I had many fantastic leadership takeaways from my GEE Experience. From teamwork, providing vision, enthusiasm and gratitude as a leader, the value of coaching, working with cultural differences and more!

I came into it the project very excited about working with a team of people from all over the world. As excited as I was, the first critiques of my leadership came after the first meeting. I went into the meeting without an agenda or structure in mind. I was confident in my ability to meet new people, bond and form connections within the group. However, after the meeting I was disappointed at the lack of group connection that had been established. My immediate reflections were 'why has this happened?'. Some of my thoughts included: perhaps nerves got to me? Did I ask good icebreaker questions to generate discussions? Did I overestimate my leadership and soft skills? Should I have had a structure for the meeting? Then I gave myself some slack and considered whether it was a lack of confidence, enthusiasm, or strong cultural differences from my members. Controlling and mitigating these thoughts within myself was a key learning process throughout the project. Which leads me to what coaching taught me and the importance of coaching within this program.

My first coaching session felt like all I did was talk about how things went. But this was extremely beneficial as it helped guide my thoughts towards what I needed to ask myself and focus on. A key moment for me was in a coaching session after my third meeting where I had a mix of commitment and very few ideas. The coach asked me “What outcome would like from this meeting?” followed by “what should you do to achieve this outcome?” With providing any advice, answering these two questions allowed me stop worrying about what wasn’t going so well and focus on the vision: the end outcome and how I could get there. From this point onwards it allowed me to guide my thinking towards what mattered, rather than what had been. Another key question for me was being asked “how would you want your GEE team leader to be?”. I answered, “enthusiastic, excited, grateful, pro-active and towards all group members”. From this point on I had a better understanding of how to guide my team a get the most out of them. After this point, I felt like my leadership was twice as effective.

In many ways these are simple leadership and social skills to make people feel valued and important. However, if these things don’t come naturally to you, it can be difficult to remember when you are extremely task-focused and stressed about completing the project. Reflecting on my coaching experience, all the learnings were rational processes you could use in many parts of your life. Whether that be cooking dinner, catching up with friends or making a dinner. But suddenly when put in a leadership context, you have an expectation and perception on yourself to be a “Great Leader”. When the reality is, you already are a great leader in many aspects of your life.

Another key takeaway for me was a lack of conscious consideration of how and too what extent the cultural perspectives affected the perception of my leadership. When I first read my team bio’s, I ran the country they were from through a website that looked at Hofstede’s cultural difference. This gave me a rough idea of the different cultures in my group. However, if I was to do the project again, I would considered the impacts of the cultural differences. I would do this by being more aware of these differences and slightly altering how I talked to my members individually based on their cultural norms. It would have been interesting to see if this change would have made a difference or improved my leadership. Reflecting on this, also feels like a missed opportunity I could have learnt from.

I have learnt many ways to improve, but there were some things I did very well to gain high task completion and productivity from my team. We had less than a week left, and we had assigned tasks and roles for people to work on different parts of the proposal. I undertook multi beneficial actions after this meeting. I made a post outlining what all of the different members where working on, I wrote up our businesses overview and posted it on the page so the team knew what we were working towards and set up a Google Doc with the structure of our proposal. I feel like all of these factors greatly contributed to the production of the team. It provided them with a tangible visual goal we were working towards, it gave them confidence in my leadership, provided evidence that there team contribution greatly mattered for the completion of the project. Doing this also free my tasks up, allowing me to help individual members with what they were working on.

To conclude, the GEE was an extremely unique valuable course. Unique and valuable in so many ways, in its learnings, its format, its assignments, its challenges and so much more. I recommend anybody to take part in the GEE.