The Global Integrative Module (GIM)

An international project for training students solve the social challenges of tomorrow by working in global virtual teams across schools and across programs

Iñesta, Anna
ESADE Business & Law Schools, Universitat Ramon Llull
Centro de Innovación Educativa
Av.Pedralbes, 60-62, 08034 Barcelona (España)
ana.inesta@esade.edu

Valencia, Maika
ESADE Business & Law Schools, Universitat Ramon Llull
Dirección de Calidad y Desarrollo de Programas
Av.Pedralbes, 60-62, 08034 Barcelona (España)
maika.valencia@esade.edu

Caporarello, Leonardo
SDA Bocconi
Department of Organization and Information Systems
Via Bocconi 8, room S003 / 306
20136 MILANO

Statler, Matt
NYU Stern School of Business
Department of Management and Organizations
Kaufman Management Center
44 West Fourth Street, 7-97
New York, NY 10012

Mària, Josep Francesc
ESADE Business & Law Schools, Universitat Ramon Llull
Departamento de Ciencias Sociales
Av.Pedralbes, 60-62, 08034 Barcelona (España)
pep.maria@esade.edu

Revista CIDUI 2016
www.cidui.org/revistacidui
ISSN: 2385-6203

Marin, Jose Luis
ESADE Business & Law Schools, Universitat Ramon Llull
METFund-GIM Project
Av.Pedralbes, 60-62, 08034 Barcelona (España)

Sayeras, Josep Ma
ESADE Business & Law Schools, Universitat Ramon Llull
Departamento de Economía, Finanzas y Contabilidad
Av.Pedralbes, 60-62, 08034 Barcelona (España)

Serlavos, Ricard
ESADE Business & Law Schools, Universitat Ramon Llull
Departamento de People Management & Organization
Av.Pedralbes, 60-62, 08034 Barcelona (España)

Rovira, Xari
ESADE Business & Law Schools, Universitat Ramon Llull
Departamento de Operaciones, Innovación y Data Sciences
Av.Pedralbes, 60-62, 08034 Barcelona (España)
xari.rovira@esade.edu

1. **ABSTRACT:** El Global Integrative Module is an elective course that aims to respond to this challenge by offering an international innovative learning experience lead by ESADE, and with the participation of students from three business school partners; NYU Stern School of Business, SDA Bocconi and Sogang University. This session will share results showing the effectiveness of the GIM as an environment capable of equipping students to confront the challenges of current professional activity.

2. **KEYWORDS (in Catalan or in Spanish)::** Interdisciplinariedad, modulo de aprendizaje, trabajo en equipo, aprendizaje online

KEYWORDS: Interdisciplinarity, learning module, team work, online learning

3. DEVELOPMENT:

1. Introduction

In the highly uncertain current socio-economic environment, the increasing rate of globalization and developments in information and communication technology, have invited management professionals to confront a complex labor market, characterized by multicultural environments, competitiveness, flexibility and the need for continuous learning (van Baalen & Moratis, 2001; Dess & Picken, 2000; Taras, Caprar, Rottig, et al. 2013). This has brought with it a "need for cross-cultural and virtual collaboration competencies across all organizational ranks, professions and industries" (Taras, Caprar, Rottig, et al. 2013: 429). Furthermore, in the last few years intrapreneurial activity from a cross-cultural perspective has come to be considered a requirement in innovative organizations (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis & Strange, 2002; Reiter-Palmon & Illies, 2004). In line with this, creativity has come to be considered one of the most valuable characteristics among managers, as it allows for more successful problem solving (Proctor, 1999; Puccio, Firestien, Coyle & Masucci, 2006; Puccio & Cabra, 2009). Moreover, the development of intercultural competence has been considered "the biggest challenge that looms in the new millennium" (Waldman, de Luque, & Wang, 2012: 14). To which one must add the need to train future managers to participate in civil society (Hollander, 2007; Watson, 2007) and "to enhance public prosperity and well-being" (Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011, p.4).

Traditional teaching methods are no longer sufficient to train future competent managers who are capable of performing well in the conditions outlined above, and Business Schools are proceeding to innovate their curricula and educational practices so as to adapt to students' future professional needs (Jurse & Mulej, 2011; Rehg, Gundlach, & Grigorian,2012), and the kind of innovation required goes beyond international field trips and internships. The characteristics of the current professional arena require management schools to develop the kind of powerful learning environments (de Corte, Verschaffel, Entwistle, Van Merriënboer, 2003) that are necessary for students to embark on their professional career with the necessary knowledge and skills. Only in this case will they be able to add value to the knowledge-construction processes that provide their organizations with the innovation edge that will ensure their success and survival in the changing market.

The Global Integrative Module (GIM from now on), an international innovative learning experience lead by ESADE, aims to respond to this challenge by proposing a competence-based module based on the resolution of a challenge of social impact. This paper will present the results obtained regarding the effectiveness of the GIM as an environment capable of equipping students with the knowledge and competencies necessary to confront the challenges of the current professional environment, considering both students' performance and the stakeholders' perceptions. In the following lines we present the theoretical underpinnings this teaching and learning design is based on and the teaching and learning experience of the GIM is described.

2. Modules as suitable learning environments to train future managers

modules are curriculum units of a more global nature than traditional courses, which allow for the design of innovative learning tasks and dynamics. Such innovation lies in the characteristics of the tasks which articulate the students' learning process and which we may summarize as being:

- More complex: from the point of view of cognitive complexity (they require profound knowledge of concepts from different knowledge fields), personal complexity (tasks which promote the development of students' awareness as individuals / future professionals by requiring from them a clear positioning regarding the analyzed question) and relational complexity (teamwork, influence, leadership).
- More authentic: in that task resolution requires from students the application of learning processes similar to those which take place in the context of real professional activity.
- Transversal: not restricted by the disciplinary conventions found in courses.

Therefore, we will claim that the kind of tasks and learning dynamics that can be proposed in Integrative Modules contribute to the integral formation of students (i.e., involving the participant in the holistic sense of the term) and allow for authentic competence based assessment (Gielen, Dochy & Dierick, 2003) characterized by the fulfillment of the conditions detailed below (Wiggins, 1990):

§ Students' achievement is examined on the basis of relevant tasks

§ It requires students to apply the learnt knowledge in situations which are as similar as possible to professional situations

§ The proposed problems are ill-structured, intentionally ambiguous, reflecting the complexity of the professional world.

§ The group of knowledge and competences necessary to solve the specific situation/task is evaluated simultaneously

• A justified argumentation of the students' answers to the questions designed to solve the problem is required

• The ability to act intentionally in social contexts is evaluated.

Among the expected benefits of this type of tasks in students' learning we can find:

a) Students' adjustment of their learning strategies: If participants realize that the central objective of the task proposed in the Module is to allow for the knowledge and competences learned to be available for the successful resolution of future problems and authentic tasks, they will approach the learning process in a deeper way

b) Increased student' motivation: the resolution of the tasks involves a challenge, a new situation which allows students to position themselves in the professional's shoes, approaching their learning to the professional reality.

c) Possible retroactive effects upon the teaching-learning process, that is, upon the way professors approach the teaching process. If professors become aware that students will need to face complex and authentic tasks, they may adjustment the way in which they articulate their formative proposals so as to improve students' achievement and performance in this kind of tasks.

Finally, through the creation of Global virtual teams (GVTs), integrative modules like the GIM allow for the promotion of a global view and collaboration among participating faculty and

students alike. These teams are geographically dispersed teams and use Internet-mediated communication to collaborate on common goals. Typically, these teams consist of members from diverse cultural backgrounds who have previously not worked together in face-to-face contexts (Lipnack & Stamps, 2000). Among other advantages, Taras, Caprar, Rotting, et al. (2013: 415) claim that "GVTs can provide students an opportunity to gain direct experience in working across cultures and time zones" and can, therefore, serve as an effective personal development tool in organizations (Maznevski & DiStefano, 2000).

3. The Global Integrative Module Experience: outline of the learning experience

The GIM was designed as an evolution of an Integrative Module which was implemented for the first time in the academic year 2010-2011 at the beginning of the second year of the Bachelor of Business Administration - BBA (henceforth BBA) at ESADE Business School. Following the success of this module, a global edition (the GIM) was created and, having been awarded funding from the i2i Challenge Call 2012 of the GMAC Management Education for Tomorrow (MET) Fund, a local face-to-face pilot edition was implemented at ESADE in the academic year 2012-2013.

The local edition involved the participation of ESADE students from three distinct academic programs: the Master in Business Administration (henceforth MBA), Master of Science Programs (henceforth MSc Programs) and the BBA, who worked together in academically diverse teams to propose a solution to a topic of high relevance ("How can companies contribute in order to ensure a healthy lifestyle for future generations?").

The first international edition of GIM (2013-2014)

The 2013-2014 edition of the GIM progressed further, incorporating the participation of students from three partner business schools (NYU Stern School of Business, SDA Bocconi and Sogang University) who, making use of virtual learning platforms, worked together with ESADE students in academically and culturally diverse teams to resolve the current social, political and economic challenge: "Why and how can companies contribute to the reduction of economic inequality in the world?"

By going global and opening the module to a wider range of students varying in terms of both cultural and academic profiles (enrolled in undergraduate, MSc and MBA programs) the GIM provides a distinct learning experience in that:

- the problem to be solved is internationally relevant.
- students need to cater for both global and local implications at the same time when constructing their positioning on the matter the teams are formed by students from the different participating Business Schools and by students of different levels of expertise.
- a virtual learning environment has been designed so as to enhance students' international team.

As for the specific learning objectives, at the end of the Global Integrative Module students are to have:

- developed a professional approach allowing them to feel capable of confronting and successfully solving problems, no matter how complex these might be.
- developed competences to solve complex problems by applying pragmatic as well as socially responsible criteria, catering for both global and local perspectives.

- participated in shared decision-making and information search through strategic ICT use.
- developed competences to collaborate in the construction of a community of practice (simulation of professional consultancy situation) in virtual environments, making the most out of the opportunities that these put at our disposal.

The design and implementation of GIM required collaboration from Project Leaders at each of the four partner business schools, as well as interdisciplinary cooperation from members of an Academic Team of ESADE professors pertaining to the departments of Economics, People Management and Social Sciences. Also, a tutor from each of the partner business schools was placed in charge of three teams of international students. The role of tutors involved supporting the different teams of students. Support was offered mainly online, although in the case of in-house students face-to-face meetings also took place. Tutors were the first point of contact for students in the case of doubts or queries. Finally, a committee was created for the purpose of assessing students' work. This committee consisted of the Academic Team of professors at ESADE together with the Project Leaders and the GIM Coordination team.

The 2013-2014 of the GIM counted on the participation of a total number of 74 students from the four participating business schools. The profile of students was hugely diverse in terms of culture as we have students from 24 different nationalities participating in the GIM. 12 highly diverse teams both in terms of academic profile and cultural background were created.

The proposed challenge asked students to consider themselves part of a team of professionals who had been contacted in order to elaborate a consultant report. The purpose of the report was to present a well-thought out solution to the challenge that companies are currently facing. In order to solve this challenge the teams have had the following resources at their disposal: introductory video lectures from three different fields of knowledge (Economics, People Management and Sociology), readings and other materials provided by the committee and tutors, and access to their team's Virtual Studio, an online learning platform where they could work collaboratively to elaborate the various deliverables required before the submission of the final report. Students were given an editing role in their Virtual Studio allowing them full control when deciding how and why their studio should be used. The objective of these studios was to enhance shared knowledge-construction and problem-solving among the members of the international teams.

4. Method

The study we present aims at obtaining results that will allow us to assess the contribution of the GIM project to students' learning. Specifically, our objectives are:

- To analyse the stakeholders' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the GIM as an environment capable of equipping students with the knowledge and competencies necessary to confront the challenges of the current professional environment
- To assess the contribution of the GIM Project to students' learning of what the challenge required from them (i.e. understanding of what economic inequality involves and awareness of the role companies to reduce it)

Regarding the first objective, our initial assumptions are that the GIM Project will prove an effective environment capable of training future responsible managers and allow students to acquire competences to develop their creativity and intercultural competence in the process

of taking managerial decisions. With regards to the second objective, our initial assumption is that the GIM Project's learning task will allow students to obtain a deep understanding of the kind of contribution companies can make to reduce economic inequality on both a local and global level.

The sample includes 74 students, 4 tutors, and project leaders from the four participating business school as well as the Academic Team from ESADE.

5. Results and Discussion

Regarding the first objective, aiming to analyse the stakeholders' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the GIM as an environment capable of the equipping students with the knowledge and competencies necessary to confront the challenges of the current professional environment, we obtained a response rate in our first research instrument, the final survey, of 33.33% among participating students and of 67% among the participating faculty, tutors and project leaders.

The results obtained have allowed us to partially confirm our initial assumptions. The data collected have shown that one of the main contributions of their learning experience during their participation in the project was the intercultural dimension involved in the process of taking managerial decision. However, students' perceptions have not indicated the development of creativity as one of the main learning outcomes of the GIM project.

Specifically, a majority of students' citations in the reflection paper mentioned the increased understanding of a relevant global issue/develop global competency, working in an international environment and fostering team building skills as a contribution of their participation in the project. Also, among the aspects mentioned as strengths of the project students highlighted the internationality of the experience (this was also the most highly rated item in the quantitative section of the final survey, obtaining a 6.4 out of 7), the coordination and planning they had had to master to fulfil the objectives of the project, and the complexity and challenges they had to address.

The data collected from the academic team members, tutors and project leaders's answers to the final survey confirm students' feedback by highlighting as strengths of the module the fact that it makes students deal with complexity, the interculturality of the learning experience and the fact that it makes students confront the impact diversity and different learning styles can have when working in teams for a common complex goal. Also, the data collected reveal that the main takeaways for the academic team members, tutors and project leaders involved were related with the new learning processes they were jointly contributing to design and propose for the students, with the challenges of working with international teams they themselves experienced as members of the international GIM coordination team, and the international perspective.

Regarding the second research objective, aiming to assess the contribution of the GIM Project to students' learning of what the challenge required from them (i.e. understanding of what economic inequality involves and awareness of the role companies to reduce it), the content analysis conducted on the data obtained through the students' reflection paper (produced by 51% of the participating students) partially confirms our initial assumption that the GIM Project's learning task will allow students to obtain a deep understanding of the kind of

contribution companies can make to reduce economic inequality on both a local and global level. This is the case because while students' feedback confirmed the perception of a change in their understanding of economic inequality as a global issue (receiving 18 citations, 24% of them), as well as their participation in the project having drawn their attention to the challenges faced and the role played by companies in reducing economic inequality (with 10 citations, 14,4%), the grades obtained by teams in the different outcomes show just an above the average performance instead of the excellence that would indicate an in-depth approach (with an average score of 3.4 for the first deliverable, 4.3 for the second deliverable, 4.0 for the third one and 3.8 for the fourth and last one, all scores above 5) and result from an assessment of students' learning that would not support a deep understanding of the issue under study. This result has triggered an important reflection process among the academic team members, tutors and project leaders, which has resulted in the introduction of a series of adjustments in the design of the GIM experience to be implemented in the following edition of 2014-2015 with the objective of ensuring that the learning process proposed enhances not only the development of the competencies related with interculturality and project management but also the acquisition of more in-depth knowledge regarding the issue of economic inequality. Among these adjustments we find the introduction of a test designed to ensure students' understanding of the main constructs involved, increased contact with the members of the academic team and project leaders so as to provide more opportunities for interaction related to the contributions of the different knowledge areas to the resolution of the challenge.

All in all, the data obtained in this implementation has revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the Global Integrative Module as a learning experience, providing project leaders with the necessary insight to ensure an enhanced edition of the Module in the following academic year 2014-2015, and we expect the data we will collect on this second edition will allow us to confirm a progress in the development of this project as a relevant learning experience for management leaders of the future.

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