

Developing Cultural Intelligence Through Experiential Digital Global Engagement (EDGE) Exercises

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Abstract. Cultural intelligence (CQ) enables an individual to function effectively in diverse cultural situations. Educational programs that enhance intercultural competencies can prepare students to succeed in the global workplace; however, cross-cultural training programs using traditional pedagogies have proven to be inadequate because they rarely help students to develop and practice the ability to process information during and after a culturally diverse experience. Conventional in-person education rarely relies on active interculturally collaborative projects in real time. Online course formats (including MOOCs) are essentially devoid of any form of social engagement. Neither of these models allows a meaningful opportunity to obtain intercultural competence. The Experiential Digital Global Engagement (EDGE) exercises described herein attempt to address this challenge by providing practical projects and learning scenarios organized around authentic interaction with peers and colleagues from a foreign country. These exercises are appropriate for various courses (e.g., Business Communications, Global Studies, Global Marketing, International Business, International Management) at both the undergraduate and the graduate level in a variety of delivery modes, including face-to-face, hybrid and fully remote.

Keywords: cross-cultural, culture, experiential exercise, globalization.

1. Introduction

In a global economy, students need to be provided with the understanding, skills, and values needed for cooperating in the cross-cultural context. However, most students are not actively engaged in experiencing global issues such as dealing with cultural differences and internalizing relevant skills because of the shortcomings of traditional pedagogies (de Andreotti 2014, McCall 2002). Therefore, we designed a series of experiential exercises, using internet-based communication tools, to cultivate cross-cultural aptitude in our students. Collaborating with partnered institutions around the world through web conferencing and learning management systems, we created a high-impact

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experiential learning environment for students, engaging them in internationalization while recognizing and respecting their local contexts.

The experiential exercises presented in this paper can be used in the undergraduate or graduate business classroom in a very real, dynamic and impactful way by use of a variety of delivery modes, including face-to-face, hybrid and fully remote. These exercises were designed to partner undergraduate or graduate students with their peers at foreign institutions in the way that can allow students to leverage and share their cultural background so as to provide a powerful and meaningful understanding of global issues and cross-cultural communications. For example, one exercise is on cross-cultural communication, which engages students meaningfully and deeply with peers in a different culture, with the aim of raising students' awareness of cultural differences and broadening their understanding of diverse perspectives, allowing both domestic students and their counterparts in foreign institutions to benefit from sharing their perspectives and experiences in their home countries. This design can be replicated in other courses and programs at other higher education institutions that seek to internationalize their curricula.

2. Theoretical Foundation

The ability to work effectively in cross-cultural contexts has become increasingly important with increasing globalization, workforce mobility, and international assignments (Eisenberg *et al.* 2013, Joy and Poonamallee 2013). Cultural intelligence (CQ) training helps employees to increase their competencies in cross-cultural management (Ramsey and Lorenz 2016). Educational programs that enhance intercultural competencies can prepare students to succeed in the global workplace (Mosakowski *et al.* 2013); however, cross-cultural training programs based on traditional pedagogies have proven to be inadequate (Earley and Peterson 2004) in that they rarely help students to develop and practice the capability of processing information during and after a culturally diverse experience. Conventional in-person education rarely relies on active interculturally collaborative projects in real time. Online course formats (including MOOCs) are essentially devoid of any form of social engagement. Neither of these models allows a meaningful opportunity to obtain intercultural competence. The Experiential Digital Global Engagement (EDGE) exercises described herein attempt to address this challenge by providing practical projects and learning scenarios organized around authentic interaction with peers and colleagues from a foreign country. Experiential Digital Global Engagement (EDGE) exercises attempt to address this challenge by providing a high-impact experiential learning environment in which students can internalize such relevant skills.

Experiential Digital Global Engagement (EDGE) learning was based on the State University of New York (SUNY) Collaborative Online International learning (COIL) model (American Council on Education 2016). In this model, instructors in two or more countries collaborate in designing their course syllabi and joint exercises for students in each class to complete, using web conferencing and other internet-based communication tools. Most universities internationalize their curriculum by welcoming culturally diverse students and offering possibilities to study abroad or to do an internship abroad. COIL offers new options for students who are not ready or able to travel. This virtual learning experience, or internationalization, is effective in developing students' intercultural communication skills and preparing them for the global workplace (Esche 2018, Marcillo and Desilus 2016). The COIL method connects classrooms across the globe and can be applied to courses such as international management, communications, information technology, project management, etc. No particular type of technology is required in using the COIL method. It is "a new teaching and learning paradigm that develops intercultural awareness and competence across shared multi-cultural online learning environments" (State University of New York Center for Collaborative Online International Learning, 2015).

3. Learning Objectives

The exercises are designed to help students at partnered institutions to accomplish the following:

- Develop knowledge of cultural dimensions and their impact on cross-cultural interactions in the context of international business operations.
- Develop skills and awareness in cross-cultural communication through directly engaging with foreign peers to build rapport and deepen understanding of diverse perspectives.
- Develop their own view on international business and global strategy and generate their own solutions to cross-cultural misunderstandings.

4. Exercise Overview

Students conduct joint exercises that engage them in real life global work environments and challenges. Using internet-based communication tools, students can jointly complete exercises with peers at partnered universities

abroad. They can learn to collaborate and contribute as members of a geographically diversified virtual team.

Pre-Work

A partnership should be established between instructors at two institutions in different countries before the start of the semester. These instructors can identify the corresponding courses for which the joint exercises are appropriate and exchange their course syllabi. Frequent interactions are needed for the instructors to design the details of exercises together. Each student is paired with a peer in the partnered class and assigned to individually read the course syllabi and make the initial contact with the partner student. The method of pairing students is at the discretion of the instructors and depends on the needs of their students. The student pairs in the partnered classes will complete the following exercises throughout the semester.

Exercise One: Cultural Dimensions

To equip students with knowledge about cross-cultural differences, the first exercise to be done by the partnered classes is to respond to a few real-life situations and to make a choice based on their own cultures. At the start of the class session, students are asked to answer the series of situational questions listed in Table 1. For example, the first question asks them to choose between the individual and the team with regard to taking the responsibility for a product defect. The majority of the population in an individualist society would choose the individual, but more people in a collectivist society would choose the team (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2012). We observed similar patterns in our partnered classes. Most American students chose the individual whereas more French students chose the team.

The partnered classes can do this exercise synchronously at a predetermined time if the classrooms can be connected virtually, using video conferencing technologies such as Polycom, Adobe Connect, Zoom, Webex, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, etc.,. When the students see the different responses to the same situational question, they are likely to have a better understanding of the concept of culture shock. Culture shock has been viewed as the process of initially adjusting to a new cultural environment (Petersen 1995). It involves an overwhelming feeling experienced by someone subject to a foreign culture (language, way of life, habits). Students may experience it when studying abroad because of the use of a foreign language, different learning methods, and unusual expectations of the instructor or interaction with other students. Students can also experience it in an EDGE exercise if they are immersed in cross-cultural interactions. Studies have shown that even a brief time contrasting elements from different cultures, such as watching back-to-back slide shows comparing Chinese and American cultures, exposed individuals to multicultural experiences and