative outcomes associated with study abroad (e.g., increased alcohol consumption from Pedersen, et al., 2010).

### **Theoretical Foundation & Implications**

Session attendees will likely be aware of the extensive OB literatures on team formation and effectiveness, group decision making, cross-cultural competency development, and creative problem-solving. What may be less known is how these topics and others may be captured and enhanced through a student’s participation in a short-term faculty-led study abroad experience (Gaia, 2015). While this session is designed to provoke roundtable discussions, it is important to ground such discussions in relevant literatures. I’ll start by proposing a *Crew Mentality*, then describe what are faculty-led study abroad programs (Keese & O’Brien, 2011), and further provide a context for the consideration of individual and group-level creativity and decision making. We will look at how a Crew: creatively problem solves; looks after one another by coming alongside in times of sadness or missing home; sinks or swims together (experiencing group level negative or positive consequences); builds a cultural identity and “swift trust” in a short amount of time (Meyerson et al., 1996); adapts to changes more readily; and allows for the emergence of different leaders at different times in the program (“shared leadership” from Pearce & Conger, 2002; e.g., the provision of logistics/plan for afternoon hike in the Alps). Questions to be asked, include:

*How do individuals in a study abroad program create, and problem solve, differently or similarly to a group?* We will look at group creativity (Hennessey, 2003; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003) and discuss the impacts of epistemic motivation (“the degree to which group members

tend to systematically process and disseminate information”) and prosocial motivation (PSM; “the extent to which group members seek collective gain” from De Dreu et al., 2011) on group-level creativity. As De Dreu and colleagues (2011) state, “PSM is stronger under, for example, participative decision making, shared social identity, and collective reward schemes.” Attention will be paid to how a faculty member can facilitate PSM through the Crew mentality mindset, ideally at the outset of the program’s first meetings and reinforced routinely in the goings on of the group.

*How do study abroad participants’ creativity benefit from multicultural experiences?* By being exposed to a foreign place, culture, and peoples, a student’s creativity is activated due to the destabilization of routine and existing knowledge frameworks, the introduction of alternative viewpoints and perspectives, and being out of the status quo (e.g., Leung et al., 2008; Tadmor et al., 2009). What is the “superadditive effect on dyadic creativity” that results from multicultural experiences; or “collective creativity” (Tadmor et al., 2012)? We know that self-efficacy is a driver of individual level creativity (Richter et al., 2012), but so too are other non-individual elements. From Tadmor and colleagues (2012) research, they found that “dyads performed best on a creative task in terms of fluency, flexibility, and novelty—three classic dimensions of creativity—when both dyad partners had high levels of multicultural experience.” How, then, does a short-term study abroad experience embed this positive creativity effect in future dyadic or collective creativity among our students? One explanation could be that these multicultural experiences provide opportunities for students to both give and experience receiving “respect” from others, leading to more creative and innovative idea generation in the future (Carmeli et al., 2015).

*How does a faculty member's perceived support mediate the relationship of the Crew's creativity?* Creativity will thrive in an environment where psychological safety exists (e.g., Carmeli et al., 2010; Hu et al., 2018). How does a faculty member provide this psychological safety in a study abroad experience and can such safety extend to a group, rather than only to an individual's creativity? Tu and colleagues (2019) lend some insight into what this support does to team-level creativity and ethical decision making: "we confirmed that psychological safety climate mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and team-level creativity."

*How can faculty effectively moderate the counterproductive peer pressures among students to consume alcohol more frequently while studying abroad?* One of the negative perceptions of faculty-led study abroad experiences is the concern and responsibility of faculty to deal with the consequences of students consuming alcohol at greater amounts and/or more frequently (for a summary, see Overby, 2020). This is a genuine concern and one that should be addressed. Pedersen and colleagues have conducted multiple studies looking at this topic from the impact of student characteristics on increased risk of alcohol abuse while abroad (e.g., Pedersen et al., 2010; Pedersen et al., 2014) and created the Sojourner Adjustment Measure (SAM) to investigate whether this psychological adjustment by the student to the new (temporary) culture ("sojourner adjustment" from Church, 1982) could contribute to less negative engagement with alcohol (Pedersen et al., 2011). The SAM is useful here as all four of the positive factors are embedded into the *Crew Mentality* presented in this session: "social interaction with host nationals, cultural understanding and participation, language development and use, host culture identification" as these are associated with less negative consequences to students (Pedersen et al., 2011). While some may question why the topic of alcohol use is included in this MOBTS session focused on creativity and innovation, the relevance becomes

clearer when one looks at the other literature on the import of psychological safety and perceived support on co-creation and innovation.

### **Session Description**

In this roundtable provocation session, the main objective will be to provoke discussion about the value of faculty-led study abroad opportunities while overcoming fears or dispelling myths about what it's like to be a faculty member who leads such a program. I was encouraged to propose this Roundtable Session after reading the Call for Proposals and seeing that MOBTS Oceania 2024 is inviting the type of inspiration that we have within us, based on our own teaching experience. To be sure, I am 'living my best teaching experience' when I am leading students abroad and watching what happens to each of them as they develop during the program.

I'll begin the session with a dose of my enthusiastic, albeit brief, description of these types of programs drawn from my own experiences, an overview of the faculty led study abroad literature and the benefits accrued to students. Next, we'll peer into the team/crew literature and present the results of a survey-based study conducted with one of my study-abroad students. Following this, we'll take advantage of the Roundtable setting by inviting each table (as a makeshift "Crew") to discuss potential solutions to problems by engaging in the task of co-creating a response to a real-life situation we encountered while abroad and then share with the rest of the participants how their team (or Crew) decided to respond to the challenge. From there, we'll talk about what a crew needs to succeed and how best to create the *Crew Mentality*, in a short amount of time. Topics emerging from the discussions will likely include how organizations can cultivate a crew mentality among short-term teams, how organizational culture can serve as a self-policing or self-regulating mechanism warding off attempts to step outside the

norms, and how the *Crew Mentality* among study abroad students can provide similar positive benefits to creativity.

In all of this it is my hope that, because of this session, faculty who are unfamiliar or fearful of participating in a faculty-led study abroad program will be emboldened to consider creating a program to the benefit of their students' creativity and cross-cultural competency development. I would welcome the opportunity to encourage other MOBTS members to engage in this fulfilling work as it has, indeed, been one of the most meaningful teaching and development activities I've engaged in during my 20+ years as a business professor. As the MOBTS Oceania Call for Proposals signaled, this is me "living my best teaching experience."



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