

## ◆ Danica Burghout, p271, New Zealand, English 1<sup>st</sup> Language

The GEE was not a project that I ever considered would be part of my university career, especially after my participation in the Young Enterprise Scheme and International Trade Challenge in Singapore in sixth form. I thought my beloved days of leading teams and writing business plans were done (or at least until I entered my profession). I was originally very dubious of my ability to effectively manage a team again (let alone an international team) and nervous to start the competition, but once it began, it was sure to be an experience I would never forget.

Very early on, I decided to place a large focus on our organisational culture (inspired by the amazing cultures of Google, Apple etc). I wanted it to be consistently motivating, supportive, stimulating and inspiring. This had to be fostered from our very first point of contact, so my launch letter was written in a tone that exemplified this culture. I believe a constant effort to exude this culture from every pore, and being the biggest advocate of the culture (even being upbeat when half asleep), was successful as team members began to mirror my behaviour. Conflict, negativity and any lack of passion was basically non-existent for the entirety of the GEE which was an amazing achievement.

I also emphasised the need to meet deadlines and stick to a timeline from the beginning. This meant a majority of the work was conducted in the middle week as I strongly believe in the tangible and intangible benefits of time management. However, on reflection, I think I should have left longer for the creative stage of the process. Looking back, I feel this was slightly rushed and we did not have enough time to come up with the most creative idea possible. Unfortunately, one team member had very minimal internet access as he was communicating via mobile from his village in Rwanda which made his contributions difficult. I mainly had to communicate separately with this member across different mediums, but luckily he was able to text through his project section.

It was also a challenge to integrate everyone's ideas and make sure the ideas of the business were united across cultures. To overcome this, we collectively created a Business Overview once our idea had been decided so all team members could refer to this finalised overview when writing their individual sections. We also had a peer-review stage after everyone had completed their draft sections. The draft was uploaded to a Google Doc and a few days were allocated for the team to read each part and provide anonymous feedback. This was a great tool to allow for team work across continents as everyone felt they contributed to the overall success of the business plan.

What fascinated me the most about working with students from around the world is how similar we really all are. We all value relationships and interaction; we all crave acceptance and belonging; and we all strive for success and achievement in some shape or form. It made my day to see their positive comments about my leadership on my personal Facebook page, and I could see how they thrived after positive affirmation from their team leader. Despite our different cultures, my team always reciprocated the high level of respect and admiration I showed them. This provided an insight into what needs to be done to successfully work in partnership for progress across the globe.

I have definitely made some personal learning throughout GEE. I can be quite overpowering in my ideas but I have learnt to step back for the sake of others and the sake of our organisational culture. The idea chosen was not one I was particularly keen on but once I stepped back, the value in having such a wide cultural base of knowledge was overwhelmingly clear and it only enriched the content of our business plan. I have learnt that not everyone operates on the strict timetable that I set for myself, but it is okay to calm down, relax and enjoy the ride. Finally, the fire inside of me for such projects has been reignited. I am passionate about leading teams and creating businesses, and I know this because GEE didn't feel like work from the very beginning. If I can centre my career around this passion, I will never be "working" a day in my life and that's such an exciting realisation to have at a young age. It is incredibly possible for students around the world to collaborate on a business that will make a difference – I only now wish we could turn our business plan into action!