Training Module 1

What Is X-Culture and How It Works

Updated: January 27, 2018

Learning by Doing
History

X-Culture was launched in 2010. It was originally designed for university students. Universities from 7 countries (about 400 students) participated in X-Culture in the first round. Since then, our team has been growing steadily. Now, close to 5,000 Master’s and undergraduate students from over 140 universities in 40 countries on 6 continents participate in X-Culture each semester (see the complete list here).

In 2013, several companies teamed up with X-Culture and presented their real-life business challenges for our students to solve. Ever since, we partner with 5-10 companies every semester. They ask for help with real-life international business challenges. The students try to help those companies solve their challenges.

In 2012, the first X-Culture Global Symposium was held in Florida as a part of the AIB-SE conference.

In 2013, Mercedes-Benz hosted the X-Culture symposium at its full-cycle bus and truck factory in Turkey. Subsequently, annual X-Culture meetings have been hosted by corporate partners including the Home Depot, Louis Vuitton, JBC, Hard Rock International, and Perkins. The opportunity to meet face-to-face with their teammates, exchange ideas, expand professional and personal networks further benefits our students.

In 2016, X-Culture Webinars with CEOs became standard. Additionally, our graduates created the X-Culture Alumni Association and the X-Culture Coaching Program was launched.

In 2018, we have the first group of X-Culture Kids ages 9-17 participating in X-Culture.

Why?

International Experience

We live in a global world. In school, at work, in our personal lives, we must interact with people of different cultures. International experience helps us interact more effectively.

Everybody wants to hire people with international experience. They are more likely to be admitted to good universities and get good jobs.

Teaching how to work with people from different cultures is notoriously hard. It is not something one can learn from books or lectures. Learning in a classroom how to interact with foreigners is like learning how to swim on a football field.

One must get in the water to learn how to swim. One must have a practical international experience to understand other cultures.
Unfortunately, it is not easy to find opportunities to gain international experience. International travel is costly. Even if one can afford to go overseas as a tourist, there is a big difference between being a tourist and being a co-worker.

X-Culture is an effective way to gain international experience and learn how to work in global virtual teams.

**Business Experience**

Just like international experience, business experience is hard to gain from books or lectures. It is hard to understand business theories without applying them in practice.

X-Culture students solve international business problems for real companies. The students receive detailed information about their client company and its products. Then students have live webinars with company managers. Then they try to solve the challenges presented by their client companies.

So, in addition to international experience, X-Culture students also receive business consulting experience.

**Program Design**

**Pre-Project Training (4 weeks)**

A series of training modules, such as:

- Online Collaboration Tools (Skype, Doodle, Dropbox, Google Docs, WhatsApp, etc.)
- Cross-cultural communication.
- Problem solving in teams.
- Team leadership.
- The art of writing winning business proposals.
- Plagiarism and academic referencing.
- The basics of International Business.

**Practical Training (8 weeks)**

The students work in global virtual teams:

- The students are placed in international teams (typically 5-7 people per team, each from a different country).
- The students are serving as consultants to real businesses and develop their solutions to real-life problems presented by our business partners.
- They experience the challenges and learn best practices of working in teams, communicating online, dealing with time-zones, and cultural differences.
- Students have webinars with the CEOs of their client organizations.
- After completion of the project, the teams submit their final business proposals.

**Post-Project Reflections (4 weeks)**

After the reports are submitted:

- Students present their work in-class and/or in a live online teleconference.
- Students write papers where they reflect on their experiences.
Benefits

1. **International experience**
   Complete a project in a team where each team member is from a different country.

2. **Business experience**
   Solve a real business challenge for a real client company.

3. **New knowledge and skills**
   Train in cross-cultural communication, online collaboration tools, international business, business writing and presentation, and more.

4. **Personal and professional network**
   Friends around the world, contacts at many universities and several companies.

5. **Cultural intelligence**
   A documented significant improvement in cultural intelligence from before to after the project.

6. **X-Culture Certificate and Recommendation Letter**
   You learn and grow. We provide a documented proof.

7. **Stronger resume and improved chances of a new start**
   X-Culture experience makes you a much stronger applicant for a higher-education school, stipend or job.

The Task

The goal of X-Culture is to give trainees an opportunity to complete a business project in an international team. The exact questions that the teams need to answer are less important than cross-cultural interactions, teamwork, and problem solving.

The trainees in X-Culture serve as business consultants to real companies and help solve their real-life international business challenges. Below are several examples of the problems that the students may be asked to solve:

**For kids**

Client: **Innosaprk**, a Lithuanian manufacturer of educational toys

Challenge:
- Research who else is making educational toys and advise Innospark on how they can improve their product to make it more competitive.
- What would be the best new market for Innospark? In which country do you think people would buy toys like this?
- Research and describe this country.
- How would you sell toys in this country? Where would you advertise, what would your ads say, and why?
- What should be the price of Innospark toys in that country? Why?
- What is the best way to ship the toys to that country? Why?
Client: **Finnish Schools International**, a network of private schools that operate around the world, using the Finnish education methods and teachers from Finland.

Challenge:
- Design the school of your dream. If you could design a school any way you want, what would it be like? What would you teach? How? How would you test if the kids are learning?
- In which country do you think parents would want to send their kids to your dream school?
- Research and describe this country. What do your teachers need to know about the country before moving there to teach the kids?
- How would you select the teachers for your schools? How and how much would you pay them?
- How much should studying in your dream school cost? Remember, you must make enough money to pay your teachers and for your building, electricity, etc.
- How would you convince the parents in this country to send their kids to your dream school? Where would you advertise your dream school, what would your ads say, and why?

The results need to be presented in a team report 10-20 pages in length.

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**For Professionals**

Client: S-Cape, a manufacturer of raincoats

Challenge:
- Conduct an industry survey and analyze how S-Cape compares to its competitors, its strengths and weaknesses.
- What would be the most promising new market for S-Cape?
- What does S-Cape need to know about the market’s economy, political system, institutions, and culture to be successful there?
- What is the best way to start selling S-Cape products in that market? Should they rely on direct exports, open their own stores, sell through distributors or retailers, or sell online?
- What is the best way to advertise S-Cape’s products in the proposed market? Design the marketing strategy, including promotional channels, marketing message, marketing budget, and design a sample marketing ad.
- What is the best way to ship S-Cape products to the proposed market? Provide the estimated shipping and insurance costs.
- If S-Cape needs to hire personnel in the proposed market, what is the best strategy for personal recruitment, selection, compensation, and management?

The results need to be presented in a team report 20-35 pages in length.

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**Communication**

The communication among the students starts via email. Email is the most universal online communication method worldwide. Just about everyone has an email account and knows how to use email.

Students will be trained in how to use other online communication and collaboration tools such as Skype, WhatsApp, Viber, Facebook closed groups, Dropbox, Google Docs, and the like. The teams are free to choose any communication methods.

Most teams start with email and continue using emails throughout the project, but many also create a closed group in Facebook or WhatsApp, have occasional meetings in Skype, and also use either Dropbox or Google Docs.
Team Leadership

We will not be appointing team leaders. Every team member is equal. However, teams are welcome to elect a team coordinator if they want. Usually an informal leader emerges two or three weeks into the project and this person does most of the coordination. But some teams hold a formal election and select a team coordinator. Some teams may also agree that someone is responsible for writing, someone else for research, and someone else may do the graphics. Ultimately, we leave it up to the team to decide how they want to govern themselves. However, we closely monitor what is going on in the team and provide help if the team cannot self-organize.

Time Requirements

The X-Culture trainees (and for younger trainees their teachers and parents) should expect to invest a considerable amount of their time and effort.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trainees</th>
<th>Hours</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-Project Theory Training</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Studying training materials</td>
<td>2-3 per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly theory test</td>
<td>1 per week</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Practical Training</strong> (8 weeks)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Correspondence with teammates, per week</td>
<td>1-2 per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research and report write up, per week</td>
<td>1-2 per week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other unexpected tasks and issues that need to be addressed</td>
<td>1-2 per week</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Post-Project (4 weeks)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparation for presentation</td>
<td>2-3 total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentations (in class or online)</td>
<td>1-2 total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing a reflections paper</td>
<td>4-5 total</td>
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<td><strong>Average per week over the 4 months</strong></td>
<td>3-6 per week</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL over the 4 months</strong></td>
<td>40-80 total</td>
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Teams

Each team is comprised of 5-6 students. They will be from different countries.

Depending on the number of participants from different countries, it is possible that some teams will have multiple students from the same country (e.g., two students from the U.S., four more students each from a different country).

Performance Appraisal

To be able to identify problems early on, we monitor every student’s performance and provide help once problems are identified. This is what we measure:
1. **Four weekly theory tests**
   At the end of each of the four weeks of the pre-project training, the students will be taking a test. The tests will evaluate the students’ ability to work with information and learn the skills that are necessary for completing a business consulting project in an international team.

2. **Weekly progress surveys**
   At the end of each of the eight weeks of the practical training, each student will be asked to complete a progress survey. The survey will ask how the student and the team are doing, how they are progressing with their task, and what kind of help may be needed.

3. **Plagiarism**
   After the project is over, the teams will submit their final reports. Each report will be automatically checked for plagiarism. Reports that contain plagiarized work will be excluded from the competition.

4. **Report quality**
   Each team report will be evaluated by a panel of experts (university professors and client company representatives). The winning teams will be selected based on the quality of their team report.

5. **Reflection paper quality**
   After the project is over, the students will be asked to write a reflection paper that describes what they have learned from working in an international team and how they can use this knowledge in their future careers. The papers will be evaluated for quality and the students will receive feedback on their work.

**Underperforming Students**

It is our goal and expectation that every student who is admitted to the X-Culture Academy successfully completes the program. However, X-Culture is a team project. Students who do not meet the expectations of their teams may be excluded from their teams.

The reasons for exclusion could be the following:

- **Missed or failed one of the weekly theory tests.**
  Students who fail the theory test will be given a chance to re-take it, but a failure on the second attempt will lead to the exclusion from the program.

- **Low peer evaluations**
  Peer evaluations are measured on a 5-point scale (5=excellent, 4=good, 3=acceptable, 2=low, 1=bad). Peer evaluations below 2.5 will result in a warning. If the peer evaluations do not improve next week (2.5 or less two weeks in a row), the student will be excluded from the team.

- **Disrespectful behavior**
  Instances of conflicts and disruptive behaviors (bullying, excessive confrontation, obscene language) will be investigated and may lead to exclusion of students from the project.

Instances when students underperform to the extent when they must be excluded from the project are extremely rare. Even if somebody is having difficulties meeting the team’s expectations, we try to provide help and guidance, which almost always helps.
Cannot Change Teams

Occasionally, we get a request from a student who asks to be transferred to another team. Sorry, we will not be able to move students to other teams. But we will help students work out their problems in the old team.

So if something goes wrong in your team, if somebody is not working hard, or is not nice to you, please let us know. We will talk to the “bad” team member and help you resolve the problem.

Certificates and Recommendation Letters

Upon a successful completion of the X-Culture Project, all students will receive:

- Personal performance review
- Personal Cultural Intelligence report
- Personal recommendation letter
- X-Culture Global Business Certificates

Winner Awards

Additionally, the members of the Best Team will receive additional Winner certificates. They will also be invited to the X-Culture Global Symposium where they will meet their team members and other X-Culture graduates, and participate in the program designed to prepare students for a successful career.

The next meeting will be in Italy in July and then in the U.S. in October.
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<tr>
<th>Jan 29 – Feb 25</th>
<th><strong>Theoretical Training</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Each week, the students have to review several training modules.</td>
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<td>The training modules for the week will be released on Monday.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The training modules are located here: <a href="https://x-culture.org/2018-1">https://x-culture.org/2018-1</a> (password: 20181).</td>
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<td>The students should plan to spend 2-3 hours studying the training materials.</td>
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<td>Each Wednesday, each student will receive an email with a personal link to the weekly Theory Test.</td>
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<td>The students have until 11:59 pm on Sunday of that week to complete the Theory Test.</td>
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<td>The test will take about 30 minutes to complete, but students can take as much time as they need to complete the test.</td>
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<td>To pass the test, the students must correctly answer at least 80% of the test questions.</td>
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<td>Only students who successfully pass the test will be allowed to proceed to the next week’s training module.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Feb 26 – Mar 4</th>
<th>Break</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mar 5 – Apr 29</td>
<td><strong>Practical Training</strong></td>
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<td>Students who pass all four Theory Tests will be placed on international teams.</td>
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<td>On March 5, the students will receive by email the names and email addresses of their team members.</td>
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<td>The students will start communicating by email, but can then use any other communication tools, such as Skype, WhatsApp, etc.</td>
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<td>On March 5, the Challenge Instructions for each client company will be released.</td>
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<td>Between March 5 and March 8 (the exact time to be confirmed), we will have a webinar with the CEOs of each client company. The CEOs will tell more about their companies and explain what kind of help they need.</td>
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<td>The teams will have to review the challenges and together select one that their team will work on.</td>
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<td>Every Wednesday, each student will receive a personal link to the Weekly Progress Survey. The survey will ask to report how the student and the team is doing and how much they have completed so far. The survey will also ask to evaluate performance of each team member.</td>
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<td>The Weekly Progress Surveys are due by 11:59 pm on the Sunday of that week.</td>
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<td>The teams have to complete and submit their team business proposal by 11:59 pm on April 29. The team business proposal must be 15-30 pages long.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Apr 30 – May 27</th>
<th><strong>Post-Project Reflections</strong></th>
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<td>After the project is completed, the students will individually write a Reflection Paper where they will reflect on their experience in X-Culture, what they learned, and what they would do differently if they had to complete another project in an international team.</td>
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<td>On May 27 (the exact date to be confirmed), we will have a teleconference where the teams will present their work and students discuss their experiences.</td>
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<td>In the end, the students will receive their X-Culture Certificates and recommendation letters.</td>
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<td>The best students will be invited to the X-Culture Symposium.</td>
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