

GLOBAL ECOLLABORATION COMPETITION 2012 – A GLOBAL TEAM ACCEPTS A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

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Abstract

In autumn 2012 ninety young project managers all over the world will participate in a virtual case study competition, the Global eCollaboration Competition (GeCCo). The participants will be matched into distributed teams of 5 members with one representative per country per team and compete against each other. Within 24 hours they will have to present a solution to the given case. Due to this method the participants will experience work in virtual surroundings and multi-nationality in teams, competences highly demanded in this time and age.

To prepare this event the organizing team faces the challenges of distributed work and limited resources since all organizers are working on a voluntary basis. It is a completely different organizational paradigm in which the two core team members, located in Germany and Finland, outsource all subprojects to so called supporters.

The paper will offer insights in the organization of a complex project in a virtual surrounding with few core team members and secondly present some methods to ensure the motivation of the involved supporters. The elaborate degree of delegation demands a high degree of trust and motivation that cannot be achieved by personal meetings and has to be established in virtual environments. Communication structures and methods play an important role.

Keywords: *collaboration; virtual team work; collaboration tools; project management*

Resumen

En otoño de 2012, noventa jóvenes administradores de proyectos de todo el mundo participarán en un caso de estudio virtual, el Global eCollaboration Competition (GeCCo). Los participantes estarán distribuidos en equipos de 5 miembros con un representante por país por equipo y compiten unos contra otros. En 24 horas deberán presentar una solución para un dado caso. Debido a este método los participantes experimentarán trabajar en un entorno virtual y multinacionalidad en equipos, competencias altamente demandadas en estos tiempos y época.

Para preparar este evento el equipo organizador se enfrenta a los desafíos de trabajo distribuido y recursos limitados desde que todos los organizadores estén trabajando con carácter voluntario. Es un paradigma organizacional completamente diferente en el cual los dos equipos centrales, localizados en Alemania y Finlandia, externalizan todos los subproyectos a los llamados participantes.

el documento ofrecerá puntos de vista en la organización de un proyecto complejo en un entorno virtual con unos pocos equipos miembros centrales y en segundo lugar presentarán algunos métodos para asegurar la motivación de los participantes involucrados. el elaborado grado de delegación precisa de un alto grado de confianza y motivación que no puede ser alcanzado por encuentros personales y tiene que estar establecido en entornos virtuales. estructuras y métodos de comunicación juegan un papel importante.

Palabras clave: *colaboración; trabajo del equipo virtual; herramienta de colaboración; gestión de proyectos*

1. Introduction

In the last decade the way of collaboration and work has undergone a dramatic change. Processes became more distributed among the globe in order to benefit from globalization.

Globally operating teams became more and more important in innovation and development processes. These teams have several advantages but also some limitations (Walther et al., 2005). The work of those teams has been facilitated by the developing technology, namely the Internet and other communication technologies (Casey and Richardson, 2006). This new way of working has different advantages such as diversity and the possibility to work 24 hours a day in different parts of the world. Nevertheless the upcoming challenges connected to this development are foreseeable and have been proved to have a major impact on the project. Well planned and effective communication is one of the most important criteria when it comes to project success in distributed teams (Nunamaker, et al. 2003). The ICB 3.0 highlights the importance of communication and mentions this factor as “vital to the success of projects, programs and portfolios” (ICB 3.0, 2006).

The team of GeCCo is a virtual team. Virtual team is defined as a group of individuals “who interact through interdependent tasks guided by common purpose, working across space, time and organizational boundaries with links strengthened by webs of communication technology” (Lipnack and Stamps, 1997).

Javenpaar et al. (2004) showed that trust and mutuality have an important impact on a virtual team and that there has to be a balance of trust and structure to facilitate the most beneficial outcome. A consensus widely supported among different cultures is the establishment of trust and its perception as Flammia et al. (2010) showed in their study.

Daim et al. (2011) found out, that in global virtual teams the cross-functional communication may suffer from cultural differences unless there is a strong presence of organizational culture support.

Since it was not possible for the whole team involved in GeCCo to meet face-to-face, motivation in a virtual surrounding played a major role. The participating organizers were highly motivated from the start and signed in for the program voluntarily. A mayor task was to keep the motivation up, in the given case, we want to shed some light on how we dealt with this topic. At first we will describe the motivation of the GeCCo project and its challenges. In a second part we will demonstrate a new organizational paradigm and focus especially on the importance of communication management. At last the first experiences of the ongoing project will be described.

2. Background information

To understand the project's concept properly there is need to explain reasons why project was initiated.

2.1 IPMA & IPMA Young Crew

Project GeCCo takes place network of International Project Management Association (IPMA) and part of IPMA called IPMA Young Crew (YC). YC gathers young professionals interested in the area of project management. There are more than 14 countries which are involved with their own YC. Each country can join different initiatives set by YC Management Board or they can create their own events and projects. There are some international events which take place on regular basis such as World Young Crew Workshop preceding IPMA World Congress.

These international events are important for YC because there is the possibility for networking and sharing experiences with other YCs. As mentioned above there are over 14 countries all over the world involved in YC that mean high cost for participating in these events. Networking among members of YC is also possible just among management boards of local YCs. Therefore we identified need to connect regular members of YC within local YCs.

2.2 What is GeCCo?

Project Global eCollaboration Competiton is a new initiative by YC which should help networking among local YCs. During this global pioneer event, 98 young project managers from 14 countries all over the world will experience intercultural and international collaboration through virtual environments.

In a 24 hours lasting case study competition 98 participants from 14 countries will be first matched into multinational teams and will work distributed and present their strategic solution to a jury at the end of the workshop. The most successful team will be selected and gains a price.

Virtual communication, group dynamics in distributed teams, management of different cultures and time zones are some of the factors that make this project unique.

The idea of the project arose several years ago but creating project's concept started during 24th IPMA World Congress 2010 in Istanbul. The team was established in 2011 one team member had to leave the core team. The core team is supported by Local Organizers in the country, representing the project and connecting the local Young Crews and their members to the international initiative.

2.3 Why GeCCo?

The network of the YC is spread over the whole globe. Few events exist where the global scale of this network is accessible. Mostly travelling costs prevent emerging YC's to attend IPMA World Congresses or international workshops. Only few representatives of some YCs stay in touch on a regular basis during international events such as IPMA World Congress, creACTivity workshops and many others. Thus members of the national YC's are unaware of the international scope of YC, a fact GeCCo is meant to change.

2.4 What are the goals of GeCCo?

GeCCo has several goals:

- Strategic goals
- Tangible goals
- PM goals

2.4.1 Strategic goals

Strategically it is very important to improve the contact and knowledge exchange between established and emerging YCs. Through GeCCo the contacts between the national YCs are increased and extended. So new ideas can be created, new projects can start or co-operations may be established involving local Young Crew members on national level. This is not only important for the participants but also for their involvement in YC. As a matter of fact, the whole preparation for the event can be seen as a proof of the potential of this kind of working paradigm, in which people can co-operate and collaborate with a high level of trust and commitment even without face-to-face interaction.

Furthermore the YC increases its reputation as a highly international and interesting network for global operating companies to search for experienced and skilled young professionals in the field of project management.

2.4.2 Tangible goals

GeCCo event has various outcomes directly connected to the competition. The participants experience the work in multicultural teams operating in a completely virtual environment training their soft skills in a unique setting. Not only the participants of the 24 hours case study competition but also the organizing teams will be part of a distributed team.

The participants will get a case study to solve in their team within 24 hours. The exact case is not defined yet though the result may be a contribution to an existing problem.

2.4.3 Project management goals

The interesting idea about GeCCo is the new organizational paradigm. During the preparation of the event it became obvious, that just two people were not able to manage the project on their own. All tasks were listed and clustered in subprojects. The resulting breakdown structure was analyzed focusing the possibility to outsource the tasks, leaving only project management and sponsoring in the scope of the core team. Thus ensuring the feasibility the organizers were facing another challenge. Outsourcing tasks to characters they've never met.

Further progress should be achieved before the 26th IPMA World Congress 2012 in Crete, within budget and content stakeholders (Core Team, Local Organizers, Keynote Speakers, Sponsors and Participants).

3. Structural challenges of GeCCo

There are several challenges confronting the organizers of GeCCo along the way:

- Involved people are working voluntarily in their free time. This means there are no disciplinary manners to achieve commitment.
- Core Team identified too many tasks to be performed by just the two people, though it was unrealistic, that further staff could be convinced to take part in the core team due to the high workload. In fact the organization of the project itself is an experiment in a virtual and multicultural environment.
- Finding sponsors for the project is an important part in order to deliver interesting prizes for participants. GeCCo is a new project and finding sponsors could be hard due to lack of information in field of project management

Since the project is 95% virtually organized a team building is not possible to be performed face-to-face. The high degree of delegation of tasks requires trust and commitment in a non-committing environment. Motivation and communication became the main concerns of the core team.

The long planning phase threatened to demotivate the Core Team through the feeling of being prepared for a non-realistic-scenario. Furthermore time differences between the locations of the involved parties did not facilitate virtual meetings and their productivity. Due to studies or work, all tasks required a longer period of time. A further problem occurring after the Kick-Off was the increasing number of questions asked by the Local Organizers concerning their activities in the countries and in the other working packages. Also the tracking of ongoing activities became an obstacles.

The Local Organizers confronted different circumstances in all their countries concerning the organization of their YC or the number of applicants for participation. This resulted in individual application processes in each involved country; nevertheless the Local Organizers expressed a high need to share their opinions on similar tasks.

At last the target group of GeCCo is specifically interesting for many companies looking for young professionals in the area of project management. The visibility of the project is huge and reaches a lot of project managers around the globe through the publicity in the member associations' websites and newspapers.

The paper will concentrate on the aspect of motivation through a facilitation of communication and will present experiences till now.

4. Solutions for identified challenges

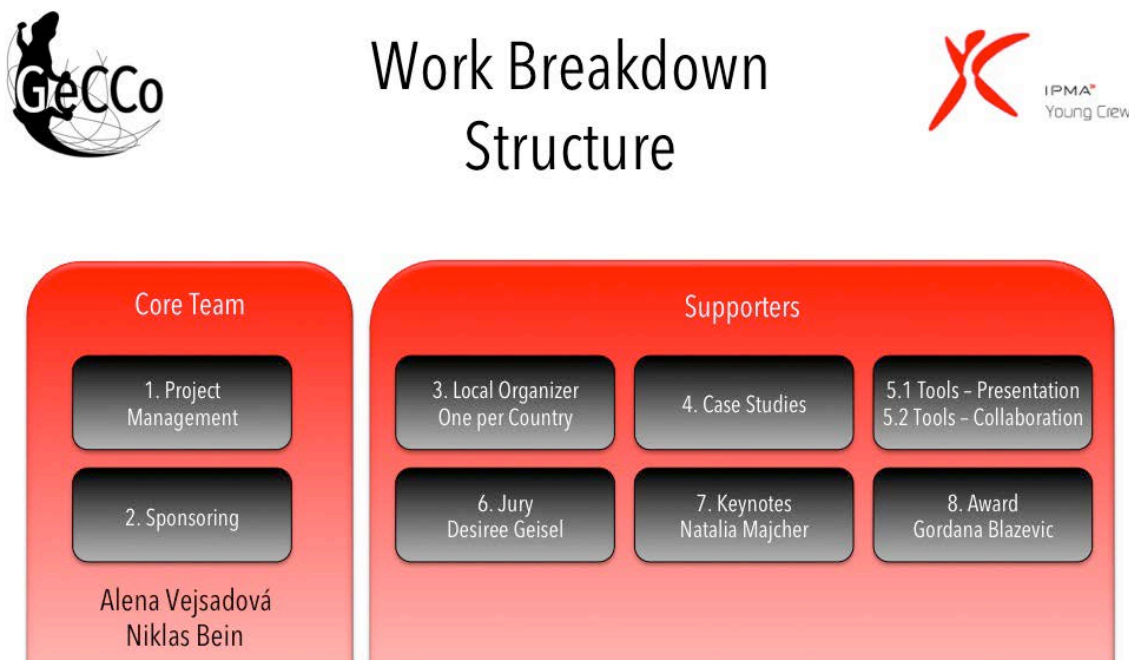
As shown above communication is the key for commitment in this project. Since GeCCo itself is an experiment and performed for the first time, the Core Team explored various tools for virtual collaboration. At first the needs and the selected tools are presented and in the following the experiences during conduction of the project.

4.1 Working Breakdown Structure & Roles

The Core Team designed a structure to overcome the obstacles that were identified in the planning phase that has started in 2010.

The project is divided into eight subprojects or working packages (Figure 1). The Core Team is responsible for Project Management and Sponsoring since these packages are considered key parts of the project. All other tasks were prepared to be realized by other team members.

Figure 1: Work Breakdown Structure of the project



Since the project aims to involve many YCs worldwide, it needs representatives and people in charge in every participating country. Therefore the role of Local Organizer was designed. These are the people who conduct marketing and selection for the event.

If Local Organizers were devoted to spend more time on the project they could choose another packages in order to take responsibility for it. Local Organizers and Core Team form the project team.

It is obvious that many working packages are strongly connected. For example the packages Sponsoring, Award, Case Study. Sponsors should deliver the Case Studies and pay for the given prices during the award. Even though the tasks were organized in working packages a lot of communication is to be conducted the core team.

4.2 Motivation through communication

All team members have joined the project voluntarily and perform their tasks in their free time and on top of their usual jobs. The tasks themselves require a certain professionalism that is comparable with the standards at work and will be perceived as a pure leisure.

The main motivation of the participants to join this project was to experience the international scope of YC, to work in a multinational team with team mates all over the world and be part of this unique project in the IPMA.

It is obvious that this motivation has to be kept alive by enabling the Local Organizers to perceive these aspects of the project. Since it was and is not possible to arrange face-to-face meetings other techniques have to be used to feel the experience of an international project. The risk of losing a team member is high due to the big distances and the complete virtual communication. So it was the mayor task of the project to make sure that everyone feels involucmed and recognizes the progress made.

4.3 Communication Plan

Three main areas of different kinds of communication could be identified. At first the team has to store and work on several files at the time. Secondly one-to-one communication and discussion had to be possible concerning decision processes and sharing of experiences. At last communication tools for one-to-n had to be found in order to perform the kick-off and the online streamed event.

These requirements are very diverse because the project should be managed by using freeware solutions for collaboration. The need to use a combination of tools was identified:

- **E-mail** - for communication within project team and potential sponsors
- **Skype** - for communication within project team
- **Facebook** - as a fast channel how to reach all project members and participants of GeCCo
- **Google tools** - to create documents and work on them at the same time
- **Do[Box]** - to create project plan and track workload on the project and to run discussions
- **Dropbox** - to store documents created while running project
- **Livestream** - to stream live events of GeCCo (Kick-Off, Keynotes and Award)

These tools were selected and the portfolio has grown organically. Whenever there was a new tool it was firstly tested and introduced. Few weeks after the Kick-Off the Core Team realized that some tools were not used in the way intended and therefore the advantages and disadvantages were assessed by looking at the use of the tools.

In the following a table present an overview about the used tools, the identified advantages and disadvantages and the acceptance by the users (Table 1).

Table 1: Tools and experiences

Tool	Advantage	Disadvantage	Acceptance by user
E-mail	Easy to use Common Every member of team has e-mail	Private e-mail addresses should not be used to communicate with public Slow	Well accepted and used for questions addressed to Core Team
Skype	Cheap way of replacing face-to-face meetings and phone calls Available from different locations Instant messaging	Limited number of participants in free calls Technical problems during calls Hard to manage discussion with higher number of participants	Mainly Core Team uses this tool. Skype calls, chatting with Local Organizers; without CT participation is not known.
Facebook Site	Informs people interested in the project and gives a statistic about the visibility of the project Propagation of the project	Need to update page on regular basis in order to keep interested people informed	The site has over 50 likes Most of Local Organizers like this page, they are posting interesting articles on site as well
Facebook Group	Fast communication Easier to respond for question No need for official communication	Not all Local Organizers have Facebook account Mixing social network with work matters	Facebook site and group is used frequently to ask questions (except Local Organizers without Facebook account)
Google Docs	Fast sharing with bigger number of collaborators Easy to use Easy to change	Complicated administration of all documents Editing of documents is possible mainly in online mode	Core Team was using Google Docs from beginning of project Local Organizers are familiar with Google Docs
Google Sites	Presentation of project to public Sharing information with Local Organizers and Core Team Quick navigation	Static Need to be kept up to date Only in online version	Core Team and Local Organizers have access to extended part of Google Sites
Do[Box]	Tool for project planning Sharing files Discussion	Platform of Do[Box] is still developing some features are not working properly	Core Team and Local Organizers have access to Do[Box]. They should be encourage to use it more often
Dropbox	Sharing of files Copy on own hard disk	Difficult system of sharing documents It is not possible to customize folders due to everyone needs	Core Team and Local Organizers have access to Dropbox files. Few of them are using that
Livestream	Streaming tool Sharing keynotes speeches	Good internet connection needed to receive good	Core Team and Local Organizers are testing this

Easy to use from different parts of World	streaming of event	platform
Tool for chatting during live event		

4.4 Channels & Coordination of Communication

It is obvious that there are too many tools and platforms for communication. They were added continuously during the conduction of the project. That caused big number of communication channels in the project.

To avoid problems with communication overload a communication plan was created which sets responsibilities and tools to use during the project. This document provides an overview regarding responsibilities and makes our communication more efficient. It was not used from the beginning, which caused a bigger workload for Core Team members because questions were answered randomly. The clarification of responsibilities made work more efficient and clear for everyone in the team. The communication plan is divided into two parts. The first part tracks interaction among the team members due to their responsibilities in the project and frequency of communication. The second part is focused on the communication tool in usage.

The clarification of communication channels and responsibilities on project makes communication easier and faster. The communication plan is a good tool for the core team as well as for Local Organizers in order to know where to send their questions regarding the project and in order to get proper and quick answer.

4.5 Proposal to close one or two channels.

You can see in Table 1 that some of the tools are overlapping and some communication channels need to be eliminated some of communication channels in order to make the communication within the project team clear and efficient. In order to close some channels we had to identify the most useful tools in usage and the level of convenience concerning the team members.

After evaluation we decided to close and limit these channels:

- Facebook Group

Some members of the project team are not involved in communication on Facebook. Some were not using this particular social network due to the questionable data security and private settings. Others did not enter on a regular basis.

The Local Organizers using Facebook on a regular daily or hourly basis on the other hand used the quick possibility to exchange information, share links or news. This caused at first an informational asymmetry in the project team, which was only perceivable by the ones excluded. The Core Team tried to forward the information via Email but this ended in high workload forwarding messages.

To clarify the situation, the Facebook group will be shut down and all discussions should be held in the [Do]Box platform. The acceptance of this is not yet foreseeable, since it might be, that discussions that were held in a social network are not that vivid in the working environment of [Do]Box and the frequency of visiting the site might decrease.

- Dropbox

Dropbox is not used often by the team members. This might have to do with the early stage of the project. Not much had to be documented yet and most of the Local Organizers will start their work on their tasks in May or June. During the project the relevance of this data storage might increase in a phase of high collaboration between the Local Organizers (e.g. designing flyers or writing press releases). Final results can be posted on the [Do]Box site as well as a final deliverable or a working package. Due to the few uses, we intend to use the Dropbox rather for bilateral work than for the whole team or just for the core team. The possibility to store information there will not be limited technically.

5. Discussion and Outlook

The given case of the GeCCo project showed that motivation in a distributed team is more difficult than in a face-to-face setting. A proper communication structure enables the team members to exchange ideas and motivate each other. A direct motivation by the Core Team is rather difficult to achieve. Some of the offered communication channels were accepted better than others and also used in a different manner than intended. This means that the communication structure evolves with the project during the process and has to be adjusted and reviewed just like any other method applied. The shown example has no empirical validity but can inspire other project managers to get a different perspective concerning the work in distributed teams.

The GeCCo project can be considered as a pioneer event in the network of the IPMA YC and will deliver more findings along the conduction. Further aspects concerning virtual collaboration will be observed and described in future papers.

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