The Global Case Study Challenge: Competencies for the Future of Work in Virtual Environments

Guest post by Eithne Knappitsch

The Global Case Study Challenge (GCSC) began as a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)/Virtual Exchange program, offering students an authentic and immersive intercultural learning opportunity. As the importance of New Work and remote work contexts grew following COVID, it became clear that students and professionals needed to develop more effective competencies to excel virtual and hybrid work environments. Initial iterations of the GCSC revealed that while students possessed strong digital skills, they frequently lacked essential digital collaboration competencies – the attitude, knowledge, and skills to become high performing teams in diverse, interdisciplinary, and international contexts. Recognizing this gap in competencies needed for future New Work environments and those acquired at higher educational institutions, the need for the GCSC to further develop into a transformative, career-oriented global teaching and learning program became obvious. At the same time, the GCSC management team – a virtual female-led team - became inspired by the potential for virtual exchange to contribute to a paradigm shift in higher educational settings as responsible and sustainable forms of education (and internationalization). The GCSC, over the five consequent iterations from 2018 onward evolved into a transformative program, resulting in the development of the GLOW model. This CID guest post explores how the GCSC GLObal Work (GLOW) model addresses these pressing needs and empowers students and educators with the competencies required to excel in virtual and intercultural work settings.

From Virtual Exchange to Competency Development: The GCSC initially aimed to provide students with an authentic and experiential intercultural learning opportunity through virtual exchange. However, as the landscape of work shifted towards remote and virtual contexts, it became evident that students required a different set of competencies to thrive in these environments. The GCSC responded to this need by incorporating the development of essential competencies for virtual work into its curriculum, ensuring that students leave the program equipped with the skills necessary for success in the future of work. As Simon Haas, a student at the Deggendorf Institute of Technology, said "Working with other students in a digitalized way is the perfect preparation for future jobs, as you learn technical skills but also intercultural competence."

Addressing the Digital Collaboration Gap: While many students possess strong digital skills, the GCSC discovered a crucial gap in their digital collaboration competencies. In virtual work environments, effective collaboration is paramount, requiring skills such as virtual communication, teamwork, and conflict management. The GCSC responded by integrating digital collaboration competencies into its program, empowering students to navigate the complexities of virtual teamwork and leverage digital tools to enhance collaboration. By bridging this gap, the GCSC ensures that students are well-prepared to thrive in the collaborative demands of virtual work environments.

Responsible and Sustainable (Virtual) Education: Virtual exchange holds the potential to be a responsible and sustainable form of education, but only if students acquire the necessary competencies. The GCSC recognizes this and has taken deliberate steps to foster inclusive and sustainable education. By providing authentic intercultural experiences in virtual settings, the GCSC ensures that students from diverse backgrounds have equal access to transformative learning opportunities. Furthermore, by emphasizing sustainability competency within the GLOW model, the GCSC equips students with the knowledge and skills to contribute to global consciousness and fairness, environmental stewardship, and ethical business practices. An anonymous student commented: "I learned that it is possible to work on a task with foreign people quite well, although you never got or will get in touch with them personally; before this project I could not imagine this way of working."

The GLOW Model - Empowering Competencies for the Future of Work: The GCSC GLOW model encompasses intercultural communication, digital collaboration, and sustainability competencies, representing a comprehensive approach to developing the skills needed for the future of work in virtual environments. Through immersive project-based learning, students enhance their intercultural awareness, communication, and cooperation skills. They also acquire the ability to navigate virtual platforms and leverage digital tools effectively. Additionally, the inclusion of sustainability competency fosters a mindset of global responsibility and equips students with the critical thinking and problem-solving skills necessary to address sustainability challenges in the corporate context. Elena Anguita Lueza, a student at Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, concluded: "It was definitely a great challenge to collaborate with students and professionals from all over the world, and coordinate meetings taking into account the different cultures and time zones."

Conclusion: The Global Case Study Challenge, born out of a virtual exchange program, has evolved into a transformative initiative that empowers students with competencies for the future of work in virtual environments. Additionally, it contributes to the development of a **G**lobal, **C**onscious, and **S**ustainable **C**ommunity. By addressing the need for effective competencies in digital collaboration, the GCSC ensures that students are prepared to thrive in virtual and hybrid teamwork settings. Moreover, by fostering inclusive and sustainable education, the GCSC contributes to a more equitable, socially sustainable, and environmentally conscious world. Through its GLOW model, the GCSC demonstrates the power of virtual education in empowering students, educators and higher education institutions with the skills required to succeed in the dynamic and collaborate landscape of future work.

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