



# **Activating Global Virtual Teams Through the Development and Facilitation of a Learning Activity**

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### **Abstract**

With the ascending of globalization, Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) quickly gained popularity and nowadays are widely used for remote work worldwide. While some people already successfully use GVTs for their daily operations, for others first experience of them might seem challenging due to the lack of knowledge and working experience. This project-based research aims to help students to prepare for working in Global Virtual Teams (GVTs). For that purpose, 114 pieces of advice specifically developed for GVT's was created amongst students who participated in the X-Culture project, who at the conclusion of the project created together a set of practical advice cards designed to help future X-Culture participants understand the challenges faced in the GVT experience.

The practical advice cards created were tested during a classroom activity by a focus group of 17 international students. During the activity, participants were encouraged to share their own experiences while participating in the X-Culture GVT experience. The majority of the participants noted the relation between the advice on cards and the real situations they faced during the X-Culture project. They also mentioned that they see the produced game as a beneficial introductory preparation activity for successful entering and operating in a GVT.

Based on the analysis of the data derived from the X-Culture participants, the final deck of practical advice cards was resolved. The result is a functional learning tool that can be facilitated in learning environments with the goal of educating and preparing participants for working in GVTs.

### **Keywords/tags (subjects)**

Global virtual teams, X-Culture, practical advice cards, frame game, gamification

### **Miscellaneous (Confidential information)**

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# 1 Introduction

Working in a multicultural environment, collaborating with people across the seas, doing business remotely, - all of these are not new phenomena for modern societies anymore. We learnt how to adjust to the rapidly changing conditions of the nowadays life and think out of the box. With the advent of Globalization people also realized the importance and convenience of international connections and modern technology, in its turn, just simplified the process. Thus, humanity took advantage from the possibility to keep in contact with one other despite the distance and started using it not only for communication, but for doing work as well. Such a term as Global Virtual Team (GVT) appeared and already took an important part in the working process of many international education and business-related organizations.

Since virtual team operations are not always smooth and there are many challenges teammates can face, in this thesis we will present our practical advice card activity, that we hope can help in anticipating problems and misunderstandings that might arise due to the differences in cultural background and knowledge. We have produced our cards on the basis of the experience of the students who had a chance to work as part of a GVT and will analyze its working principles on the example of X-Culture Project. We will touch on the topics of gamification, social constructivism, and experiential learning as well as talk about the motivation for the game creation and its facilitation.

## 1.1 X-Culture project

X-Culture Project is “a large-scale international experiential learning project” (X-Culture, n.d) that combines numerous cultures to share experiences and gain knowledge through building international connections and establishing new contacts. In the framework of this project, students and researchers work in a multicultural environment with participants from all over the world, solving real-life problems and cases provided by companies working across the globe. For several weeks, participants work in intercultural global virtual teams, overcoming possible cultural misunderstandings, time zone challenges, language barriers, and difficulties of online communication in the process of determining the problem in the case and proposing a solution for the company the participants in each team chose from the project’s company options.

During the X-Culture Project, the participants on each team remain in contact with each other and the coaches of the project in case of necessity. Students also are asked to complete weekly progress update surveys and short reports where they are asked to evaluate their peers and themselves based on the contributions made over the previous week. Participants can always express their feelings and concerns about the future of the team and have a chance to ask for help or advice from the coach when they feel to be unable to cope with the situation themselves.

The X-Culture project connects students from around the globe, enabling the creation of new co-operations and intercultural friendships that can be maintained even after the end of the project. “We encourage you to stay in touch after you complete the project. With thousands of X-Culture alumni worldwide”, - stated on the official X-culture website. Thus, by participating in global symposiums organized by X-Culture project twice a year for its alumni students get a chance to meet their teammates in real life. More importantly, students gain valuable skills in time management, various aspects of marketing, and learning from teamwork challenges.

## **1.2 Motivation for the thesis**

We both participated in X-Culture Global Collaborations course in Autumn 2021 among some other JAMK students as a part of our Cross-Cultural Management Essentials course. Participating in X-Culture was a very educative experience for us, as we became familiarized with the concept of Global Virtual Teams. It is self-evident, that in a project of this magnitude, students will have varying experiences, as numerous factors affect a team’s success. As students are assigned to a group in the project, the outcome might vary regardless of one’s own personal performance and often a single member cannot steer the entire group towards success. Two different outcomes, numerous discussions along the way, and most importantly the experiences we were left with after the X-Culture project made us think about the lack of cultural knowledge we had before the project. Discussions with our peers only strengthened this supposition, as each student’s experiences varied greatly. Faced with the problems of different understandings of time, context, and space, we realized how useful it could be to step into the project being more prepared. We found it important for students to familiarize themselves with the possible challenges that being a part of a GVT might entail. We decided to utilize our personal experiences with X-Culture project and contribute to the future participants’ success in it.

The product of our thesis will be a set of practical advice cards designed for GVTs and the X-Culture project to improve their performance. The data of the card activity was collected from the students who have already completed participation in the project. The main goal was to create a card deck of 52 cards, with a piece of practical advice on each one. The cards can be used by facilitators in a variety of ways with rules that they can invent and adapt themselves. Hence, facilitators could achieve their own goals within the educational process framework. Our goal is to increase motivation for participation in the X-Culture project or any other project that includes working in GVTs, since we consider motivation to be the strong foundation of any learning process. We believe that our product will help students gain some basic understanding and knowledge for the effective functioning in a GVT, be prepared for future challenges, and to be able to find solutions for already existing misunderstandings in virtual teamwork.

## **2 Literature review**

Our focus in literature review is expanding future players' and facilitators' knowledge and understanding about the topics essential to our game. We think that such topics as GVTs, gamification, facilitation, experiential learning, and social constructivism most support the idea of it and reasons for its creation. We will begin the literature review with the concept most valuable and most prominent for our card game and the whole X-Culture process; GVTs.

### **2.1 Global Virtual Teams**

As stated previously, X-culture strongly relies on well-functioning diverse teams working virtually. Inevitably, there are endless forms and descriptions of a Global Virtual Team, hence there is not an unambiguous description for the perfect GVT. Nevertheless, we are listing a few of the most prominent features of one in this literature review.

Although they share many similar qualities, Global Virtual teams and traditional teams also have very distinct characteristics to separate them from each other. Whereas a traditional team tends to be geographically limited to a certain location, global virtual teams are not defined by geographical or cultural factors. Virtual teams can be described as "geographically distributed but otherwise fairly homogeneous team whose members rarely or never meet face-to-face" (Katz, L.

2009, p.1). Virtual teams are also said to represent a response to the growing need to find rapid and low-cost solutions to complex organizational issues (Ebrahim et al, 2009). Key features of GVT are different location of the team members and the use of electronic means of connecting. These teams utilize various technologies such as telephone, e-mail, teleconferences, and other collaborative tools. In addition, the members of global virtual teams can belong to the same organization or multiple different ones. (Gibson et al, 2003).

As for all forms of teams, there are also certain advantages and disadvantages to the growing phenomenon of global virtual teams. Ebrahim et al, (2009) discuss how GVTs are a great opportunity for organizations to create pools of talent and expertise by abolishing space and time barriers. GVTs enable specialists and talents from around the globe to work together in a team and combine their knowledge without the inconvenience of geographical limitations. Compared to a traditional team, global virtual teams help reduce travel time and costs including accommodation and travel costs. Moreover, due to the diversity in GVTs, originality and creativity between team members is likely to increase and inequality and discrimination to decrease (Bergiel et al, 2008). Ferazzi (2014, p.1) lists “good communication skills, high emotional intelligence, an ability to work independently, and the resilience to recover from the snafus that inevitably arise” as the traits all well-functioning GVT members should have in common. According to Brake (2005), due to the lack of informational richness of face-to-face communication, the importance of a proactive and person-centric leader is increasingly important for a GVT.

Katz (2009) also notes that working in such teams can be challenging in many ways considering different time zones, language barriers, and cultural differences. Bergiel et al. (2008) point out how technology, different virtual platforms, and the concept of working in a virtual team might be unfamiliar to many team members, who thus might require additional training on the topic. The authors also mention that a virtual environment might not be suitable for everyone, depending on personal and psychological factors. Klitmøller et al. (2015) have found out that most GVT’s emphasize English skills as the most crucial factor when discussing challenges in global virtual teams. Nowadays, students and people in general are so used to working in an international setting, that cultural knowledge and adaptation is not as important as sufficient language skills, they continue. According to their research, students feel levels of uncertainty when working in a GVT with people who possess differing language proficiency levels. Cagiltay et al. (2015) add that thanks to the

highly advanced technologies nowadays, global virtual teams have the facilities to function as well as a traditional team despite their geographical dispersion.

## **2.2 Social constructivism**

“Constructivism” is an approach to learning that refers to how people “construct” their knowledge and how they use it for learning new things. Its key idea is that learners use their previous knowledge and experience as a foundation and build up on it with new things they learn (Phillips, 1995).

French psychologist Jean Piaget played an important role in the theory of constructivism. He believed that people construct their own understanding, and therefore education is a constructive process (Piaget, 1957). He studied children from infancy to adolescence and made a conclusion that children go through a number of phases as they develop cognitively as a result of the interaction between natural abilities (nature) and external events (nurture). Lev Vygotsky's theory is very similar to Piaget's one regarding how children are gain knowledge and skills, but he paid more attention to the social aspect of learning. Thus, he suggested that “every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level and, later on, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 57). Vygotsky was sure that society plays a crucial role in the "making meaning" procedure, so the surroundings children are raised in can influence their way of thinking and the matters they think about. Earlier, Dewey (1938) proposed that the process of learning is a social activity, something that students do together through interacting with each other, thus, to Dewey, learning is not an abstract concept. In that way, we can assert that teaching and the process of education are the exchange of knowledge that was already constructed before.

According to Vygotsky (1978) students are able to build their knowledge by talking and interacting with each other and their teachers, moreover, comprehension of the lesson improves when students are encouraged toward collective discussions and chance to work together on tasks. He claims that since learning process requires active participation and creativity, teachers must encourage students to produce questions, create hypotheses and test them for the “vitality.” Educators should also appreciate the mistakes students might make during their journey instead of



avoiding or trying to minimize them. Conducting research and problem solving in a real-life context must be offered by instructors as well, because they motivate students to find a solution and stand for it, whereas open discussion promotes the birth of new ideas. Thus, classroom needs to be considered as a community for dialogue and exchange of ideas.

For the successful application of social constructivism theory in the field of education, teacher is more in line of the role of a facilitator. A constructive teacher is a person who questions the students' answers without paying attention to the correctness of them in order to make sure that the student has learned the lesson. In addition to it, Rickards and DiVesta (1974) suggested that encouraging learners to explain their answers induces them to relate new material to their previous knowledge what in its turn improves learning. Thus, main responsibility of the facilitator becomes the creation of the environment where students are the active participants in their own educational process through common decision making and problem solving. In this way can be stated that knowledge creation results from many social processes and collaborations and the process of learning means as much as skill and knowledge gained at the end. In simple terms, the journey is just as valuable as the final destination.

### **2.3 Experiential learning**

Kolb (1984) suggested that experience is crucial in the creation of knowledge since learning happens via exploration and participation. So, he defined learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". His whole theory evolves around the process of transforming experience into knowledge, what means that the learner can combine new observations with their existing learning with each new experience. According to Dewey (1933), learning comes more through reflecting on an event than from the experience itself. People must always focus on the chance for fresh learning because otherwise such things will not happen. It takes reflection on what happened, how it happened, and why for learning to take place. The experience will be forgotten if these are not incorporated into the learning process.

Experiential learning strategies are extremely important in the educational field, as the primary goals of the educational system are to prepare students for the challenges of the real world including entering labor market. While designing experiential learning, it is important to keep in mind

how participants might increase their own knowledge and abilities through analysis and reflection on the experience. According to Kolb's cycle of learning—Plan, Do, Review, Apply—when students are given the green light for experimental learning, it is all about giving them a chance to try with different methodologies in a different setting, whether indoors or outdoors. When learner encounters something, it is typically likely that they will remember it forever (Moody, 2012). Most students agree that moving, touching, stretching, or being challenged in some way is the most effective learning method, whether or not it is relevant to their future career. Providing learners with experiences also ensures that students most likely will not find the material uninteresting and irrelevant, making it easier for them to become involved in the project right away. It follows that during an event, learners gain confidence in one another, learn how to handle various forms of communication, and develop teamwork. By establishing connections between the learning that occurred, obstacles and conditions of real work, as well as by committing to proceed, it will be possible to produce an educational experience that will be remembered. Learning happens when students are pushed outside of their comfort zones, since experimenting is needed to make their event successful. As a result, they have the chance to discuss their impressions of one another and consider different strategies for cooperating. Also, it helps students to develop and unravel potential that was previously hidden from view. Experiences that a student may refer to may influence relationships and behavior with others. For some students, learning experiences may have a profound effect, as an experience is a whole process in which cognition and action cooperate and not compete. Experience is closely related to both the recollection of the event and its outcome. The general rule for experiential learning is that it develops information and experience through the conscious or unconscious internalization of observed interactions (Kolb, 1984).

## **2.4 Gamification in education**

According to Kapp (2012, p.10) gamification is “using game-based mechanics, aesthetics and game thinking to engage people, motivate action, promote learning, and solve problems”. It can be successfully integrated into any field of life and make an impact to human's behavior and influence people's choices, for example in marketing and business (Zichermann & Cunningham, 2011). In this work, however, gamification will be considered in the context of education.

Playing is a process that makes any time-spending more exciting and the process of learning is no exception. Huotari and Hamari (2012) expressed that gamification increases students' involvement, which is why it can be used as an efficient tool in educational settings. The existing articles research shows that gamification influences student's behavior and engagement, what makes this technique to be an effective method in dealing with the problem of laziness and demotivation. The intrinsic and extrinsic game elements, along with psychology behind the game, play a crucial part in its system and affect the process, results, and further outcomes, thus, through matching elements of the game with motivation, the creator is able to produce an encouraging game activity and help students to meet the learning objectives of the particular course. Moreover, if students are rewarded for their achievements in addition to an already diverse and fascinating academic environment, chances of gaining interest in attendance and performance can be significantly increased (Kiryakova et al., 2014). These authors also mentioned that despite the competing elements that take place in games, it is important for game creators to focus more on gaining experience and particular skills for group work rather than creating a contesting between the participants.

Some important characteristics must be taken into consideration during educational game design. First, learning objectives and the psychology behind should be clearly determined and researched as key elements of the game. Various ways can make it happen. For example, basic observation or survey among students can be useful for instructors to understand students' struggles or wishes for easier and more accurate game elements selection. However, the game must be at the same time a tool for solving a particular defined problem. Because each game element leads to developing different thoughts and learning experiences (Helms et al., 2015), the second important characteristic is a careful selection and implementation of those. Relevant elements used in the game could stimulate students' curiosity and motivation to succeed in the objectives of the course whereas competent and timely implementation to the learning process would accelerate the process. The last characteristic is collecting and analyzing feedback that would give creators important data for the further research. The evaluation phase can take place during different stages of gamification process: it can be pre-evaluation, during and post testing of the game.

## 2.5 Facilitation

Utilizing a frame game in the form of practical advice cards requires facilitation and therefore a facilitator to monitor and administrate the game in a classroom. Hogan (2002) states “Facilitators help groups of people by identifying and using a variety of processes that help participants to bring ideas to the surface and enable them to reach their goals.” In this case, the facilitator of the game will instruct the students and guide them through the process of playing the game, with the end-goal of learning more about working in a global virtual team. Berta et al. (2015) remind that all facilitators do not have to be formally trained for the role, while some might have received extensive skills and knowledge from training.

According to De La Cruz (2009) the facilitator in a project works as the objective third party who helps in identifying problems, solving them, and assisting in decision making without a particular point of view on the subject. De La Cruz also notes that facilitating learning is becoming one of the most efficient ways to cultivate active learning. Facilitation itself is a process that might include silence or even the absence of the facilitator. The process encourages people to be responsible for one’s own skills, efforts, and achievements, while the facilitator is guiding them to the right direction (Bentley, 1994).

Another description of facilitation comes from Kirk and Broussine (2000), as they believe the aim of facilitation is “to establish and hold an environment within which learning is created”. The authors also state that the main task of facilitation in groups is to simultaneously aid the group in creating learning and in becoming aware of the process of learning experientially. Berta et al. (2015) believe that the promise of facilitation lies in “its potential to stimulate higher-order learning in organizations through experimenting with, generating learning about, and sustaining small-scale adaptations to organizational processes and work routines”.

Hogan (2002) also notes that the facilitator should not take credit for any occurring outcomes of the session, and instead should recognize and acknowledge the efforts and accomplishments of the participants. In essence, the facilitator should aim to encourage students to create, share, per-

ceive knowledge themselves, and mainly act as a tool in achieving that goal. In addition, Hogan expresses the importance of debriefing after the session, as the main goal is learning, regardless of the outcome of the session.

Facilitating should not be mixed with teaching. Tarek (2021) reminds that teaching is supposed to create new knowledge strategically and systematically, whereas facilitation helps in connecting experiences with new knowledge. While teachers are expected to possess a certain level of knowledge and expertise, facilitators tend to utilize the existing knowledge base of the students or participants to find the answers to questions. Hence, as the aim of our product is to encourage students to learn themselves by connecting their personal experiences with provided new knowledge, facilitation is the correct term to be used in the context of our learning activity.

### **3 Research methodology**

Since the product of our thesis is a physical card game, this thesis is considered to be a developmental project where we are utilizing previously collected data. Therefore, we do not have to use any specific data collection methods. We are dealing with data that consists of 114 card ideas that were suggested by students who had already participated in the X-Culture project. This data works as the basis for our frame game that will later compose of only 52 cards. The process of getting from 114 cards to 52 cards will be explained in detail in the paragraph 3.2.

The next step was to conduct a classroom activity, where we are testing the first sample version of our game. The students were engaged in focus group discussions in small groups while they were actively participating and ideating. At the end of the activity a debriefing session took place. During this, students shared their contribution to our project. One of us was working as the main facilitator and the other was constantly taking field notes during the activity about new card ideas from the focus group members, feedback and the debrief session. Based on the notes, we evaluated the need to include any new cards or conduct any improvements to our game suggested by the focus group students.

### 3.1 Our method of card classification

To begin with, we needed to analyze and evaluate the data acquired from previous X-Culture participants. As mentioned, there were 114 practical advice cards created by JAMK students that had already experienced the X-Culture project during fall 2021, and these 114 cards work as the baseline for our frame game. In order for us to wind up with a card deck of 52 cards, we needed to eliminate a total of 62 cards from the original 114. The detailed process of choosing the cards will be explained in the upcoming chapters.

First, it was necessary to start by reading and carefully reviewing all 114 cards keeping in mind that the cards were organized from the most important to the least important by the students themselves. There were two sets of top three cards, the first ones chosen by Cross-Cultural Management Essentials and Marketing course students and the second ones chosen by Cross-Cultural Management Academic Track students. The top cards are visible below:

Cross-Cultural Management Essentials and Marketing course students:

1. Try to see this as a possibility to learn new things.
2. Do not be selfish, even though your teammates might be.
3. Do not just distribute separate tasks to everybody, try to brainstorm ideas first and then allocate the roles and tasks.

Cross-Cultural Management Academic Track students:

1. Act and participate in the same ways you would like your teammates to do for you.
2. Be patient: Learn how to move past teammates who underperform and do not let them upset you.
3. Do not neglect the importance of regularly seeing your team members in Zoom, Teams, or some other live and if possible visual platform.

When starting the card elimination process, it was found easiest to divide all cards into certain categories based on their characteristics. Each card belongs to at least one category, making it rather simple to classify and assort them. The categorization was done so that selecting the final 52 cards would be easier and faster, but also so that we can easily eliminate any cards that occurred more than once. In addition, all inappropriate or otherwise dysfunctional card suggestions were terminated without further analysis. The categories we managed to create were Help, Attitude and emotions, Learning and Experience, Dividing tasks, Communication, Timing and Deadlines, Getting to know the topic, Plagiarism and Secondary data, Leadership and Responsibility, Documents, Freeriders, and finally, the cards that were going to be deleted right away.

The category Help included all cards related to asking for help from one's teammates, classmates, and the project coaches. Attitude and emotions included cards related to approaching the project without any prejudice, adjusting one's attitude, and controlling emotions. Learning and experience included cards encouraging participants to perceive the project as a learning experience instead of only focusing on the results. Dividing tasks included cards related to dividing the tasks on time and equally to avoid misunderstandings. The category Communication emphasized the importance of communicating with one's team members and adjusting communication styles to find the best match for each team. Timing and deadlines included cards suggesting following the schedule and submitting tasks before deadlines. The category also includes cards highlighting the importance of each individual setting personal deadlines and following them mindfully. The next category included cards discussing researching the case company before the project, as multiple respondents reported feeling like it would have made the project itself much easier. The category Plagiarism and secondary data included cards discussing the significance of avoiding plagiarism at all costs. Leadership and responsibility contained cards related to dividing certain roles in a group, choosing a leader, and completing one's own tasks responsibly and on time. The next category Documents was focused on cards discussing writing everything on shared documents so that each team member can save the work. Freeriders category includes cards handling freeriders in a team and the fact that a person does not have to be included in the project if they continuously fail to contribute. Finally, the Deleted category included all cards we considered to be somehow inappropriate,

disrespectful, or otherwise irrelevant to our project. In total, five cards were classified as irrelevant or inappropriate and thus deleted.



Figure 1. Card Classification Categories

## 4 Testing the cards

### 4.1 Classroom activity

At this point, we have the first version of the frame game completed with the top 52 cards. The next thing we needed was feedback and data from actual students who are playing the game. In order to acquire feedback, the practical advice cards were tested in the form of a classroom activity at JAMK. For the successful implementation of this classroom activity, a detailed facilitation guide was created to guide the facilitation of the activity (See appendix 1). There were 17 exchange students from the Cross-Cultural Management Essentials course present for the test run of our game, and everyone was expected to participate in the activity. All participating students had already completed the X-Culture project before the classroom activity took place, allowing them to be able to reflect on their own experiences of working in a GVT. The students were informed about the classroom activity beforehand, but they had not familiarized themselves with our cards beforehand at all, so the students did not know what to expect from the game.



We worked as the facilitators for our game during the classroom activity. One of us worked as the main facilitator, while the other one was making notes and gathering feedback of the session. The teachers of the Cross-Cultural Management course were also present during the session making notes and preparing feedback of the activity. We had very little experience of working as a facilitator, which is why we created a detailed facilitators guide for this specific activity (See Appendix 1). The first step was to specify how many students would be present for the classroom activity. We were told 17 students would be arriving to the session, and we arranged the classroom accordingly. We were going to form four teams, meaning there had to be four tables and chairs for everyone. The activity began on time once all students had arrived in the classroom. Following the facilitator's guide, we began by explaining the background information of the project and our motives behind organizing it. There were three groups of four students and one group with five students, and all the groups were randomly composed with some students familiar to each other and some not. Five minutes were reserved for the introduction, after which we were able to start the actual activity.

We began by dealing the cards to each team, with each team receiving 13 cards. The cards were placed face down, so that everyone could read their cards at the same time. Once all cards had been dealt, the teams could turn them around and start by reading all 13 cards carefully. They were then asked to reflect on their personal experiences of working in teams, specifically in global virtual teams, and to eliminate three cards they considered to be the least important for the successful teamwork. By this point, each group was left with ten cards with important pieces of advice on their tables. Then, the groups were asked to stand up and move to the table on their left, while leaving their cards on the original tables. By this point, the groups are seated at a new table with 10 cards they have not seen before. The students were asked to read the cards thoroughly once again, and then to eliminate another three cards with the same principle as on the previous round leaving each group with seven cards the students considered to be important for the success of global virtual teamwork. The same process will be repeated once again, leaving the teams with 4 cards. They moved between tables one more time seeing four cards left on the table. They were asked to review the cards, and eliminate two, leaving each table with two cards, before moving back to their original tables. Now, that the groups had moved back to their original tables, they saw the two cards that were left after all groups had eliminated cards from the original deck they were given. The final step in this part of the process was for each team to choose one card as the most important piece of advice in their opinion. All four groups had one card left, and they were

asked to justify their reasoning behind choosing that particular card to everyone. The chosen cards from each team were presented to everyone in the classroom, collected, and documented. The results will be discussed in section 5.

The next step of the classroom activity was the collection of new card ideas from participants. Each student was provided with post-it notes and a pen and was asked to reflect on their own past experiences of working in global virtual teams, specifically during their X-Culture participation. Based on their personal experiences, they were asked to come up with new pieces of advice, they had not seen in the existing cards, but they thought could be useful for other students taking part in the X-Culture project. The new card ideas were written down on the paper notes and the students were allowed to write as many new ideas as they could think of. Eventually, we gathered a total of 15 new card ideas that were different to the existing cards (See Appendix 3).

During the activity, it was clear that students were intrigued by the activity, and we were pleased with their active participation. All students took part in the conversations actively while seeming to enjoy and everyone had opinions to share with their peers. Overall, the activity was successful and completed on time.

## **4.2 Observations made during the activity**

The participants were definitely enjoying this kind of time spending and seemed involved into the process. They were actively discussing which cards to eliminate in each round what was taking approximately 5 minutes per table in the beginning and couple minutes more during the last two rounds. Everyone was included into the conversations, and we did not notice anyone staying quiet. We could also hear how students were discussing X-Culture related topics and justifying their card choices by using their personal experiences. Constant table switching was making them smile and interact more.

Participants chose the cards that became crucial for their success or could have helped in solving some misunderstandings during the project. Almost half of the students had experienced some level of problems related to the situations presented on the cards, and another half expressed that

their projects were more or less successful due to these factors. Some participants were also holding discussions in their native languages and justified it by saying that it was the easier way to make decisions, although the main language of the cards and facilitation is English.

## 5 Results

### 5.1 Focus group discussion.

By the end of the game testing session the participants were asked to come up with the top three most important cards and to justify their choice, which we considered to be a successful ending to our activity. The cards are presented below:

1. Act and participate in the same ways you would like your teammates to do for you.
2. Don't be hesitant to ask for help! Your colleagues are there for you.
3. Make sure everyone understands what to do and when. It is important for the whole team to be "on the same page".

Apparently, several participants had faced inequality and dysfunctional relations between team members, which ultimately had an impact on the process of work as well as the result of the project. They mentioned that not all teammates were friendly and openminded despite good attitudes and acts of encouragement from the rest of the team members. Thus, with the hope of influencing these negative-minded people, participants gave the first place to the card with the advice of treating people in the same way you want to be treated in return. The problem of untimely request for help took the second position among the card finalists. Students mentioned experiencing feelings of disappointment, sadness, and even anger with the freerides that failed to do their parts in time, which lead to demotivation for the rest of the team. Yet, help still was not requested. Participants said that they were scared and embarrassed to share their problems even with their friends not to mention the coaches of the project. By giving the second position to this card participants wished to request for help earlier and stop trying to show patience and tolerance towards irresponsible teammates causing possible friction in the team. The third place was given

to the card related to creating a common standpoint in the team. Students expressed that they could achieve it only by regular meetings on Zoom or some other live platform, since it was easier to brainstorm ideas and come to conclusions while seeing and hearing each other. The participants were also asked to share how frequently they met up with their groups, and it turned out that the teams who would meet in live platforms 3 or more times per week reached notably better results at the end.

All in all, during the post-game discussion, students noted the relation between the advice on the cards and the real situations they faced during the X-Culture project. When they were asked whether these pieces of practical advice would help them resolve any misunderstandings within the team or feel better during the project had they played our game before X-Culture, all participants gave a positive answer.

## 5.2 New card ideas

After the card testing activity, the participants were given the opportunity to write down any possible new cards ideas that they think could complement the already existing card deck, and to choose one new idea per table. Thus, apart from a large number of advice suggestions, we got the focus group's top 4 cards as well.

Many new card ideas were similar or repeating the existing ones, so we selected 15 ideas and highlighted participants' top 4 ones.

1. Adapt yourself and the work of the team to each person's strength.
2. Fix deadline every week
3. Establish a meeting every week to keep everybody up to date.
4. Don't hesitate to explain your opinion, even when you are the only one to think that.
5. Be creative.
6. Understand the skills of each teammate while sharing the work.
7. Be tolerant.

8. Be respectful.
9. Do your best to create team cohesion.
10. Adapt the English skills to allow the whole team to understand one another.
11. Communicate when you have doubts about the project.
12. Warn your teammates if you can't manage to do your work.
13. Use a social media that is used by everyone.
14. Discuss strengths and weaknesses of each member at the start of the project.
15. Be involved or don't choose this course.

It took a while for us to decide what could be the possible outcome of having 15 new ideas for the cards. The first concept was to keep collecting new ideas from former X-Culture participants that would play our game during the Cross-Cultural Management-course at JAMK University of Applied Science. Thus, we would have the chance to create a brand-new alternative deck of cards based only on JAMK students' experiences, which could be quite interesting. The second idea was to go through our 52 cards deck and 15 new ideas and try to merge them by combining certain ideas or excluding the ones that repeat each other. Finally, we could continue collecting ideas the same way as in the first concept, but neither create the new deck nor combine cards into 52 cards deck. Instead, we could have a larger number of cards in the deck and divide it into sections similar to the ones we had during the card selection process. These categories could include for example, "Communication", "Timing and deadlines", and "Attitude and emotions". This would allow facilitators to utilize the card game in more diverse ways, while giving them more freedom to adapt the game to their specific needs.

All in all, it is the part of the future possibilities.

### 5.3 Comments to survey

In the survey that was conducted at the end of the classroom activity, the following questions were asked:

- Do you think this game could have prepared you to X-Culture and for working in a GVT?
- Would playing this be useful to a new X-Culture participant in your opinion?
- Did you like this game as a form of teaching?

Each student was provided with a piece of paper and was asked to answer at least the above-mentioned questions. After analyzing the feedback from the participants, we can conclude that all 17 participants think that our game highlights possible problems and misunderstandings that may arise and simultaneously offers solutions for these issues, which could have prepared them for X-Culture. The participants also said that knowing some of the advice beforehand could have made their time in the project easier, which leads us to believe that our practical advice cards could serve a purpose as a useful interactive learning tool for the future X-Culture participants. The feedback included comments such as “This game can be very useful to understand the best ways to work in a group”. Some participants even hoped they could have played the game with their X-Culture team members, suggesting it would bring the most benefits to the team, when some of the topics such as deadlines, communication, or rules could be discussed beforehand. It was also expressed that playing the game with one’s team before the project could help the members get to know each other better.

Answering the second question, participants claimed that playing our game could be useful for a new X-Culture participant, since it gives an overall impression on what to expect from working in GVT and being an X-Culture project participant in general. It also prepares future students for facing challenges and cultural differences without fear and surprise. Comments such as “it reminds participants to be tolerant and understanding” and “with this game a new participant can begin X-Culture with a lot of tools to achieve great work and know how to work in a group” suggest that the participants understood the purpose of the activity as an educational tool and agree that it could provide X-Culture participants with tools to perform better in a GVT.

All 17 participants said that they liked our game as a form of teaching. They found it interesting to encounter situations they have already faced during X-Culture or to learn something new in an informal atmosphere of playing. Comments such as “Much more practical and engaging than a boring lecture”, “The game was dynamic and fun”, and “The game provokes thinking” confirm that students prefer to learn through a gamified activity rather than more traditional means of teaching.

## 6 Conclusions

As our thesis is a project-based thesis, rather than testing a theory, our main objective was to create a functional learning tool to help future students facing similar challenges as we did. We wanted to create a concrete tool that would help students prepare for projects such as X-Culture, where operating in a GVT is vital, and also to perform better in one. It seems as there currently are no games or activities like ours preparing students for the exact purpose of working in a GVT. In order to do that, we investigated various aspects including game facilitation, gamification, experiential learning, social constructivism, and global virtual teams.

After taking part in the X-Culture project, a set of practical advice cards specifically for GVT's was generated amongst numerous JAMK students based on personal experiences with the project. After investigating, categorizing, and eliminating some of the cards based on relevance, propriety, and importance, a deck of 52 practical advice cards was created. Each card containing a piece of advice serves the purpose of preparing students for the upcoming project, so they are more aware of what to expect from working in a GVT, but also to provide them with possible solutions to challenges they may face during the project.

A test session for the practical advice cards was facilitated in the form of a classroom activity. The goal of the classroom activity was to get previous X-Culture participants from different cultural backgrounds to test out the practical advice cards in a real classroom setting and simultaneously gain feedback and insights on our activity from the very target group of our game. The focus group selected the most important pieces of advice amongst all cards, and in addition produced their own suggestions for new cards. Feedback was collected from the participants and without excep-

tion, all participants agreed that they would have benefitted from participating in the activity before their experience with GVT's. Based on the experiences of the participants and the acquire feedback, we were able to make necessary edits and finalize our deck of cards.

## **6.1 Future research possibilities**

The product of our thesis is a physical deck of practical advice cards, that were prepared to coach students perform better in GVT's in projects such as X-Culture. A facilitation guide has been created for the practical advice cards, where the process of utilizing them in a classroom activity has been explained. However, as the card game is a frame game, multiple different variations of the activity can be implemented with our cards. Although we have used the X-Culture project as the reference for the practical advice cards, the cards are not personalized to only being used in the context of preparing for X-Culture. The practical advice cards can be used when preparing for work in GVT's in any context, because the content of the cards can be applied to any GVT's.

Regarding the future, a digital version of the practical advice cards activity could be established. This way the game could be played with no physical limitations. The activity could even be run virtually in the X-Culture GVT's that are distributed around the globe. The card deck could be extended with additional cards, from previous X-Culture participants to make it suitable for a larger number of participants, as currently the number of participants is somewhat limited. A brand-new alternative card deck could also be created merely based on the experiences and card ideas generated by JAMK students, as there are enough unused card ideas to create a completely new one. As the practical advice cards are only a frame for a game, it could be rather easy to keep developing them into a more detailed game or personalize them for a specific purpose.



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## Appendices:

### Appendix 1. The facilitation guide.

- **About our game**

Through the joint effort of the teams, players must choose top three advice cards out of the 52-card deck that they consider to be the most important for the successful teamwork in GVT and justify their choice at the end.

- **Number of participants:**

From 8 to 24 people

- **The composition of the game**

52 practical advice cards

- **Preparation for the game**

It is mandatory for the game to have 4 teams from 2 to 6 people in each. Preferably players sit together around the tables for the easier process of discussion and card elimination, thus if possible, the playing space should be prepared in advance. 13 cards have to be put on each table face down.

- **How to play**

Players get divided to four teams and take place around the tables. The game begins.

**1<sup>st</sup> round.** Each table turns 13 cards face up and arranges them so that everyone can see and read the content of the cards. Then each team eliminates 3 cards that they consider to be less important for the successful operations in a Global Virtual Team and put these 3 cards face down on the side of the table. 10 cards left.

**2<sup>nd</sup> round.** Players stand up and move clockwise to the next table, while leaving their 10 cards on the original ones. Same process happens as in the previous round, students eliminate 3 cards and add them to the rest of the excluded cards face down. 7 cards left.

**3<sup>rd</sup> round.** Students change tables and eliminate 3 cards again. 4 cards left.

**4<sup>th</sup> round.** Students change tables and eliminate 2 cards. 2 cards left.

**5<sup>th</sup> round.** Teams return to the tables they started from with 2 cards on it. Now they should decide the top card.

**6<sup>th</sup> round.** Next, participants should be asked to discuss why they think the particular card was left on the table in comparison with the rest 12 ones.

**7<sup>th</sup> round.** The top 4 cards (1 card per table) must be shown to everyone, and students vote for the one card to eliminate.

- **End of the game**

The game ends when 3 TOP cards are left.

- **Debriefing the activity**

The following questions can be asked:

- What are your expectations in working as part of a GVT in the future?
- Do you feel you realized the challenges you can face while working in a GVT?
- Do you think this game would help you to be somehow prepared for the possible problems and misunderstandings in your team?
- Did you like this game as a form of teaching?

- **Possible outcomes**

- Students will have an idea of what to expect from being a part of a GVT and how to solve certain problems.
- They will also realize that every team faced some kind of misunderstandings and challenges along the way, so they are not the first or only ones.

- Participants have a chance to mentally prepare for the complications during X-Culture Project.
- Students have beneficial discussions with their colleagues, sharing experiences and opinions related to the topic.
- **Game creators**

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## Appendix 2. The original 52 cards

Act and participate in the same ways that you would like your teammates do for you	Be active and engaging straight from the beginning	Be prepared to go outside of your comfort zone
Be conscious about your actions, as your work inspires your teammates	Be firm with your team members about plagiarism	Be friendly and respectful to your teammates

Be polite and respectful of others' privacy. Privacy means different things in different cultures.	Be practical with your expectations and pragmatic about your resources and skills	Be patient
Consider this project as a learning experience regardless of the results	Don't expect that your teammates will think, behave, talk, and work like you do	Don't be hesitant to ask for help! Your teammates and colleagues are there for you
Don't be selfish, even though your team members might be	Do your best, so that you can be proud of your own work	During meetings, don't only focus on work. Sharing something personal helps to break the ice and built team spirit

Don't get upset if things don't go as planned	Encourage and push the team if necessary	Familiarize yourself with other time zones and try to find common times for meetings and prepare for scheduling challenges
Get to know your case/tasks as much as you can	Give honest feedback on your teammates	It is helpful to know or learn about the concepts related to the field of your work
If there is a problem, talk about it and seek clarity with your teammates	It might be best to agree on a team leader in case problems arise.	Keep an open mind about the project



Let your creativity flow	Look forward to meeting new people	Learn how to manage your stress
Make sure to divide task equally	Make sure everyone understands what to do and when. It is important for the whole team to be “on the same page”	Make sure to introduce yourself to build a bond before starting the project
Make sure to establish clear work ethics and rules	Regular video meetings support team building and allow everyone to catch up on each other’s work	Remember to appreciate yourself and those around you

Set your own personal deadlines	Silence does not equal agreement, always try to respond, and wait for a response	Set clear deadlines, taking into consideration that everyone has different perceptions of time
Start working from the beginning of the project and don't leave the work to the last minute	Take initiative in your hands and don't be afraid to be the first to suggest ideas	Try to maintain constant communication with your team
Talk with your colleagues, who are in the same situation	Try to improve any mistakes or deficiencies, even if it was not your job	Try to establish a connection with your teammates early in the project

Time management is a cornerstone of the project	Take time to think and reflect	Try to create a project timeframe in advance in order that things flow better
When assigning roles, be sure to identify and make use of everyone's strengths and interests	You don't have to put up with free riders. It only makes your work harder	Don't just distribute separate tasks to everybody, try to brainstorm ideas first and then allocate the roles and tasks
Do your part consciously and on time	Do the best of your capability	Don't pass your duties onto others but be ready to assist others in the moment of need

Be prepared to make  
compromises

### Appendix 3. New card ideas from the focus group

Adapt yourself and the work of the team to each person's strengths	Fix deadline every week	Don't hesitate to explain your opinion, even when you are the only one to think that
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Understand the skills of each teammate while sharing the work	Establish a meeting every week to keep everybody up to date	Be creative
Use social media that is used by everyone	Do your best to create team cohesion	Be tolerant
Discuss strengths and weaknesses of each team member at the start of the project	Be respectful	Adapt English skills to allow the whole team to understand one another

Be involved or don't participate in the project	Warn your teammates if you can't manage to do your part	Communicate when you have doubts about the project
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#### Appendix 4. Comments from participants

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It was a good work, and this game can be very useful to understand the best ways to work in a group.</li> <li>- Yes, to understand the main rules for working in a group and it's important that everyone works in the same way.</li> <li>- Yes, it was very funny and not boring.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, of course. It was really interesting to prioritize information and to know what is important in a team and to working in a team.</li> <li>- Yes really, with this game a new participant can start X-Culture with a lot of tools to achieve great work and know how to work in a group.</li> <li>- The teaching of this game was good. In fact, the game was dynamic and fun. It was really participative and interesting.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, this game can prepare the future participant to the project.</li> <li>- I can be a little useful.</li> <li>- It's interactive and everyone is interested.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, it would help.</li> <li>- Yes, as it would allow them to see what aspects of the project would help them the most.</li> <li>- Very good, much more practical and engaging than a boring lecture.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I think this game could have prepared me to X-Culture. It was really interesting.</li> <li>- Yes, I think it could be great for a new participant to play this game and be conscious about rules.</li> <li>- It was very dynamic and fun. It was a good form of teaching.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, in some ways. Just to know that everyone works differently, and we have to adapt.</li> <li>- Yes, why not, to be prepared.</li> <li>- It's interactive, and everyone can share their opinion.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I think it would have been useful to make this game before starting the X-Culture project with my team in order to know them better and to agree on important rules.</li> <li>- Yes, it could be very useful.</li> <li>- It was playful.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- This game could be useful to understand what's really important when we work in a multicultural project such as X-Culture.</li> <li>- This game is a good way to be active in the learning process.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Game helps to see which problems you might have to tackle during the project and how to solve them.</li> <li>- Playing this game before participating in X-Culture project will need more explanation on what the project will be about.</li> <li>- As a form of teaching, games are usually efficient, as participants learn by doing and they will less likely forget the content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I think it is relevant but not necessary because for me some of the cards are obvious.</li> <li>- Yes maybe, to understand better the faults we have to manage.</li> <li>- Yes, but it will be interesting to have a summary to understand better where we are going.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, if the other people of the team (not only JAMK students) participate to this game.</li> <li>- Yes, why not.</li> <li>- It's fun and participative. We can discuss with our teams and have opinions from everyone, so it's very interesting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- It would have helped for the GVT, but each team works differently.</li> <li>- It would be helpful to know the basis of how to manage in groups.</li> <li>- Very creative and playful. Good to have the attention of everyone.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, I think this game could have prepared me to X-Culture and working in a GVT, because we can talk about all the subjects like deadlines, communication, and rules before starting.</li> <li>- Yes, this is useful to a new X-Culture participant, because this member will be not so present at the beginning, but with this game they can introduce themselves easily.</li> <li>- It was nice to have interaction with other students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, this game could prepare me to X-Culture and for working in a GVT.</li> <li>- Yes, this game can be useful to a new X-Culture participant because this game can improve communication between members, introduction and improve the fact of sharing our opinions and making decisions in a team.</li> <li>- I like it.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, it could've been helpful to review all those kinds of topics that are important in teamwork.</li> <li>- Yes, it can remind participants to be tolerant and understanding.</li> <li>- Yes, I personally like this teaching method. It is interactive and captivates the attention.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Yes, I think it could have helped working in a GVT.</li> <li>- Yes, it gives people confidence with how to conduct themselves / what to expect.</li> <li>- It's fun and interactive and provokes thinking.</li> </ul>



- This game allows us to consider what is important to a groupwork and what you have to take into consideration.
- This game was useful because it highlights some important points to understand the principle of collaboration.
- The form of teaching was interesting because it was dynamic and fun. It was the occasion to share our opinions with each other.