

# Together We Innovate: Cross-Cultural Teamwork Through Virtual Platforms

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Rikke Duus<sup>1</sup> and Muditha Cooray<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

In a global business environment, marketing education must support students to develop cross-cultural agility and adeptness with an aim to enhance their employability. This article contributes with an experiential cross-cultural exercise that enables students to develop new enterprises in collaboration with other students in a different country through virtual teamwork. The exercise exposes students to practical cross-cultural learning, enterprise development, and virtual team management. Results from students' reflection journals indicate that the exercise is enjoyable, builds confidence in a range of skills, and prepares students for future employment. We offer guidance and direction on how to design and execute this experiential cross-cultural exercise and also highlight the challenges faced and strategies for success.

## Keywords

cross-cultural collaboration, teamwork, virtual platforms, employability, innovation in marketing

## Introduction

In today's competitive and global business environment, it is important for marketing graduates to acquire international agility and adeptness. Across sectors and geographical locations, global competencies are a workplace necessity, especially as small businesses and enterprises expand globally (Taras et al., 2013). Global competencies include the ability to work collaboratively with teams of people from a range of cultures and backgrounds, excellent communication skills, and the ability to embrace multiple perspectives (Council for Industry and Higher Education, 2011). In particular, teamwork with members from geographically and culturally dispersed backgrounds is a vital skill to meet the challenges of a global business environment. Students are better equipped for employment if they gain experience of navigating in international teams during their university education (Kohler, Fischlmayr, Lainema, & Saarinen, 2013). However, despite business schools' strong focus on developing students' cultural awareness and international ethos, many graduates do not feel able to understand and solve cross-cultural business challenges (Blasco, 2009). Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that most business schools teach students through *indirect* experiences—that is, through case studies, videos, books, and articles. Indirect experiences do often not provide experiential and cross-cultural learning opportunities for students (Taras et al., 2013). This is an issue that is being addressed through *direct* experience-based learning activities that encourage cultural immersion and cross-cultural teamwork (Erez et al., 2013; Gilmore & Anderson, 2011).

Such new educational methods include experiential, cross-cultural, and virtual-team projects (Mintzberg &

Gosling, 2002). Global virtual teamwork is facilitated through Internet-based platforms and involves geographically dispersed members who have no prior face-to-face interaction collaborating on common tasks and goals (Taras et al., 2013). It requires students to work across time zones, engage with different cultural perspectives and business practices, and working styles and approaches (Erez et al., 2013). These experience-based projects engage students at multiple levels and have a holistic perspective on learning (Kolb, 1984). Learning-by-doing empowers students to gain a greater sense of control of their own learning and practical experience, useful to future employment (Clark, King, & Jurn, 2012; Moore, 2010). Taras et al. (2013) found that working actively across cultures improves students' abilities to collaborate internationally, enhances their cross-cultural competencies, and reduces their prejudices toward different cultural groups. As more and more organizations and small business enterprises make use of this kind of virtual and cross-cultural team construction, it is a relevant skill for students to acquire to ease the transition between higher education and the workplace (Erez et al., 2013; Wright, 2000).

As the focus on cross-cultural and virtual collaboration increases in marketing education and business practice, educators require guidance and inspiration to execute such initiatives of their own. In this article, we provide clear guidance

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<sup>1</sup>University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, Hertfordshire, UK

## Corresponding Author:

Rikke Duus, Business School, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, AL109AB Hertfordshire, UK.  
Email: r.i.duus@herts.ac.uk

on how to design, plan, and implement an experiential cross-cultural exercise (ECCE). The major contribution of this article is to describe the innovative activities that enable students to gain experience of working across cultures, virtual project management, and entrepreneurial enterprise development. We offer advice on course content, assessment strategy, use and management of virtual collaborative platforms, selection of partner institution, and planning of instructor exchange visits. Finally, we discuss the challenges faced by students and instructors and provide strategies for success.

## Experiential Cross-Cultural Exercise Description

The ECCE is the latest of several initiatives designed and implemented by the authors in the past 8 years. In 2013, we were awarded the prestigious Vice Chancellor's Award in the category "Excellence in International Engagement" for the successful execution of the ECCE. The Vice Chancellor's Award is an annual event, celebrating the best and most innovative initiatives from faculty across the university. The selection process entails a first round of nominations (approximately 500 in 2013), a second stage of shortlisting (typically 3 shortlisted in each category), and thereafter, the winner in each award category is announced at the Vice Chancellor's Awards Ceremony.

The exercise is designed for undergraduate marketing students on the course Product Innovation International, and it is the students' first and only exposure to an international collaboration during their degree program. The course is delivered in the business school at a large university in the United Kingdom (UK) in collaboration with an Indian institution (ranked in the top 20 in India) situated in the suburbs of Delhi. The 11-week course is delivered in 2-hour weekly team-taught workshops in 2012 and 2013 to a total of 152 UK and 163 Indian marketing students. The UK and Indian teams each have 4 to 5 members, hence a combined collaborative team of 8 to 10 members. The UK and Indian instructor teams jointly develop the week-by-week activity plan (see the appendix) that includes course content, interim report submissions/presentations, and collaborative activities that lead to the successful design and launch of a new enterprise in Delhi, India.

In the first workshop, students are presented with a scenario that sets the context of the collaborative exercise:

You are a cross-cultural team of entrepreneurs looking to take advantage of rising business opportunities in Delhi, India. You have come together to share and gather knowledge of the social, economic, legislative, and political drivers in Delhi that will enable you to successfully identify and launch a new enterprise. You have a budget of £100,000/INR 10,200,000 acquired from previous employment and bank loans. You have 10 weeks to develop the new enterprise and launch plan. At different stages you will update your business mentors (the instructors) on your progress to gain guidance and feedback.

Students are instructed to work together as a cross-cultural team to share knowledge of the business environments in the UK and India. The UK students tend to have only basic knowledge of the Indian way of life, consumer trends, and business practices. Therefore, the Indian students play a significant role in sharing their knowledge and experiences throughout the collaboration. All students undertake secondary research to identify a suitable business opportunity, which is tested through primary research in Delhi. At four stages during the ECCE, the UK and Indian students submit or present their interim progress in class to their instructor team (see Table 1). Each interim should demonstrate that knowledge and information has been shared between the UK and Indian students and confirm agreement on key aspects related to the new enterprise (e.g., unique selling points, pricing strategy, consumer targeting approach, etc.). On completion of each interim report/presentation, the instructor teams in the UK and India discuss the teams' progress and identify any faced with difficulties to devise a support strategy. The UK and Indian students work together as equal partners and benefit from each other's knowledge about the local market, marketing planning, research design, and financial business forecasting.

The cross-cultural teams use Facebook, Skype, Google Docs, e-mail, and mobile apps to communicate, share information and insight, discuss, and reach agreements for their projects. This ensures continuous project progress and feed-forward from instructors on completed work. Instructor team-teaching also generates student engagement and creates a high level of interaction between student teams and instructors.

In the design and implementation of the ECCE, the authors draw on their extensive experience in developing other international and action-based learning initiatives. These include "Marketing@UH," a concept that brought together more than 100 small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), 700 students, and 15 academics for an effective exchange of knowledge, expertise, and innovation (2004-2009); "e-mktgEDGE," which engages more than 200 students in collaborations with SMEs and digital marketing agencies to deliver creative online marketing strategies (2009-2013); and the "International Collaborative Partnership Programme," where more than 120 MBA participants take part in triangular collaborations with 40 plus corporations, SMEs, academics, and MBA participants from other higher education institutions (HEI) around the world (2009-2013).

### Interim Report Submissions and Presentations

For the collaborative project, the UK and Indian students submit interim reports and present their work in class, which creates peer learning (Pittaway & Cope, 2007) and permits instructors to monitor understanding of key concepts in line with the tasks set (see Table 1; Perie, Marion, & Gong, 2009). The students use their Facebook group pages and Skype

**Table 1.** Interim Report Submissions and Presentations.

Assessment/submission	Description	Outline of project report templates
Interim 1: New Business Proposal	A proposal agreed on by collaborating teams detailing the new proposed business and a rationale for its viability in the Delhi market  500 words. Deadline: Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The business concept</li> <li>• The new business' unique selling point</li> <li>• The target audience and rationale</li> <li>• Initial market and consumer trends in India that support the business' potential success</li> </ul>
Interim 2: Market Analysis, Consumer Trends and Competitor Review	A detailed review of the data collected, key market launch challenges identified, and relevant consumer trends  700 words. Deadline: Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated business concept outline</li> <li>• Extended market and consumer trends in India that support your business' potential success</li> <li>• Competitor review and comparison</li> </ul>
Interim 3: Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning	Presentations in class followed by Q&A  Deadline: Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consumer segmentation</li> <li>• Segment-targeting strategies</li> <li>• Positioning and branding strategy of the new business</li> <li>• Primary data from Indian consumers to be used in the above areas of focus</li> </ul>
Interim 4: Launch Plan, Entry Strategy and Financial Overview	Presentations in class followed by Q&A  Deadline: Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smart Objectives</li> <li>• Entry strategy and launch methods</li> <li>• Financial figures from a 3-year forecast</li> </ul>

meetings to discuss and agree on the content for each interim. The UK and Indian students then complete the interim reports and presentations separately and upload them via Google Docs and Facebook for sharing within the collaborative teams. Combined, the four interims cover the main sections of the new business report. Detailed templates for the interims and the final report are provided to all students to alleviate unnecessary uncertainty about what is expected. Confusion about the tasks often lead to disengagement (Bruffee, 1973; Dillenbourg, 1999) and a focus on “getting to the end” rather than actively engaging in the learning experience (Boxtel, Linden, & Kanselaar, 2000).

At the final stage of the collaboration, the UK and Indian students are responsible for separately writing up the complete new business report based on the collaborative work undertaken for each of the interims. Reports submitted by the UK students are assessed by the UK instructor team and vice versa for the Indian submissions. As the interims and the final business report are written up separately by the UK and Indian teams, this helps reduce social loafing and increase individual accountability in each collaborative team.

### Assessment Strategy

The assessment is designed to ensure positive interdependence for group work, yet reward individual performance

through individual accountability (Bacon, 2011). The assessment is made up of the collaborative new business report (group, 30%), engagement in virtual collaborative platforms (10%), creative posters (20%), and critical essays (40%; see Table 2). Assessment of students' ongoing online and in-class contribution was put in place to minimize social loafing and unaccountability (Brooks & Ammons, 2003).

### Virtual Collaborative Platforms

Virtual cross-cultural teamwork has become more achievable with the growth of free online collaboration and knowledge-sharing platforms that can bring together students across locations, time zones, and cultures (Taras et al., 2013). These platforms include virtual learning environments, instant messaging, video platforms, blogs, wikis, and online social networks. Facebook is used as the main virtual collaborative platform for discussions, exchange of information, web links, videos, and draft project work. Each collaborative team has a closed group space. In addition to Facebook, the teams have meetings via Skype, exchange information via e-mail, use Google Docs to organize and share files, and communicate via the application WhatsApp on their mobile devices (see Table 3). The UK students also use the university intranet for document sharing, planning team meetings, discussions, and assessment submissions.

**Table 2.** Assessment Strategy.

Assessment	Description	Weight	Individual/team
Report	A collaborative new business report	30%	Team
A3 poster	Each student has to design a creative poster that illustrates one aspect of the business report	20%	Individual
Contribution	Engagement in virtual collaborative platforms	10%	Individual
Critical essay	A critical discussion of contemporary new product development issues	40%	Individual

**Table 3.** Virtual Collaborative Platforms.

Virtual collaborative platforms	Platform usage
Facebook	Main platform for discussion and sharing. Easy, convenient, and instantaneous access.
Skype	Facilitates virtual face-to-face contact. Used for in-depth discussions.
Email	For longer messages with attachments shared within the group.
Google Docs	Sharing of larger files and draft work.
StudyNet	University intranet used by U.K. students to organize and manage the project.
WhatsApp	Mobile phone application for instant communication.

Students hold their Skype meetings on campus, typically in the library, with access to a stable broadband connection. The UK team members get together and Skype from one computer and vice versa for the Indian students. Students already use most of the platforms and therefore feel comfortable and at ease. Unfamiliar virtual platforms may create complexity and uncertainty between collaborators (Correia, 2008; Karpova, Correia, & Baran, 2009).

### Setting Up and Managing an ECCE

The exercise is executed in three stages. Table 4 outlines the ECCE process, activities required at each of the three stages, and timescales. Stage 1 involves the pre-ECCE activities, including gaining management support, identifying a partner institution and course, putting together the instructor team, and briefing students. Stage 2 is the execution of the ECCE. Here, we explain how we created the collaborative teams, set up the virtual platforms, arranged for the primary data collection in Delhi, organized the instructor exchange visits, and monitored and reviewed progress. Stage 3 is an evaluation of students' experiences.

#### Stage 1: Pre-ECCE Activities

**Gaining Support.** The senior management teams of the business schools at both the UK and Indian institutions were consulted during the development of the collaborative concept to gain support for the teaching and learning requirements (e.g., instructor resourcing, appropriate class rooms, and timetabling) and for financial support for the instructor exchange visits. Arrangements for flights, accommodation,

and other logistical aspects of the instructor exchanges were completed early to gain competitive rates.

**Collaborative Partner Institution and Course.** The particular partner institution in India was approached as the instructors already collaborate with this institution for a similar initiative on the MBA program. Good working relations between instructors were already established as well as a similar vision of international collaborative learning. In the months leading up to the ECCE, several conversations were had via Skype to align and agree on two appropriate marketing courses, learning outcomes, project objectives, assessment strategy, timescales, and how to manage the teams and support students in their collaborative activities.

**The Instructor Team.** The UK instructors are originally from different countries (Denmark, Sri Lanka, and India) and make up an international teaching team. Combined, instructors have corporate and enterprise experience from Denmark, Australia, Sri Lanka, India, and the UK and are active researchers in the areas of small business management, business innovation, and consumer research. This creates diverse discussions with business examples from around the world. Each in-class workshop is delivered by at least two of the instructors. Instructors prepare a profile of work experience, research interests, and educational background that is shared with the students prior to the first class to allow familiarization with the team.

**Briefing Students.** Participating students are briefed in the term preceding the ECCE to gain early buy-in and interest. This provides students an opportunity to become

**Table 4.** The Experiential Cross-Cultural Exercise (ECCE) Process.

Stage 1: Pre-ECCE activities	Timescales
Gaining support	Previous academic year
a. Senior management	
b. Degree program leader	
c. Student briefing	
Collaborative partner institution and course	September–November
a. Use existing links	
b. Agree on submission deadlines	
c. Align project objectives	
d. Develop course guide for students	
e. Gain ethics approval for primary research	
The instructor team	September
a. Instructors with relevant research and work experience	
b. Obtain an international mix	
c. Instructor briefing	
d. Prepare instructor profiles	December
Undertake academic staff exchange visit	January
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Stage 2: Activities during the ECCE	
Start of term	Week 1—February
a. In-class student briefing	
b. Create U.K. and Indian student teams	
c. Create collaborating teams	
d. Allocate instructors to teams	
e. Set up virtual collaboration platforms	
Provide project report templates and guidelines	Week 1—February
Review of progress and feedback on Interim 1 (new business proposal)	Week 3—February
Primary data collection	Week 4—February
a. Provide interview guides	
b. Feedback on methods and sampling	
c. Support with data analysis	
Host academic staff exchange visit	Week 5—March
a. Ensure input and feedback to all teams	
b. Set up additional workshops	
Review of progress and feedback on Interim 2 (market analysis, consumer trends, and competitor review)	Week 5—March
Review of progress and feedback on Interim 3 (segmentation, targeting, and positioning)	Week 6—March
Review of progress and feedback on Interim 4 (launch plan, entry strategy, and financial overview)	Week 8—April
Monitoring progress in virtual collaborative platforms	Ongoing
Reviewing progress with collaborative course instructors	Ongoing
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Stage 3: Evaluating students' experiences	
Voluntary reflection journal	Week 10—April
Performance evaluation	On course completion

familiarized with the concept and requirements at an early stage and for those most keen to start researching about India and business opportunities in Delhi.

### **Stage 2: Activities During the ECCE**

**Creating the Collaborative Teams.** In the first session, students are briefed in detail on the course concept and hereafter create self-selected teams with four to five students in each team. The instructors have previously employed different ways of constructing teams with varying results. A student self-selection approach was opted for, as students are already familiar with each other (Pittaway & Cope, 2007). This approach is also considered to make students' experiences of teamwork more valuable (Chapman, Meuter, Toy, & Wright, 2006). On team formation, group spaces for the UK teams are set up on the university's intranet followed by the creation of the collaborative teams. The collaborative teams are created by the UK instructors on receiving the list of Indian student teams. The UK and Indian teams are matched up at random. Team information, including student names, e-mail addresses, and Skype IDs, is shared with all students.

**Setting Up Virtual Platforms.** One student from each collaborative team creates a group page on Facebook and invites the team members and the instructors to join. Students can use their existing Facebook accounts or create new accounts for this course. Each instructor mentors five to six student teams by following their progress on the virtual platforms, reviewing interim submissions, and discussing progress in the in-class workshops.

**Primary Data Collection.** The collection of primary data from Indian consumers is an important stage to test the new enterprise concept against local consumer preferences and attitudes. The teams collaboratively design their data collection tools and the Indian students collect the data from consumers, which is jointly analyzed and utilized to enhance the proposed enterprise and business offering. To help students collect relevant consumer data, a set of 10 questions are provided to students related to the new business concept, pricing strategy, usage behavior among other. Each team then adapts these questions to suit their specific offering. Most teams need additional support at this stage to ensure the data collection tools and the data collection are completed on time. Once the data is collected, students find it exciting to analyze the data as it relates directly to their new business.

**Instructor Exchange Visits.** The instructor exchange visits are integral to the collaborative initiative. The UK instructors visit the partner institution for 3 days at the start of the term to help brief the students on the collaborative ethos, assessment, use of virtual platforms, and cross-cultural teamwork etiquette. Half way through the 10 weeks of the ECCE, the

Indian instructor visits the UK institution. During the 4-day visit, the instructor delivers sessions on business opportunities and challenges in India, participates in student-driven workshops, and interacts with the teams on a one-to-one basis for feedback and guidance. Students at both institutions enjoy this aspect of the exercise as it demonstrates its collaborative nature and provides them an opportunity to interact with instructors from a different cultural and geographical context.

**Monitoring Progress in Virtual Collaborative Platforms.** Instructors monitor students' progress and communication on the virtual platforms on a weekly basis. On Facebook, instructors can participate in and comment on students' discussions. To make this manageable, it is recommended that an instructor does not mentor more than five to six teams. Typically, 10 to 15 minutes is sufficient to review each team's weekly progress. The role of the instructor is primarily to (a) provide direction to students, (b) ask critical questions that will generate discussion within the teams and facilitate a deeper engagement with the project, and (c) encourage participation from all students.

**Reviewing Progress With Collaborative Course Instructors.** The UK and Indian instructor teams communicate via e-mail and Skype as and when required (typically 2 to 3 times per week) to identify teams that are making insufficient progress or facing team working challenges. The specific issues are discussed and action is taken to support the teams. Quick action is important to ensure all teams progress successfully through the four interim stages. This communication between instructors is important to facilitate the collaboration at both institutions.

### **Stage 3: Evaluating Students' Experiences**

**Reflection Journal.** On completion of the collaborative project, students write a reflection journal on their experiences of working on a cross-cultural and collaborative project, which skills they think they have developed/improved on, challenges they think they have overcome, their best experiences from working on the project, what they would do differently in a similar project, and how they think this experience may benefit them in future employment and enterprise development. The reflection journal serves as an instrument for instructors to collect course feedback and also encourages students to reflect on the skills, knowledge, and experiences acquired from participating in the exercise (Burgess, 2012).

### **Student Reactions and Results**

An account of students' experiences of participating in the ECCE is presented based on their reflection journals. The results highlight that students enjoyed the collaborative

project, have gained confidence in their own abilities, and feel better prepared for future employment. However, collaborating in cross-cultural teams is not always easy, and issues related to different time zones, teamwork delegation, and open-mindedness to others also emerged. In our discussion, we explore further these challenges faced by students and instructors and provide our recommendations to help other marketing educators successfully implement an ECCE in their curriculum.

### Content Analysis

A comprehensive content analysis, similar to that adopted by Burgess (2012), was conducted of marketing students' reflection journals from 2012 and 2013. A total of 143 reflections of approximately 500 words each were analyzed. Nine marketing students did not submit their reflection. The reflections were read and coded by the authors, which helped develop a common understanding and agreement of the emerging themes. The unit of analysis is phenomena or themes that help illuminate students' experiences of participating in the ECCE (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Using students as base, instead of themes, is recommended; however, the data were not recorded in a way that would enable this analysis. The percentages presented here are expected to be very close to the outcomes of an analysis based on students as the unit of analysis. A total of 1,750 entries were made according to 24 themes. This method of analysis reveals how often a theme is mentioned among the 143 students. Most themes were mentioned once by students and a few mentioned a theme twice. Only few students mentioned a theme three times. On identifying the 24 themes, these were grouped into five categories: confidence in own abilities, enjoyment in learning, employability agility, collaborative working, and team challenges. The categories, themes, and frequency of responses per year are presented in Table 5.

**Confidence in Own Abilities.** This category contains 27% ( $n = 479$ ) of the 1,790 entries and has 5 different themes. This is the category with the highest relative percentage of entries. The themes demonstrate that students feel more confident about many of the behaviors and skills that marketing educators seek to develop in students during their degree (Ardley & Taylor, 2010; Smith & Paton, 2011). This includes the ability to communicate with others ( $n = 148$ , 31%), work in teams ( $n = 74$ , 15%), do presentations ( $n = 70$ , 15%), be organized, and manage time and pressurized situations better ( $n = 99$ , 21%). Eighteen percent ( $n = 88$ ) of the entries in this category also reflect that students feel more confident about their ability to manage a project through virtual platforms.

**Enjoyment in Learning.** This category contains 23% ( $n = 417$ ) of the 1,790 entries and has 5 different themes. Russell-Bennett, Rundle-Thiele, and Kuhn (2010) highlight that

when students enjoy collaborative learning activities they are more likely to develop deeper engagement. Our findings reveal that students enjoyed the ECCE, in particular spotting and coming up with a new enterprise idea and developing this idea into a realistic business report ( $n = 126$ , 30%). Students also enjoyed learning about the Indian culture ( $n = 88$ , 21%), working with students from India ( $n = 82$ , 20%), and undertaking collaborative research through sharing information and experiences within their team ( $n = 82$ , 20%). Students also found the ECCE exciting, as it was their first exposure to cross-cultural learning ( $n = 39$ , 9%).

**Employability Agility.** This category contains 19% ( $n = 338$ ) of the 1,790 entries and has 4 different themes. Many students believe that they can benefit from the experience in future employment ( $n = 127$ , 38%). Students also report feeling better prepared and more optimistic about their opportunities to gain employment in an international organization ( $n = 77$ , 23%). This confidence in the exercise's ability to benefit them in future employment is possibly derived from having gained a better understanding of business opportunities in India ( $n = 90$ , 27%) and how to develop a new enterprise ( $n = 44$ , 13%). Gault, Leach, and Duey (2010) explain that practical experience is the key differential factor that can help new graduates find employment especially in highly competitive markets and industries.

**Collaborative Working.** This category contains 17% ( $n = 299$ ) of the 1,790 entries and has 5 different themes. These themes reflect students' experiences of working on a cross-cultural, virtual, and collaborative project. Students report feeling more confident about working in a team with different people ( $n = 89$ , 30%) and being able to understand situations from multiple perspectives ( $n = 66$ , 22%) and different working styles ( $n = 41$ , 14%). Some challenging situations did arise (see below); however, most teams managed to solve the problems within their team ( $n = 62$ , 21%). Many students also overcame the challenges associated with collaborating with other students who they had never met ( $n = 41$ , 14%). Overcoming such challenges is crucial for effective virtual team collaboration (Erez et al., 2013).

**Team Challenges.** This category contains 14% ( $n = 257$ ) of the 1,790 entries and has 5 different themes. Taras et al. (2013) recognize that students typically experience several challenges when working internationally and collaboratively. Practical challenges that students reported on include working across different time zones ( $n = 39$ , 15%), delayed or slow communication between the UK and Indian students ( $n = 45$ , 18%), and a lack of effort to arrange more frequent Skype meetings ( $n = 51$ , 20%). Another issue that some teams faced was the experience that at times the UK and Indian teams were working independently and not all members of the collaborative team contributed equally ( $n = 42$ ,

**Table 5.** Content Analysis of Students' Reflection Journals.

	Year 1	Year 2	Years 1 and 2
Enrolment	98	45	143
<i>Categories, themes, and response frequency in no. (%)</i>	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Confidence in own abilities			
I believe I am a better communicator now in terms of explaining myself to others verbally and in writing.	113 (32)	35 (27)	148 (31)
I have improved my team working skills.	50 (14)	24 (18)	74 (15)
I now feel more confident presenting to an audience.	59 (17)	11 (8)	70 (15)
I believe I am now more organized and can manage my time and pressure better.	69 (20)	30 (23)	99 (21)
I have learnt to manage a project through virtual platforms and I enjoy it.	58 (17)	30 (23)	88 (18)
Subtotal	349 (28)	130 (24)	479 (27)
Enjoyment in learning			
It was exciting to come up with a business idea and developing a realistic business report.	80 (28)	46 (35)	126 (30)
I enjoyed learning about the Indian culture.	65 (23)	23 (17)	88 (21)
I enjoyed working with students from India.	49 (17)	33 (25)	82 (20)
I enjoyed undertaking collaborative research through sharing information and experiences with my team mates.	61 (21)	21 (16)	82 (20)
I found the module exciting and interesting as it was a new experience.	30 (11)	9 (7)	39 (9)
Subtotal	285 (23)	132 (24)	417 (23)
Employability agility			
I can benefit from this experience in future employment.	93 (43)	34 (28)	127 (38)
I now know more about business and enterprise opportunities in India.	52 (24)	38 (31)	90 (27)
I now feel more prepared to work abroad and believe I have a better chance when applying for a job in an international organization.	43 (20)	34 (28)	77 (23)
I have learnt about developing a new enterprise.	29 (13)	15 (12)	44 (13)
Subtotal	217 (17)	121 (22)	338 (19)
Collaborative working			
I am now more confident about working in a team with different people.	69 (32)	20 (25)	89 (30)
Collaborating with people I have never met was a challenge that I overcame.	26 (12)	15 (19)	41 (14)
I now understand situations from multiple perspectives.	54 (25)	12 (15)	66 (22)
As a collaborative team, we managed to solve problems that occurred.	40 (18)	22 (27)	62 (21)
I have learnt about different working styles.	29 (13)	12 (15)	41 (14)
Subtotal	218 (17)	81 (15)	299 (17)
Team challenges			
It was a challenge to work across different time zones.	25 (14)	14 (18)	39 (15)
At times the communication between us was too slow.	31 (17)	14 (18)	45 (18)
We should have made more effort to arrange meetings via Skype.	36 (20)	15 (20)	51 (20)
At times it felt like the UK and Indian teams were working independently and not all members of the team contributed equally.	30 (17)	12 (16)	42 (16)
I realize I need be more patient, adaptive, and open to other students' ideas when working in a team.	59 (33)	21 (28)	80 (31)
Subtotal	181 (14)	76 (14)	257 (14)
Total	1,250 (100)	540 (100)	1,790 (100)



16%). The issue most often referred to relates to a lack of patience, adaptability, and open-mindedness toward other students' ideas ( $n = 80, 31\%$ ).

## Discussion on Challenges and Strategies for Success

Overall, the ECCE has been successful from the perspective of students and instructors. Results from students' reflections demonstrate that students respond positively to the experience and can see the benefit to future employment. However, students and instructors did encounter several challenges. We describe these challenges and provide strategies for success.

### *Student Challenges and Strategies for Success*

**Initial Anxiety and Discomfort.** A significant challenge when delivering an ECCE is students' lack of prior exposure to practical cross-cultural and collaborative learning. At both institutions, this is students' first experience of working across cultures with students in a different country. Some of the UK students expressed skepticism toward having to work in teams with students from a different country and culture and only through virtual platforms. Some students were overwhelmed and anxious about how to manage the collaborative project and dedicate enough time to ensure continuous communication and progress with their collaborators. Gilmore and Anderson (2011) explain that it is not uncommon for students to feel anxious in experience-based learning. We use a number of methods to help students deal with these challenges. A comprehensive concept briefing is given to students in the first class. This briefing explains the benefits associated with collaborating and interacting across cultures and developing new enterprises. To reduce anxiety related to the process, a detailed schedule is provided with key dates for Skype meetings, interim submissions, and assessment deadlines (see the appendix). Students are also encouraged to post their queries on the module intranet (StudyNet). After the first week, students tend to have settled in to their teams, developed initial new enterprise ideas, and established the first contact with their partner students via Skype and Facebook. The virtual contact creates excitement and reduces apprehension as students realize how the information sharing will help them with their project (Turban, Liang, & Wu, 2011). We recommend inviting students from past ECCEs to participate in sharing their experiences with the current cohort and facilitate a Q&A opportunity. These activities support students to build confidence and enthusiasm about the ECCE.

**Reaching Agreements.** In any team project, students may face challenges in gaining consensus on decisions, which are

important to the project. At times, students can be unwilling to accept and be open to other students' ideas (Marks & O'Connor, 2013). In a virtual cross-cultural project, this type of challenge is prevalent because of cultural differences and geographical distance. We observed that gaining agreement within the collaborative teams on the new business idea was a challenge for some teams. Either the UK or Indian students were less willing to consider suggestions from their collaborators, which caused some conflict and long discussions on the virtual platforms in order to finally reach an agreement. Disagreeing is a central part of learning, as it encourages students to negotiate, support their ideas with solid research, communicate clearly, and make efforts to gain support and buy-in from the team. These are all important experiences and skills to develop in life as well as in the workplace. Interestingly, 31% of the entries in the category "Team Challenges" relate to students realizing the need to be more adaptive, patient, and open to new ideas when working in a cross-cultural team (Popov et al., 2012). This indicates that students have matured in their approach to teamwork and may now be better prepared for similar situations in the future. To support students in reaching agreements, we emphasize the importance of supporting new ideas and suggestions with solid secondary research and data. Every week, students present, informally or formally, their project progress and receive feedback from peers and instructors. The feedback is shared between the teams via Facebook and Skype meetings and helps facilitate the teams in their decision making. Finally, we recommend that an experienced business practitioner be invited to deliver a guest session on the importance of working across cultures and how to gain agreements on key project decisions in cross-cultural teams.

**Willingness to Share Information.** Despite the UK and Indian collaborative teams working toward the same goal of launching a new business in Delhi, some unconstructive team working occurred. At times, and only for few teams, information and draft work was not shared in time for the interim submissions/presentations. Hence, some students felt that the teams were working independently and that some team members were not contributing as much as others. This issue represents 16% of the entries in the category "Team Challenges." Unequal contribution is not uncommon in teamwork (O'Leary & Mortensen, 2010). Some teams adopted an "exchange policy," which meant that they would only share information or draft work if other work or information was shared in return. This attitude is derived from a high sense of fairness and collegial approach to teamwork; however, it did cause delays and negative attitudes among members of some teams. To help students overcome this challenge, the instructor teams gathered updates from each team every week and assessed their progress in the virtual platforms. Any team not collaborating efficiently was contacted via e-mail or

requested to meet with the instructor to encourage further contribution to the project. For this collaborative exercise to work, it is important that instructors engage in teamwork issues as they emerge and support students in overcoming their challenges well in time.

*Making Continuous Progress.* Some teams found it challenging to make continuous progress with their projects because of the new complexities of navigating within their local as well as overseas teams, time commitments to other courses, and what is considered typical university student procrastination (Clark et al., 2012). Teams were supported through the interim submission/presentation approach, which did help most teams make step-by-step progress with supervision and guidance from the instructor team. It provided students with manageable milestones with each interim contributing to the completion of the final project. It further allows feed forward, useful for the next interim and which supports the students in producing a final project submission that is of a higher academic quality.

### *Instructor Challenges and Strategies for Success*

*Gaining Support.* One challenge an instructor may face is gaining permission and support from the school management to implement an ECCE and fund the instructor exchange visits. The UK and Indian institutions have been fully supportive of the initiative for 3 consecutive years. We emphasize that this is a unique cross-cultural initiative that creates direct interaction between students in two different countries. We have also demonstrated that employers expect marketing graduates to have international awareness and exposure by the time they complete their degree (Kohler et al., 2013). Finally, the exercise challenges students to engage in experiential learning through the development of a new business suitable for the Indian market. We recognize that gaining financial support for the instructor exchange may be a challenge for some institutions. We emphasize the importance of a face-to-face element to facilitate the collaboration start-up as well as the insight that is transferred from the Indian instructor visit.

*Identifying a Partner Institution.* Another challenge that must be considered by instructors before setting up an ECCE is that of identifying a suitable collaborative partner institution. We recommend that an institution that the instructors are already familiar with is approached. For this ECCE, we extended an existing collaboration from the MBA program. This eased communication, agreements, and discussions between instructor teams. It is important that all instructors believe in the exercise's cross-cultural and collaborative ethos and are willing to devote additional time and effort to support the student teams, which can extend to support outside allocated in-class sessions.

*Identifying Marketing Courses.* Once a suitable partner institution has been identified, the next step is to identify two courses that have a similar subject focus, learning outcomes, assessment structure, and timings. We recommend that the two courses be similar in their focus, which will allow the instructor teams to jointly develop a weekly teaching and activity schedule. The courses used for this exercise are Product Innovation - International (UK) and Product and Services Marketing (India). The two courses focus on similar topic areas and learning outcomes that can be taught and assessed through the development of a new enterprise. A further consideration is the time span of delivery of the two courses. In the case of the ECCE, the course in India starts 2 weeks prior to the UK course during which the Indian students undertake preliminary research into new enterprise opportunities in Delhi. Any further time span difference is likely to be a disadvantage.

*Devoting Additional Time and Effort.* One of the key challenges faced by instructors who undertake an ECCE involves the time and effort devoted to designing, organizing, and delivering the collaborative exercise. Early planning of the exchange visits and preparation of course content and the weekly activity plan is strongly recommended. This exercise takes more time and effort than other standard courses; however, it is a rewarding experience for instructors as well as students. Instructors gain new knowledge of a different business environment and upcoming trends, expand their academic network, demonstrate an ability to actively integrate cross-cultural initiatives in higher education, and increase opportunities for global, collaborative research. It further adds value to the Marketing Program as it is the only course that embeds real international exposure and cross-cultural teamwork for students. Using ECCE as an example of a ground-breaking exercise, we have been successful in gaining national and international conference acceptances and been awarded school-based research grants.

### **Future Plans**

In future we hope to extend this collaborative initiative to also include HEI partners in the UK and the United States of America. This kind of exercise could further make use of business practitioners as mentors for the collaborative student teams, with opportunities for internships and student exchanges. Proactive use of alumni and student mentors may also add value to the participating students' experience and help sustain the collaborative links established from previous years.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the ECCE has proven to be successful in engaging students in cross-cultural, experiential, and virtual teamwork.

Students learn to overcome initial anxiety and discomfort from being in an unfamiliar situation while being embedded in a realistic cross-cultural enterprise development environment with a safety net. The interaction between students from different cultures and countries creates a rich community for sharing of knowledge, experience, and business practices. This develops students who are better equipped to navigate in intercultural teams, generate new ideas, and solve business challenges. Student reactions highlight a real interest in learning about each other's cultures, increased confidence in communicating and working with people from different backgrounds, open-mindedness to new perspectives, excitement about developing a new business, and a strong belief that the experience will benefit them in future employment. From a teaching perspective, the ECCE is a great value addition to any marketing degree program. It does require additional time and effort from instructors to set up and manage, especially in the first year; however, this is exceeded by the rewards and excitement of delivering a unique experience with students. The ECCE has gained significant interest at educational conferences and from national

marketing education bodies and has facilitated new future opportunities for instructors at the two participating institutions. The key to success when implementing an ECCE is to undertake thorough and early planning, creation of clear course content, test virtual platforms, and have comprehensive discussions with the collaborating instructor team to agree on a week-by-week delivery and activity schedule.

Potential exists for the exercise to be delivered between institutions in different countries, interstate, or even within the same state. The assessment design, learning outcomes, tasks, and guidelines can be tailored to meet the specific requirements of the institutions. Several marketing courses are suitable, including global marketing, entrepreneurship and enterprise, product and service innovation, retail marketing, and consumer behavior. This makes ECCE a versatile model for many types of HEIs. One area for future research is the degree to which initiatives such as the ECCE enhances the learning of cross-cultural teamwork and new business creation in an emerging market context.

## Appendix

### Week-by-Week Activity Plan (2-Hour In-Class Workshops)

Week	Lecture topic	Report section	Student activity	Collaborative activities	Instructor activity	Assessments and submissions
1	Comprehensive Project Briefing		Read module handbook to understand module concept, assessments, and deadlines. Do initial secondary research on business opportunities and challenges in India through practitioner and academic publications.	UK teams to get in touch with appointed Indian collaborative teams to identify a new business idea for the Delhi market. Teams to assess and evaluate initial ideas and identify relevant secondary data. Set up collaborative group spaces on Facebook, a shared space on Google Docs, and exchange Skype IDs.	UK and Indian instructors assist the formation of self-selected student teams. Collaborative teams are matched. Instructors available for support drop-in sessions.	A new business proposal (NBP) template is made available for teams to complete and submit in Week 3.
2	Innovative Idea Generation Processes	Section 2	Students to bring draft NBPs to class produced collaboratively with their Indian partners.	Discuss and evaluate new business ideas via the collaborative technology platforms. Share feedback from UK and Indian instructors and integrate actions to improve the NBP. Skype meeting: Discuss Interim Submission 1	UK and Indian instructors review new business ideas and provide feedback. Agree actions with student teams toward completing the NBP. Team-based instructors are confirmed.	
3	Market, Consumer, & Competitor Assessment	Sections 3 and 4	Five-minute pitch of the NBP to the class and instructors for guidance and peer feedback.	Integrate instructor and peer feedback into NBP. Discuss data collection methods, sampling, locations, and timings with collaborating team. Agree on final NBP.	UK and Indian instructors provide feedback and help students finalize their NBPs.	<i>Interim Submission 1: New Business Proposal</i>
4	Market Research (Primary)	Section 4	Students to draft consumer questionnaires, interview guides, and sampling methods.	Discuss and confirm the methodology and timings for collecting data from consumers in India. Review designed data collection tools. Share sector, consumer, and competitor information for Submission 2. Skype meeting: Discuss Interim Submissions 2 and 3	Instructor feedback on data collection tools, sampling, and methods of analysis.	
5	Guest lecture by professor from collaborating institution: Challenges & Opportunities for SMEs in India		Prepare a brief overview of the new business and questions for visiting professor.	Share feedback with Indian collaborators and make necessary revisions to the business model. Prepare presentation slides for Submission 3 (in-class presentation), finalize data collection tools, collect primary data from Indian consumers, and complete data analysis to be included in Submission 3.	Feedback from visiting professor to all teams based on local knowledge and business expertise.	<i>Interim Submission 2: Market Analysis, Consumer Trends, and Competitor Review.</i>

(continued)

## Appendix (continued)

Week	Lecture topic	Report section	Student activity	Collaborative activities	Instructor activity	Assessments and submissions
6	Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning	Sections 5 and 6	Presentation on the identified consumer segment, targeting, and positioning approaches. Presentation via PowerPoint followed by a Q&A with instructors and peers.	Start discussions on costing for marketing and operational activities associated with the business start-up and launch.	Student team presentations. Feedback from class and instructors.	<i>Interim Submission 3:</i> Submit PowerPoint slides on Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning.
7	Forecasting, Sales Planning, and Contingencies	Section 7	Students to complete a detailed financial overview using a template provided by instructors.	Share feedback from instructors on the financial overview, review the feasibility, and suitability of the financial forecasting. Agree on the final financial forecasting, sales planning, and contingencies. Prepare presentation slides for Submission 4 (in-class presentation). Skype meeting: Discuss Interim Submission 4.	Discuss costing with teams and review the businesses' financial viability. Provide advice on how to optimize the financial model.	
8	Market Entry, Launch, and Action Plan	Sections 8 and 9	Presentation on the market entry and launch of the new businesses. Presentation via PowerPoint followed by a Q&A with instructors and peers.	Discuss any outstanding issues and complete any unfinished sections of the collaborative report.	Support teams in class and provide feedback. Support students on their financial breakdowns and budgets.	<i>Interim Submission 4:</i> Submit PowerPoint slides on Launch Plan, Entry Strategy, and Financial Overview.
9	Guidance, Feedback, and Last Q&A	All sections	Students to bring their final drafts to class.	Discuss any outstanding issues and complete any unfinished sections of the collaborative report.	Support teams in class and provide final feedback.	<i>Final submission:</i> Submission of final New Business Report and A3 Posters.
Two-week spring break						
12	Developing a Critical Discussion on Contemporary NPD Issues	Essay	Students to read the mandatory articles, prepare summaries/mind maps, and essay outlines.	N/A	Discuss the mandatory articles and feedback on students' essay outlines.	Submission: Reflection Journal
13	Writing a Critical Essay: A final thought	Essay	Students to complete essay drafts and prepare questions for the instructor team.	N/A	Review students' progress and give recommendations on improvements.	Submission: Critical Essay

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