Progress Report for Leadership Foundation for Higher Education

QUARTER 4

Project Title: A Distributed Leadership Approach to Supporting Internationalisation in Higher Educational Institutions

Project Leaders:

Dr. Fahri Karakas leads the project; with guidance and support from Prof. Mark O’Fenton-Creevy (Co-Director of IMPEL\(^1\) Initiative).

Home HEI: The Open University Business School

Background

This project began in February 2011. We have finished implementing the project at the Open University. This is the last quarterly report of this small development project. However, we will continue our dissemination activities as well as our paper building on this project.

The collapse of national economic boundaries, massive advances in global communication technologies, international mobility, and cultural diversity pose new challenges for international collaboration in the British higher education system as British universities pursue greater internationalisation (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Chan, 2004; De Vita and Case, 2003; Kameoka, 1996; Neave, 1992; Knight, 2006). The aim of the project is to create a distributed leadership approach to developing faculty and staff understanding of building international partnerships. The theoretical context of this work is that of ‘distributed leadership’ to support building international partnerships and virtual collaboration whereby the process is conceived of as dispersed across the organisation.

With the advent of web 2.0 interactive capabilities and web conferencing tools, virtual collaboration is more ubiquitous. Virtual collaboration enables flexibility, creativity and innovation without benefit of a physical environment; eliminating physical, cultural, and organizational boundaries. By accessing the collective intelligence and wisdom of partners or experts connected via the internet, universities can access knowledge and expertise that might otherwise require significant cost and effort.

\(^1\) International Management Education and Learning
Virtual collaboration opens up exciting new possibilities for our colleagues at Open University and their research partners including interactive meetings, virtual training platforms, joint collaborative bidding, and co-authoring articles.

**Principal activities, progress, and milestones achieved**

The quarterly goals and milestones for this project have been successfully completed in the fourth (last) quarter.

We have successfully delivered the staff development workshop titled “Getting the Most out of International Partnerships: New Perspectives on Virtual Collaboration” on April 19 at the Open University. The workshop has generated tremendous interest and participation across the university. More information and details of the workshop are provided below in a separate section.

As a whole, this LFHE small development project has produced positive impact and outcomes; including engagement of a broader group of Business School faculty in international partnerships and virtual collaboration and deeper and more multi-faceted partnerships with existing international partners.

The principal activities and progress achieved in the fourth quarter are outlined in detail below.

**1. Staff Development Workshop delivered successfully at the Open University**

In this quarter, we have implemented the staff development workshop at the Open University. On 19 April, 2012, Thursday the IMPEL workshop titled “Getting the Most out of International Partnerships: New Perspectives on Virtual Collaboration” took place at the Open University Business School. All colleagues who have been engaged in international partnerships were invited to this workshop; but the workshop was open to all colleagues interested in building international partnerships using virtual collaboration.

In this workshop, we brainstormed and discussed innovative ways to make our international partnerships and related projects more effective, productive, and sustainable (See Figure 1 for a sample slide). We discussed models and methods of successful virtual collaboration (George, 1996; Heffernan and Poole, 2005; Ratcheva and Vyakarnam, 2001); building on our research and progress in
this small development project. The workshop has generated tremendous interest and participation.

We have discussed and learned from the experiences, challenges, and best practices of all collaborations in break-out and interactive sessions. The workshop has been an interactive opportunity to share best practices and innovations in using technology for international collaboration across the Open University. The workshop has also been a great opportunity for sharing our updates and learning from each of our own international partnership projects; leading to a shared vision of visual collaboration and internationalisation; as well as a collective sense of progress and momentum. Below was the brief outline of this workshop:

**IMPEL Workshop 19 April –Outline**

Gettting the Most out of International Partnerships:
New Perspectives on Virtual Collaboration

14.00-17.00 Presentation Room, Michael Young Building

1) Introduction and welcome 10 min.
2) IMPEL Agenda and Update – Dr. Sally Dibb 10 min.
3) Plenary Workshop on Virtual Collaboration – Dr. Fahri Karakas 50 min.
   - LFHE project summary and update
   - The case for collaboration
   - Managing collaboration
   - Overview of virtual tools, web 2.0, social media
   - Suggestions for building international partnerships & virtual collaboration

4) Break into Groups for Discussion on Partnership Projects up to now 25 min.
   - Sharing updates/outcomes about own project (10 min)
   - Sharing experiences/learning: challenges & best practices (15 min.)

5) Reporting Group Discussions to the Whole Group 15 min.
   - Sampling of learning/experiences/best practices

6) What is Next? Brainstorming and Discussion in Groups 15 min.
   - How can we get the most out of our projects? Maximizing outputs
• Resolving challenges and keeping momentum

7) Final Plenary Discussion 20 min.

• What are the next steps?
• Future opportunities & challenges
• What support do you need from IMPEL?
• How can we go ahead?
• Sharing our vision/goals/progress across the school

The presentation part of the workshop was organized in four parts:
• Part 1: The case for collaboration
• Part 2: Managing collaboration
• Part 3: Overview of virtual tools, web 2.0, social media
• Part 4: Learning from LFHE project: Issues & suggestions

Figure 1: Sample Workshop Slide

Planning for International Research Collaboration

Yourself
Skills/knowledge Needs Interests

Partners
Complementary skills/knowledge/access Impact and academic credibility Work style, culture, personality

Review, evaluate, adjust

Create A Model That Works for You All
Shared vision, goals and timeline
Shared expectations and norms
Ways and tools to sustain virtual collaboration
2. A Practice Based Model of Virtual Collaboration has been proposed and shared

The emergent learning, insights, and discussions of this LFHE project have been useful in the building of a best practice model to support faculty and staff in forming and sustaining international partnerships and collaboration.

The following emergent model of virtual collaboration (See Figure 2) has been introduced and shared in the workshop. Now we are in the process of disseminating this model through other HE workshops and conferences; as well as through a practitioner-oriented article to be published in an international HE journal.

This virtual collaboration model involves a series of circular activities including finding the right partners with complementary skills, meeting them and building partnership with them based on trust, agreeing on shared vision and goals, sharing resources and knowledge, sharing roles and work flow, evaluating progress, and producing and disseminating outcomes. During each set of these activities, researchers now have access to a wide variety of practical tools that help them manage virtual collaboration more effectively.

The model illustrates this cycle with examples of how web 2.0 tools can enhance virtual collaboration at every stage. The model also shares implications and suggestions for practitioners interested in virtual research collaboration; including the following:

- Focus on your partners and the types of interaction desired
  - What do they need & want? What would you like them to think, say and do as a result of each meeting?

- Do the required preparation and pre-work
  - Advance connecting and building personal connections, preparation and planning, advance phone and email work
  - Set measures of success for each meeting.
  - Have clear times for each step. Send reminders for the tasks before the due date.

- Keep bringing a human touch to virtual collaboration.
  - Smile, share examples and be conversational to bridge the virtual gap.
  - Build trust among virtual team members (Holton, 2001)
  - Be available after the virtual session for informal connection.
  - Provide partners with email, voicemail and in-person times to meet to continue collaborating.
• Use facilitative techniques to keep the discussion lively.
  - Use a storyboard to plan participation.
  - Use stories and metaphors to inspire a shared vision.
  - Use material which is engaging & visually appealing. Use pictures and visuals (graphs, colour and multi-media) during conversations and meetings.
• Allow creative chaos, excitement, and trust to thrive
  - Build a community of ideas. Create structures where everyone learns from each other.
  - Build on a pipeline of ideas and projects; synthesizing and iterating them to come up with outputs
• Let collaboration be media of self-expression, passion, deep learning, and flow.
  - Evoke engaged collaboration where you and your partners design, create, play, and innovate.
  - Engage your partners in ways that have relevance to them.
  - Capture their attention and imagination. Honour their unique knowledge, talents and skills to bring out individual talent and excellence.
• Harness the global brain or collective intelligence
  - Use of social networking tools (blogs, wikis, OpenLearn, Twitter, academia.edu, newsletter, LinkedIn groups)
  - Self-organization, flexibility, and robustness enabled by web 2.0 interactive capabilities and web conferencing tools
  - Access knowledge and expertise that might otherwise require significant cost and effort
• Learn from the principles of self-organization, chaos theory, emergence, and complexity
  - Understand the dynamics of virtual collaboration and stigmergy in living systems (a form of self-organization that produces complex, intelligent structures, without need for any planning, control, or direct communication between the agents)

This model (Figure 2) is still being disseminated and will be shared across UK HEIs using social networking tools and digital platforms; as well as through future workshops.
We have found the following resources particularly useful and as part of this model we have been recommending these resources to interested colleagues and institutions on virtual collaboration:

- Virtual Research Environment Collaborative Landscape Study: A JISC funded project (Carusi and Reimer, 2010)  
- International Research Collaborations: Much to Be Gained, Many Ways to Get in Trouble
3. The Range and Quality of Virtual Research Collaboration Projects have increased

Faculty members at the Open University Business School have been engaged in numerous international partnership projects and visits throughout the world. There are currently more than 30 different research projects that are conducted in collaboration with partner organizations in more than 20 countries. The range and the quality of these international partnerships provide the Open University Business School a strategic advantage by providing the basis for an international collaborative knowledge ecosystem.

Both the quality and the range of our international partnership projects have increased tremendously since last year. More faculty members are involved in international partnership activities and these partnerships are research partnerships. Some of these partnerships also involve the identification of research and grant bidding opportunities through meetings with international partners. Many of these partnerships are sustained through various forms of virtual collaboration that are built on the basis of face-to-face meetings or previous relationships.

The uses and functions of virtual collaboration have become deeper and more diverse. The experience of virtual collaboration provides faculty members a range of benefits by meeting their particular professional, academic, and personal needs; including resolving methodological problems; getting feedback; asking for guidance when experiencing writer’s block; accessing critical academic information and professional knowledge; achieving a sense of progress and momentum; and building high quality relationships.

Faculty members have been using an increasing range of virtual tools such as Skype, DropBox, Elluminate, Adobe Connect, Twitter, blogs, wikis, and email to communicate with their international partners. The experiences of using a variety of digital platforms with international partners have provided faculty members with experiential knowledge on the differences and functionalities of different virtual platforms and digital tools.
Skype: Many colleagues use Skype meetings on a daily basis for their collaboration and research with their international partners. Some colleagues use Skype several times every week to coordinate their international research projects.

Drop Box: This application allows quick folder and file sharing among colleagues in remote locations. Some colleagues mention they have stopped using USB storage since using Drop Box; as any changes they do to research files are automatically updated and shared with other research team members. Drop Box is also used for backing up research data and documents.

SocialLearn: Colleagues are using SocialLearn to reflect and inquire on the new learning and collaboration spaces enabled by virtual tools. Some of the issues of inquiry and reflection are social learning, collective sensemaking, social media, open educational resources, p2p relationships, and authentic inquiry.

Google docs: Some colleagues at OUBS use their Google accounts to share and edit the articles that they are co-authoring with colleagues overseas. As Google docs function as wikis, co-authors can add or revise information to the document at the same time.

Team Viewer: This is a screen sharing technology used for sharing information that needs a visual demonstration; such as sharing and viewing particular SPSS analyses on data.

Basecamp: This tool is used to manage and track research projects and tasks among team members. Colleagues can share, assign, and organize tasks, as well as communicate about their progress and goals.

Cloudworks: Colleagues have been using this platform to share their research and teaching ideas and experiences with the wider academic community. The platform is also used as a space for brainstorming, idea development, and idea sharing regarding teaching and research.

Academia.edu: Colleagues use this platform to find potential new collaborators, to follow each other’s work, to share their research papers, and to disseminate their research outputs.

4. Paper on Virtual Collaboration has been further developed

In this quarter, we have finished writing a preliminary draft of the paper on virtual collaboration. The paper still needs additional revisions and work before it can be
sent out to a journal. This paper is a practitioner-oriented paper developed on the basis of the literature and built on our experiences and learning at the OUBS. The literature gap on the role of social media, web 2.0 and social networking tools in sustaining international collaboration among partners is addressed. The paper will be further developed in the upcoming months and submitted to a high quality peer reviewed international journal at the end of 2012 (International Journal of Leadership in Education or Educational Management Administration and Leadership). Below are some of the themes from the paper:

• Universities today are faced with more complexities, competition, and change than at any other time in history. To effectively cope, academics need to focus on new ways of research, innovation and value creation. This implies a dramatic shift in the mindsets of academics and academic staff regarding the new paradigm. The digital ecosystem has had a transformative and irreversible impact on the global landscape of academia. The concept of virtual collaboration can provide academics a fresh perspective and an integrative vision of global networking, open innovation, and collaborative research.

• Collaborative research is more crucial than ever, particularly beyond national borders. Since external collaboration is indispensable and many complementary research capacities come from outside partners, academics need to pay particular attention to strengthening their collaborative research capabilities beyond their universities.
  • Academics now have the virtual tools to collaborate with partners from all over the world, but they need to move from traditional research models to network orchestration and open innovation models. They need to find the barriers preventing virtual collaboration, eliminate them and come up with solutions that bridge distance, culture, epistemology, discipline, and department walls or barriers.
  • As scattered specialists and lone researchers link up and collaborate, they can uncover a big picture full of opportunities for networked science and innovation. Collaboration on a massive global scale opens up a world of possibilities for how research is designed, implemented, and disseminated. To see these possibilities, academics need to look outside their universities continually and push their universities and departments to work with outsiders, making external collaboration an integral part of the organizational culture.
• International research collaboration a rapidly growing component of core research activity for all universities. Bruce Alberts (2010), the editor of Science, noted that over half of the papers published in the journal in 2009 were co-authored by international teams.
  • US National Science Board (2010): Between 1988 and 2007 the percentage of articles worldwide that involved international authorship rose from 8% to 22%. European international co-authorship rose from 22.4% to 49.9% in the same period.
• Virtual research environment has been defined as:
  • The tools and technologies needed by researchers to do their research, interact with other researchers (from different disciplines, institutions or countries) and to make use of resources and technical infrastructures available both locally and (inter)nationally
• Virtual research environment:
  • Involves tools for improving their workflow, to gain efficiency
  • Communication, sharing, collaboration, dissemination research ideas and output
  • Creating, storing, organising, sharing, searching, enriching, re-creating
  • Enables open feedback and reviews of work
  • Discuss & share information (articles, cases, data, methodologies)
  • Q&A, rapid response, serendipitous discovery
  • Emerging trends, topics, insights in the field
• One defining feature of virtual research collaboration is the formation of global “online communities” where widely dispersed but like-minded researchers come together in cyberspace based on similar interests, transcending geographical and social boundaries. Virtual collaboration enables researchers to participate in networks of cutting-edge and innovative activity
  • Virtual collaboration provides access to a wider range of facilities and resources
  • Collaboration provides opportunities for researchers to move further and faster by working with other leading people in their field
  • Collaborative research is also identified as contributing to some of the highest impact activity
• We are living in a global village where the collapse of national economic boundaries, the bridging of distances through telecommunications, rapid technological changes, workforce mobility and cultural diversity, the spread of wireless, fiber-optic and broadband technologies, and the
increasing convergence of digital technologies pose new challenges and opportunities for researchers throughout the world.

- As ubiquitous computing connects people, ideas, and resources; the Internet is becoming the most powerful force for open science and social innovation.

- World 2.0 as an interactive, hyper-connected online ecosystem or mega-platform where users create and share knowledge, innovate and collaborate together (e.g. InnoCentive), interact, network or connect with each other (e.g. LinkedIn, Skype, or Twitter), write reflection blogs (e.g. blogger), podcast their presentations or make creative films (e.g. YouTube), develop projects (e.g. wikis or Google docs), and express themselves to the world.

- These tools have made it possible for professionals from all over the world to collaborate, interact, and participate in the process of innovation and value creation.

- Wikinomics defines the new art and science of collaboration (Tapscott and Williams, 2006) where billions of connected people collaborate and participate in innovation, wealth creation, and social development on the virtual global platform of the Internet.

- According to the authors, this participation “has reached a tipping point where new forms of mass collaboration are changing how goods and services are invented, produced, marketed, and distributed on a global basis” (p. 10). Tapscott and Williams propose four key principles of mass collaboration: openness, peering, sharing, and acting globally. Millions of people collaborate in diverse ways on joint projects, write blogs and wikis, communicate with Skype, chat and use e-mail, work concurrently on Google documents. Never before has collaboration across time and space been so fast, easy and cheap. These millions of connected individuals can now actively collaborate and participate in innovation to advance arts, culture, science, and education.

5. Results and Dissemination

This one-year LFHE funded project has progressed with good momentum and a shared interest among the Business School faculty and among our international partners. A good understanding of the elements for successful partnerships, staff involvement, and virtual collaboration has emerged. The project has produced significant new knowledge on international virtual collaboration and a model that
can be replicated across the higher education sector. We have already started disseminating our learning, findings, and the model through workshops, conversations, and a paper. The project has generated significant interest among faculty at different higher education institutions and NGOs in the higher education sector. For example, the project highlights were shared at the Annual Lunch of Association of British Turkish Academics (ABTA). About one hundred Turkish and British academics from 26 institutions across the UK attended this event and the project has generated wide interest. In particular, academics interested in partnering with Turkish institutions and colleagues found the tools and the approach very inspiring and useful. We are sharing the insights and strategies for building and sustaining international partnerships using virtual collaboration with stakeholders, partners, and colleagues in higher education.

We will continue disseminating project findings, learning and best practices through a) future workshops in HE conferences, b) a publication in a high quality peer reviewed international journal, c) through Association of National Teaching Fellows and through the HEA and LFHE; and d) through social networking tools and digital platforms. We will replicate and expand workshop on virtual research collaboration in the SRHE (Society for Research into Higher Education) conference in December 2012.

We have almost finished the draft of the practitioner-oriented paper exploring virtual collaboration tools, methods, and vision. We will revise it and polish it several times before we submit it to a respected higher education journal; and we will position our contribution in international partnerships, virtual collaboration, and higher education literatures.

A significant implication and suggestion that has come from this LFHE project is the necessity of designing and implementing a good impact assessment and measurement system to evaluate whether international collaboration projects have desired outcomes for universities or departments. We have devised a preliminary system as part of the project; which can be used as part of the model of virtual research collaboration that is being disseminated.

Another significant implication and suggestion from this LFHE project is the following: It is critical for universities and departments to provide academic members time, opportunity, and resources to build collaborative research projects based on their interests and passion. Academics should be able to develop their own collaborative projects and budget these projects into their job descriptions, including the time and resources to implement these projects. This is the right time for academics to design and build virtual research collaboration
and to boost academic competitiveness, creativity, and connectivity beyond university borders.

7. Financial Update

In the last quarter, we have spent more than 11 days to coordinate and advance this development project, to organize and implement the staff development workshop, to develop the paper, and to disseminate project results and outcomes. The staff time cost of all these project related writing, R&D, and research tasks (including the development of workshop materials, writing the paper, dissemination activities) have amounted to £3093.

We have reduced the workshop costs to a minimum of £78.10; which amounts the catering costs for the workshop (we have utilised and made most of the OU resources for this workshop).
References


