



The X-Culture Global Virtual Team Coach Program

Training Module 1

The X-Culture Project: Purpose, History, Method, Vision

Updated: August 15, 2019



*“Tell them and they will forget.
Show them and they will remember.
Engage them and they will understand.”*

The quote is attributed to Plato
or some other smart man who lived thousands of years ago.

WHAT IS X-CULTURE AND HOW IT WORKS

History

X-Culture was launched in 2010. The idea was to put students into international online teams, where each student lived in a different country. As the students are working on a course project, they would collaborate across national borders, time zones, and cultural differences.

To find a colleague in another country who was teaching a similar course, the founder (Dr. Vas Taras) simply sent out a call through [Academy of International Business](#). The response was very positive. Dozens of professors from around the world replied within the first hour. The X-Culture Project was born.

Universities from 7 countries (about 400 students total) participated in X-Culture in the first round. Since then, our team has been growing steadily. As of the 2018, 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 late 2012, X-Culture expanded beyond academia when about 100 corporate employees and other non-student professionals participated in the project.

In 2013, several companies teamed up with X-Culture and presented their real-life business challenges for our students to solve. Mercedes-Benz was our first partner and we even brought our 50 best students to the full-cycle Mercedes-Benz bus and truck factory near Istanbul, Turkey as part of the [X-Culture Global Symposium](#).

Ever since we partner with up to 10 companies every semester. The students are working on real-life international business tasks presented by real companies. Cooperation with the real businesses makes the project more practical and effective. In return, our client companies receive ideas from thousands of bright young people around the world – and like it so much that they offer jobs to the students who suggested the most interesting ideas.

In 2012, the first [X-Culture Global Symposium](#) was held in Florida as a part of the [AIB-SE](#) conference. [Mercedes-Benz hosted the X-Culture symposium](#) at its full-cycle bus and truck factory in Turkey in 2013. More recent meetings have been hosted by corporate partners including the [Home Depot](#), [Louis Vuitton](#), [JBC](#), [Hard Rock International](#), [Perkins](#), [Nuova Simonelli](#), [Eurosuole](#), [Cocci Grifoni](#), and [iGuzzini](#), [Calgary International Airport](#), [Lake Louise Ski Resort](#), and more.

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 2017, X-Culture started experimenting with a program for pre-college children, and in 2018 the first class of 100 kids ages 9-17 completed the X-Culture project.

Lastly, we are experimenting with the Research Hackathon (or Xackathon) idea, where we are trying to change how research is done in management science. A number of research hackathons have been organized in 2017-19 and we are continuing our experiments in that area. [More here](#).

The Task

All project materials, including the challenges presented by this semester's clients are available at:

2019-2a: x-culture.org/2019-2a (password 20192)

2019-2b: x-culture.org/2019-2b (password 20192)

X-Culture is a project designed to offer students an opportunity to complete a project in a global virtual team, and, in the process, experience the challenges and learn the best-practices of global virtual collaboration.

Just like a real job on a project involving people from different countries, participation in the project is very demanding. Students will experience problems and conflicts. There will be times when every student will be frustrated and upset. Some team members will show disappointing performance. However, students will also learn a lot in the process and when they must work in a global virtual team again as part of their job, they will be much better prepared, know what to expect and how to resolve problems when they arise.

Students will have many pleasant experiences, moments of discovery, and will grow both personally and professionally. Students will meet people from around the world, make friends, learn about new cultures, as well as acquire new skills and qualifications that will help them in their careers. When the project is over, students will be happy they had this experience. Students will also receive an X-Culture certificate and support letter that will greatly improve their chances of getting a good job.

The challenges students will experience in X-Culture are exactly the challenges students will experience when they have to work in a team as part of their future job. X-Culture is just a time machine that shows you what will happen to you when you are required to work with people from around the world on the projects that will be part of their job. It will not be any different from the real world, and the better you learn now how to deal with those challenges, the more effective you will be on a similar project in the future.

It is very important to keep in mind that the X-Culture project is an international interaction/collaboration exercise and not a test of knowledge. The task is designed so that the project maximizes cross-culture interactions and international business problem solving so that the students gain first-hand experience in these areas. The particulars of the exercise may not always perfectly match every topic on the course outline, but that is not the goal.

Accordingly, until 2013, the task was to develop a business proposal for a hypothetical or a real MNC. However, there was no contact between the students and the company.

Starting in 2013, actual companies started approaching X-Culture and bringing their real-life international business challenges. In 2014-2015, we were selecting about a dozen companies every semester. In 2016, we decided to reduce the number of companies/challenges to about 5, while at the same time increasing company involvement and student-company interaction.

The involvement of real companies with real challenges makes the project more meaningful and more interactive for students. The students receive a chance to interact with the company, gather more information, develop a better business proposal, and in some cases even see their ideas implemented. If their work impresses the company, students may even get an internship or job offer. Furthermore, many partner companies also offer post-market commission, which makes the project even more realistic and beneficial to the students, as well as giving them a chance to earn some money. Finally, the involvement of real-life companies may benefit professors who seek collaboration with businesses for professional development and consulting purposes.

In 2014-2016, we also experimented with giving students two options:

1. Solve a challenge presented by an X-Culture corporate partner; or
2. Develop a business proposal for another company of the team's choice using a generic set of instructions.

It was expected that most teams would choose Option 1, which was the case. However, we thought some students would know of companies with interesting real-life international business challenges and the students may have an easy access to those companies (work for them or have ties otherwise). We encouraged that teams develop a business proposal for a company of their choice, provided the company is interested in the input and is ready to actively collaborate with the team during the project development (Option 2).

However, only 2-3 teams would pursue Option 2 and choose their own company and the generic challenge did not always work for their prospective client, so that option was dropped.

So Option 2 was modified in a way that students/teams are still encouraged to engage new clients, but we would take more time to work with the company, prepare a detailed personalized set of challenge instructions and enroll that company as a client next semester, open to all teams.

Most companies ask for help with expanding their market and developing new market entry strategy. Most companies select 6-8 questions from this list:

1. **Competitive Position Analysis:** Who are the competitors of the client company? Strengths and weaknesses compared to the competition, analysis of the competitors' products, pricing strategies; the threats and opportunities these strengths and weaknesses present.

Optional: Survey of the potential clients. Interview one or more potential buyers/distributors regarding:

- Current products/suppliers they use, why?
- Who makes the procurement decisions?
- How did they choose their current suppliers/products? What was the selling point?
- Do they know about the X-Culture's partner's product?
- What would it take them to switch to the X-Culture's partner's product?
- What do they find attractive or repelling about the X-Culture's partner?

2. **Identify New Promising Markets:** Analysis of the market characteristics that are necessary for the product to sell well, and identify specific markets that meet these criteria. Where the product is likely to be successful?
3. **Market Analysis:** Once the promising markets are identified, provide a review of the consumer tastes, cultural, economic, and political factors that must be taken into account when operating in the market.
4. **Market Entry Mode:** Is direct exporting the optimal market entry mode, or a joint venture, franchising, wholly owned subsidiary, or a partnership with the local distributors, government agencies, or other forms would be more effective? If a partnership with a local distributor, retailer, or company is advised, what companies would be the best candidates for such partnership?
5. **Pricing Strategy:** Develop the pricing strategy that will result in the highest profits in the proposed market, including the optimal price point, as well as the way the price should be charged (fixed price, bulk pricing, repeat customer discounts, financing, stipends, etc.)
6. **Promotion Channels:** Who makes the purchasing decisions about the product in question in the proposed market? Are there cheap or free promotion channels that allow to reach the decision makers, such as

mailing lists, social media groups, professional associations and meetings, industry periodicals, or similar channels that are not as expensive as TV, but allow to get directly to the decision makers?

7. **Marketing Strategy:** What is the best way to convince the consumers (or purchasing decision makers) to buy the product from the X-Culture's partner? Best marketing message, vehicle, slogan, packaging, and other elements of the marketing campaign?
8. **Finances:** What is the best way to collect payments and move money across borders when doing business in the proposed market, particularly with respect to transaction fees, currency exchange, and taxes?
9. **Certification:** Does the product need to be certified to be sold in the proposed market? If so, how such certification could be obtained? Any other legal requirements or cultural necessities with respect to the product packaging, labeling, branding, etc.?
10. **HR:** Would it be necessary to hire sales representatives, agents, managers, or other personnel? If so, what is the best way to recruit them, what compensation level and system will ensure the optimal balance of motivation, retention, and cost? Other personnel management tips?
11. **Logistics:** What is the different ways to ship the product and which one offers the best price, reliability, and timing? What paperwork needs to be complete to make the shipment?
12. **Trade regulations:** Are there import tariffs, custom duties, or other trade restrictions on the product in the suggested new market? If so, how exactly are they applied and what does the company needs to do to comply with the rules.

The questions cover most of the subfields of business (strategy, marketing, HR, logistics, etc.) which allows students of different majors select a section of the report that is most closely related to their course and work on it. At the same time, all students are exposed to the range of issues companies face as they are expanding into new markets.

Weekly Progress Surveys

All X-Culture participants will have to complete weekly progress surveys. The surveys will contain questions about the past week's progress, team dynamics, and peer performance evaluations. The information will be used to provide participants with intermediate feedback on their answers to the challenge questions, as well as to identify participants who may be struggling and provide them with support. The data will also be used for research purposes so we can better understand why some teams perform better than others and how the project can be designed in the future to minimize problems and improve the quality of the solutions developed by the participants.

Each participant will receive a personal email on Tuesday or Wednesday of each week. The email will contain a performance review, feedback on last week's deliverables, as well as a personalized link to the next progress survey. The surveys are normally due every Sunday.

Report Formatting and Weekly Deliverables

We have extensively experimented with the different formats of the project, in particular with respect to finding a balance between giving student participants more autonomy vs. imposing stricter requirements and providing more detailed guidelines.

The first few rounds of X-Culture, there were virtually no rules. On Day 1 of the project, students would receive the names of their team members and the task and on the last day of the project, they would be expected to submit the final report. That, obviously, did not work very well. Most teams procrastinated until the last few days before the final deadline. Furthermore, the quality of the work was often dismal. Without clear guidelines on what to do

and how to do it, the teams were left to figure out on their own the best way to structure and format their reports and what to put in them. While some teams did a decent job, many were completely lost and submitted random unorganized piles of notes, copies of Wikipedia articles, and other unrelated materials.

Starting in 2011, we started providing more detailed instructions as to how the report should be structured and formatted. First, we standardized the list of chapters that must be included in the reports, with relatively strict rules as to the length and content of each report section. The biggest challenge was to make students keep their reports short and focused, so we had to impose strict page limits.

Likewise, we started requiring standard formatting, such as that all reports be written using the same font, line spacing, use the same referencing style, and the like. This greatly improved not only the visual appeal of the reports but also the content quality. With the need to spend time and energy on figuring out how to format the document removed, the students can now spend more time developing their recommendations.

Equally importantly, the standard feel and look of the reports allowed the raters and clients to focus on the ideas and not be distracted by the visual differences in the reports. When most reports were poorly formatted, the winning team was often the one that submitted the prettiest document. In those days, literally, the reports that were written in the same consistent font; had a few nice figures; a professional looking title page; and some graphics on the pages; had a much greater chance of winning the competition because most other reports just looked awful. With all submissions in the same format, more attention is devoted to ideas rather than presentation.

Most important, starting in 2013, we imposed a requirement that the teams report their progress and submit their work every week. First, the weekly progress surveys simply asked for an update on what the team has been able to accomplish so far. Later, we started asking for the actual weekly deliverables, such as a draft of a report section or a decision with respect to the recommended new market, price of the product, or product promotion channel.

Our research showed that even when our resources were limited and we could not evaluate every weekly submission and provide feedback, the quality of the reports still went up dramatically. By imposing weekly deadlines, we forced the teams to have an early start and complete some work every week. This way, the teams would spend the entire duration of the project working on their reports instead of putting it off until the last week.

The quality improved even further when we launched the Coaching Program. While learning and gaining new experience in evaluating work of others and providing feedback, the Coaches also help students learn and improve their work. Win-win. More on the role of Coaches and the development of the program in the training module on the X-Culture Coaching Program.

Also, see the training module on The Foundation of Crowdsourcing for more information on the different models we tested with respect to the ways to organize the workflow within and between teams.

The 2019-2 Schedule

Due to academic calendar differences in different countries, there are two different tracks every semester: early and late. The general schedule for each track is provided through the website:

2019-2a: x-culture.org/2019-2a (password 20192)

2019-2b: x-culture.org/2019-2b (password 20192)

The due dates of each report section are different depending on the client. Please consult your Challenge Instructions for details.

Evaluation (Grading/Marking)

The X-Culture competition is open to anyone. Most participants are MBA and business students who participate in X-Culture as part of their international business or related courses. For these participants, the project usually constitutes 20-50 percent of the course grade/mark.

Regardless of your participation status, we track the performance of every individual and team. The following information is collected and used to (1) identify problems and provide help and support where needed, (2) select the best teams, students, and instructors at the end of the project, and (3) provide the instructors with the necessary information to give their students project grades/marks:

- Performance on the Readiness Test (% questions correctly answered, must get at least 80% to be placed on a team)
- Ability to meet weekly deadlines as per completion of weekly progress reports
- Weekly peer evaluations (if participating in a team)
 - o Effort
 - o Intellectual contribution
 - o Leadership and help with team coordination
 - o Friendliness and collegiality
 - o Help with writing the report
- Quality of the report (as evaluated by expert appraisers)
 - o Quality of each part of the report
 - o Creativity and novelty of the teams
 - o Depth of analysis, strength of the arguments
 - o Formatting and presentation
 - o Plagiarism (every report is automatically scanned for plagiarism)
- Quality of the weekly deliverables is also used for grading by some instructors, but not by others. It is hard to evaluate many the deliverables submitted every week. The Coaches provide some quality ratings and some instructors use these very valuable statistics, but not all. In most cases, the weekly deliverables are used to prompt students to do a little bit of work every week, to gauge the quality and progress of their work, and to provide constructive feedback. Second, the logic is that even if the quality of weekly submissions is low, it is all about learning – if the students use the intermediate weekly feedback and improve their work towards the end of the project, they should not be penalized for poor-quality deliverables in the early phases.

For students, the quality of the report accounts for 40-60% of the project grade/mark, peer evaluations for 20-50%, and weekly progress reports for 10-20%. The exact grade/mark structure is determined by each instructor to ensure it fits the course structure and institutional policies.

IMPORTANT: Team members who receive negative peer evaluations (below 2.0 of 5.0) will receive a warning. If the peer evaluations do not improve (below 2.0 two weeks in a row), the person will be excluded from the team.

Team Size

Each team is comprised of 5-6 students.

We have experimented with different team sizes in the past and have made the following observations. Smaller teams have an easier time coordinating and managing their efforts. Unfortunately, smaller teams are very vulnerable to mid-term dropouts and/or lack of participation of team members. While four is probably the optimal team size, a loss of one or two teammates, which is not an unlikely scenario, means that the remaining team members are not really a team anymore. Also, members of smaller teams are exposed to less cultural diversity.

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). In some semesters, we would see a larger number of students from another country, such as a dramatic increase in the number of participants from Colombia in 2017-2a. So, as a result, it was necessary to put two Colombia students on every team, and we even had a few teams with three Colombian students. Still, every team would still be represented by at least 3, in most cases by 4-5, and often by 6-7 different countries.

It is important that students are informed up front that changes in their team composition are very likely. Late enrollments and/or dropouts are inevitable and a lack of commitment from some team members is not uncommon. As long as the students are aware and expect team composition changes, such changes, when they happen, pose a minimal threat to the team's performance and actually make experience more realistic and valuable.

For privacy protection reasons, the complete list of students and their emails will not be shared with students and instructors. Each student will receive a personal email with the names and email of his/her team members only.

Occasionally, emails get sent to the Junk mail folder. Students should be informed about this possibility and should check their Junk mail folder if the email is not received by the specified date.

If the team composition changes due to late enrollments or dropouts, the members of the team will be informed by the project coordinator immediately.

Team Assignment

Students are assigned to teams on a random basis. With so many people involved in the project, accommodating individual requests for team composition is close to impossible.

We attempt to maximize cultural diversity within each team. When possible, the teams are composed so that each team member represents a different country, and the countries represented on a team are as distant as possible.

Occasionally, some instructors request that their students be placed on teams in pairs (two students from the same course on each team). It is expected that such an approach could help if the students have limited English skills. The utility of this practice has not been tested, but it appears to work. The concern is that placing students from the same country on one team limits the need for communication across cultures and consequently diminishes the value of the experience for some students. On the other hand, if English skills are severely limited, this may be the only way to make participation in the project possible for some students.

Special note on Master's students

We normally place Master's and Undergraduate students on separate teams. However, due to various reasons, it is not always possible to keep them separate, so we may have some mixed MBA-Undergraduate teams.

Team assignment is done in two waves:

1. About 80% of the students are placed on teams before the official project start. For these students, the semester starts a few weeks before the official project start. We receive the names/emails of these students and send them their Readiness Test links well in advance, and they complete the Readiness Test before the project start.
2. About 20% of the students are placed on teams after the official project start. In most cases, these are the students from the universities where the semester starts later as well as students who couldn't take the Readiness Test on time for other reasons. These students are generally placed in brand new teams, but occasionally they may be added to existing teams that lose team members due to dropouts. Team members may also be added to teams that choose to exclude team members for non-participation, or to teams that specifically request additional team members for other reasons. Unless specifically requested by the team, no new team members will be added to the team after the first two weeks of the project.

Alternative Team Formats

Typically, a team is composed of 6-7 students who are in different countries and communicate electronically. However, exceptions are possible and often necessary. **By default, all students are placed on international teams.** However, if the instructor prefers that his/her students work in collocated teams or individually, we can certainly accommodate this request. To give you a perspective, every semester 2-3 instructors request that some or all their students be placed in collocated teams, or complete the project individually, while most instructors prefer the default international team option.

Individual participation: It is required that all instructors give their students a chance to complete the project individually. Some students do not want to, or cannot work in a team for various reasons (busy schedule, limited language skills, etc.). These students can complete the project individually. X-Culture will offer them all the materials, guidelines, progress monitoring and other support needed for the students to complete the project and for the instructors to have complete information about student performance for grading/marketing purposes.

Also, students who are excluded from their teams due to a lack of participation can still complete the project individually to get a course grade.

Collocated teams: It is encouraged that instructors give their students an option to complete the project in collocated teams. If there are students in the class who cannot or do not want to be a part of a global virtual team (limited English skills, no interest to deal with the hassle of virtual collaboration), we can form collocated teams where all team members are from the same university and can meet face-to-face. The students will still be completing the same task and will receive the same support from X-Culture. We will monitor their performance and provide all the materials - they will just communicate face-to-face, not online. We have several collocated teams every semester and it works very well.

Less diverse teams: While even two-country teams would provide a very real cross-cultural collaboration experience, we strive to keep team diversity as high as possible, though maximal diversity is not always achievable. Depending on the list of participants in each season, it may be mathematically impossible to keep all teams perfectly diverse (each student from a different country) and it is possible that some teams may have two or even three students from the same country. For example, in 2014-1a we had an unfortunate situation when the track was dominated by the US and Brazilian universities, each team had at least two students from the U.S., at least two students from Brazil and one or two students from elsewhere, often to a total of only 3 countries per team.

Homogenous dispersed teams: Due to over-representation of some countries in our project, occasionally we form teams of students from different universities in the same country (culturally homogeneous geographically dispersed virtual teams). Occasionally, students request to be put on these teams as they want to experience and learn virtual collaboration but don't want to deal with the challenge of cultural diversity.

Sub-teams: Occasionally, instructors request that their students be placed on teams in groups. It's usually the case when some students in the class are not fluent in English. In this case, students with limited English skills may be placed on teams in pairs with students who are fluent in English. This way the weaker student can communicate via the stronger student. This would not only allow the student with limited English to participate in the project but also makes the arrangement more realistic for the rest of the team, as the use of an interpreter is common in the real workplace.

Despite the variety of options, having students placed in the global virtual team remains the default. Any other format must be specifically requested by the instructor.

Communication Modes/Tools

Students are free to choose the communication mode that works best for them.

Experience shows that free online communication tools, such as email, Skype, Google Docs, Facebook Groups and Dropbox are the most popular and sufficient tools for effective collaboration.

While most students are likely familiar with email and Skype, some may not know how to use newer collaboration tools. The pre-project training will provide detailed instructions on how to use Skype, Google Docs, Dropbox, MS Word Track Changes, Facebook Groups, and Google+.

Plagiarism

The reports will be submitted via www.TurnItIn.com which automatically scans them for plagiarism. The system checks millions of online sources and identifies all parts of the report that have been copied and pasted. Some similarities are acceptable (e.g., properly cited quotes and extracts), but if a substantial portion of the report has been copied and pasted, or work of others is not properly cited, the report will be flagged for plagiarism. The results of the plagiarism analysis are automatically shared with the X-Culture Admin and all participating instructors. Any project participants who submit plagiarized work will be immediately removed from the competition.

Report Submission

We use a centralized team report submission system on the TurnItIn platform. Please see the X-Culture Training module for more details.

Since most instructors prefer to grade/mark printed reports, and printing is time and resource consuming, instructors can request that their students submit hard copies of the team report. The students must then submit an identical copy of the report to the one submitted electronically. However, if you prefer grading electronic copies of the reports, you don't have to request a separate submission from your students – you will be able to download electronic copies of the reports directly from TurnItIn.

Grading/Marking

It is important to highlight that the purpose of the X-Culture project is not to be an exam of students' knowledge or skills, but an experiential exercise designed to help students gain knowledge and skills.

It is also very important to remember that the outcome of the exercise (i.e., quality of the team report) is largely not under the control of an individual student. It is possible that despite the best effort and strong skills of a student from your class, the quality of the report of their *team* will be poor because of a lack of skills and commitment from some team members, communication difficulties, or for a range of other reasons.

The grading/marking scheme must be designed not only to encourage participation but also to allow for a high individual grade even if the team fails. Otherwise, the students will be under too much stress. Even if one of their teammates does not do well, high-performing students should still be able to get high grades/marks.

On the other hand, we want to maintain some degree of teammate interdependence to ensure that students are motivated to work as a team. Therefore, some team-level dimensions of performance must be included in the individual grades.

Below is a typical value of each project component. Individual instructors can make adjustments to ensure the optimal fit to their university practices. This is only an example. Different professors may assign different weights to different project components.

Performance Indicator	Recommended Value
Individual:	
Completion of the pre-project training	Must pass to enroll*
Weekly progress reports, 10 total @2% each, submitted individually by each student (completed fully and before the deadline)	20%
Post-project survey (completed before the deadline, % questions answered, check for response non-randomness);	Must be completed to receive project grade/mark*
Peer evaluations (as evaluated by the other team members in terms of effort, intellectual contribution, help with writing the report, coordinating team efforts, other comments), reported weekly and post-project, an average of all.	40%
Team	
Quality of the team report (as rated by the instructors)	40%

*IMPORTANT: To ensure that students come sufficiently prepared and that all necessary data is collected, the pre-project training test and the post-project survey are *mandatory* components of the project. That is, a student will not be put on a team until he/she completes the short pre-project training and passes a simple online test, and the student will not receive the project grade/mark until he/she completes the post-project survey which contains such essential components as peer evaluations and reflections on the experiences during the project. Assigning a fixed number of points to these components (e.g., 10 points if the student completes the pre-project training and 10 points if the student completes the post-project survey) will allow some students to “legally” miss these critical components.

Also note that most of the tasks listed above can only be evaluated on a pass/fail basis (e.g., the student either reports progress with establishing contact with teams and gets full credit for submitting the form or does not complete the form and gets 0). The number of teammates with whom the student established contact is not that important provided that the student tried his/her best to establish contact with his/her teammates; the student either completes the pre-project survey and gets credit for it or does not complete it and receives 0 for this component. The specific answers to survey questions don't matter, provided that all questions are answered and the responses are not random.

The only exceptions from the pass-fail rule exceptions are the quality of the team report and peer evaluations that can be evaluated on a continuous scale (e.g., 0-100% or some other scale rather than just pass/fail) – and it is perfectly fine if you choose to evaluate these project components on a continuous scale.

Special note on team report evaluations

Each instructor grades/marks reports submitted by teams with his/her students. This way, each report is evaluated separately by 5-7 instructors (depending on the team size).

As discussed above, different instructors may place different weight on the quality of the team report in the grades/marks of individual students. However, it is imperative that team reports are graded/marked using standard report evaluation form (see Appendix for a link to the team report evaluation template).

First, if all instructors use the same evaluation dimensions, then all students work toward the same set of expectations.

Second, a standardized form allows for an easy integration of team report evaluations provided by different instructors in a single data file for research purposes.

Third, standardized report evaluations allow for selecting the best student teams based on integrated instructor ratings.

Expected Time Investment

Here are rough estimates of the time requirements for instructors and students:

Task, Students	Approx. Combined Hours
<i>Before the project starts:</i>	
Pre-project review of the materials	1-2
Readiness Test	1
<i>During the project:</i>	
Correspondence with teammates, per week	1-2
Research and report write up	1-2
Other unexpected tasks and issues that need to be addressed	1-2
<i>After the project:</i>	
Post-project survey	0.5
TOTAL over the eight-week period	15-30 hours

X-Culture International Collaboration Certificates

All participants who successfully complete the project will receive an X-Culture certificate. By default, electronic high-resolution print-ready certificates are sent to instructors at no extra charge.

Instructors occasionally order the certificates to be professionally printed at local print shops and distribute them to the students at the end of the project, but sometimes they just distribute the electronic copies and leave it up to the students to print the certificates. Please check with your instructor to see how the certificates will be distributed in your class.

Instructors and students used to be able to order hard-copy certificates directly from the X-Culture office, as long as they were willing to cover the print and shipping cost. We don't offer that option anymore due to the high cost of shipping and the time requirements for print and packaging. It is cheaper and more efficient to order the the print locally.

X-Culture Global Symposium

Once a year, the best students are invited to the X-Culture Symposium. The past symposia have been held in Istanbul, Turkey at the Mercedes-Benz full-cycle bus and truck production factory; in Atlanta, GA, USA at the Home Depot headquarters, in Miami, FL, USA; at the Louis Vuitton regional office; in Savannah, GA, USA at the JCB central office and main production factory. In 2016, the Symposium will be held aboard a Royal Caribbean cruise ship on its four-day voyage from Florida to the Cozumel Island and back.

Up until 2017, the X-Culture Global Symposia used to organize exclusively in collaboration with the Academy of International Business – Southeast US Division and were typically held in the Southeast part of the USA. However, at some point the, Academy of International Business became too small a platform for the X-Culture meetings. The AIB-SE conference is first and foremost, a scholarly conference. It is for international business researchers and professors, and not students. So, the number of X-Culture students was always limited to about 50 to preclude the conference from becoming a student event and to keep its focus on research and teaching.

With almost 40,000 X-Culture alumni as of 2017, the demand for participating in the X-Culture Global Symposium was far beyond of the 50 spots available at AIB-SE conferences. Accordingly, we tested – and it was a great success – and independent [X-Culture Global Symposium pilot in Miami, FL](#). More about the event [here](#) and [here](#).

Accordingly, we invited 150 best students from 43 countries to Miami for a longer event that was fully dedicated to X-Culture. Being fully in charge of the venue and program also allowed us to pack more training sessions, workshops, competitions, and field trips into the program, thereby making the event more developmental and educational.

Also, for the first time, we invited several Coaches to the event. Most of them received travel stipends from X-Culture. The Coaches gained new experiences in organizing events, leading teams, solving various problems, as well as meeting one another face to face and expanding their personal and professional networks.

Moving forward, the plan is to organize two, possibly three annual X-Culture Global Symposia. One of them, as before, will be co-organized with the Academy of International Business – Southeast USA Chapter and will be held in the U.S. The other one or two – independent X-Culture Global Symposia organized outside the U.S. The former one is envisioned to be smaller and more selective, designed primarily for the X-Culture alumni who are interested in continuing their education at the graduate level (Master's, Ph.D.) and academic careers or careers in research and development. The latter will be larger, still very selective, and will focus primarily on business and career development.

In 2018, one Symposium was held in [Macerata, Italy](#) and another one in Nashville, USA.

The 2019 Symposia are in 1) San Antonio, TX (in association with the Academy of International Business – Southeast USA Chapter) and Calgary; 2) Canada (X-Culture Global Business Week hosted by the University of Calgary).

More information about the X-Culture symposia could be found [here](#).

X-Culture Off-Shoots and Spin-Offs

Initially, X-Culture was envisioned as a purely experiential learning project. It was all about giving students an opportunity to work with people from other countries. All about an exercise in dealing with cultural differences, time zones, learning how to communicate and collaborate online.

Today, X-Culture is much, MUCH more than just students from different countries working in international teams. Here is a very brief overview of the main programs and projects stemming from X-Culture. Many of the have the potential to become as big, or even bigger, as the original X-Culture project itself.

X-Culture Research

The first year, the data were collected exclusively for the grading purposes. In 2010, we only had one survey which was comprised of just a few questions about the student experiences and peer evaluations.

Soon enough, however, the tremendous potential of X-Culture as a research platform became obvious.

Studying teams in general, and global virtual teams in particular, is notoriously difficult. The paradox is that all of us work in teams at least sometimes. Teams are ubiquitous in all forms of organizations. Yet, it is almost impossible to gain access to a large enough sample of teams that are working on a similar task under similar work conditions for an extended period. Even if one had an agreement with a large organization, it is unlikely one will find more than 2-4 teams at the same time that are suitable for a comparison and study.

As a result, most academic papers on teams relied on cases studies. That is, on studying in depth one or a few teams. Also, the researchers would usually be only allowed to observe, possibly ask questions, but not manipulate the work design or experiment with other aspects of work design and team dynamics.

Alternatively, the sample would be comprised of a few student teams that completed a short in-class simulation for a course credit. That, a professor took a class of 20-30 students, split them into 5-10 teams, asked them to perform a simple task, and observed their behavior. This sampling method allowed for experimentation, but the generalizability of the findings always remained suspect. It is not clear if the findings obtained based on observing a group of young students completing a hypothetical task for no compensation are generalizable to the real workplace where the task is a real business project, the stakes are high, the cultural differences are real.

X-Culture provided a more realistic experimental lab and a much larger sample. First, thousands of people working in hundreds of teams that participate in X-Culture offer sample sizes literally hundreds of times larger than in typical studies on teams.

Second, while it is true that most of our participants are students taking part in the project as part of their coursework, the conditions are very similar to those in the real workplace. The cultural differences are real. The time zones are real. The online communication is real. The clients are real. The problem is real and the solution is of interest to the client. The stakes are high and not limited only to X-Culture having a major effect on the grade. X-Culture has the potential to greatly impact the students' future careers. The best students get a chance to attend the X-Culture Global Symposium and even get paid in a form of the prizes, travel stipends, and aftermarket commission. Many students get internships and job offers. The X-Culture Certificates and Recommendation Letters carry a huge weight when it comes to job search. Taken together, the potential rewards and losses a huge, much bigger than a small bonus normally offered to the students for participating in traditional studies, and approaching the magnitude of the incentives that the corporate employees deal with.

Most important, X-Culture allows for collecting huge amounts of data that are multi-level, multi-source, multi-method, and longitudinal. And on top of that, the project allows virtually unlimited opportunities for experimentation, restricted only by the codes of research ethics of course.

As a result, the X-Culture researchers have already made a number of groundbreaking discoveries and published a number of papers, and are working on dozens of more studies that have the potential to greatly advance our understanding of global virtual collaboration, teamwork, and international business.

More on the X-Culture research efforts and research papers [here](#).

X-Culture Consulting

Starting in 2013, X-Culture has been essentially providing consulting services to real business. While we had approached our corporate partners as *partners*, and not *clients*, effectively we are in a business of crowdsourcing business consulting. We are now actually experimenting with the models where our partners pay for the services and plan to completely shift to a more traditional for-pay consulting model by the end of 2018.

We are also actively promoting our students as consultants, rather than just students. It is true that many, perhaps even most students cannot offer solutions worth a client's money. However, some students are extremely talented and produce ideas comparable in quality to those offered by a professional consultant.

Not surprising, many X-Culture students get job offers from our partner companies – and we would like to promote that trend.

Our goal is to build a platform where anyone (not just 5 partner organizations) can post a business challenge and anyone (not just the 5,000 lucky students) can contribute to developing a solution.

However, unlike the traditional freelancer platforms that simply connect clients with service providers, we envision X-Culture as a platform with a process that relies on crowd-collaboration, not just free-lancing.

More on our experiments in this area and our vision for the future of the X-Culture Consulting branch in this [TEDx talk](#).

X-Culture Coaching Program

There is an entirely separate training module on the purpose, history, and evolution of the X-Culture Global Virtual Team Coaching Program. The idea was given to us by the literally hundreds of students who would come to us after the project is over and ask if there is another way for them to stay involved and continue learning through X-Culture. It would make no sense to ask them to participate in X-Culture again as students, but it would make perfect sense to provide them with an opportunity to share their experience and wisdom with the new generation of X-Culture students, while at the same time learning how international teams operate, what challenges they face, and how those challenges could be resolved.

The Coaching Program was first tested in 2016-1. There were only seven Coaches who received virtually no additional training and who had to rely only on their prior X-Culture experience. Despite on that simplistic approach, the program was an instant success.

The Coaches now receive much more rigorous and comprehensive training and go through the program in a much more structured way.

The program is still in its startup phase, but is already greatly benefiting both the Coaches and the Students.

VirtualTA.org

A related project is codenamed the Virtual Teaching Assistant, or VirtualTA.org. Just like the Coaching Program, it was conceived in response to the repeated requests by the students to provide them with an opportunity to stay involved and continue gaining new experience and skills.

Every semester, we receive hundreds of emails from students who are interested in continuing their education at the graduate level, particularly in Ph.D. programs. The students ask if they can assist X-Culture with our research and teaching needs, in exchange for mentorship, experience, and possibly recommendation letters. Essentially, they are asking if they could become Teaching/Research Assistants in hope (and rightfully so) that that would improve their chances of being accepted to good graduate programs.

We heavily rely on these volunteers, but there are many more of them that our project can use. At the same time, there are many professors around the world who could use the help of an additional teaching/research assistant.

Accordingly, we are building a platform where motivated students can offer their time to experienced and nurturing professors in exchange for mentorship, guidance, research and teaching experience, and a recommendation letter when applying to a graduate program.

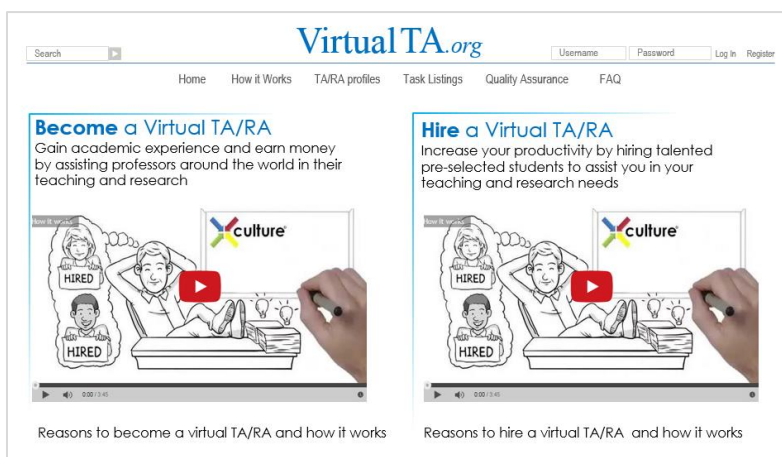
Think about it as an Airbnb or Uber, but for teaching/research assistants, where – and this is very important – the trainees are all verified students with academic career aspirations and the mentors are all verified professors at accredited universities capable of providing quality mentorship.

We are even considering offering an option to pay the teaching/research assistants. Most professors have funds for hiring student help, and some tasks may be hard enough to warrant a pay. X-Culture may make such arrangements easier, and may even keep a small percentage of the payment to fund its operations.

We envision a time when not only hundreds of thousands of students and professors will meet at VirtualTA.org to help each other grow and achieve their professional goals, but also when VirtualTA.org will be a major factor in the admission to graduate programs. The applicants will be sharing how many hours that have clocked as teaching/research assistants for professors they met at VirtualTA.org, what their ratings are, and so on.

It is even possible that the professors' ratings on VirtualTA.org will affect their promotion opportunities. The universities want to recruit the best possible graduate students who can do a great job as teaching/research assistants. However, they also want faculty members who can be effective mentors to the graduate students. The rating system on VirtualTA.org allows for monitoring these skills and abilities.

We already have a working prototype website, but still need more internal testing before we can release the service to the larger open academic community.



X-Culture Facebook Page and Online Community

As of 2017, X-Culture has about 85,000 followers on Facebook and our website gets up to a thousand unique visits every day. Based on the number of followers/visitors and their profile provided by Google Analytics, the vast majority of these are not current or former X-Culture students. The project now attracts a much larger crowd of people interested in international business, consulting and education.

This presents wonderful new opportunity to have a greater positive impact on the world. Though to be honest, we are still trying to figure out how we can serve this large group of followers better, and how we can use this large following to advance our agenda.

See [X-Culture Stories](#) for more information on our work, challenges, frustrations, and successes on this front.

X-Culture Alumni Association (XAA)

Almost 40,000 students have participated in X-Culture alumni as of 2017. It is a large group of highly talented and motivated students that will become managers and company owners in the coming years. A platform where they can stay in touch and help each other grow is a logical next step. The X-Culture Alumni Association (XAA) is such a platform, launched in 2015.

We envision XAA to be a largely independent organization that works closely with the X-Culture “parent” but is governed as a separate institution. It is even possible that this network will become open to motivated young people who have never participated in X-Culture.

It is still very much work in progress. There is a huge demand from the X-Culture alumni to stay connected and continue to grow together, but we are still searching for the best format to continue offering them value. More on the X-Culture Alumni Association [here](#).

WikiDemix.org

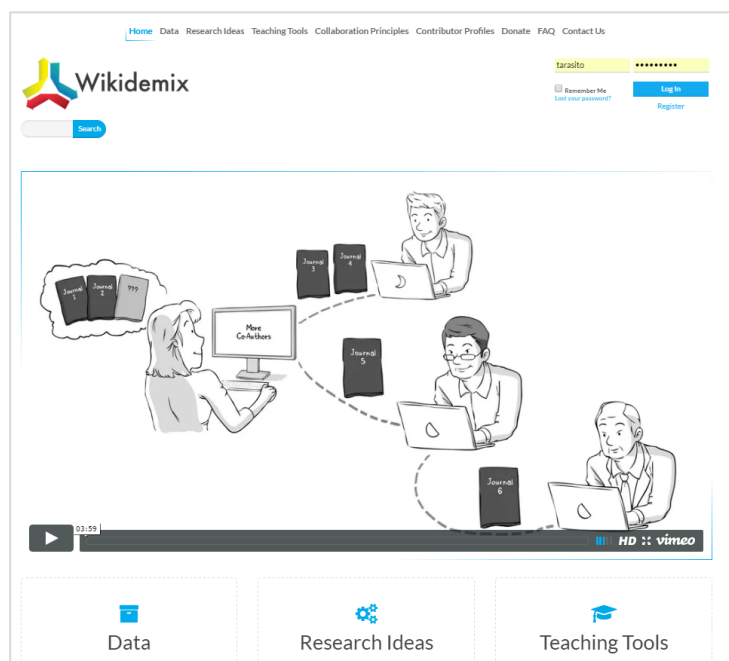
X-Culture is one of a few large-scale research platforms in the world that openly shares its data with the world. Our goal is to create new knowledge, and data sharing is a step in that direction.

At the same time, we encourage other research teams to share their data. Our experience is that there are many researchers who are happy to share their data but have no platform where they can do so. As a result, thousands of old datasets are aging and losing their relevance on hard-drives of the many researchers, forgotten but not fully utilized for science.

With WikiDemix.org we seek to change the culture of how science is done in our field. The platform provides an opportunity to formally publish your data, as well as research ideas and teaching tools.

We have already built a fully functional WikiDemix.org website and plan to formally launch it in 2019, after some additional beta-testing.

See <http://wikidemix.org> for more details.



X-Culture Hackathon

Further, on our attempts to create new knowledge through research crowdsourcing and to change the science culture in our field, we are experimenting with the X-Culture Research Hackathon concept. The first pilot was tested in 2017 and the results were extremely encouraging.

The basic idea is research paper development through research marathons. A group of researchers comes together as if to a conference. However, instead of running from one presentation to another, they spend several days developing papers, exchanging ideas, getting to know other – with the ultimate goal of having a draft of a publishable paper ready before the event is over.

The plan is to organize the X-Culture Research Hackathons along the main international business conferences, X-Culture Global Symposia, and possibly in the future as self-standing events. We are also very open to the idea of sort-of franchising the idea, similar to how it is done with TEDx. There could be one main event organized by the X-Culture team, while more local events could be held by interested parties largely independent, but in reliance on the X-Culture data, branding, and technology. The early tests show that the optimal group size is 15-20 people, so it would make sense to rely on a large number of smaller Research Hackathons, than one big annual event.

Please see [this page](#) for more on the concept and early tests.

X-Culture Kids (X-Culture Academy)

Lastly, but probably most importantly, we have opened X-Culture to kids ages 9-17. The need and demand for cross-cultural training, for younger students, is huge and our early tests show that teenagers and even children are very interested and capable of working with their international peers, solving simple business challenges, and learning in the process.

2018-1 is the first beta test with about 200 kids from 12 countries in the program. More on this concept [here](#).

Current Challenges

X-Culture is growing rapidly and already making a major impact on how International Business is taught, as well as research and consulting, are done in our field. We have received several major awards for our work and stories about X-Culture have appeared in numerous media around the world.

However, despite our rapid growth and success, X-Culture faces a range of challenges. Nothing insurmountable, but there are still many areas where we can improve; many directions we can explore, many issues that we need help with.

As we are quickly moving forward, we often sacrifice quality for speed and efficiency. As a result, our website is not very professional looking, our documents contain typos and poor wording, we make no investments in public relations and project promotion, and our academic pursuits leave little time on pursuing revenue that we so desperately need for our continued growth.

Our biggest needs are in copyediting, social media management, fundraising, graphic design, and management of our relationships with businesses.

We will continue to rely on the good will of our partners and volunteers to staff most of our needs but are also looking to hire some permanent staff for some of the more technical and time-consuming functions.

Preparing for the Theory Test

On the Theory Exam, you will be asked to show your understanding of the purpose of X-Culture, as well as its history, principles, methods, and challenges.

Most importantly, X-Culture is still very much work in progress. Thus, we are extremely interested in the input from the Coaches on how the project can be improved. Any help will be much appreciated, from small typo corrections to offers to take a lead on large projects or take charge of entire functions within X-Culture.

For the final reflection paper, Coaches can choose to work on the (re)design of the X-Culture Project or its off-shoot programs. This can include a design of new training materials, a redesign of the existing programs such as the Coaching Program, help with the design of the new programs such as X-Culture Kids, or similar.

We are very open to criticism and very receptive to new ideas. You see a problem – tell us. Better yet, take a lead towards the solution.