I discovered a new phrase while participating in the Global Enterprise Experience; “circadian disruption”. The competition taught me in the most practical way why a CEO of a New Zealand based, multinational company shifted the headquarters thousands of kilometres away to a more reasonable time zone. Please excuse any grammatical errors in this journal, it’s too early in the afternoon and my mind hasn’t completely woken up.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed my GEE experience. The team members that were acknowledged on the proposal were from China, the Netherlands, Finland and the Dominican Republic. I was surprised (and relieved) with their fantastic English proficiency and working with my team was in most respects easy. Politeness and respect was always maintained from every member. My Latin American and Asian team members were the most responsive with communications, even when taking into account time zones. In the final week of the competition I was actually working on the competition and doing other university assignments during the night and early morning and sleeping during the day. I found that my team were more likely to stay engaged in constructive conversation and perform their designated tasks when I was also awake and responding immediately. This was needed around the end of the competition after made a late pivot.

A Word on Preparation

“Preparation is key”, Mum would say to me. I began to learn the truth of this statement right from the outset of the competition. Within an hour after launch I had a very eager team member emailing the group and expressing his excitement to be working on the project with us. That email was music to my ears; my team sounded just as eager as I was! I wanted to immediately respond to it but figured it should be my pre-prepared launch letter that responds to his email and welcomes the team at the same time. Unfortunately it was not written as well as I thought should be and mild perfectionism got the better of me. I spent hours rewriting the email so as to put my best foot forward and welcome the team into a supportive and productive environment. By the time the perfect email had been prepared, the team member was fast asleep and I had lost what could have been a rare opportunity for connecting and fostering engagement among the team.

Effective communication is the cornerstone of a productive and successful team. For this reason, my insufficient preparation of communication mediums could have inhibited the team from reaching its true potential. Three of the team members did not reply to emails for at least the first week. Thinking they might eventually offer their opinions, I drew out the decision of which communication mediums to use. Because the process was taking so long, a team member stepped up and made the decision to use WeChat, to cater for our Chinese member. I endorsed the decision. While his intention was good, this decision caused problems for communication later on. Firstly, two members of the team, including the one whom had made that decision, almost never used the platform and were eventually blocked from the system, making group communication very difficult. WeChat also doesn’t have the function that allows a user to see when their messages have been viewed. This caused significant issues with following up with team members as I didn’t want to come across as pestering but needed to know whether people were receiving my messages and working on the set tasks. Had I been better prepared for this and learned the pros and cons of the world’s most
common social media platforms, I might have influenced the choosing of a more ideal platform that empowered our group’s communication more quickly. A note for any future GEE participants reading this; WhatsApp isn’t very big in New Zealand but it is really big in Europe, North and Latin America and even Africa. I later found out that all members of my group have a WhatsApp account except for the Chinese member.

Leadership successes were also founded on thorough preparation. Over a third of the competition had passed when it was made clear that the two concept ideas the team had been developing were not going to win over the judges. That evening was an emotionally difficult one and I scanned the internet for hours, searching for evidence that the ideas could be possible and profitable. I couldn’t bear to tell the team that we would have to choose another idea; the process took long enough the first time! Luckily, learnings from that day’s tutorial kept circling through my head and I decided to revisit an idea that I had initially discounted. Because I had researched the idea some months before, I could immediately begin writing a compelling case for why we needed to pivot and I was able to provide a well-developed alternative. The early preparation had made the whole process quick and easy and within a day the team had successfully pivoted and begun researching the final idea used in our proposal.

**Additional Insights**

I should have adapted my leadership approach to the competition’s short time frame earlier. In the beginning I was trying to be very democratic but it wasn’t very effective because three of my team members weren’t responding to emails. In retrospect, they would have been comfortable with me being a bit more direct with decision making because at the very beginning when everyone is still communicating by email and people live in time zones, decision making can take a very long time.

Some people do just expect to be told what to do. I thought my team would bring more to the plate but from the start some members seemed like they were just waiting to be told what to do. This is despite my words encouraging a collaborative space where every person can offer suggestions on the business concept and the leadership of the team. This might have something to do with age, because I noticed the oldest member of the group, who was at least twice the age of the rest of the team members, was comfortable with regularly sharing his thoughts.

I should have followed up early when I suspected that a team member might not deliver. It’s good giving my team independence and autonomy over their tasks thus showing that I trust them. However, my intuition is pretty good and it doesn't make sense to let someone fail at something when the competition time frame is so short. In other environments there can be merit in letting people make mistakes and learning from it, however short duration competitions aren’t appropriate environments for this.

Transferring vision is difficult. I wrote pages of notes on where the concept was headed as updates came along and yet when it came to writing the sections it was as if many team members hadn’t read them. Next time, rather than messaging each person about their understanding of the topic and what they were planning to write, a video call would be better because the team member can’t avoid looking into it by writing simple replies. They would be compelled to ask questions so they don’t look silly.