Chapter 12
Embedding GVT in Coursework Assessment: Method and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

The chapter provides a general overview of an international collaboration project conducted in an international business module at Taylor’s Business School. The international collaboration project is designed to provide students with an experience in working on a cross-cultural virtual team. This study employs a case study that consisted of 34 Malaysian students and the main instrument used in this study is the students’ reflective reports. Based on the reflective reports, the chapter discusses the challenges and the synergistic experiences faced by the students. In general, students find it interesting to work in this project; on the other hand, students also found it difficult to communicate with others as well as getting the project ready on time. The chapter also highlights the benefits of working in this project and some recommendations to academics who wish to embark on such activity in class.

INTRODUCTION

The study of International Business (IB) major has gained much popularity in recent years due to the increase a complexity of businesses and the growth of MNCs around the world. A good business school could tap into this opportunity by offering interesting IB programmes which focus on experiential cross cultural learning (Doh, 2010). This may include mobility, exchange opportunity, global internship etc. These options could be expensive and undesirable for many students from developing countries; hence, it remains a challenge for business schools to offer a wholesome cross cultural experience to their students in this region. In general, institutions still rely on the common pedagogy, such as, cases, videos and articles in teaching IB; however, these methods do not include the “cross cultural experience” and...
it is viewed as rather monotonous (Jurse and Mulej, 2011). Additionally, employers expect graduates to have (and not limited to) a global mindset and ability to work in a diverse background. Thus, if learning of IB domains are confined within a classroom, it will not meet the expectation of employers (Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002).

In order to provide students with more opportunities to gain cross cultural experience, the researchers in this study decided to engage the experience of Global Virtual Teams (GVT) for the IB students. Adopting GVT in teaching international business modules is a more realistic and experiential way to encourage students to cultivate a global mindset and to appreciate working with people from diverse background. Virtual teams are formed by students from various universities that worked on a project together to solve a problem with the aid of internet and technology. In GVTs, the students faced challenges and constraint similar to those faced by as employees who work in a MNC which deals with stakeholder from different parts of the world (Zakaria & Al Safi, 2013).

The experiential journey a student could obtain from GVTs include working with students from different backgrounds and countries. Unlike conventional teams, the team members are from diverse cultures, they work in different time zones around the globe, they depend on the advancement of internet tools to interact and most commonly this could be the first time the team members work in such a project (Powell et al. 2004; Fuller, Hardin & Davidson, 2006, Zakaria & Al Safi, 2013). Trust acts as a crucial element to bond the team together in accomplishing tasks. Furthermore, given the duration of the project and semester timeline, the students need to quickly form the team and bond well via the internet to perform the tasks given. Such experiential learning is valuable as it reflects the real challenges faced by many employees working in MNCs in communicating with their peers in different parts of the world.

The aims of this paper are to (1) provide a framework for implementing GVTs in an International Business coursework through classroom experience and also to (2) identify the challenges experienced by students in completing their assignments in a GVT.

BACKGROUND

With the intention of providing a more realistic learning experience to students, many higher education institutions are now introducing different methods and interesting experiential learning activities to their students. Their ultimate goal is to enhance learning and strengthen their employability upon graduation. As such, Institutions of higher learning adopt Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) as one of the teaching and learning method in their assessment plan. Zakaria and Al Safi (2013) claim that GVTs are becoming “the most widespread and innovative working structure in Multinational Corporations” (p.166).

A GVT comprises of people from different parts of the world coming together to work on a project (Zakaria and Al Safi, 2013). The difference between a conventional team and GVT is the members of GVT work on a virtual platform and use technology to communicate and perform the required tasks (Egea and Gregor, 2002) as opposed to conventional team where the members meet face-to-face.

Advantages of GVTs

The formation of team members from different geographical locations has led to several synergistic advantages. The first advantage would be the ability to develop cooperative teamwork and enhance networking. Zakaria and Al Safi (2013) reported that working in a GVT enables teammates to bond