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The Virtual University: Lessons from a Virtual Cross-Cultural Learning Situation in International Management

Mikael Søndergaard
Aarhus University

Jeanette Lemmergaard
University of Southern Denmark

Paul Donnelly
Technological University Dublin, paul.donnelly@tudublin.ie

See next page for additional authors

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Authors

Mikael Søndergaard, Jeanette Lemmergaard, Paul Donnelly, and Marta B. Cálas

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Mikael Søndergaard - *Odense University, DK*
Jeanette Lemmergaard - *University of Southern Denmark, DK*
Paul F. Donnelly - *University of Massachusetts-Amherst, USA*
Marta B. Calás - *University of Massachusetts-Amherst, USA*

Abstract

This paper addresses some issues regarding virtual learning and the future of traditional universities. Specifically, it considers these issues by reflecting on the following: First, it focuses on the repercussions of information technologies for teaching and learning in "cross-cultural" courses. It critically assesses, via three recent examples, how these approaches influence teaching and learning in the context of international management courses. Second, drawing from the above examples, the paper reflects more broadly on the implications of these technologies: (1) for new forms of knowing and knowledge production; and (2) for the future of institutional conditions of universities.

Much has been written in recent years about upcoming changes in universities as information technologies become easily available and increasingly sophisticated. What would be the future of these technologies and how would they affect the university is, nonetheless, still widely debated. For instance, some argue that the superstructure of higher education has become unstable, for the printed word, on which the world of academe was built is challenged by the use of information

and communication technologies (Victor, 1999). While the printing press and printed publications gave birth to the university as we know it today, information and communication technologies are, at least, "opening a doorway to a new form of institution of higher education" (Victor, 1999: 74). Despite these expectations, currently the printed and the face-to-face spoken words are still the main vehicle of communication in university teaching and learning.

Concurrent with these lofty predictions of wide ranging systemic transformations are more modest actual changes at work. Virtual learning might be providing universities and other learning institutions with real short term solutions to the problems of shrinking resources and of reaching an excluded student body that either cannot afford the luxury of a full-time higher education or that requires access to flexible lifelong learning opportunities (Bayram, 1999; Miller, 1995; Otchet, 1998). Furthermore, it is suggested that most online learning will be career-related, with lifelong learning becoming a necessity, such that it is expected that much course content will be market-driven, but not necessarily replace traditional university courses. Additionally, computer-mediated education is believed to facilitate positive learning outcomes (Alavi, Yoo & Vogel, 1997; Webster & Hackley, 1997), while the virtual classroom is regarded as having the potential to provide students with learning experiences that are superior in terms of increased immersion, participation and fidelity (Mirabito, 1996).

These positive assessments are, nonetheless, contested by other views. The quality of the educational experience, the lack of access to education for less affluent groups, issues concerning the learning styles of some groups vs. others, including gender differences, as well as the credibility of the research on which many of the positive outlooks are based, have been subject to critique (Biemiller, 1998; Koch, 1998). Others contend that many university administrators

assume that these technologies will be a replacement for more costly faculty without realizing that these "replacements" are not only eventually more costly but also that, if anything, technology enhanced education is an enhancement not a replacement for faculty based education (Monaghan, 1996). In fact, some have made a persuasive case that the apparent "progressive trend" in American education brought about by these technological innovations are actually a regression towards mass-production, standardization and support for commercial interests in education (Noble, 1998). This argument is echoed through the experience of the Open University in the UK, an institution that has been involved in successful distance learning activities longer than their American counterparts. The Open University provides education through a bundle of technologies that include periodic interaction with faculty in traditional instructional settings; a model based on enhancement not replacement (Blumenstyk, 1999). In fact, Open University officials have been critical of the limited views of American educational authorities regarding the meaning and design of distance education.

Two recent reports (Gladieux & Swail, 1999; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999) are well-documented analyses of the current situation in the United States. Gladieux and Swail focus on the question of access and conclude that all the promises surrounding computer-based education are based on very little experience and much less systematic data. Thus, they question whether these new technologies are liable to deepen the divide between the rich and the poor, the educational haves and have-nots in today's society. Further, Phipps and Merisotis review the research that has already been done and find that, in general, it tends to support technologically enhanced education. However, once they closely scrutinize these studies they confirm that much of it is badly flawed such that data and/or results do not support the conclusions or, more

important, that many central questions pertaining to the educational experience are not even asked. It seems that when it comes to research on these technologies in American educational settings there is more advocacy than evaluation.

While we are not uncritical supporters of the use of these technologies in the instructional process, and in principle agree that there is more hype than substance upholding their use at this point, we also believe that there is real value in certain uses when it comes to instruction involving international issues. In what follows, we will describe our experiences in a particular technologically enhanced course, and discuss the rationale behind our approach. We will provide, as well, a brief assessment of our results. At the end we articulate other critical issues that stemmed from our experience, and reconsider them in light of greater concerns regarding the future of the university as an institution.

Enhancing Cross-Cultural Courses through Information Technologies

By way of introduction, let's consider first the discourses of "globalization." They assert a need to prepare students for the information-based jobs of the "global village" (Dimitriades & Kamberelis, 1997; Miller, 1995), such that they are capable of dealing with "a world increasingly constituted by and through rapidly developing technological apparatuses" (Dimitriades & Kamberelis, 1997: 138). Moreover, they would need to develop a sense that the connections between cultural, social, technological, economic and representational phenomena are not simple, natural or immutable (Appadurai, 1990). Under the premises of globalization, then, it is possible to re-consider instruction through these technologies as a blessing in disguise. That is , these instructional approaches may provide a way to debunk the orientation toward education as an end

product with a more or less shortened "shelf-life" (as the marketization of education would led us to believe) and re-articulate it more clearly into an on-going process of learning to learn.   In principle, then, familiarity with the uses of information technologies "because of globalization" might aid in the task of encouraging critical thinking in students (Pelton, 1996).

More directly related with our work,   new technologies in both the work and the teaching environment stress the role of complexities which derive from differences in respect to education, age, gender and culture (e.g., Nadler, Thompson & Morris, 1999; Hill & Palestrant, 1998). At the same time, transnational management literature provides insights into the workings of business corporations where the interaction and integration of important organizational units located in many countries around the globe is a business imperative. As the two come together, it might be precisely in the business world environment where the hype surrounding these technologies will be debunked. It is in these intersections, between the promises of the "ivory tower" and the everyday-ness of the "global business world," that students may experience the advantages and limitations pertaining to distance and virtual information and communication.

Consider the following: anecdotal evidence suggests that virtual teams are becoming more prevalent among transnational organizations (Kiser, 1999), presenting challenges not only related to time and space, but also to culture. Indeed, the experience of a virtual team at Royal Dutch Shell serves to illustrate problems brought about by technology that are often overlooked. In terms of communication, one team member noted: "We routinely find out we're miscommunicating, that we forgot to inform a person in the loop, that some people had different expectations as to what's going to happen" (Kiser, 1999: 28).

Distance has the potential to exacerbate language and cultural differences, as suggested by the Shell team members noticing that, even though they may be speaking English, the Dutch team members can feel that their US colleagues are talking in code, especially when colloquialisms are used. The US team members have also noticed that their Dutch counterparts have a preference for structure, wanting details about the process and how it will work, and who will make decisions. The difficulties described in these experiences are supported by other research. For example, Hiltz & Wellman (1997) note that computer-mediated communication "seems good for giving and receiving information, opinions and suggestions; [but that] it is less suited for communicating agreement and disagreement; and it is worst for social-emotional tasks involving conflict and negotiation" (45).

Despite the promise of information and communication technologies to bridge space and time, Shell's virtual team members have found that traveling to meet face-to-face is still necessary to work on problems created by language and cultural differences. Such has been its experience with virtual teams that Shell has established what it calls a Network Learning and Support Center, located in Houston, Texas, "as a sort of paramedic service for virtual teams … provid[ing] first aid and ad hoc assistance … to help virtual team members learn to work together more effectively" (Kiser, 1999: 32). Further, Kiser notes that "when virtual teams don't work well, members can feel as if they're adrift in cyberspace … When there's a problem, it takes longer to figure it out and know it's going to be a problem, and it's harder to know what to do about it" (30). Arriving at a working arrangement that suits everyone in the group can be a complex process, something that is not helped by technology.

So, what does all this have to do with teaching international management? We contend that it has a lot to do with it. If our key aim is, precisely, to encourage critical thinking among our students, and to provide them with experiences through which they could critically evaluate the promises, complexities and difficulties of the world they will encounter upon graduation, we could hardly find a more conducive vehicle than cross-cultural virtual teams involved in resolving several thorny issues. As a caveat, however, we are relying strongly on the specifics of our situation for support of these arguments. Computer-mediated experiential learning for business courses has been growing (eg. Alavi, Yoo & Vogel, 1997; Arbaugh, 1998) but few cross-cultural experiences have been reported in the research literature regarding international business courses (e.g., Duke University[1]).

Some Promises of Information Technologies for Teaching Cross-Cultural Courses

Courses that consider cross-cultural issues often assume the possibility of cross-cultural comparisons. Yet, this assumption has been thoroughly challenged through notions of cultural incommensurability as well as cultural imperialism from both inside and outside the organizational literatures (e.g., Clifford, 1986; Czarniawska, 1998; Geertz, 1983; Kaghan and Phillips, 1998; Kuhn, 1970; 1993; Redding, 1994; Taylor, 1985).   That is, to compare implies that the issues under comparison can translate into one another, or that they can be evaluated in relation to a neutral standard. Said differently, "cross-cultural" often assumes equivalence across cultures. Such notion may overshadow the possibility that cultural differences could be so profound that no equivalence is reasonable ---i.e., that the differences are incommensurable because they belong to

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[1] www.fuqua.duke.edu.

different systems of understanding. To say "cross-cultural" is also to conceal the fact that there is

no "neutral" standard for comparison since all "standards" are cultural creations, depicting the

normalizing premises of some cultures but not others.

In other words, despite the assumption of sensitivity to the uniqueness of different

cultures, "cross-cultural" courses often promote the illusion of cultural universalism as they search

for a generalizable frame for understanding . For instance, Adler (1997) cautions that cross-

cultural miscommunication frequently results from the lack of cultural self-awareness or the

ignorance associated with not knowing one's own cultural conditioning, subconscious cultural

blinders or the lack of conscious attention to one's own cultural assumptions. Lack of cultural

self-awareness often provokes projected similarity, meaning the belief that people in other cultures

are more similar to oneself than they actually are. Such beliefs often bring about inappropriate

behaviors that exacerbate further misinterpretations by all the members in the situation.

In conventional instructional formats the nature of these problems ---i.e., the level of

incommensurability in so called "cultural differences"--- even if conceptually acknowledged, often

goes unnoticed or falls into the background of the course. More "practical" concerns become the

center of attention, such as how to communicate across cultures or how to make decisions that

take into account cultural differences. This is often the case in courses oriented to professional

education such as management and organization studies. Under conventional instructional

formats ---i.e., classroom instruction, in a specific country, with students who belong mostly to

that country--- it is difficult to convey the importance of incommesurability in the experiential

sense. Classroom-based cross-cultural simulations used within a single country, even in the best-

case scenario (e.g., Bafá-Bafá) are contrived situations of short duration. There is little "external

validity" on which to rely when it comes to learning the complexities of actual cross-cultural interactions.

In light of the above, we report in what follows the experiential activities we created in the spring of 1998. We believe that these activities address the issues of cross-cultural incommensurability and complexity already indicated as well as the difficulties of working in virtual teams through computer mediated engagements.

No Virtual Beginning

In what follows, we provide a short description of the learning situation, introducing the context of the experiment. We [Professors Calás (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) and Søndergaard, (SDU- Odense University), with the aid of teaching associates Donnelly (Amherst) and Lemmergaard (SDU – Odense)] collaborated to introduce a real life virtual-team experiment into the teaching situation. The start of this experience was not virtual. The participant professors have known each other for about 10 years prior to the experience and have met often in professional meetings. At an informal gathering at the Academy of Management in Boston in 1997, they decided to bring together their common interest in cross-cultural issues and cognition in a teaching experience, since they were involved in teaching international management. The concept of forming and using e-mail groups was gradually developed during January and February of 1998.

The Formation of E-mail Groups in Amherst and Odense

On the basis of student e-mail accounts, the computer assistants at Odense University

divided the 72 students (36 US and 36 Danish) into 12 subgroups, with 6 students in each. Each

student had a US or a Danish counterpart respectively and three such pairs formed one subgroup.

There were three levels of communication. The first level was the link between the

student pairs, which was private among themselves. The second was the subgroup e-mail

address, which was shared by the students of that group. Finally, the third level was the e-mail

address available to, and shared by, all participants. The professors had access to e-mail

communication for the subgroup level and above. The purpose of this set-up was to have

students solve the cases in pairs first, then reach a group level decision, before the group solution

was finally posted to the "all participants" common address.

Described in a more technical manner, the e-mail groups were linked via a listserver (see

Appendix A). A listserver is a mail system that allows people to communicate using only one e-

mail address. That is, one sends a message to this single address and all the subscribers get that e-

mail – Mikael Søndergaard's e-mail account was used as this single address.

When we constructed the e-mail linkages, three major points had to be taken into account.

Since a list on a listserver can have several different configurations, questions arose as to whether:

a) the members should be added by themselves, thus allowing all people to participate;

b) the system administrator (or moderator) should add the members; or

c) the list should be a closed list, ie, can all people post to the list or is it strictly for members

In the end, we decided that it would be best if members were added to the list by the moderator/

administrator and that, in order to keep non-related mail from the list, it could only be used by

members. To get used to the media and to each other, each student was invited to start

communicating on an informal basis with her/his counterpart from the start. At a given point in

the semester, the first case exercise was suddenly introduced with a relatively short deadline, followed by the other two during the rest of the semester. They were structured in levels of increasing difficulty.

The Three Cases

The first e-mail assignment was introduced on March 26th (see Appendix B). This assignment consisted of a mini-case which was adapted from the case "The Controversy Over the Islamic Head Scarf: Women's Rights and Cultural Sensibilities" (Phatak, 1997: 166-170). The original case was discussed first in each class (Amherst and Odense) and afterward students were asked to communicate with their partners in the other country regarding the issues involved in the variation of the case as shown on Appendix A. While this first assignment could be considered merely as a warm-up exercise to make the students comfortable with the technology and the time lags in communication, it should be mentioned that the substance of the case was in itself important for issues of cross-cultural differences.

The original case situation occurred in a third country (France) that was a foreign location for both the Amherst and the Odense students. It also portrayed general circumstances that are subject to much Western cultural stereotyping of women in Islam (e.g., Czarniawska and Calás, 1997). While not all students communicated with their partners, those who did reported back in class the similarities (a good deal) and differences (modest) with their partners in the other country. Not surprisingly, the similarities referred to common (in the West) women in Islam stereotypes. This offered an opportunity to discuss in class the formation of cultural stereotypes and the impact of those stereotypes regarding migrant populations to Western countries.

The differences, however, provided an even richer discussion since the Danish students were more aware of the conditions in France than were the American students and, to a certain extent, the discussion became the occasion to remark the fundamental differences that may have been masked under the common focus on the women in the case. Specifically, the Danish students were willing to consider the special circumstances of French institutions under French regulations, while the American students were fairly adamant about the need for a universal solution to the issue, no matter the location. It was the students' own divergent attitudes toward cultural differences, as they voiced their own incommensurable premises, that provided a glaring example of the difficulties behind "cross-cultural" comparisons .

The next assignment was a case on Asea Brown Boveri (HBS 192-139), introduced to the students on April 2nd (see Appendix C). After participants had worked in their subgroups and submitted their group answers to the general list, the case was discussed in class. The group work and class discussion were enriched by a talk at Odense given by Kim Kenlev, assistant to the CEO of the Danish holding company of ABB, which was videotaped and sent by courier to Amherst for use in class.

In this case, the students became very immersed on the transnational and global issues pertaining to the company and, in a sense, found a common "safe ground" on which to allay their differences. It should be noted that the lessons the students were following in both locations (USA and Denmark) at the time of the case involved the topic of organizing for international business. Also, we must remark that the theoretical arguments pertaining to this topic are not "neutral." The literature and research on transnational and global organizations have been mostly generated in the USA, through this country's understanding of organization theory. Yet, in

appearance, students seemed to become culturally disconnected from the topic such that the discourse of "organization" became their common zone of engagement. The question of the cultural imperialism of organizational theories could have been raised at this point, but we did not do so at the time.

The two first assignments did not differ too much from the traditional mode of case teaching, other than not all the students were able to prepare for class face-to-face, and had to rely on computer-mediated communications. However, the third exercise presented them with an unexpected experience.

The third assignment (see Appendix D), differed from the other two in that student preparation and learning took place via a simulation in international ethics, developed by Rathcke and Larsen (1996), which formed the basis for the final real-time case process. The students received the simulation, in which a series of bribery and ethical dilemmas took place, via e-mail. Having prepared for class, a real-time case analysis took place, where a number of new situations were introduced in real-time to the students via e-mail. A class discussion of the simulation and the group experience took place during the following class.

Besides critical thinking as a tool for providing business students with long term skill-sets, existing research on the subject of ethics at an international level points to the difficulty of arriving at a universal ethics framework due to the influence of culture (e.g. Cohen, Pant & Sharp, 1992; Vogel, 1992). Through our approach, we sought to address the "globalization" promise of a unitary cultural system, that in fact was already called into question by the prior experiences. It is here that the more dramatic results occurred, as will be discussed below.

An Analysis and Some Learning from the Experiment

Part of the analysis is based on survey responses from 31 students from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst and 23 students from SDU-Odense collected a the end of the experiment. A summary of the survey's results is presented in Appendix E. The questions were adapted from Hofstede (1997) and adjusted for the purpose of the simulation.

The participants were asked to rate, on a 6-point scale, some of the main dimensions of the virtual-teams Amherst-Odense experiment. The results are not convincingly clear for either group and it is difficult to ascertain from this survey whether students actually liked or disliked the experience. On average, the participants seemed to like communicating through e-mail (Odense, 3.4, Amherst 3.8), but did not believe that the e-mail communication contributed to the quality of the group. The groups seemed to have cooperated well, obtaining good group results, and did not believe that they could have achieved the same quality without the group work.

It seems that there was not a large degree of personal friction in the group, nor did it seem that there were major differences of opinion over the decisions being made. To a large extent, participants seemed to have enjoyed working with the groups and were satisfied with the process through which the results were obtained. The table indicates only modest differences between the Amherst and the Odense participants.

Yet, students in Odense also provided open-ended responses. According to the Danish participants' comments, the e-mail case discussions and interactive bribery simulation learning situations were exciting and stimulating for the learning process. A variety of themes and dilemmas could be dealt with simultaneously, and hereby increase the intellectual demands on participants. However, it was a general concern that the method was very time-consuming and

needed a more firm structure. Further, the participants expressed frustrations over the technical

problems that occasionally occurred, despite these being of insignificant importance.

Some participants had little or no experience with the use of computer technology before

these exercises and found the exercises a nuisance. Similarly, some students' lack of equipment at

home added an extra source of frustration, as these students were obliged to come to the

university to do the required assignments.

Direct Observations of the Danish Participants during the Real-Life Case Process

Lemmergaard observed the Danish student groups while they were participating in the

bribery simulation. The observation of all groups was possible, as the whole computer lab was

reserved for the experiment.

From the notes made during the simulation, Lemmergaard made the following

observations. First, it was evident that the participants showed a significantly high level of

interactivity and a high level of inventiveness with respect to alternate solutions. A drawback,

however, was that the participants spend an unnecessary amount of time formulating their

responses, and lost the value of short and immediate comments on the various themes.

Second, generally, it was only when the answers were precise and complete that they were

shared between the group members. The fruitfulness of spontaneity was hereby lost. Responses

became statements, rather than thoughts for discussion. It was observed that formal interaction

was particularly prominent in groups that had not been interacting on an informal basis prior to

the simulation. The strong self-censorship that the participants employed was particularly

prominent when dealing with sensitive subjects such as international bribery (third case). In other

words, comments made verbally can be reformulated or even denied more easily than something committed to writing. Therefore, the participants were very focused on their use of words and hesitated to state their immediate reactions to the situations presented.

Third, the time pressure which the participants experienced was intentional (Søndergaard et al, 1997). However, due to the sensitivity of the subject, participants were further stressed by having to communicate in written form. A further element to be considered when dealing with non-English-speaking participants is the language barriers. The non-English-speaking participants spent an unreasonable amount of time on spell checking and dictionary consultation, and as mentioned above, lose the value of the spontaneity in their comments.

Based on these observations, Lemmergaard suggests that when using e-mail simulations for the first time it is advisable to use a test-example in order to 1) have the participants consider and realize the time pressure, 2) enforce and make obvious the advantages of the short comments strategy, and 3) allow for inconsequential comments and remarks on a structured, but informal, basis in order to make the participants more familiar with the other group members and the applied method.

Analysis of the Ethics Decision-Making Content Data

Donnelly performed an analysis of the ethics decision-making data, both pre- and post-simulation, where some interesting results emerged. Prior to the simulation, US women exhibited a utilitarian ethical orientation, while US men tended towards a formalist ethical orientation. This was in keeping with Gilligan (1982) who suggests that women, because they are considered to be more caring, have a more context-specific ethics framework than men, who are considered to be

more concerned with issues of universal justice. However, the results for the Danish participants were the reverse, with Danish men tending towards a more utilitarian orientation than Danish women, throwing Gilligan's findings into question regarding the universal applicability of her work. The question of context-specificity could also be raised regarding the cultural aspects of gender.

For instance, according to Hofstede's (1987) typology, Danish society is considered to be more caring than US society, which would suggest that Danes would show a more context-specific utilitarian orientation when it comes to ethics decision-making than US individuals. However, our results pre-simulation show Danish women exhibiting a more formalist orientation (i.e., universalistic justice principles against Gilligan's findings regarding women) than both their male counterparts and their US counterparts, both male and female.

Post-simulation, US women tended towards becoming more utilitarian, with US men tending towards a more formalist orientation, again in keeping with Gilligan. While the Danish participants, both men and women, moved towards a more utilitarian framework, Danish women were still less utilitarian-oriented than Danish men. Although US men were more formalist than all other groups, Danish men and women were nonetheless less utilitarian in their ethics decision-making than US women, all of which lends further support to questioning Hofstede's typology, as well as questioning Gilligan's work given that gender differences are often culture-specific.

In Closing: Consequences for the Virtual University

Communication through the electronic medium calls for timely and accurate data processing by the individual. If today's universities are expected to prepare the employees of

tomorrow for the ever-increasing time pressure they will have to deal with throughout their lives, these simulations may at least provide that form of experience. By pushing the participants to identify the problem, create alternative solutions, and develop convincing arguments for decisions, through the use of electronic case studies between nationalities, the participants may have become better prepared for "real life" situations in the global economy.

Similarly, due to the hesitation from some students regarding the use of computers it would be tempting to dismiss this medium. However, the students need to become more accustomed to working with computers in order to prepare for work-life, an argument in favor of increasing this kind of teaching mode. Further this approach emphasizes the skill of written communication through electronic media but also develops an awareness of the constraints of written communication in these fast decision-making processes.

But, in saying this, we introduce an important limitation and that is that not everyone has equal access to such technology. Indeed, not everyone among our membership had 24-hour access to a computer and e-mail, something that led to problems when it came to collaborating on assigned cases. Equally, some were more au fait with technology and were anxious to overcome the time delay with e-mail by moving to real-time messaging.
We, both students and professors, also noted the limitations of technology when it comes to communication and decision-making. And then there is the issue of language. Through what language should participants communicate? In our case, we used English as lingua-franca since the Danish students could accommodate to this. However, what happens when more people are introduced, resulting in more language variety amongst participants? How do we decide, if such a decision is reasonable, which language is to take precedence? Why should others be expected to

accommodate our lack of fluency in other languages? In our cyberspace classroom, English was given a privileged position, given that the Danish course was being taught through English and that the US students did not know a word of Danish. As pointed out above, this had implications for the Danish participants in that it hampered their participation.

Further, beyond the above, our virtual learning situation raises important questions regarding what we understand by university. Essentially, we had two professors from two separate, independent institutions collaborating on teaching an undergraduate course in international management. Each had a class of students physically located at each institution and met with them at the officially scheduled time. Yet, we created a third space, one located in cyberspace, where part of our separate courses came together at different points throughout the semester. This space was neither Amherst nor Odense, but another institution that transcended the limits of space and time, one that enabled us as educators to collaborate in a way that had not been possible up to very recently.

The space we created is different from that generally trotted out in the literature we reviewed. Using this approach we have moved beyond merely thinking about transforming our individual bricks-and-mortar institutions into virtual campuses, where we continue to offer courses as individual professors cocooned within our institutional boundaries, to positing a different model. We see possibilities for collaboration in delivering courses, where we can work together in cyberspace, rather than alone in our classrooms. This is especially pertinent for those of us teaching courses with an international component. Rather than being the all-knowing 'sage on the stage,' we can more easily incorporate other ways of knowing into our cyberspace

classrooms, ways that can potentially introduce colleagues and students from countries around the world that would otherwise be next to impossible without the available technology.

This brings us to a somewhat related question, whose course was it? While we each offered our separate international management courses in our respective bricks-and-mortar institutions, we collaborated in cyberspace. But, once away from cyberspace, we were back in our own territory. Essentially, we collaborated in creating a learning space that we could each use for our own purposes. However, this collaborative space did not feature anywhere in a course catalog or schedule and our collaboration was not formally recognized by our separate institutions.

Moreover, there is often an inbuilt assumption that virtuality will simply replace what we have at present, in other words, that universities will simply use information and communication technologies to introduce online versions of what they have at present. However, this assumption of moving our courses – lock, stock and barrel – from the classroom to cyberspace as an end in itself ignores other possibilities, ones that can move us beyond the false binary of person and machine. Rather, our model offers an insight into ways in which technology can act as a catalyst for reconfiguring relations between students and professors. As educators, our forays into cyberspace saw us move from being 'sages on stages' to 'guides on the side,' with our students taking on a more active role in their own learning.

We juxtaposed that which could be considered both scarce and highly valued, namely ourselves as educators and time/distance, with that which could be considered commonplace and without value, namely our students, to arrive at what could be considered a richer learning environment (Bryson & De Castell, 1994). In ceding some of the teaching to our students, we

have perhaps addressed the concern of Nobel physicist Kenneth Wilson who considers undergraduates the most underutilized teaching resource in the university (Miller, 1995). In our cyberspace environment, with us acting as observers in the wings, there was little need for student exchanges to flow through, and be mediated by, us as instructors. Technology, therefore, "provides a means for reconstructing the division of labor in classroom tasks and for restructuring power relations between participants in educational contexts" (Bryson & De Castell, 1994: 214).

Thus, as a final note which can already be gleaned from some of the above, our experiences, through technological enhancement of our courses, *provided not a replacement but an enrichment to our work as faculty*. In fact, this was a time consuming and labor intensive approach for the four of us, much more so than anything we do in our more conventional courses. Thus, a word to the wise of those who foresee the replacement of people by machine in the name of "educational progress," if you want to do it well, don't expect that it'll be cheap.

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APPENDIX A

For further use of this system, and before setting up a listserver system, it is necessary to check if your current mail system supports the listserver facility. Examples of systems that support listserv are Mercury (Novell NetWare and Windows NT™) and most UNIX mail systems. In the Amherst-Odense experiment we used Davis Harris's Mercury for Netware,[2] which is a free mail and listserver.

As to the technicalities, at the file level, a listserver may consist of several configuration files and/or directories:

1) Listserver configuration file (holds the configuration for each of the listservers hosted by the mail system)

2) Listserver "list" directory (holds all the files associated with one particular server)

3) Members (a list of the current members of the list)

4) Welcome message (the message a user gets when s/he is added to the list)

5) Farewell message (the message saying goodbye when a user is deleted from the list)

6) Digest (a file or directory holding a digest of files containing all the mails posted in a specific period of time, say a week)

We are grateful for the input from the computer experts[3] at Odense, which was used as background material for the previous paragraphs. For more information on setting up a listserver, they kindly refer to two web references:

- http://www.lsoft.com/manuals/user/user.html
- http://www.greatcircle.com/majordomo/FAQ.html

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[2] http://www.let.rug.nl/pegasus/

[3] Network administrator, Jan Pedersen, cand merc, and Support Assistant, Henrik Neumann Frederiksen, stud merc. SDU-Odense University.

APPENDIX B

Imagine that you are an assistant to the local human resource manager in a company with subsidiaries in Odense and in Amherst. On Monday afternoon, Taraneh is planned to come for a job interview with the local human manager. Your task is to prepare your boss for the interview.

You have been informed about the Taraneh's story as it can be read in the case listed below. Your boss has never been dealing with the issues described in the case before nor has your boss thought much about them.

Your assignment is to discuss in your e-mail subgroups what information your boss needs in order to prepare Taraneh for the possible reactions in the local community of Amherst and Odense, in case Taraneh moves there with her daughter.

Your boss has read the case. In order to prepare your boss' reflection of the issues related to the story of the case, we suggest that the subgroups provide answers to the following questions:

1.   It is said that a person's freedom ends where it encroaches on another person's rights. Give your interpretation of this idea using examples. Do freedom and individual rights have a universal meaning or should they be defined differently in different countries?

2.   Consider the head-scarf controversy as a symbol of the broader debate on the status of women. Develop a cultural relativist approach and take sides in the events depicted in the case accordingly What can you say about the mandatory use of head scarves in Iran? About their mandatory removal in French public schools?

3.   In the controversy over head-scarves in French schools, many liberals and intellectuals have found themselves siding with extreme rightists and nationalist groups denouncing the use of head scarves.   What are the likely motivations of the first group and what probably incites the nationalist groups to oppose head-scarves?

In addition to the information provided by the case, please note that the function of the scarf or veil in the Islamic world is based on the idea of protecting the honor of the family. The honor of the family is considered to be the sexuality of women. Covering the whole body, the face or just the hair women hides their beauty and keeps men from getting attracted to them.

In short, please, discuss in your individual Odense-Amherst subgroups the three questions that follow the case. All groups should post their reply to the questions in the general list (IM98@samnet2.ou.dk)
by 18:00(Odense)/noon (Amherst) Sunday 29 march. Your instructor will discuss with you the responses in class Monday 30 March (Odense) and Tuesday 31 March (Amherst). To be sure, you find a listing of subgroups after the case.

Remember that only the instructors and the members of your subgroup will be able to read the subgroup discussions. Everybody will be able to read the final answers on Sunday.

MINI-CASE
The Controversy Over the Islamic Head Scarf: Women's Rights and Cultural Sensibilities
Source: Written by Farid Sadriech, PhD student in International Business, Temple University, Copyright 1997 by Arvind V. Phatak.

Appendix C

Dear Students in international management in Amherst and Odense,

We wish to thank all of you for your answers and efforts in general in trying to meet the deadline. At least you know by now that "summer time" is not summer time everywhere. Europe has shifted over one week before the US. The weather seems to tell us the opposite. In the Boston area it was record warm, here it is snowing a bit....

Marta and I have decided to continue with another case. Since we will dealing with ABB in class next week let's do another virtual case analysis based on the case Asea Brown Boveri (HBS 192-139) as well as that you all got. Likewise you all got the Taylor interview with Barnevik. The guest lecture on ABB after the case will be taped and mailed over, so all of you will be updated on what happened after the case. It is a fascinating way to organize an international corporation. We hope you'll enjoy doing the case.

Please note that you are only supposed to post the answers of the group on the general list. The general list is im98@samnet2.ou.dk.

Discussion in the group must not be posted on this general list, but on the appropriate group list. g*

The deadline for posting group answers on the general list for the ABB case is two hours before the class here on Monday morning. Deadline is 8 am Danish time and 2 am Us time Monday April 6th.

Because of some changes and an unfortunate mistake on the side of Odense, we will once more list the subgroups and the appropriate addresses below.

1. What do you think of the organization structure Barnevik has chosen to manage ABB?

2. How does the ABB organization work?

3. Would you accept a job as a front line manager in ABB?

Sincerely yours

Mikael Sondergaard

Appendix D

From: MIKAEL SøNDERGAARD <mso@busieco.ou.dk>
To: "International Management (1998)" <im98@samnet2.ou.dk>
Subject: case 3
Date sent: Tue, 5 May 1998 16:24:09 +0100 (MET)
Organization: Sch. of Busi. & Eco., O.U., Denmark

Dear Students in International Management in Amherst and in Odense,

We are now ready for the 3rd and final e-mail case of the spring semester 1998. Marta and I are very happy for your activities so far regarding our attempt with the e-mail case teaching mode.

We would be very grateful if you would take a few minutes before reading the case following this message filling in the questionnaires. We need your help with your answers in order to describe the exercise to the business and academic communities. Both communities have already shown an interest in this. We are happy that international businesses are demanding some of the skills that we, by this token, are providing you with.

In addition to these 1) questionnaires, you will get in this message; 2) case BioTech; 3) exercise 1 - 5; 4) an updated list of e-mail groups. Please answer the questionnaires and mail them to MSO@busieco.ou.dk. Full discretion assured.

Then do the exercise 1- 5 in groups. Answer only to the group list. Once you got a group answer, post it on the general list IM98@samnet2.ou.dk. Please remember that only the group answers should be posted there where all students can read.

The deadline of this part of the simulation is May 7th; 8am Amherst time and 2pm Odense time.

Good luck

Mikael Sondergaard

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1) Questionnaires

BioTech China - Ethical Decision Making 1 by Thomas Rathcke & Jeanette Larsen.

Appendix E

Item		N	N	Scale Avg.
Personal friction in group		**A great deal**	**None**	
	All	10 (19%)	44 (81%)	4.6
	Amh	2 (6%)	29 (94%)	5.0
	Ode	8 (35%)	15 (65%)	4.1
Differences of opinion before decision		**Very many**	**None at all**	
	All	8 (15%	46 (85%)	4.5
	Amh	5 (16%)	26 (84%)	4.8
	Ode	3 (13%)	20 (87%)	4.5
E-mail communication		**Liked it a lot**	**Did not like it**	
	All	27 (50%)	27 (50%)	3.6
	Amh	14 (45%)	17 (55%)	3.8
	Ode	13 (57%)	10 (43%)	3.4
E-mail contributed to the quality		**A great deal**	**Not at all**	
	All	13 (25%)	40 (75%)	4.3
	Amh	8 (26%)	23 (74%)	4.2
	Ode	5 (23%)	17 (77%)	4.4
Group cooperation		**Good**	**Bad**	
	All	31 (57%)	23 (43%)	3.4
	Amh	18 (58%)	13 (42%)	3.2
	Ode	13 (57%)	10 (43%)	3.5
Group results		**Good**	**Bad**	
	All	38 (70%)	16 (30%)	3.1
	Amh	24 (77%)	7 (23%)	2.7
	Ode	14 (61%)	9 (39%)	3.4
Same quality without group		**No**	**Yes**	
	All	18 (33%)	36 (67%)	4.0
	Amh	8 (26%)	23 (74%)	4.4
	Ode	10 (43%)	13 (57%)	3.6
Result reflects personal opinion		**To a large extent**	**None**	
	All	49 (91%)	5 (9%)	2.5
	Amh	29 (94%)	2 (6%)	2.2
	Ode	20 (87%)	3 (13%)	2.8
Group task		**Enjoyed**	**Did not enjoy**	
	All	39 (74%)	14 (26%)	2.9
	Amh	23 (74%	8 (26%)	2.9
	Ode	16 (73%)	6 (27%)	2.9
Process		**Satisfied**	**Dissatisfied**	
	All	29 (54%)	25 (46%)	3.5
	Amh	18 (58%)	13 (42%)	3.3
	Ode	11 (48%)	12 (52%)	3.7

Note: All (N=54), Amherst (N=31), Odense (N=23) for all items except 4 and 9.
          For items 4 and 9: All (N=54), Amherst (N=31), Odense (N=22).