When I started, the Global Enterprise Experience I thought it would be an easy and interesting way to satisfy my interests in the Sustainable Development Goals and social entrepreneurship. Dreaming up a business idea and creating a proposal was a bit more interesting than the essay’s I normally have to write for my international development degree.

But boy was in for a shock, this wasn’t easy nor was it just a business proposal.

I initially turned down the leader role as I didn’t have much time. Within a few days, we were all in a group chat, people were saying who they were and where they were from, it was a learning experience in itself. Our group leader Katlego sent many messages outlining what we had to do, asking for ideas to get started, sending examples of previous reports.

I put forward a few ideas based on my knowledge such as small scale filters so people could burn domestic rubbish rather than contribute to landfill. Many people put forward far too ambitious ideas, for example that cost far too much capital or too complex to capture in a 6-page business report.

I learnt to understand the cultural and social difference and how they affected communication but still struggled with it. In particular, how blunt some people were when they didn’t think a certain idea was good but would simply say ‘that’s a bad idea’ or ‘there is no market for that in this country’ but would not contribute any constructive feedback. I found it very frustrating and difficult at the start and found it knocked my confidence and struggled not to take it personally.

After nearly a week of sending different ideas and backing up the team leaders call for action and more ideas or for people to at least say which ideas they supported we were still not making any progress.

I gathered research about other products or social enterprises that were related to our Sustainable Development Goal to help people think.

I also found I had to support, empower and encourage our group leader in situations for example to make an executive decision on what our project would be. Originally, he wanted everyone to be in complete agreement but this is very hard if not impossible with 8 people across the world especially when someone people weren’t even replying or contributing. In these kind of setting I quickly learnt you had to revaluate what is realistic. The skills to nature and support someone else in their leadership was not something I expected at all coming into this experience but was a great thing to be part of.

By this point I felt like more of a co-leader and could feel my can-do attitude, excitement about starting new ideas and fast past brain starting to fire up and get restless with the lack of progress we were making. Discussions in the group chat, which were mostly between me and the group leader by this point let to a decision that our project would be creating a farming app that provided easy and practical education about environmental friendly farming practices.

I have never failed to complete anything in my life. I failed one assignment in my whole life and it was in year 10, nearly 6 years ago and I still remember it like yesterday. There were plenty of tears and I rewrote the assignment and resubmitted it and ended up receiving the highest grade. So, with my personality there was no way we were going to not finish.

As my group was not progressing and many people stopped contributing I got more stressed.

3 days before the project was due I reminded my team members that the work needed to be done, most people had been allocated their bits to do, we had a google doc but it remained empty.

2 days to go and still nothing was done so I decided to get to work and do the bulk of the work to kick start people. And I’m glad I did, not just to avoid the same kind of tears and sense of failure in year 10 but because of the impact it had on our team.

Once people had clear direction and something to work on they could add to they were much more productive I think people felt the pressure to do some work and contribute once they had seen how much I had done People were really thankful and helpful to each other in our group chat that last day.

We bonded and achieved more in the last 24 hours of the project than the previous 3 weeks. As someone who finishes her assignments at least 24 hours before they are due this was an uncomfortable process for me. The work isn’t perfect or the standard I would expect but done is far better than perfect.
It was good to learn that I can actually still work and survive even with such tight deadlines and pressures even if it is not how I prefer to work.

Even though I ended up doing most of the work on the actual report I am glad I did as it empowered and allowed the other team members to contribute and get a final report whereas I think if they had to start form a blank canvas it would have been hard- it often is for everyone. I was very conscious of being a leader that takes over a takes the easy route of doing the work themselves rather than working with others to do it which was why I turned down being a leader at the start and waited so long to do the work but it proved to be the right thing in this setting.

The experience also made me realise my privilege. I spend all day on a computer with high quality internet access, we get taught how to use google docs and other digital literacy skills in school. I have self-taught myself how to use coding software to make apps and design software such as canva to make our report visually appealing and coherent but to even have access to such software and the time to learn how to use it is a privilege that not many of my team mates necessarily had in their different areas of the world.

I learnt to put set time limits, for example saying, “I will be online for 10 more hours and then I will not be working and won’t be back online for another 12 hours” rather than people having to use a time zone calculator, it was little things like this that made it easier to communicate with my diverse team.

I often had to re word my messages for them to be in plain enough English for people that English was a second language, this is not only a great lesson in communication but also in allowing myself to not get everything right the first time and sometimes having to try a few times.

I am proud that our report reflects the experiences and expertise of many of the people who contributed. For example, Katlego added some great info about the local market and problems in his area and country. While it took time to foster these relationships and motivate people to contribute, it was less time and energy than doing that research on that area myself and trying to learn it. People are experts in their own life and experience and that’s the best kind of expert you can get.

Starting GEE I thought I was going to have to use my research skills, my knowledge of social entrepreneurship and my communication skills to create a report. While yes, I had to do this I also had to use my creativity, my patience, my resilience and innovation by trying different approaches to motivate and inspire people, supporting someone else’s leadership as well as realising my own strength and ability to do this and I was glad I stepped up more as a leader as already discussed.

I would definitely do this project again. It was a challenging, frustrating and interesting 3 week and in the end, it was a productive, hard and successful last 3 days to pull the team together, step up into a support leadership role a complete the project. I would change my leadership style next time by stepping up into a leadership position from the start and acknowledge the privilege and knowledge I have such as having English as my first language and access to further applications than some of my team mates.

I now understand why it is called the global enterprise experience because it really is a whole experience.