

From crickets chirping to humbling, blissful synergy, our team advanced steadily forward. I would like to share my insights on the enlightening Global Enterprise Experience. I'll admit that my university experience has been somewhat mixed. At times I was demotivated from applying theories to artificial cases and essays that seemed as though they would not hold water in a real-world context. With sincerity I can say that the GEE however contributed greatly to my personal development, and unlocked a passion in me for working in teams that I have sadly not often previously felt.

One night I had been working late on our report. My head met the pillow at 3am, but I had set an alarm for 4:50am to attend our first voice/video meeting that we had arranged. I awoke at 4:48am, 2 minutes before my alarm, without prompt or aid. Coincidence perhaps, but I enjoyed the GEE enough to joke that even my sub-conscious was committed. This meeting was my first time engaging with the team with voice and vision, and it was here that I began to realise that this did not feel like work for me. I was passionate about our vision. We had things to do. This was a labour of compromise, of dedication, of diversity and learning. My perception was globalised. The GEE was challenging, but it never felt like work, or like something simply necessary for a grade.

When I first committed to the GEE I was somewhat anxious – I had recently accepted a 3-month full-time work contract in my discipline - on top of my studies. This was something I knew I had the discipline to do, but the GEE added another layer because there were other people depending on me. Despite this, I found that I always had adequate time for everything. In fact, I have done more university work during this period than when my schedule was carefree in past trimesters. I owe it to my fantastic team members for making this period of my life not feel so lonely and stressful, and for helping me to believe in myself and question myself. We complemented one another on our efforts and ideas. We exercised patience and understanding. But it wasn't always this way. At first communication was sparse. My questions and prompts went unanswered. I realised that this group would not at first function autonomously. I needed to take initiative.

A group of 8 needing to make effective choices in 21 days requires leadership. Furthermore, to maintain active contribution, communication, harmony, and innovation, is not something that can be done through delegation and deadlines. Disengaged management here would not be sufficient. I first needed to create and contribute to a positive mood. Because I know that there are power hierarchies in some of the team's countries, and that we have different cultures and perceptions and ways of conducting ourselves. I made it abundantly clear that I would happily lead them and commit fully, but that I wanted more so to guide them through innovative processes and create direction – not to be dictating or over-decisive. I wanted a shared vision.

To make creativity flow, I minimised the administrative side by creating a report template, and providing some creative techniques such as labelled brainstorm templates and stimulating questions for us. We limited our virtual spaces so that we were not scattered and our work remained organised. I knew that language skills were sufficient but would pose issues. I needed to be concise and clear without sounding patronising. I avoided phrases and complex grammar. Despite this, my team consistently provided great insights despite barriers. I believe that language is a medium for presenting our thought processes. It was amazing to see how different minds worked when contributing in a second language – not filtered by clichés and common turns of speech. Perhaps it is just my perception, but I feel that at times, a deep layer of thought was being presented when the layer of regulated English was stripped away. Some of my discussions with members made me so happy despite frequent internet disruptions, misunderstandings, and distorted voice-quality. I do hope that we remain in contact after this project.

Some members at times seemed to fade from the circle. I understand that power-cuts and internet issues are frequent in some of these countries, and of course flexibility was exercised. However, when I noticed that these members were online each day. I detest manipulation. I prefer to try and create a desire to contribute. I contacted members individually to pull them back into the group, asking them their opinions and advice in friendly ways. We had members specialising in many areas (accounting, HR, engineering) and I encouraged them to use their experience on tasks they found interesting. One member apologised for his lack of contribution but reassured me that he was still with the group. He said that the GEE experience was something new and confusing to him. It was moments like this where I felt my privilege – the dynamics of the project were not alien to me, and things that were second nature perhaps were not so for people from elsewhere. We arranged time to talk in private to create clarification. During our talk I had something of a minor epiphany – I wanted to be a leader who helped the team to develop, to help them take a rewarding experience away from the project.

Overall, the GEE helped me connect with people from countries I never thought I would speak with. It helped lift my ignorance of developing countries and assist my interest – here were people with less opportunities and privileges than me, who were volunteering for GEE despite their hardships. The GEE made me more globally aware, and challenged me to lead and solve problems. It was not just preparing a report. It was an opportunity. I hope to work in a space where I can help people grow. I hope my future endeavours feature diversity of background and thought.