2019 GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP EXPERIENCE: PERSONAL REFLECTION

Role: Team Leader

Team Countries: South Africa, New Zealand, Malaysia, Nigeria, Netherlands & China

WEEKS 1-2

I was fortunate to have a highly responsive team who immediately sent warm greetings as soon as the team names were announced. I emailed a personalized welcome note to the team to break the ice and get us going with choosing a communication platform. I also created a shared drop box link with all of our bios, relevant mark sheets and a list of the 2030 UN Development Goals. The next two weeks proved to be an unending maze preventing us from finding a common communication platform. Our team mate from China tried her best to get access to WhatsApp, Google Docs and Skype with no luck. We then tried getting the whole team onto WeChat, creatively working around the hurdle of two members who could not sign up by creating profiles on their behalf, which they then logged into.

In Week 2, we were finally celebrating having a single communication line. I shared a World Clock timetable based on everyone’s cities and set up a World Clock app on my phone to constantly stay aware of the time zones as our countries were across the spectrum. With this info, we were able to determine the best time for a video chat meeting and finally make some progress. But alas, WeChat blocked all of the team members in Southern hemisphere and brought us back to our starting point. We then decided to work with what we had – 7 members on a WhatsApp group with a nominated team member (I appointed Malaysia) sharing all discussions on WeChat to keep our Chinese team mate updated. I also checked in periodically with her via email.

• Don’t sweat the small stuff!

WEEKS 2-3

Now that the communication lines were finally opened, we needed to start generating ideas as quickly as possible to catch up. I sent the team a longer ‘check in’ message via WhatsApp and email (to ensure that our team mate in China was included), where I asked that we each discuss a topic with a brief paragraph providing background on the problem addressed and noting which UN goal it was in line with. I also used that opportunity to motivate the team with a reminder of our desired end goal of possibly winning the prize to actually implement our idea. At this stage, I was also beginning to understand the team dynamics. I took note of the various personalities in order to learn how to balance their strengths for our team to achieve the best outcome. We had a conversation starter, a strong peer leader, a diligent administrator, two willing participants awaiting instructions and two quieter ones.

Before we knew it, it was the final week and we were still trying to choose an idea. Life was starting to suck all of us back in and the group chats were getting quieter and quieter. One team member had exams starting, another was out of her country and struggling with technology, whilst another had undergone an operation and was offline during her recovery. I went quiet as well. I was drowning in research submission deadlines, teaching blocks, work meetings and report deadlines and life itself. Just as I was starting to feel overwhelmed and pity myself, two strong peer leaders emerged in the group.

• The key to getting things done is starting!

WEEK 3

Our first peer leader took it upon himself to get the discussion going again, throw in topic ideas and we eventually selected one of his ideas to move forward with. I was ever so grateful for the assistance, and made sure to show appreciation on the group and in a private message. In fact, the one thing our team was not short of was words of encouragement and gratitude.

We had a majority vote on an idea that I was worried did not meet the criteria outlined, however I did not want to impose my views when a vote had already taken place. I did not want our team to miss the memo either, and thought it best to just share questions regarding how we will approach our gaps to align with the requirements.

At this stage, peer leader 2 showed up. He diplomatically but succinctly debated the merits of our topic with research to back his views. This created a healthy debate amongst the two peer leaders and myself. Although the rest of the team was quiet, we came to a conclusion that we needed to change topics and swiftly selected a new one. I advised that we just work on the one suggestion unless it too had issues, as we had run out of time and could not indulge in a fresh brainstorming session. We agreed on behalf of the team, who fortunately were also on board later on when it came to crunch time.

• Communication is key...

In the last 5 days of the contest, our team displayed its greatest attributes. The more tense it got as we chased the finish line, the greater the comradery. Everyone contributed a section, with some working together on sections. And where there were any difficulties, the team kept in touch regularly either on the Group, or privately via WhatsApp and email. This eased stress levels as I always knew what was happening with each team member.

I had the tough task of editing the document and adding the Executive Summary, to ensure that it flowed like a story, covered all the criteria and looked presentable. I also ran behind schedule with finishing off but kept my team informed, who remained encouraging and grateful throughout.

The genuine, well presented, well thought out and exciting concept presented in our final proposal was truly reflective of our team. This GEE experience was a lot more challenging than I expected, and I believe leaving the contest on great terms with new friends around the globe was the greatest win of all!

• I am not alone!
• Communication is key... If you suffer in silence, no-one will know to assist!
• Diplomacy is an art!
• It is hard to read expressions and navigate cultural etiquette via messaging!
• Gratitude eases tensions!
• We are in this together!
• Team work makes the dream work!

NAME

TEAM

COUNTRY

NOLUVO NELA

TEAM 151

SOUTH AFRICA