

Enhancing Student Employability Through Global Virtual Teams in Higher Education: An Exploratory Study Among Greek X-Culture Participants

Antonis Klidas and Marilena Antoniadou

School of Business and Economics, Deree – The American College of Greece, Greece

Abstract. Global Virtual Teams are increasingly used in international business education in order to help students develop professional skills and competences needed for global careers in business. This study explores the effects of participation in the X-Culture Project, a global collaborative initiative, on students' employability and professional development. We conducted in-depth interviews with 23 students of an American liberal arts college in Greece who had completed the X-Culture project successfully. Our findings uncovered positive effects on students' employability mostly manifested in enhanced soft skills, global virtual teamworking experience and cultural adaptability. Although not all participants reported a positive X-Culture experience, there was unanimous recognition of the positive impact of X-Culture on students' psychological capital, especially in terms of enhanced self-efficacy perceptions, resilience and optimism. The study findings underline the transformative learning impact of international collaborations based on global virtual teams and the need to incorporate such experiences in higher education curricula.

Keywords: Global Virtual Teams, X-Culture, employability capital, psychological capital, global skills.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, a primary goal of higher education (HE) has been to enhance student employability, ensuring students are 'job ready' upon graduation (Moore & Morton, 2017). However, this goal is often unmet, as evidenced by the recognized 'skills gap' between employer expectations and graduate skill levels (Hurrell, 2016; Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020; Succi & Canovi, 2020; Konstantinou & Miller, 2021; Bhatti et al., 2023). Similarly, international business education struggles to produce graduates prepared for an increasingly globalized and multicultural world (Kedia & Englis, 2011; Key et al., 2022). Traditional classroom teaching falls short in imparting the global skills necessary for effective functioning in a multicultural environment (Mendenhall et al., 2013;

This shortened version of the article is for promotional purposes on publicly accessible databases.

Readers who wish to obtain the full text version of the article can order it via the url

<https://www.neilsonjournals.com/JIBE/abstractjibe20klidanton.html>

Any enquiries, please contact the Publishing Editor, Peter Neilson pneilson@neilsonjournals.com

© NeilsonJournals Publishing 2025.

Xu & Flambard, 2021; Swartz & Shrivastava, 2022). Real cultural immersion experiences, such as study abroad programs and international internships, are argued to be more effective (Taras et al., 2013) but are utilized by only a small proportion of students (Daniel et al., 2019; Rauer et al., 2021).

A more accessible alternative is the use of global virtual teams (GVTs), where students from different cultures collaborate on projects (e.g., Shea et al., 2011; Erez et al., 2013; Swartz, et al., 2020; Rauer et al., 2021; Stoica et al., 2021; Vidovic et al., 2021; Baker & Klidas, 2022; Zetting et al., 2022). The X-Culture Project, a notable example of such international collaboration, aims to enhance students' cross-cultural competence through GVTs (Taras et al., 2013). Despite numerous studies on GVTs' functioning and effectiveness (e.g., Taras et al., 2019; Davaei et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2022), no research has explored X-Culture's impact on student employability and career development. Understanding these influences is crucial in today's global job market, where cross-cultural collaboration is essential.

Our qualitative exploratory study addresses this gap by examining the impact of X-Culture on graduates' employability. Focusing on graduates from an American liberal arts college in Greece, who participated in X-Culture as part of a Cross-Cultural Management course, we employed the 'employability capital' framework of Peeters et al. (2019) to identify personal resources in the form of human and social capital that support employability. We complemented this with the concept of 'psychological capital' (Luthans et al., 2014), recognizing the importance of positive psychological resources in achieving academic and professional success. The integration of psychological capital aligns with the rise of positive psychology and positive organizational behavior (Luthans & Youssef, 2007). Consistent with Stahl and Tung's (2015) call for a positive approach to studying culture in international business, we treated cultural differences in our course positively and proposed virtual cross-cultural immersion as a unique opportunity for professional and personal development.

The primary aim of this study is to assess X-Culture's influence on career development and employability among Greek private college students. Specifically, we evaluate how the project contributes to developing employability capital—skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enhance an individual's ability to gain and retain employment—and psychological capital, namely the resources of resilience, optimism, hope, and self-efficacy. We also examine how these experiences help students develop their cross-cultural competence, a critical asset in today's globalized workforce (Hruby et al., 2020; Swartz et al., 2020).

Our study contributes to cross-cultural management education theory by linking collaborative projects like X-Culture with graduate employability. It enriches existing knowledge by documenting how international collaborative projects can enhance employability and psychological capital among students. The research highlights the importance of such projects in developing critical soft skills, such as adaptability, teamworking, leadership, problem-solving, and cross-

cultural communication skills, which are crucial in the global job market. These findings suggest HE institutions should integrate structured international collaborative projects into their curricula to better prepare students for the global economic landscape. Additionally, the insights into psychological capital development and its role in student employability offer valuable information for educators and curriculum designers seeking to enhance students' career readiness.

In what follows, we review employability literature and present the concept of employability capital integrating in the discussion the perspective of psychological capital. We then present a conceptual framework articulating the expected impact of X-Culture on these capitals. Subsequently, we outline our research methodology and present and discuss the research findings. Finally, our paper discusses implications for theory and practice and concludes with our study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review

Overview of Employability

Employability is increasingly viewed as a dynamic, lifelong process involving the acquisition and enhancement of qualifications, experiences, and attributes that facilitate not just securing initial employment but also preserving and advancing a career. This concept has evolved from merely reflecting skills and qualifications to encompassing a broader spectrum of "personal capabilities", including skills, understandings, and personal attributes that enhance one's capacity to obtain and maintain gainful employment (Hillage & Pollard, 1998). This framework posits that employability not only improves one's position within the labor market but also enhances the ability to navigate different career paths effectively.

The definition of employability has been long debated (Harvey, 2001), and the massification of HE often conflates it with employment outcomes. This confusion leads to simplistic measures, like the percentage of graduates securing full-time jobs within a set timeframe, to evaluate HE institutions employability initiatives. In the UK, for example, graduate statistics are collected fifteen months post-graduation as indicators of success, driven by pressure to simplify metrics (Birmingham et al., 2021). However, this approach presents two issues: it reduces 'employability' to merely obtaining and maintaining employment, focusing on immediate job placement rates, and shifts the perception from an individual's ability to secure employment to an institutional accomplishment, overlooking graduates' personal agency.

Governments globally increasingly recognize HE's role in developing 'human capital', crucial for national prosperity and societal welfare (Yorke & Knight, 2007). Enhancing graduate employability is a critical goal, referring to graduates' readiness for jobs matching their education level. However,

employability differs from job acquisition, which is affected by factors like economic conditions and market discrimination (Linke, 1991; Knight & Yorke, 2004). This shifts the focus from simply securing jobs to broader preparation and capability-building for workforce success.

Employability Capital

Numerous scholars from various academic fields have emphasized the importance of establishing unified definitions and integrating conceptual frameworks concerning employability (e.g., Harvey, 2001; Knight & Yorke, 2004; Small et al., 2018; Peeters et al., 2019). This study adopts the framework developed by Peeters et al. (2019), which provides a comprehensive structure for understanding employability in a coherent and holistic manner. The term ‘employability capital’ builds upon Forrier et al.’s (2009) notion of movement capital, encompassing a broader spectrum of labor market dynamics, including the ability to secure and retain jobs. This dual understanding highlights that the competencies constituting employability are crucial for both securing and retaining employment.

Employability capital, as defined by Peeters and her colleagues, consists of an array of personal resources, including knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These resources help individuals navigate and overcome challenges within the labor market, thereby strengthening their position and enhancing their employability. In the framework of Peeters et al. (2019), employability capital comprises several dimensions: job-related capital, career-related capital, and development-related capital. Job-related capital includes skills and knowledge directly applicable to specific job roles, encompassing hard skills like technical know-how and proficiency with tools, and soft skills like communication and teamwork, crucial across various roles. Career-related capital involves broader competencies for navigating career paths, such as networking, career planning, and creating professional growth opportunities. Development-related capital focuses on continuous learning and personal development, enhancing current job performance and preparing individuals for future roles, emphasizing lifelong learning, adaptability, and personal growth. Peeters et al. (2019) also highlight social capital, which involves networks and relationships that support career opportunities and advancement, enhancing the use of one’s knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the labor market.

Psychological Capital

While Peeters et al. (2019) underscore the role of personal resources in enhancing an individual’s labor market position, they do not integrate psychological resources in their framework. However, there is increasing recognition that psychological resources in the form of psychological capital (PsyCap) play a pivotal role in an individual’s employability throughout one’s career (Jabeen et al., 2022). In fact, several studies incorporate psychological capital as an integral