JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS, FINANCE
AND ADMINISTRATIVE SCIENCE

Doctoral Dissertation Proposal

The Link Class Project: Collaborative virtual teams between Peru and The Netherlands

Mariella Olivos Rossini [a,*], Sandra Rincón [b], Anne-Francoise Rutkowski [b]

[a] Universidad ESAN, Lima, Peru
[b] Tilburg University, The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

The Link Class Project presented in this article provides an example of established collaborative group activities to negotiate and build a report together in virtual teams composed of students at Universidad ESAN, Lima (Peru) and Tilburg University, Tilburg (Netherlands). It further analyzes the effects of a campus based internationalization strategy supported by the use of technology.

Based on previous experiences with virtual classrooms, the authors adhere to the ancient Chinese philosopher's, Lao Tzu, quote: «If you tell me, I will listen; if you show me, I will see; but if you let me experience, I will learn».

© 2015 Universidad ESAN. Published by Elsevier España, S.L.U. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Link Class Project: equipos virtuales colaborativos entre Perú y los Países Bajos

RESUMEN

El Link Class Project que se presenta en el siguiente artículo aporta un ejemplo sobre las actividades de un grupo internacional colaborativo en el que los estudiantes deben negociar y desarrollar un reporte conjunto, mediante actividades desarrolladas a través de equipos virtuales entre alumnos de la Universidad ESAN (Lima, Perú) y Tilburg University (Tilburg, Países Bajos). Además, se analizan los efectos de una estrategia de internacionalización in campus respaldada por el uso de tecnologías.

Sobre la base de las experiencias previas con clases virtuales, los autores adhieren a la cita del antiguo filósofo chino Lao Tzu: «Si me hablas, escucharé; si me muestras, veré; pero si me permites experimentar, aprenderé».

© 2015 Universidad ESAN. Publicado por Elsevier España, S.L.U. Este es un artículo Open Access bajo la licencia CC BY-NC-ND (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

1. Introduction

As national economies increasingly become more interdependent through globalization, successful interactions are a prerequisite to rip benefits offered by the international market. International trade provides countless interactions among employees of diverse cultures either online as well as face-to-face. According to Lane and Distefano (1992), the skills required to perform effectively in a globalized market depends on the abilities to manage cultural diversity and to apply intercultural competences in the appropriate context. Intercultural competences have been coined as:

«The basis of intercultural competences is in the attitude of the person interacting with people of another culture and this means a willingness to suspend one's own values, beliefs and behaviors, and an ability to see how they might look from an outsider's perspective». (Byram, Barrett, Ipgrave, Jackson, & Méndez, 2004).

Additionally, evidence shows that cross-cultural competences are new attributes required in leading new organizations in the global economy. This new style of management embeds awareness and skills including cosmopolitanism, intercultural communication, cultural sensitivity, acculturation, to name a few (Grahn & Swenson, 2000). These concepts can be pointed as

* Corresponding author.
E-mail address: Molivos@esan.edu.pe (M. Olivos Rossini).

the acquisition of "cross-cultural" or "intercultural" competence, which is perceived as crucial for organizational communications and team management.

Companies as well as organizations are aware of the challenges in handling such cultural diversity. Most companies are already facing the challenges of having teams working across distance. Many have embraced a variety of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to support synchronous and asynchronous working interaction in teams that are distributed over the globe (e.g., video-conferencing, email, social network). Given the need for employees to develop the abilities to manage cultural diversity, higher education has also faced the challenge of how to teach these skills to prepare students for the labor market. The strategic role played by ICTs in "management education" is viewed as a key point to support the internationalization of the campus or what is also known as 'internationalization at home'. Management education is the field of study and practice crucial in impacting positively the society in our global world (Bush, 2006) while focusing on the aims and operation of educational organization and its influence on the delivery of education. In the last decades, institutions of higher education across the globe have been investing in internationalization precisely to create opportunities for students to acquire cultural diversity. Many universities have embraced technology such as introducing e-learning platform like blackboard technology to support students learning. Virtual teams composed of students from various nationalities have been successfully running for at least two decades (see Rutkowski, Vogel, Bemelmans, & Van Genuchten, 2001). Leidner and Kayworth (2006) reviewed 82 articles from 38 different journals to examine the influence of culture, both national and organizational on the development and use of ICT.

Are universities really exploiting the benefits of ICTs properly for the students? Most of the current research on management of education and ICTs focuses on elaborating online courses, video lectures and online syllabus. However, not much attention has been given to the interaction among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. The academic literature has primarily focused on understanding the process of developing virtual teams; class curricula and online assessment method (see Ubell, 2010 for a detailed overview). While in an educational context, using synchronous technologies such as video conference has demonstrated to be efficient in learning about each other's cultures, not much is known about the development of intercultural competences in the context of "at home".

Jane Knight reported that the concept of "at home" has been developed as the result of a greater focus on international mobility and its limitation. "Internationalization at home" gives greater prominence to campus-based elements such as the intercultural and international dimension in teaching, learning, research, extra-curricular activities, and relationships with local cultural, as well as the integration of foreign students and scholars into campus life and activities (Knight, 2008). The author defined internationalization "as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education" (Knight, 2008). Although the study abroad programs have mostly facilitated this international dimension in the curriculum, the reality is that only a minimal percentage of students participate in such programs. The cost is particularly high, and requires extra funding. Technology tools provide channels of communication becoming and important resource resolving, in the short-term, the limitations associated with restrictions for international mobility or participating in exchange programs (Olivos, 2014). The latest EUROSTUDENT report (Macready & Tucker, 2011) stated that there were five main reasons why the students will not study abroad: financial insecurities (57%); insufficient support of mobility in the home country (49%); lack of individual motivation (48%); insufficient support of mobility in the host country (24%); and lack of language competency (23%).

Institutions of higher education in developing countries are also confronted with similar challenges as in developed regions. One of these challenges is the adoption of internationalization strategies with its high costs. As new technological developments are creating conditions where intercultural learning can take place in the classroom, universities in these countries are also exploring these opportunities. Thus, the need to innovate in education by offering students another perspective on the new sociocultural and technological requirements of a globalized world has led to the development of a new kind of education, for example virtual classrooms at Tilburg University (Rutkowski, Vogel, Van Genuchten, Bemelmans, & Favier, 2002). Furthermore, the "class link" project in Peru has offered best practices regarding the importance of managing time, team process as well as the capacity to select the technology to fit task that team of students can apply in order to improved students learning experience.

In this article we present the exploratory lesson learned from an educational project "class link" in learning cultural competence using virtual experience. When looking at the broader picture, we speculate that it is possible for students to learn those skills from a distance. While the benefit maybe different than for those experiencing the cultural clash when travelling abroad, virtual experience should support "cultural awareness" and benefit to those students who cannot experience travelling because of the high cost of study abroad programs.

2. Case study: The adoption of "internationalization at home" using virtual classroom: The Link Class Project (Peru and Netherlands)

The Link Class project is a course designed to relate cross-cultural theories with management science. The aim of the course is to offer students the opportunity to understand, explore and appreciate the nature of cultural diversity, national and cultural differences by providing a direct international experience in a virtual collaborative learning environment with students and faculty from other countries.

Learning objectives of the course are to build the soft skills necessary to work in a virtual collaborative environment and to acquire key cultural and cross-cultural competences as well as to understand cultural systems and their implications for international business. The course methodology consists of prior lectures in local classes and then active interaction among the students as they link through videoconference. The concepts about Culture and Stereotypes, Intercultural Management, Leadership across Cultures, Marketing Globally presented in class material are composed mainly of conceptual papers, cases and role-plays that relate to culture theory and its application in management.

The students in both locations are organized by the lecturers in international teams composed of 4-6 students depending of the size of the class. Lecturers agree on the groups' schedules and session's agenda while asking teams to present on selected topics and tasks. A typical first session consists on a warm-up round for students to start communicating and introduce themselves.

After the video conferencing class, the teams using mainly social media prepare presentations, as well as follow-up discussions and negotiations of tasks and activities. Students have to handle project management form and agree on deadlines and times to deliver assignments that can include either an ethnographic report of the two cultures interacting in class, a case study to team discussion, an international marketing project, or a survey report on comparison of cultures.
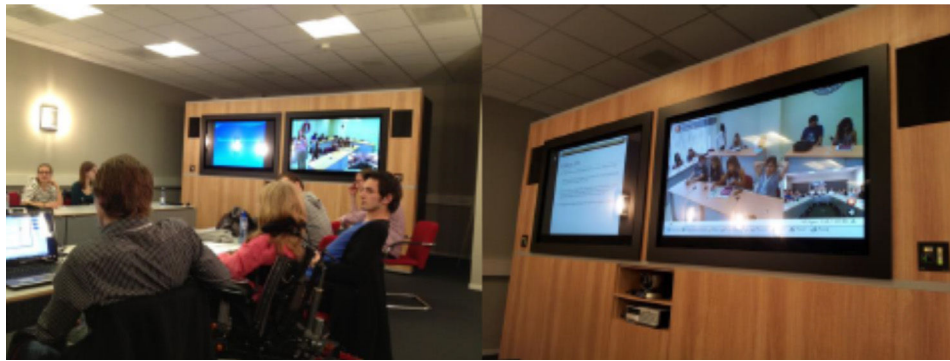
Figure 1. Link Class Universidad ESAN and Tilburg University 2013
Photo: Prof. Michael Bender, UV Tilburg courtesy.

In the case of the virtual collaboration link class between Tilburg School of Economics and Management and ESAN, students had four video conferences where they discussed their progress on a report. This approach used the similar structure as in E-collaboration: The Reality of Virtuality (Rutkowski et al., 2010). Students were evaluated on collaboration based on the report they co-wrote in virtual teams. For the virtual collaboration link class between Tilburg School of Behavioral and Social Sciences in the Spring of 2013 and of 2014, students had 6 videoconferences where they discussed research papers based on cultural differences in society between Europeans and Latin-Americans and the impact of these differences in work environment (Figure 1).

3. Preliminary results

A sample of 199 responses was collected between 2012 and 2014 in the various Link projects ran between ESAN (Peru), Tilburg (Netherlands) and other universities. The selected sample for the study was 77.8% composed of 49.2% of Peruvians, 12.1% French, 9% of Dutch and 7.5% of Americans.

Preliminary results indicated that overall students enjoyed the experience of using synchronous technology to interact with students of other cultures. Also they recognized the value of interacting at a personal level and the impact on their professional development. Currently, results are under analysis in order to answer specifics hypothesis linked to ICTs usage as well as cultural preferences.

Interestingly, preliminary results revealed that participants from Peru expected video conference technology to be easier to use ($p = 0.001$) (M = 5.27, SD = 0.21) than participants from the Netherlands did (M = 3.97, SD = 0.42). However, after participating in the project, Peruvian students indicated that they could share their emotion in an appropriated way during the exchange while Dutch students were more critical about this aspect (Mean difference = 1.29, $p = 0.001$) (PERU: M = 4.87, SD = 0.22 vs. NL: M = 3.63, SD = 0.43). The preliminary results also indicated that Peruvian students showed a greater desire to acquire international competences than the Dutch students did (Mean difference = 0.4871, $p = 0.04$; PERU: M = 6.052, SD = 0.14 vs. NL: M = 5.41, SD = 0.273).

Also in their narrative, the students recognized the value of interaction at personal level and the impact on their professional development. One student stated about cultural and business skills: «I enjoyed mainly the course because you compare your country with other countries in the world. You can learn the way every country does marketing, business, and close business. Also, you can learn values such as respect, the diplomacy as you make deals with them». Another commented on the use of ICTs and particularly videoconference: «Using video conferences and virtual communication methods has been a beneficial experience for me. Working with people with different cultures is not straight-forward, especially when your classmates are not physically present in the classroom. I found the courses very interesting, and realized that a lot of pre-class preparation is needed for the classes to run smoothly. Learning intercultural theories before starting the video conferences definitely helped understand problems that can arise when working with people from different countries». Students were also satisfied with the balance between educational content and international experience. One student, for example, said: «The course of Intercultural Management has been really challenging for me. We had a lot of video conferences with universities from, for example, America and Portugal. We had to gather together with all the people there, in order to experience how it is to work via intercultural media. We had to work together via Skype. We used Skype and e-mail. We created the Google document where we uploaded all our documents». These preliminary results are encouraging. The future for internationalization at home is bright but warrant more attention and research to reach its full potential.

4. Conclusion

This case study is part of a doctoral research currently conducted at Tilburg University by Mariella Olivos and focuses on analyzing the effects of a campus based internationalization strategy supported in a Peruvian University. The part of the presented study explores student's cultural preferences of technology as function of the capacity of the media to carry the communication process. A particular focus is given on the assessment in the acquisition of intercultural knowledge and intercultural competence. Also, a review has been conducted on the number and type of virtual collaboration set across continent.

A set of 24 live interviews have been conducted to faculty experts from 14 different nationalities (one Algerian, one Chinese, one Ecuadorian, three Germans, one Hungarian, one Indian, one Japanese, one Mexican, one Portuguese, one Russian, one Spanish, two Taiwaneses, eight U.S. Americans, one Turkish) and organizing such class in universities of the United States, China, Japan, Taiwan, Netherlands, Germany, Scotland, Portugal, Russia, Turkey, Mexico and Ecuador. The study looks to better understand process but also capture particular set of mind if any. Results are under analysis.

The value of this set of study is to contribute to stakeholders the understanding of the relevance in training university students in cross-cultural competences as well as to reveal the feasibility of ICT to recreate conditions for the learning process, facilitating intercultural communication to work effectively in diverse environments and to promote the developing of intercultural awareness.

To conclude, the welfare of a society is linked to the access to educational resources. Acquiring certain skills, such as intercultural

competences, have a direct and positive impact on workers' productivity. The authors strongly believe that the possibilities to now deploy portfolio of ICTs have become a competitive advantage in management of education. Higher education institutions and universities all over the world should pay attention to this new trend and process to train young generations of students in developing intercultural skills. Appropriate curricula associated with new generation of ICTs including technology's tools are key resources to allow "virtual mobility".

We would like to thank our colleague, Dr. Michael Bender, at Tilburg University for his contribution in the Link Class Project.

4.1. Notes

Universidad ESAN was founded as a Graduate School of Business during the sixties and was established under an agreement between the governments of Peru and USA. The academic organization was entrusted to the Graduate School of Business of Stanford University, and currently offers graduate and undergraduate programs. Nowadays ESAN's student body at undergraduate level consists of about 3 500 students divided in three schools: the School of Economics and Management, the School of Engineering and the School of Law and Social Sciences. As a part of its mission, the university is devoted to educate responsible leaders and professionals to be able to respond to the demands of a global environment, and prepare them to contribute to the economic development of Peru. The country has experienced a positive economic growth during the last ten years (6.18% in average, according to data of the Ministry of Economy and Finances (MEF) and the Central Reserve Bank of Peru). In addition, a major newspaper in Peru (Diario El Comercio, 2013) recently posted that, since 2009, Universidad ESAN has been successfully applying the use of video conference to internationalize the classroom and, reported the experience of the students in the field of economics and business interacting with students in different universities in Asia, Europe and North America, the utilization of this methodology is benefitting them to build their intercultural skills to get into the labor market, critical requirement considering that international trade in Peru has played and essential part of its positive economic activity trend during the last 13 years (export of commodities, mainly minerals and non-traditional).

Founded in 1927, Tilburg University comprises six schools and 13 000 students of which 10% is international. It is a fully accredited research university, specialized in the fields of Social Sciences and Humanities. Tilburg University has always actively promoted ways to firmly embed education and research in society. Its motto "Understanding Society" is based on the Christian and humanist traditions in which emphasizes its basic principles of sustainability and diversity in the context of corporate social responsibility. It ranks third in Europe in business research. In addition, Tilburg University has been involved in virtual collaboration in education with some universities in China (e.g., Hong Kong, and Beijing), France, and the United States (see Rutkowski, Vogel, Van Genuchten, & Saunders, 2008). In 2004, one of these projects called HKNet (Rutkowski) won the Philips Prize for Innovation in Education, and later it was awarded a similar academic prize by the Association of Information System. Tilburg University has been investigating new emerging technology, such as virtual worlds (e.g., second life) using them to foster virtual team collaboration (De Nobrega & Rutkowski, 2012).

References

Bush, T. (2006). Theories of educational management. Connexions module,.13867. Version 1.1. Sep., 15, 2006. NCPEA. National Council of Professors of Educational Administration.

Byram, M., Barrett, M., Ipgrave, J., Jackson, R., and Méndez, M. (2004). Autobiography of intercultural encounters. Context, concept and theories. Council of Europe, Language Policy Division.

De Nobrega, K., and Rutkowski, A. F. (2012). Fostering group collaboration in virtual worlds. In H. R. Sprague Jr. (Ed.), Proceedings of the 45th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences (HICSS 2012) (pp. 983–992). Wailea, Maui, Hawaii: IEEE Computer Society Press.

Diario El Comercio. (2013). Revista Orientación Vocacional. Perú: Lima. Oct. 12.

Grahn, J., and Swenson, D. (2000). Cross-cultural perspectives for quality training. In: Cross cultural management. An International Journal, 7(3), 19–24.

Knight, J. (2008). Internationalization: Key concepts and elements. In M. Gaebel, L. Purser, B. Wächter, and L. Wilson (Eds.), Internationalization of European Higher Education. (pp. 1–22). Berlin: Raabe Verlag. EUA/ACA handbook.

Lane, H. W., and Distefano, J. J. (1992). International management behavior: From policy to practice. Boston. MA: PWS–Kent Publishing Co.

Leidner, D., and Kayworth, T. (2006). A review of culture in information systems research: Toward a Theory of Information. Technology Culture Conflict MIS Quarterly, 30(2), 357–399.

Macready, D., and Tucker, C. (2011). Who goes where and why? pp. 44. New York: AIFS.

Olivos Rossini, M. (2014). Intercultural competence training using a virtual environment, students and faculty perspectives. Implications for Management Education. In: Selbestvaluation inter kulturel Erfahrungen. Werner Muller Pelzer.

Rutkowski, A., Vogel, D., Bemelmans, T., and Van Genuchten, M. (2001). Group support system and virtual collaboration: The HKNet project. In F. Ackermann, & G. de Vreede (Eds.), Proceedings of Group Decision and Negotiation. (pp. 77–91). Delft: Unknown Publisher.

Rutkowski, A., Vogel, D., Van Genuchten, M., Bemelmans, T., Favier, M. (2002). E-collaboration: The reality of virtuality. In: IEEE Transacions on Professional Communication, 45(4), pp. 1-12.

Rutkowski, A., Vogel, D., Van Genuchten, M., and Saunders, C. (2008). Communication in virtual teams: Ten years of experience in education. Professional Communication, IEEE Transactions on, 51(3), 302–312.

Ubell, R. (2010). Virtual teamwork: mastering the art and practice of online learning and corporate collaboration. Hoboken. New Jersey: Wiley.

Mariella Olivos Rossini is an Associate Director of the Bachelor Programs in charge of International Relations at Universidad ESAN, Assistant Professor in the School of Economics and Management, AACSB accredited school. She is also an Executive Coordinator at CLADEA, the Latin American Council of Management Schools, the international network for the development of management education in the Latin American region, and serves as representative of CLADEA at EQUAL board (the European Quality Link). She is a founding member of GPE, the Global Partners in Education, a network dedicated to use a virtual collaborative environment to unite students internationally for cross-cultural and academic purposes. She introduced the link class model among Business School in Peru, USA, Portugal and Germany at Nibes, the Network for International Business Schools.She holds an MBA from UQAM, Université du Quebec at Montreal, Canada, an MSc. in Economics from UNALM (Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina, in Perú) and a Bachelor degree in Economics from PUCP (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú). Her research interest is in the area of environment of International Business, Intercultural Management. Currently, she is a Ph.D. candidate at Tilburg University, Netherlands.

Sandra Rincón is a Director of International Alumni Relations and has been employed at Tilburg University since 1997. She holds a Master of Science in Education specialized in language acquisition from Fullerton State University, California, and she is a Bachelor of Arts in Comparative Literature from University of California at Davis, USA. She has more than 20 years of experience in international education, including bilingual education, language acquisition and curriculum development of international programs (dual degrees, Erasmus Mundus & Atlantis). She serves for CASE-EU, NAFSA, and she has presented in a variety of international conferences. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate at Tilburg University, Netherlands.

Anne-F. Rutkowski is Professor in Management of Information at Tilburg University. Her current research interests include, overall, appropriate use of information technology, virtual teams, e-learning, impact of cultural context, project management, responsible innovation, usability and design, as well as medical IT. Her publications have appeared in journals such as MIS Quarterly, IEEE Computer, IEEE Software, Small Group Research, and Group Decision and Negotiation. She received the Philips Innovation Award for Innovation in Education 2002. She is currently serving on a number of editorial boards, including the Journal of the Association for Information Systems, and she recently joined the board of MIS Quaterly as associate editor.