

Global Enterprise Experience Journal

I was really thrilled to see the Global Enterprise Experience opened again this year, especially when it addressed a theme relating to the needs of youth/children which is my long-life interest.

I have a very tight schedule this year because I'm doing my master dissertation and I want to ace it. I thought I would join the team as a team member but it turned out I would lead the team. I have led a few projects before but none of them are like this one. I mean I met my teams frequently and I know them in person. In this case, I am going to work with them totally through the Internet and have no idea about them as a person. This fact worried me a bit. One of the reasons is being a leader means I've signed up for extra work besides other technical work, and many of them are something that not many people would be interested including chasing people. And it gets even harder when it happens in cyber world.

So I started preparing for the contest. It was constantly on my mind what process I have to go through and carry my team along; and how to get people feel free to speak up and contribute to the team work. It went well at the beginning after I sent the introduction letter. I was pretty anxious to see how people responded. But we had two members that did not contact us for a week so I decided to move forward and work with those who are interested. This is something I already anticipated so I did not really get mad. But I did have dilemma inside me. One part said I should have waited a bit longer and the other one said I did not want to waste the time of my team and me on chasing someone who did not even show up at the beginning. If they want credits for it, they have to contribute. So I decided to be cruel. I was lucky to have a team who supported me and shared the same view with me.

What made me crazy about is to arrange a workable time to skype with all team members. Since the time zone is so diverse, each of us had to compromise a bit. I and another team member from New Zealand ended up staying up to 2 am in the morning. My flatmate was affected too which I feel very sorry for her.

It took us a while to figure out what communication system worked the best. I set up a Facebook page but it actually turned out the least active. Emails work very well for us. Everyone was on emails and they were fast in responding. Google-docs is helpful to organize meeting time and share working documents. In addition, instant messages service such as whatsapp turned out very helpful. I would for sure recommend any teams using instant messages in future.

The most challenging part to me as a leader is to know how much information is enough to give and how to get people engaged. It is no way an easy task to make people speak up at the beginning. No one wanted to speak first. When I tried different ways to get people to discuss, I had to be careful and kept asking for feedbacks constantly to make sure I did not push people or they were feeling offended.

There were two guys in my team who were quite quiet. They hardly expressed their opinion unless being asked directly. I decided to chat with them separately via facebook and found out that they were so much more active when talking one-by-one like this. Later on, I realized that they prefer informal chat via whatsapp or facebook over email or skype. These 'formal' business tools do not inspire them much. On the contrary, there is another guy who responded to email so much but never answered a message on facebook. As such, I got different strategy sound of speak to talk to different team members. The new technology era does give people various choices of communication I reckon!

Through this experience, I've learnt a lot as a leader. I learnt (and enjoyed) how to lead a team comprised of different cultures to accomplish a shared goal despite the differences in their motivation, expectation and backgrounds. Only one member in my team took part in for credit. The rest was simply motivated by their interest. As such my job was to keep and fuel that interest. I learnt how to deal with people who do not respond to emails and request without being frustrated. As a team member you are allowed more or less to take personal preference over someone. As a team leader I do not allow myself to take personal feeling towards any member even though he/she does not fulfil his task. It is very important albeit not easy to be a fair leader. But I am proud of myself I have been able to do so.

In addition to leadership skills, I really enjoyed the topic this year. The topic that my team went for did get me. I spent hours doing research and then adjusted again and again the way our project worked whenever I got new information. I learnt a lot about that topic. The topic just amazed me. I had no idea about how hard for a girl somewhere in the world to have a sanitary pad while it is just a piece of cake for me. Their stories are exactly like the stories from my grandmother's generation. I just can't believe they still exist in this century.

I absolutely believe the three weeks I've spent with GEE is amazing and worth my time and efforts. I definitely recommend this to anyone who has intention to take part in.