

Cheers! A Teaching Project for Exploring the Opportunities and Challenges of Internationalization in a Small Local Brewery

Allan Discua Cruz

Lancaster University Management School, UK

Miriam Isabella Cavalcanti Junqueira

Montreat College, USA

Abstract. Internationalization can play a pivotal role in the success of small firms. This learning project was aimed at upper-level undergraduate or graduate students studying international business or internationalization. Acting as consultants and project managers, students were required to identify and address potential opportunities and challenges for small firms in the internationalization process. The project combined classroom learning with a field trip to enable students to contextualize their theoretical knowledge. The project spanned three weeks, with tasks before, during, and after the field trip. Working in teams, students developed cultural, social, and creative problem-solving competencies. A local microbrewery was selected as the context in which to implement this project. However, the project's principles could be applied to various regional and local small businesses that produce specialized craft products.

Keywords: internationalization, field trip, small business, microbrewery, craft products.

1. Introduction

This consultancy project was designed for a final-year undergraduate or graduate course focusing on internationalization and intended to help students understand the role of project management in the internationalization process. Internationalization refers to the process of identifying and evaluating opportunities to conduct business activities across national boundaries (Hisrich 2015). It is one of the most complex strategies that a firm can undertake and it is likely to become increasingly necessary. Even small firms that traditionally focus on local and domestic markets should consider uncontested international markets as a strategic option (Dimitratos *et al.* 2010; Dominguez & Mayrhofer 2017; Kim & Mauborgne 2014; Manolova *et al.* 2002). Since project management skills are

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integral to consultancy practices internationally (Nieto-Rodriguez & Sampietro 2017), they formed a key component of the research and practice required of students in this project (Söderlund & Maylor 2012).

In designing this project, we considered the importance of complementing theoretical knowledge with practice (Forest & Rayne 2009). We adopted an alternative pedagogical approach to advance the significance and impact of business and management scholarship (Söderlund & Maylor 2012). For example, current approaches to management in higher education do not adequately support students' consultancy and project management skills (Nieto-Rodriguez & Sampietro 2017). Developers of university curricula assume that graduates will be provided with on-the-job training by large consulting firms; thus, innovations in course delivery in this area trail behind other subjects (Adams & Zanzi 2004). However, we consider that students interested in working with SMEs or starting their own firm would benefit from a more holistic approach to management, especially in an international context.

Addressing such challenges is essential in business and management education. Practice-oriented projects allow students to gain a comprehensive understanding of complex phenomena, including internationalization (Ashta & Mor 2018; Hibbert, Siedlok, & Beech 2016). Thus, in this project, the students applied their theoretical understanding of internationalization to a specific context: a local microbrewery. However, the project combined elements of consultancy and project management as key concepts that facilitate internationalization (i.e., the project incorporated transferrable skills and was not specific to the microbrewery context). Hence, we are confident that our approach could be applied across a diverse range of small business settings.

We considered the importance of complementing theory with practice when designing the activities that formed part of this project. Such activities included a field trip, as well as dynamic discussions concerning the application of mainstream and emerging internationalization models in various industries (Buckley *et al.* 2017; Hisrich 2015; Morais & Ferreira 2020). These activities balanced students' divergent cultural expectations, interests, and communication styles to support students to understand complex processes (Janssens & Brett 2006). Such an approach was particularly crucial as we allocated the students into multidisciplinary teams to support the development of their project management and consultancy skills (Dakhli *et al.* 2018). Moreover, the project was designed to enable students to develop their critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills, as well as their adaptability and ability to take cultural and social considerations into account (Ashta & Mor 2018).