Teaching Project Management in Virtual Teams Since 12 Years: Some Lessons Learned

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Presentation Summary

Nowadays working teams are often globally distributed and composed of participants from multiple disciplines and cultures who rely on professional communication support. Companies, organizations and institutions increasingly embrace these virtual teams and use a variety of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support synchronous and asynchronous team interaction (e.g., chat, videoconferencing, e-mail, group support systems, instant messaging, forums). More and more communication takes place without meeting face-to-face. Consequences for productivity are well-known e.g., social loafing.

Students should be prepared and trained for such a workplace where project management take also place online. However, it is difficult to emulate the specifics of real world projects in a 100-hour university course. Also, and even with the development of internationalization programs, the opportunity to meet and collaborate with students from different cultures is limited.

Thus, achieving the primary goal of in-class education (e.g., building a solid core of knowledge) and defining professional specificities in the class in conjunction with giving students the opportunity to collaborate across professional culture are even more difficult. One way to bring the real world into the classroom is by combining the efforts of 100 students into a 10,000-hour project.

During the panel session we will present the Hong Kong Netherlands (HKNet) project as an example of an integrated learning activity between multiple international institutions that brings the reality of project management with professional communication into educational contexts. Virtual teams composed of students from different parts of the world (Hong Kong, The Netherlands, Orlando, Florida) build websites on specific topics that are then integrated into a single product.

The HKNet project has entered its twelve year and over 1100 students have participated. Since three years we are using virtual world (SecondLife) to improve the virtual teams' sense of place and reduce psychological distance amongst the participants. Conclusions and further technological improvements will be presented and discussed with the audience.

Brief Biography

Anne-Françoise Rutkowski is Associate Professor in the department of Information Systems and Management at Tilburg University (The Netherlands). Since 1999, her research interests and publications bridged IS and human sciences in addressing topics such as group decision making, processes of attention with ICTs, e-learning, virtual teams and virtual worlds. Applications of her work are found in the field of education, healthcare and more recently in the banking sector. She received in 2002 the "Philips Innovation Award" and the First Annual AIS 2004 (Association for Information Systems) Award for Innovation in Information Systems Education with honorable mention. Results of her research have been published in journals such as *Computer, IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, Small Group Research and Decision Support System.*