Chapter X

Students International Collaboration Project (SICP):
A Cross-Cultural Project Using Virtual Teams to Learn Communication Styles

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Abstract

“SICP” stands for Students International Collaboration Project. This chapter describes a project where students create learning with faculty mentors, offering insights into problem solving. Achieving the freedom to learn and broaden students’ individual interpersonal skills is the main goal for this new endeavor. This chapter will explain SICP’s mission and its procedures, analyze its main concepts, and describe the outcomes. Experiences of past projects in the learning curve will be used to give a
practical framework for teachers who would be interested in initiating such a project, not only for their students but also for themselves. The prototype combined French and American teams who wrote a research paper together. The learned outcomes focused on improved communication skills and team management. In the process, the students also learned about a different culture. This mentoring process constitutes an opportunity for teachers to stimulate learning by involving students in a shared responsibility experience. This project expands traditional classroom learning into an experiential process to learn new concepts.

Introduction

The workplaces of today are changing rapidly as technology races ahead with new hardware and programs. The virtual work environment has grown out of trends in globalization and the development of information technology. Previously, international business people were connected with telephones, faxes, and face-to-face meetings, but essentially operations were self-contained and regional/national. To have a strategic team operate, it was necessary to see people face-to-face in order to create new ideas, organize work, and finalize plans. However, because of mergers, corporate restructuring, and competition, businesses have been forced to operate globally (Furst et al., 2004; Roebuck, Brock, & Moodie, 2004). It is not always possible in terms of time and costs to pull employees together in one place for a meeting. As a result, researchers (Roebuck, Brock, & Moodie, 2004) have defined virtual teams as teams who conduct their work mostly through electronic technology. These cyberspace teams allow an organization to pool the talent and expertise of their employees by eliminating space and time barriers. Virtual encounters have “been characterized by high productivity, participation, satisfaction, and synergy among group members” (Nemiro, 2002, p. 70).

Background

Like the business environment, universities are also following the technological trends to provide for customer needs, to cut costs, and to compete effectively.
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