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PROACTIVE GUIDES FOR AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT

Guide creation for Arctic Business Corridor

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ABSTRACT

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This Bachelor's thesis explores methods and identifies opportunities to improve the implementation of the Arctic Business Corridor (ABC) study project with the help of stakeholder guides. The project is a complex, multilateral, short-term international project. During the project, companies give students a task regarding internationalization and the students then complete the task with the teaching staff focusing on coaching the student teams. The aim of the ABC project is to advance the internationalization of companies by utilizing the international networks of universities as well as international university student teams, while simultaneously improving the students' skills required in working life.

Due to the complex nature of the project and multiple different organizations involved, the pilot implementations of the project faced numerous challenges. The aim of this thesis is to compile guides for each stakeholder group: the teaching staff, the students, and the companies. The guides will be used in future implementations to proactively mitigate common risks associated with the project.

This thesis combines the experiences and insights of each stakeholder group with various theoretical frameworks concerning international project management, virtual teamwork, and marketing. Based on the literature and empirical research of this thesis, the critical improvement issues were identified as relating to recruitment of students and companies, communication, and time management.

The primary research was done by conducting individual and group interviews, conducting a questionnaire, and analyzing previously collected participant feedback. Additionally, all of the theoretical and qualitative data was combined in a practical application in the form of stakeholder guides. The guides will be given to future participants and will provide the stakeholders with all of the necessary information to ensure successful execution of the project and provide optimal results for each stakeholder group.

Keywords: international virtual teamwork, stakeholder guide, project work, communication

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

With trade agreements and technological progress, international business has become possible and increasingly important for companies of all sizes. The growth of internationalization among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is on the rise in Finland (Pöysti 2017, cited 28.4.2017). However, an internationalization process is both challenging and resource-intensive. Entering a market without proper research can be considered risky, and proper research for an SME is either time-consuming or expensive, likely both. Companies that are looking to expand internationally are likely to face increased demand for workforce.

A cliché among young people looking for employment is that companies expect someone fresh out of university with ten years of relevant work experience. While this is an obviously hyperbolic statement, there is a kernel of truth to it. Therefore, educational institutions should prepare students entering working life for international work and internationalization processes. While some university-level degree programmes contain a mandatory practical training period, studies that focus on specific areas - such as internationalization - can be utilized to provide students with a broader spectrum of practical experience.

1.1 Arctic Business Corridor

Created to tackle both of the above-mentioned issues, the Arctic Business Corridor (ABC) project is a joint student project conducted by University of Oulu and Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OUAS), intended to bridge the gap between higher education and working life, as well as to provide the international networks of the universities for use of local companies. ABC brings together students of various disciplines from Oulu and from international partner universities in six other countries in northern and central Europe. During the ten-week project, the students will be given a commission by a company that is planning to enter or in the process of entering a foreign market – either from Finland to one of the aforementioned foreign markets or vice versa. The most common type of commission is a market research project to provide information about the potential of the market in terms of customer base, market share, competition, legislation, taxes and tariffs, as well as possible specific needs of the customer company. Up until the writing of this thesis, the ABC

project has been executed two times, the second iteration being a refined version of the previous and taking into account the successes as well as the shortcomings of the previous implementation.

Figure 1 below illustrates the structure of an exemplary ABC case with stakeholder groups placed in their own respective boxes - there are two countries involved, students from both countries uniting to form the project team guided by facilitators from both countries, and a company based in one country with an interest to expand to the other: in this case the direction of internationalization demonstrated with the black arrow. The grey arrows indicate the interaction taking place between the different stakeholder groups.
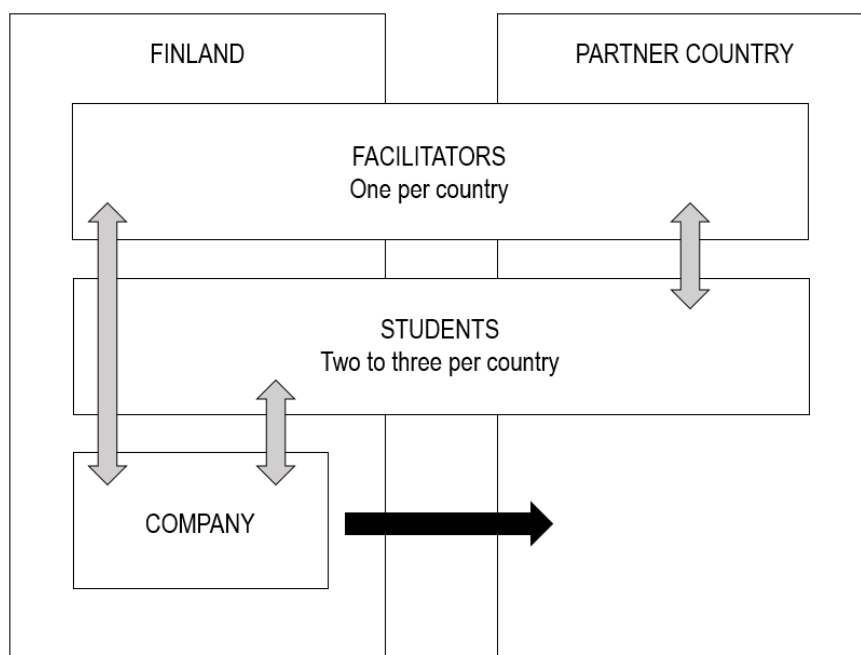
FIGURE 1. Example framework of an ABC project

ABC aims to bring international business students together in partially distributed virtual teams to provide a unique learning experience, where students gain hands-on experience and learn from a real working life project task. This gives the ABC project an additional layer of complexity, as the students who are brought together to work on a project come from different institutions. Various factors increase the complexity: different organizational cultures, conflicting schedules, home institution requirements and expectations, language barriers, and cultural differences. There are two layers of project management issues as well: the long-term and repeating project of implementing the ABC course itself, and the project task the students complete for the companies. While the course does repeat in the same format ostensibly, it can be considered non-routine, as each implementation has certain significant differences, because each realization has a new batch

of students and - in most cases - new companies coming on board with a new assignment and therefore new requirements, goals, and expected results.

1.2   Stakeholder guides

This thesis is part of the development process that aims at making the ABC project an integrated, permanent part of the curricula of the participating higher education institutions. The results of the research done for this thesis have been applied in the form of stakeholder guides for the three distinct stakeholder groups that take part in the ABC project: the facilitators, the companies, and the students. The teaching staff's role in the ABC project has been determined to be more that of facilitators who provide guidance and coaching for the student projects, and therefore this is the terminology used in this thesis for the teaching staff.

A major issue identified in the early stages of planning this thesis project was the incomplete conceptualization of the ABC project. The stakeholder guides were considered to be of assistance to the project staff in solidifying the concept, thus making it more effortless to market and convey the idea as well as the purpose of the project to the students and companies to entice their participation. Additionally, the number of stakeholder groups involved and general complexity of the project make it a challenge to manage, especially as funding restrictions may force the future implementations to be run with a reduced number of personnel involved. Based on these issues, this thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

- What are the crucial points of development in the implementation of the Arctic Business Corridor project?

- How can these issues be proactively addressed with the help of stakeholder guides?

The primary research information presented in this thesis was gathered by conducting interviews with various personnel involved in the ABC project. Facilitators from partner universities were interviewed over Skype and a workshop session was held for the ABC staff located in Oulu. Feedback from students who had previously participated in ABC was analyzed in-depth in order to determine common issues hindering the students' commitment and participation. Finally, companies that have previously participated in the project were sent a brief questionnaire in order to further help enlighten the views of their respective stakeholder group. Additionally, the authors

have been involved in the ABC project planning phases and participated ABC staff meetings to discuss and develop the project. Both authors have also participated as students in previous iterations of the course, albeit in different implementations.

Compiled by gathering findings from the literature and the results of primary research, the stakeholder guides created here constitute the project-based part of this thesis. The guides are to be utilized in the ABC project to improve participants' understanding of the nature, process, timeline, and expected outcomes of the project. The guides would also provide marketing and recruitment material to assist the staff in every country in finding suitable students and companies to participate in the project. Additionally, the guides provide a solid starting point for possible new people to be recruited in the managerial positions of the project as well as to alleviate the workload of the staff in regards with providing the necessary information to each stakeholder and new participant in each implementation.

As the output of this thesis are the three stakeholder guides to be used in future implementations of the ABC project, this thesis can be categorized as a project-based thesis. A project-based thesis is an alternative form of a thesis to a research-based one. The aim of a project-based thesis is to produce a practical guidance, instructing, rationalization, or organization of operations within a professional field. Common products of a project-based thesis are books, booklets, leaflets, or guides in physical or digital form, as well as websites or arranged events. The purpose is to combine a practical realization and reporting via the means of research communication. (Vilkka & Airaksinen 2003, 9.) The stakeholder guides produced in this thesis were created to enable both physical and digital utilization. The process of compiling and creating the stakeholder guides is described in chapter 6 of this thesis.

The Arctic Business Corridor is a study project that aims to bring international university-level students and companies together. The purpose is to utilize the international networks that universities create via co-operation and provide these networks for internationalization processes for companies. The project also gives companies the local knowledge of students in the company's home country and the target market. Due to its complex nature, the ABC project is susceptible to implementation problems. This thesis describes the process of creating stakeholder guides that will help the ABC staff in mitigating many of the risks involved.

2 PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND TEAMWORK

The present chapter will focus on the literature of project management and virtual teamwork as it applies to the Arctic Business Corridor. The combination of this literature and qualitative research conducted for this thesis is used as the foundation for the stakeholder guides. More specifically, the literature discussed here will focus on the theoretical framework of the conditions under which people working in project teams and in partially distributed virtual teams are likely to perform more efficiently and to produce desired results. There are two levels of project management within the ABC project. The facilitators can be considered being involved in repeated implementations and long-term participation, while the students and companies only participate in short-term projects. There are certain differences regarding long-term and short-term projects that have been observed in literature and they will be discussed later in the chapter. The main responsibility of project management usually falls upon the project manager, whose role we will examine in more detail in the teamwork part of this chapter.

We draw upon Artto, Martinsuo & Kujala (2006, 35), Kettunen (2009, 15), Meredith & Mantel (2006, 9-10), and Munns & Bjeirmi (1996, 81-82) for generally applicable definitions of 'project' and 'project management'. A project has a set goal, plan, budget, and schedule, and is managed accordingly. A project is carried out by people who interact with one another, the people are given distinct roles and responsibilities, and their progress as well as results are monitored and controlled. (Kettunen 2009, 15.) In a more succinct fashion, Munns & Bjeirmi (1996, 81) define a project as "the achievement of a specific objective, which involves a series of activities and tasks which consume resources". Additionally, a project has a certain specification, as well as defined start and end dates (Munns & Bjeirmi 1996, 81). Meredith & Mantel elaborate on some of the characteristics of projects: a project is generally a one-time activity with a limited time frame and accurately defined desirable results, should be important enough that it is given the attention and resources necessary to complete it, and has a level of uniqueness to it (Meredith & Mantel 2006, 9-10).

On the other hand, project management is "the process of controlling the achievement of the project objectives". Project management is the method of applying tools and techniques to ensure the goals of the project are achieved with the given resources and within set specifications. (Munns & Bjeirmi 1996, 81-82.) Similarly, according to Artto et al. (2006), project management is the application of management methods that aim to the achievement of the project's goals and result.

Project management literature provides generally applicable guidelines on how the likelihood of project success can be increased through conscious project management activities, but due to the aforementioned uniqueness inherent to projects, each project must be considered in detail by its stakeholders. (Artto et al. 2006, 35.) Stakeholders are groups of individuals who can be affected by the project or who can affect it (Meredith & Mantel 2006, 11). The theory is reflected on ABC as necessary, while the application of both the theory and empirical results is discussed in more detail in chapter 6.

2.1 Project management

A clear distinction between project and project management is useful, as successful project management does not automatically lead to a successful project. The reverse is also true: project management may fail, while the project itself may result in success. For example, a building construction project may go over budget and schedule, but the result is nevertheless a building that lasts for decades and serves its purpose impeccably. Project management has in this case failed, but the project result is nevertheless a success. This distinction should inform how much emphasis is placed on the process of project management, depending on the nature of the project. (Munns & Bjeirmi 1996, 81.)

A part of the process of project management is the temporal division of the project to its phases, as seen in Figure 2 below. These phases may overlap or directly follow one another. Each phase contains its own goals necessary for successful project management. It is common for the phases to happen in succession one after the other or partially overlap, but it is also possible in some cases that there is a need to return to an earlier phase. (Kettunen 2009, 43.) Artto et al. (2006, 48) emphasize the importance of defining expected measurable results in business projects for each phase so that progress can be monitored. ABC has these kinds of deliverables built in for the student project with the 'Checkpoint' at halfway as well as final report and presentation.
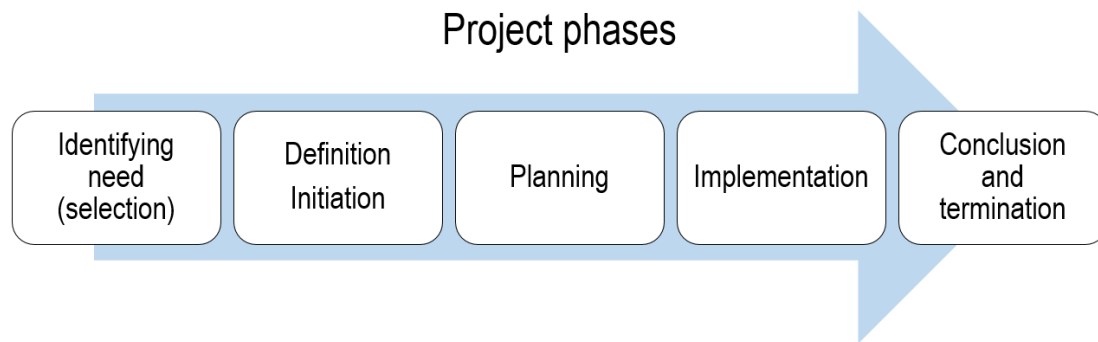
Project phases

Identifying need (selection) → Definition Initiation → Planning → Implementation → Conclusion and termination

FIGURE 2. Project phases (adapted from Kettunen 2009, 43)

2.1.1 Project selection

Project selection is an important part of project management, arguably even more important than the actual management activities that take place once the project is underway (Munns & Bjeirmi 1996, 86). Munns & Bjeirmi (1996, 83) see project selection as an activity that takes part before the actual project management activities, but as others have included project selection under the definition of project management (cf. Meredith & Mantel 2006, 41-44), the same is done here, as seen in Figure 2. In regards to the Arctic Business Corridor, project selection is of relevance to the facilitators when they are in the process of recruiting companies and negotiating with the companies of the task (project) they will give to the student team.

It is even more important for the company to consider the project if they are to use it as the basis of their decision-making process and their business activities. The company must decide whether or not the project is important enough to warrant the investment of the participation fee and the time they need to devote for the project. (Meredith & Mantel 2006, 43.) If a project is not aligned with the overall mission, goals, and strategy of the company, thus lacking the support and interest from upper management, it may seem that the company is not properly committed to the project, which may reflect negatively on the performance of the project team (ibid., 237-238). Why the project is important for the overall strategy of the company needs to be communicated to the project team in order for the team members to understand how the project fits into the larger scheme of things within the company. This will ensure the company and the project team have a common understanding of the project objectives, thus decreasing the likelihood of misunderstanding and lack of commitment. The project teams in ABC are responsible not only to the client company, but

also to their home organization. Therefore the support and interest from the facilitators will likely result in better performance from the project team. (Kappelmann, McKeeman & Zhang 2006, 32.)

2.1.2 Defining the project

After project selection, the project specifications need to be defined. For ABC, the schedule is set for ten weeks, so it is up to the facilitators and companies to define the goals, expected outcomes, risks, and scope of the project to suit the schedule, the size of the project team, and the resources available to the teams. If an inadequate amount of attention is paid to the specifications, the planning phase will most likely also suffer due to the vagueness or lack of definition in the specifications (Kettunen 2009, 44). The client company needs to assign a project representative who has sufficient knowledge and interest to participate in the project (Kettunen 2009, 49).

Due to the project team coming from outside the company and the short time span of the project, the definition phase needs to be done in more detail by the company in the ABC project. Generally, if a project is completed by employees already working in the company, they are involved in the definition phase and can use their expertise of their own field and work experience to influence what can be realistically expected. In case of outsourcing a project, there is still usually more time available for the client company and the project organization to work together on the definitions, and the project organization has more time to familiarize itself with the client's business. While the definition phase can be a part of the planning phase, the nature of the ABC project structure demands additional attention to the definition phase, hence it has been highlighted here as a separate phase. (Kettunen 2009, 51.)

In ABC, the project should be largely outlined - the scope and boundaries set - before the student team joins. The planning stage will then include the detailed scheduling within the project timeline to ensure the team will meet the deadlines for deliverables during the project. This phase should include the company representative and the student team, while the facilitator should intercede only when necessary, such as when the student team may not have enough experience to comment on topics such as time demands or resource options.

2.1.3   Project planning

The planning phase includes further refining of the objectives and specifications of the project that were initially defined in the definition phase (Kettunen 2009, 43). The planning phase includes identifying the tasks that need to be completed during the project and estimating the resources - especially time - needed for their completion (Artto et al. 2006, 49). The roles of the project team are usually appointed at the planning phase, while project manager may be selected already in the definition stage (ibid.), but the roles and leadership will be discussed in section 2.3 where teamwork theory is explored in more detail. The result of the planning phase should have a refined and more detailed version of the schedule, risk management measures, definitions of deliverables, project organization and roles, communication and documentation plan, resource analysis, and a working plan (Kettunen 2009, 44).

Since the definition of a project includes a level of uniqueness, the level of predictability tends to be low. The plan is used more as a 'roadmap' and project teams should be prepared for changes and to adapt to new circumstances during the project. The plan needs to have sufficient level of detail to be of use to the team and the project, but not so much that the team is lost in the minutiae or does not have room to adapt to changes, which are very likely to happen. During the planning phase, the goal of the project and how the project fits the overarching strategy and plan of the company needs to be considered to ensure the plan will direct the project on the correct course. (Meredith & Mantel 2006, 236.) Some project workers and project managers have voiced their objections towards the planning phase, due to its time and resource consuming nature. Educated precautions do, however, mitigate the risk of project failure due to foreseeable complications or obstacles. (Kettunen 2009, 55; Meredith & Mantel 2006, 235.) An easy way to avoid running into problems during the project in terms of the schedule is to always reserve extra time and set the team's deadlines at least slightly before the last possible date. Surprises and changes are all but inevitable, therefore best practice is to leave some wiggle room in the schedule. Scheduling small-scale projects is generally rather straightforward and it is not advisable to spend too much time solely on determining how much time each phase and task will take. (Kettunen 2009, 60.)

2.1.4 Project implementation and termination

Once planning has been sufficiently conducted, the implementation phase follows and is when the project work begins. Implementation varies from project to project due to their differing natures, so it is impossible to determine any general optimization for working on a project, aside from a few observed good practices (see Kettunen 2009, 17). The application of project management practices are dependent on the context of each project, but that the same general principles remain the same across disciplines. During implementation, team members work on their responsibilities and tasks, project manager oversees the work and ensures continuous progress as well as remains vigilant to possible needs for change or adaption. Regular communication within the project team as well as with the parent organization and possible client is essential. (Artto et al. 2006, 20.) Implementation is the allocation of resources to the correct activities at the correct time aligned with the goal of the project, with appropriate documentation (ibid., 49).

Conclusion is an oft-neglected phase of a project. A project is usually considered completed once the project result has been delivered, put to use by the client and the client has formally accepted delivery. Finalizing project documentation and handing them over to the client as well as archiving them are essential parts of project conclusion. After delivery, the conclusion phase includes a conclusion meeting or feedback meeting and the making of the final project report. The project is reviewed with the client and customer satisfaction feedback is compiled to facilitate learning. (Artto et al. 2006, 50.) For the student teams, the end of ABC is rather clear-cut, as the project has a set ending date and predetermined set of documentation that the teams must produce by the end. A final discussion is held afterwards, where the company and facilitator provide feedback for the students, and the project results are discussed. The facilitator team will then proceed to begin preparations for the next cycle of the project.

2.2 Project commitment

During the initial discussions held at the beginning of this thesis project, the ABC personnel in Oulu expressed shortcomings in the commitment of all three stakeholder groups – facilitators, students, and companies – to the project as one of the development areas. Some cases had displayed signs of lack of commitment from one or two of the stakeholder groups, such as communication problems, amount of effort put into the project, or the commitment of time. In order to establish the significance

and common denominators of professionals committing themselves to a project, we will take a brief look at project commitment literature next.

Aubé and Rousseau (2005) examined the effect collective team goal commitment has on team performance. Their results indicate that setting goals at team level and having the team members committed to those goals has a positive effect on team performance. This effect is positively correlated with higher degree of team interdependence. In other words, team commitment is more important in circumstances where team members need to interact and rely on each other more. Commitment is also likely to increase the quality of group experience and team viability, even when interdependence is low. This is to say that independent of the level of dependency between team members, the more committed each member is to the team goals, the better the experience ('team spirit') and team co-operation. The connecting link between commitment and team performance seems to be that committed team members are more likely to adopt supportive behaviors, where they provide voluntary assistance to other team members. (Aubé and Rousseau 2005, 189-190, 193, 199-200.)

The research of Barczak & McDonough (2003) examined teams in new product development projects. More specifically, they focused on the roles commitment and trust between project team members play in the success of the project. The findings indicate that trust alone is not a sufficiently significant factor on its own, but rather a factor only when coupled with project commitment. The research also implicates that commitment and trust are not factors in the speed at which the project is completed, even though this has been an implicit assumption in the literature on the topic previously. This suggests that commitment and trust within the project team is important for the success of the project, although not so much for resolving conflicts and decision-making. Trust among the team members is increasingly necessary the more interdependence exists between team members. Trust was also found to be a likely factor in reducing risk. It is therefore beneficial to promote open communication and trust among a team's members, to ensure better project commitment, functionality, and results. (Barczak & McDonough 2003, 274, 278-279.)

Kappelmann et al. (2006) surveyed numerous project management experts in the field of IT. The authors also recognize lack of stakeholder involvement and project team commitment as significant risk factors that precede project failure. All stakeholder groups are expected to contribute resources towards the project. If not all involved stakeholder groups are engaged and committed enough, it is rather likely that the project will go on to see subpar results or fail altogether. Key stakeholders

should participate in major review meetings or risk the loss of commitment of the other stakeholder groups as well. Project team members often have other tasks and responsibilities - as is also the case in ABC teams - and they are likely to direct their efforts elsewhere if they do not see significant value given to the project by the other stakeholder groups. The authors also highlight the importance of realistic expectations from client or upper level of organization, in terms of the scope, schedule, resources, and necessary skills. Expecting the team to perform beyond their realm of possibilities is likely to affect motivation and commitment. (Kappelmann et al. 2006, 32-34.)

The ABC aims to provide students with an experience in challenging teamwork environments and teach effective teamwork methods. For the companies, ABC's purpose is to provide usable results as a return on investment for the participation fee. In order to provide even better results in the future, the ABC facilitators should emphasize the importance of being perpetually involved throughout the project to both stakeholder groups. Facilitators must also recognize their responsibility to be available and intervene when necessary, even if their role is not to be as involved constantly. Commitment is a key factor in predicting the success of a project and all stakeholders are responsible for their own part in creating an environment that augments project commitment.

2.3   Effective virtual teams

The following subchapters explore the matter of virtual teams, roles in virtual teams, and the importance of communication within the team and further success factors. These are vital factors in the Arctic Business Corridor, as facilitators of the project can be considered as one virtual team, and participants in the project also make up a virtual team. First, a general definition of virtual teams is given and then we move on to virtual partially distributed teams (vPDTs), as the teams in ABC are.

An apt definition of what makes a team a virtual team can be found in Gibson & Cohen (2003). First, the team is composed of a group of geographically dispersed individuals with interdependent tasks, not merely a loosely formed collective. A virtual team is not, however, restricted by organizational boundaries, as it can be composed of members from various organizations. Responsibility of outcomes is shared between the team members, as the team should consider

themselves a sound social unit and this should be visible externally as well. In addition to these qualities, the team must maintain and control relationships exceeding organizational boundaries mutually. Moreover, as opposed to conducting internal communications face-to-face, virtual teams are dependent on technological platforms in order to be able to communicate. It is important to note that in many cases, the only criterion considered is the use of a common technological communication platform when considering whether or not a group of people make up a virtual team. All of the abovementioned required qualities must be taken into account. However, the degree of dependency on technological communication tools increases the "virtuality" of a team. (Gibson & Cohen 2003, 4-5.)

2.3.1 Project team roles

A lack of clear role allocation within virtual teams can be the downfall of a project. Principally, a factor that has a direct impact on virtual team success is leadership. Lepsinger & Derosa (2010, 32) suggest it is important to choose a team leader not on a volunteer basis, but according to the ability to balance factors that define the operations of a virtual team, such as communication, cultural factors and execution-oriented methods. As people in any position, leaders should be willing and eager to improve themselves as well, thus a team leader is also to be given feedback based on their performance. In order to achieve a favorable outcome, team members reporting directly to the appointed team leader is likely to be the most optimal solution. This is due to it increasing the probability of the virtual team as a whole having a shared sense of the objectives, the mission and the vision of the team. It also helps in increasing the team leader's ability to hold team members responsible for the correct issues. (Lepsinger & Derosa 2010, 32.)

An opposing view as to that of Lepsinger & Derosa (2010) regarding leadership is provided by Rad & Ginger (2003). Rad & Ginger claim that in a traditional project setting, leadership is solely provided by the project manager. However, they go on to state that in virtual teams, the traditional leadership role is not as crucial to the outcome of the project as in a virtual project, but leadership may be shared among all team members according to the specific task at hand in addition to the location and area of expertise. (Rad & Ginger 2003, 11.)

Interestingly, Ocker, Huang, Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz (2011) offer something of a middle ground, stating that the leadership within a partially distributed team (PDT) can be centralized with the

leader usually being from the location near to the commissioner or client of the project, or the team may distribute leadership responsibility between subgroups. PDTs success depends on how well the team leader(s) can mitigate the effects and distance of various fault lines. Ocker et al. (2011) define fault lines as barriers in communication, trust, and willingness to co-operate that are a result of distance in geography, time, function (different fields, for example engineers and business students), identity, and culture or organizational culture. Problems with time in international teams are not only in terms of difference in time zones, but also conflicting schedules. Emergent leaders tend to achieve better results, but this is also dependent on whether the leader is elected or self-appointed. Appointed leaders tend to have less success, so it is recommendable that teams decide the leader role amongst themselves. (Ocker et al. 2011, 287-290.) Naturally, not all schedules allow for this type of emergent leadership, as it requires a degree of familiarity between team members – or between members and the appointing authority – for them to properly assess potential leadership qualities.

Eubanks, Palanski, Olabisi, Joinson & Dove (2016) examined how virtual partially distributed teams perform in relation to what kind of roles the members fulfil. Their work is especially interesting in regards to the ABC project, as they examined undergraduate student groups with members from the U.S. and the U.K. working in cooperation as a virtual team. Another parallel to ABC is that the teams are partially distributed, meaning there is a subgroup of team members who are co-located and another subgroup at another location, and these subgroups communicate via technological platforms. A significant difference to ABC is that the teams had a lesser national culture fault line (two Anglophone countries), while the temporal fault line (time zone difference) was much greater. Eubanks et al. (2016) distinguish certain types of team roles that have a positive correlation with project success in vPDTs. Their results indicate a lesser significance of leadership to that of traditional long-term project teams and suggest that a more important signifier of optimal performance of short-term teams is the presence of 1) several team members who display initiative and organization skills, and 2) fewer detail-oriented members, who take the time to seek out errors and perfecting the work. The project was very short, just four weeks, and all team members possessed more or less the same information and knowledge, so an additional consideration should be employed if the teams are multidisciplinary. The authors also note that the detail-oriented team members overlapped a project leader-type role and that these properties might usually coexist. (Eubanks et al. 2016, 557, 564-565.)

The implications presented by Akgün, Keskin, Lynn & Dogan (2012) seem to confirm that a team's performance is improved if the team members feel they can trust and rely on each other's professional capabilities. Greater interpersonal trust enables the teams to communicate both within the team as well as to instances outside the team more effectively, process information more efficiently, share the same goal, and innovate more. Not only is a team's interpersonal trust a factor in successful implementation, but also the trust management shows for the team's capabilities. Managerial implications of the article suggest that showing and communicating trust, allowing freedom and creativity, providing an open-minded environment, as well as displaying a receptive and responsive attitude towards employee input are important factors in improving team performance and project success. (Akgün et al. 2012, 484-485.)

2.3.2   Communication

After allocation of roles within a virtual team, an important step is to make sure that all members of the team fully understand the requirements and responsibilities of their roles and those of the fellow team members. If an inadequate amount of time and effort is put into this crucial step, key activities may remain untouched simply due to the fact that no team member is aware that certain key activities are under their responsibility and therefore do not take accountability for the lack of conducting them. Making expectations clear within a virtual team is in fact key, since working in a virtual team as opposed to a team in the traditional sense is difficult, and having a full understanding of all goals and expectations within the team from the very beginning enhances trust and a willingness to cooperate, and aids in accelerating productivity throughout the process of working as a team. (Lepsinger & Derosa 2010, 41-42.)

As mentioned, virtual teams are reliant on using technological means for communication. Communication is an essential element and success factor of any teamwork, let alone one that works virtually. A key result of communication is developing a shared understanding within the team. Communicating solely through electronic tools causes for the lack of interpersonal cues, which are a key element in being able to build trust between team members, so virtual teams must make a great effort in communication. (Gibson & Cohen 2003, 9.) "Miscommunication can create hard feelings that might remain undetected for a long time, thereby undermining team success." (Rad & Ginger 2003, 72). All in all, placing an effort in communication when conducting a project

in a virtual team results in purposeful and intentional communication, therefore increasing the efficiency of the project (ibid., 40).

Various tools are available to virtual teams, ranging from e-mails and telephone calls to blogs and instant messaging platforms. The most ideal situation in terms of a virtual team's communication strategy is integrating a variety of tools into their daily communication activities, as it results in an increase in social interaction and team member engagement. The communication tool that demonstrates the most promise when it comes to developing a shared understanding within a virtual team is high-quality videoconferencing. This is based on the fact that videoconferencing allows for more social communication cues, such as gestures, as opposed to typing an e-mail, for example. (Gibson & Cohen 2003, 31.) Furthermore, it is a possibility to boost the informal communication of a virtual team by creating platforms, shared groups on social networking platforms and websites specifically for that use, as it supports the interpersonal relationships within a team (Lepsinger & Derosa 2010, 35).

Recognizing the importance of communication in developing a shared understanding within a virtual team in the beginning of the teamwork is a key success factor. This is due to the fact that the beginning of any project is a critical point, as it sets the tone for the rest of the project to come. It is important for the virtual team to recognize the knowledge that is essential to the outcome of the project and most importantly make sure that this knowledge is recognized in a shared understanding across the entire team. (Gibson & Cohen 2003, 35.) Furthermore, at the beginning of the project it is ideal that the team members are encouraged by the team leader to share personal information, as doing this results in the team members communicating more actively during the process of the project as well. As the project progresses, members of the team should be encouraged to actively communicate their daily activities to the team, especially having had to deviate from the plan agreed upon in the beginning of the project with the team. (Gibson & Cohen 2003, 33.) Moreover, open communication in general is a factor that must be encouraged to all team members, so that each individual feels comfortable giving their personal input on any issues and topics of conversation (Rad & Ginger 2003, 72).

A vital factor in virtual team communication is developing a plan specifically regarding communications. The team must agree upon the technological tools used for sharing information and whether information is shared more widely to stakeholders as opposed to solely within the core virtual team. A factor that has to do with the selection of communication tools is training the team

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on the technology, as it is key in maintaining smooth communication. The communication needs and wants of each team member is also to be clarified prior to beginning the teamwork process. (Lepsinger & Derosa 2010, 44-45.) Rad & Ginger (2003, 44) state along the same lines that the managing the communications of a project with a plan and training course specifically tailored for communication issues will be of great use for a virtual team, where communication is more delicate as compared to a traditional project team within close proximity of each other.

A means of maintaining smooth communication among the team is by holding regular virtual meetings, also referred to as v-meetings. Typically, the teams that have weekly scheduled v-meetings have been proven to be the most effective. It is an effective means of staying connected and aware of the progress across the entire team. However, the time scheduled for a v-meeting is to be used in an effective manner in order to achieve a favorable outcome in terms of communication and therefore it is not ideal to go through minor updates regarding the project that can be addressed with other communication tools such as e-mail. V-meetings should stay focused on the more urgent issues that would call for a face-to-face meeting in a typical project team situation but must be taken care of through conversation on a virtual platform within virtual teams. (Lepsinger & Derosa 2010, 20.)

2.3.3   Kickoff meetings

In addition to organizing regular v-meetings to ensure project success in terms of communication, another success factor for the project is organizing a successful kickoff meeting in the very earliest stages of the project. If there is any possibility for a geographically dispersed virtual team to get together even once in the beginning of the project, it can be a key success factor when it comes to the success of the project. Lepsinger & Derosa (2010, 37) explain that "the synergies and significant long-term payoff gained from meeting face-to-face in the beginning and being able to build team norms, processes and relationships outweigh the travel expenses". According to Rad & Ginger (2003, 58), the kickoff meeting of a project sets the stage for all members of the team to familiarize themselves with all aspects of the project, such as the reason behind it, the objectives, and the outcome.

Additionally, the kickoff meeting is an ideal setting for the team to collectively contribute to planning the project process that they are going to embark on. Lepsinger & Derosa (2010, 37) also state that

the kickoff meeting is an important part of the process, as especially virtual teams that have held a kickoff meeting to start the project perform better as opposed to teams that have not. Lepsinger & Derosa (2010, 37) go on to agree with that of Rad & Ginger (2003, 58) regarding the kickoff meeting as a situation for allowing the entire team to get on the same page in terms of establishing a sense of purpose, recognizing goals and expectations of the project and building a solid foundation.

As mentioned above, the kickoff meeting is an optimal environment for establishing team norms. Team members must collectively commit to the team norms or ground rules that are decided on, which aids in fostering accountability during the course of the project. Additionally, the team must be able to alter the team norms during the project process, if the challenges and circumstances of the project demand it. (Rad & Ginger 2003, 55.) Developing shared norms within the virtual team may include for example deciding on proper team meeting etiquette, which may include determining the expected rate of participation in team v-meetings. Furthermore, points of discussion with regard to establishing team norms may be expectations of collaboration during certain project phases or tasks, deciding on procedures in case of conflict, establishing a time frame with regard to response times in internal communication, and review processes regarding tasks of fellow team members. (Lepsinger & Derosa 2010, 44-45.)

Procedures made in the early stages of the project process also have an effect on how well the members of the virtual team are going to commit to mutual goals and expectations of the overall project. When a solid foundation for teamwork has been established and built in the beginning of the project, it is easier for team members to make the project tasks and common objectives their priority and truly commit to them, as opposed to letting other tasks get in the way. Strong commitment leads to the prioritization of the project in general, which therefore results in team members putting in their best efforts into individual stages and tasks of the project process. Team members having an unwavering commitment to the project results in the team exceeding their goals and expectations for the project and achieving great results. (Rad & Ginger 2003, 71.)

All in all, when considering how to establish and maintain effective team communication, especially in virtual teams, the foundation is the ability to develop a shared understanding regarding all aspects of the project. These include roles and responsibilities, goals and expectations, and team norms and guidelines. A stepping stone in the early stages of a project to build a good teamwork foundation is the kickoff meeting, which aids in the building of a shared understanding among the team. The ABC project has several teams operating within the project itself, and a shared

understanding is key in maintaining smooth project process during and across ABC implementations. Furthermore, teams creating a plan specifically tailored for their communication purposes is an effective method of maintaining a good level of communication. A weekly virtual meeting is something that an ABC student team may choose to hold to stay in control of their project and aware of project progress of team members.

3 MARKETING FOR RECRUITMENT PURPOSES

The facilitators of ABC had observed that initial interest of students and companies is challenging to achieve, whereas participant satisfaction after completion has been high. The students and companies have been glad about having done the projects: grievances have, for the most part, concerned the practical arrangements and technological difficulties experienced during the projects, while the concept itself has garnered positive feedback. The reason for the discrepancy between lack of initial interest towards the project and the general positive attitudes towards the concept and results was determined during the opening discussions with the ABC staff: the hurdle that must be overcome is properly communicating the concept, purpose, and contents of the project to both the students and the companies. The stakeholder guides are intended to also work as marketing material for the project and to communicate the concept of ABC clearly. In this chapter, the relevant marketing theories that are seen as crucial for properly conveying the message of why people should be interested in the project are described.

3.1 Services marketing

When considering the process of designing marketing, one must take into account whether what needs to be marketed is a product or service. According to Kotler (2016, 422), "a service is any act of performance one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything". Although services marketing may differ from goods marketing, services marketing is also founded upon core marketing elements, for example placing the customer at the very center of the activities and purposes of an organization (Gilmore & Audrey 2003, 9). Services marketing can be a starting point for building up the marketing for ABC, as the fact that ABC is a service has an effect on how to conduct marketing.

The process of designing marketing usually involves considering the perspective of the four P's of marketing - a classification created by McCarthy in the 1960's. The four P's stand for product, price, place and promotion. The combination of these elements is known as the marketing mix. Although a relatively old concept, the marketing mix is still widely known and used. (Kotler 2016, 47.) A relevant aspect to consider when creating a marketing mix for a service is whether the four P's of the marketing mix is as applicable for marketing services as they are for marketing goods.

According to Beaven & Scotti (1990, 5), the framework of McCarthy's four P's is in fact an inappropriate tool for constructing and implementing an effective marketing mix for services. However, an opposing argument is that the framework of the four P's can be implemented, as long as distinct characteristics of services marketing are taken into consideration. According to Gilmore (2003, 15), these characteristics that are central in services marketing are intangibility, inseparability, perishability and heterogeneity. This view is shared by Kotler (2016, 424).

The central terms of service marketing must be viewed separately in order to fully grasp their meaning. First, intangibility is a characteristic that signifies the fact that one cannot store or readily display services. Due to this characteristic, potential customers may have difficulty in evaluating services beforehand. (Gilmore 2003, 15.) What potential customers would like to evaluate is the quality of the service in order to reduce uncertainty. Due to the intangible nature of services, organizations can solely rely on the demonstration of service quality through presentation and physical evidence, such as people or communication material. Secondly, services are thought to be inseparable by nature. This entails that services are produced and consumed concurrently. (Kotler 2016, 424-425.) Not only are the providers part of the service, but additionally the customers are involved in the production of the service. Consequently, the attitudes of consumers may have an impact on the disposition of the service. (Gilmore 2003, 15.) Due to this, provider-client interaction is key in services marketing (Kotler 2016, 425).

Furthermore, services can be characterized as perishable. This is a result of the intangibility of services, as one is not able to store services and therefore reuse them. (Gilmore 2003, 15.) Finally, services are considered to be heterogeneous, also described with the term variable. High variability in services is due to the fact that the quality of the service is dependent on the provider. (Kotler 2016, 426.) Consequently, the quality levels are arduous to monitor and control. Factors that may have impacts on the perceived quality of the service are the attitudes and expectations of customers and prospective customers. (Gilmore 2003, 16.) According to Kotler (2016), the issue of quality control in services can be addressed by investing in sufficient training procedures and closely monitoring the satisfaction levels of customers with tools such as complaint systems and customer surveys. Kotler also goes on to state that service organizations may find it helpful to specifically design their marketing communication in a manner through which customers are taught more about the brand as compared to what their experiences tell them. (Kotler 2016, 426.) According to the four characteristics predominantly used to describe services, the ABC project can also be thought to fit this mold.

Beaven & Scotti (1990, 7) find the characteristics describing services above to be incorrect. This is argued by stating that it is incorrect to assume that services are strictly the opposite of manufactured goods, and that the characteristics are manufacture-oriented. Beaven & Scotti provide a service-oriented equivalent to the characteristics they find manufacture-oriented. The service-oriented descriptions of the offered characteristics can be seen in the table below.

TABLE. Manufacture-oriented vs. service-oriented characteristics of services (adapted from Beaven & Scotti 1990, 7)

Manufacture-oriented characteristics	Service-oriented equivalents
Intangibility	Services are processes with outcomes that can be perceived directly and indirectly, leaving concrete impressions
Heterogeneity	Services are personal experiences that can be uniquely tailored to meet individual needs and expectations
Perishability	Services are processes that are created and experienced, with outcomes that are often distinct, direct and imperishable
Inseparability	Services are encounters that afford opportunities for greater satisfaction through participation, shared responsibility and timely feedback

Although there are opposing views as to whether or not the characteristics mentioned above can truly be applied to services or not, Gilmore (2003, 16) provides a conceptualization of a services marketing mix using the framework of the four P's while taking into account what Gilmore believes to be the four distinct characteristics of services.

First, the product aspect of the marketing mix must be altered for services marketing, since the product is intangible. This is to be modified by identifying tangible surrogates of the service that are a gateway for managers and potential customers to get to know the product and its features. These surrogates may be tools that are used to present the service. The second P of the four P's framework is price. Price is a dubious element when creating the marketing mix for services, as the

perceptions of value of the potential customers may differ from each other. Furthermore, the factor of intangibility results in the difficulty of evaluation of the service from the customer's point of view. Managers must keep in mind that the price is indeed closely associated with differing perceptions of value, and take that into account when considering pricing. (Gilmore 2003, 16.)

The third P is promotion, which is traditionally related to product features. The lack of physical products in services causes for the need to focus on promoting an image to potential customers. Finally, the fourth building block of the four P's is place. When considering services marketing, the place may somewhat be a virtual concept. However, since services are considered an act or performance, the existence of a suitable environment for that performance is key, therefore it should be identified by managers and marketers. (Gilmore 2003, 16.)

3.2 Internal marketing

Internal marketing is considered to be an essential factor in the marketing of an organization. According to Du Plessis, Strydon & Jooste (2012), it serves as a "function in the organization to enable customer-oriented service promises through its people". The assumption when it comes to internal marketing is that services in organizations are for the most part performed by human beings in the phase of interacting with a customer. Consequently, due to the human factor in business, there is a need for internal marketing. (Du Plessis et al. 2012, 404.) To put it in more simple terms, internal marketing is essentially about convincing employees of the organization to feel passionate about the brand, which results in the employees being capable of convincing external customers to also develop positive attitudes toward it. (Drake, Gulman & Roberts 2004, 3.)

When considering the fact that the interest of students and companies regarding the ABC project can be difficult to achieve, a starting point for good and effective external marketing for the ABC project could be thought of as internal marketing. Internal marketing could prove to be an effective marketing method for being able to recruit students for the project. As stated by Du Plessis et al. (2012, 406), there are three important preconditions for effective internal marketing: internal marketing must be acknowledged as a core element of strategic management, the structure of the organization must be in support of it, and top management must be perceived as active supporters of the internal marketing process.

Although a specific list of activities to be included into the internal marketing function does not exist, three certain situations in which internal marketing can be applied can be identified. Firstly, internal marketing is applicable when an organization needs to create a service culture and service orientation. Additionally, a situation when internal marketing may be effective is when an organization needs to maintain a service orientation among their employees. Lastly, it can be applied when introducing novel products or services, technologies or service process routines to employees. In addition to these situations, a general guideline when applying internal marketing is that any function that has an impact on an organization's internal relations and on the service-mindedness and customer orientation of employees is an appropriate situation for it. (Du Plessis et al. 2012, 406.) From these situations it can be recognized that the ABC project is piloting a new service, from which the conclusion can be drawn that internal marketing is applicable for ABC at this point in time.

Once the requisites of internal marketing have been addressed, the core purpose of internal marketing becomes creating an environment of employees who do not see their jobs as definitive and individual tasks, but as an entity that contributes to the overall prosperity of an organization. (Drake et al. 2004, 14.) This type of environment in an organization is created by engaging, enabling, empowering and ensuring employees. Having put effort into this as an organization, employees will more likely take risks, make suggestions, motivate their fellow co-workers, and attract trust. (Ibid. 16-17.)

Internal marketing can be divided into categories on different levels of examining it. Firstly, it can be examined as being either an ongoing process or a short-term initiative. In an ongoing internal marketing process, information sharing is continuous and employees' contributions are recognized. An ongoing process of internal marketing can be seen as a foundation for a fruitful organizational culture in which employees function with a customer-centric philosophy. Conducting internal marketing as a short-term initiative refers to an organization practicing internal marketing with a specific, individual goal in mind. Although short-term internal marketing does not set up a foundation for a successful internal marketing culture, it can help an organization conduct short-term operations, such as starting a new program. (Drake et al. 2004, 6.)

Moreover, internal marketing can be categorized into two different levels of activity – transactional and relational. The transactional level places more emphasis on the circulation of knowledge and therefore is based on one-way communication from higher levels to lower levels. Knowledge

circulation in the transactional level can refer to information on a new product or training for certain skills, for example. The relational level has a different focus, as it is entered around knowledge discovery. In this level, the focus is on two-way communication as opposed to in transactional activities. Knowledge discovery can be characterized with activities such as team-based learning and quality improvement. (Ballantyne 2000, 48.)

Additionally, internal marketing is classified into two different styles of management. This includes attitude management and communications management. What attitude management withholds is managing the attitudes of employees, specifically their motivation for service-mindedness. What can be done to attempt to ensure positive outcomes from attitude management in terms of internal marketing is to select people with the proper predispositions for service. Additionally, management should take on the responsibility of creating the organizational culture that is favorable for positive and service-minded attitudes. (Du Plessis et al. 2012, 406.) In turn, communications management places emphasis on two-way communication between staff and management. Key in this management style is the distribution of information for all staff that are in any way involved with customers and therefore require information regarding service features, offers and processes, and customer expectations. It is also important for the staff to communicate to management regarding needs and expectations of them and what they perceive those of customers to be. Although these management styles represent differing approaches, successful internal marketing is the result of a combination of both styles. (Du Plessis et al. 2012, 406.)

The benefits of successful internal marketing are quite straightforward. The bottom line is that internal marketing is linked directly to employee satisfaction, which in turn is linked to customer satisfaction, which is the most important aspect linked to business performance in general. Internal marketing develops employees who are loyal to the brand, perform well and strive to make a genuine impact on the customer. (Drake et al. 2004, 34.) Moreover, when an organization can successfully conduct internal marketing, it is believed to contribute to accomplishing paramount success in delivering marketing activity to external customers (Gilmore 2003, 134). Having identified benefits of conducting internal marketing, one can recognize that it is something that the facilitators of the ABC project could consider placing an effort into in terms of as an end result easing the engagement of interest and recruitment of students and companies. As Drake et al. (2004, 5.) state: "Companies that consider their employees to be their greatest assets are the ones that ultimately prevail."

3.3   Content marketing

The definition of content marketing may vary depending on the source where the definition was retrieved from, simply because there are multiple methods and channels via which to conduct content marketing. Perhaps the most widely known interpretation of content marketing comes from the Content Marketing Institute: "Content marketing is a strategic marketing approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant, and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience — and, ultimately, to drive profitable customer action." (Content Marketing Institute 2016, cited 5.3.2017.) Moreover, the CEO of the Content Marketing Institute Joe Pulizzi goes on to compare content marketing to storytelling. According to Pulizzi's comparison, content marketing is virtually telling a story in order to acquire and, more importantly, retain customers. As mentioned above in the definition of content marketing by the Content Marketing Institute (2016, cited 5.3.2017), the story that makes the content must be of value, relevance and appear consistently. Furthermore, it must come across as compelling to the target audience and produce positive attitudes among prospects of the company (Pulizzi 2017, 116).

According to Gavis (2014, 52), content marketing is all about focusing on the delivery of information that will somehow aid the understanding of your prospective consumer. This interpretation focuses more on the concept of content marketing as a source of help for the audience as opposed to a story. However, Gavis (2014, 52) also emphasizes the importance of supplying the audience with information that can be found valuable, which is in line with the definition of the Content Marketing Institute (2016, cited 5.3.2017). The pre-eminent difference between the interpretations is that Gavis (2014, 52) finds the outcome of content marketing to be the prospective consumers attaining a sense of having been helped, while the Content Marketing Institution (2016, cited 5.3.2017) interprets that the ideal outcome of content marketing is driving profitable customer action. Content marketing is relevant to the ABC project in terms of offering a concrete marketing method for the project facilitators to spark and maintain interest of the external target audience.

Content marketing is not a novel marketing strategy, yet it has not been widely practiced for long. This is due to the previously existing barriers that caused content marketing to be found challenging to incorporate into marketing. The first barrier has been that content produced by smaller and lesser known brands were not as accepted and welcomed as opposed to content produced by large, widely recognized brands such as the Wall Street Journal. There has been a development in this situation, as the size and reputation of the brand has become irrelevant when it comes to content

production, as content quality and engagement is considered superior to it. The centralization of publishing talent was also seen as a barrier for content marketing. Previously, writers, editors and journalists were opposed to working for non-media brands, as it was perceived to discredit their talent and profession. However, while the stigma is nevertheless moderately alive, nowadays these professionals are available in most industries to help brands produce high quality content. Lastly, technology is no longer a barrier for content marketing. Publishing content on the internet these days is cost-effective and relatively easy for nearly anyone. (Pulizzi 2017, 117.)

Content marketing can essentially be conducted through numerous different channels. Typical channels for content distribution are websites, social media channels, and blogs. (Gavis 2014, 52.) Furthermore, content can be distributed in corporate magazines, newsletters, and through videos, podcasts and webinars (Pulizzi 2017, 116). As mentioned above, technology was once but is no longer a barrier for content marketing. The fact is that popular channels for content distribution are social media channels, websites, and blogs. However, although these mentioned channels cause for content marketing to be more affordable, it does not mean that it is effortless. Content marketing through digital channels takes time and hard work – despite the fact that it is an affordable strategy, it stands for originality and experimentation. (Lieb 2012, 3.) Establishing a channel or channels for the ABC project on social media could be a platform for facilitators to distribute content marketing actively and cost-effectively, but requires constant upkeep.

It has been established that content marketing essentially has to do with creating marketing content that is of value to the audience. The next stage of the content marketing process is to then consider what the factors are that cause for the content to be of value. Characteristics that contribute to good content marketing are difficult to reach without a clear target audience. Placing focus on too extensive a content audience can result in failure, which is why it is considered important to focus content marketing on a previously deliberated target group. Assigning focus toward a certain demographic leads to the thoroughly thought out group to genuinely find the value in your marketing and become engaged in the matter. (Pulizzi 2017, 120.) The issue of finding the right target audience has mostly been resolved within the ABC project, as target groups are in fact fairly clear - students in the business field and companies that have validated their business in their home countries and have growth potential. However, these target groups can be inspected further as a key issue is identifying what they find valuable.

Moreover, the content should be something that is of use to the audience. The group that your marketing reaches will gain far more from useful content that they have sought out themselves as opposed to sales advertisements pushed out to them. Giving away information that could be of value and of use to the target group builds trust with the prospective consumers, whether they end up purchasing or not. Even if part of the audience reached with the content decides to pass on making the purchase, the content has still sparked interest and resulted in more leads. Furthermore, the content produced needs to be of high quality. It is not enough to create inadequate content scarcely, but the content created needs to be quality content and it needs to be produced in an active manner as opposed to pushing out a few campaigns annually. (Jefferson & Tanton 2016, 15-16.) Further attributes that separate valuable content from mere content are helpfulness, entertainment, authenticity and relevance. When one can incorporate some of these attributes mentioned above into their content, it can be considered as good content marketing. However, the most value is produced from one that is able to incorporate all of the mentioned characteristics into the content. (Ibid., 52.)

There are numerous benefits to consider when it comes to content marketing. First, the content can assist and support in the creation of a brand identity. When prospective customers first notice a brand, it is equivalent to a first impression when meeting someone new – that first impression is hard to change if it is negative. Therefore, it is favorable to incorporate content in the creation of a brand identity. Making use of content marketing in the creation of a brand identity also leads to better brand recognition, loyalty credibility, and authenticity. Content also brings relevance to the brand and its products and services, and makes them accessible to the potential customer. Furthermore, conducting content marketing results in the ability to kindle customer engagement during any stage of the buying cycle. This is due to the fact that the marketers who use content marketing are aware of the fact that potential customers need education before making a purchasing decision, so they can provide solutions that the potential customers are likely to be seeking in the content. Moreover, after the potential customer becomes a customer, content aids in establishing a continuous relationship with them. (Lieb 2012, 1-2.)

The ultimate benefit of course is, according to Pulizzi (2017, 123), brands being able to reach their marketing goals through the generation and distribution of useful data for their niche market as opposed to attempting to reach marketing goals through interruptive media. In order to achieve this, what Lieb (2012) and Pulizzi (2017) both state is that the marketing department needs to transition more into a publishing department actively distributing valuable information to their niche

market. With the benefits content marketing brings having been recognized, it can be concluded that with placing an effort in creating content that includes characteristics mentioned above, it is a method that can raise awareness and interest in the ABC project and have it maintain relevance.

3.4 Recruitment via marketing

As marketing for the purpose of recruiting students and companies into the ABC project is an important factor of the sustainability of Arctic Business Corridor, the three means of planning marketing mentioned previously in the chapter could prove beneficial if taken into use. Planning the marketing of the project from the viewpoint of services marketing aids in being able to consider what to promote to the target audience of the project. According to the nature of a project, Arctic Business Corridor is intangible, perishable, inseparable and heterogeneous, having an effect on how to portray it to the audience. Additionally, internal marketing can be seen as a method of effective external marketing and recruitment success in the long run. Internal marketing can be effective in two different layers of the ABC process. Firstly, if the ABC facilitator group were to be collectively and equally motivated and passionate regarding the project, it may ease communicating the project to potential student participants and companies in a way that attracts their interest. Furthermore, companies participating in the project may reach better results when marketing their business internally to their student teams in a way that motivates students to reach potential partners and customers and sell the business idea onward.

Lastly, content marketing is a method that could prove to work when considering the external marketing of the ABC project. Since Arctic Business Corridor is a unique service that develops the skills of student participants and the internationalization prospects of companies, content marketing could be the correct style to communicate that to potential participants. Content marketing could be used to tell stories about the ABC project in various channels, providing information to the audience as to how the project could be of use to them.

4   METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methods that were used to gather primary data that provides an understanding of the specific issues and needs of the ABC project. The information gathered via various qualitative methods is used in combination with the theoretical background of chapters 2 and 3 to pinpoint shortcomings in the ABC implementations and how they can be addressed in a pre-emptive manner in stakeholder guides. Because the aim of this thesis is in understanding – rather than explaining – phenomena, the use of qualitative research methods is justified (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 1997, 224). All textual materials - interview and workshop transcriptions, as well as the answers to questionnaires - were analyzed by focusing on the content, such as frequency of words or the thematic topics arising from the research material (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 90).

The thesis process was initiated by having individual discussions with three members of the ABC staff in Oulu. Individual discussions were chosen in order to mitigate the risk of one or two persons influencing the direction of the discussion, as would be the risk in a group interview (see Koskinen, Alasuutari & Peltonen 2005, 124-125). The opening discussions can be seen as following the model of an open, unstructured, and narrative type interview (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 80). There was no set agenda or topic beyond exploring the possibilities of which direction the thesis process would take. Individual discussions also allowed to discern whether or not the ABC staff members are in agreement about the topics by comparing the results of the discussions. The aim of these discussions was to formulate an understanding of where the staffers see the most important points of improvement and to what questions they most expect answers from this thesis. These were issues such as understanding the international partner universities' perspectives as well as improving the motivation and commitment of all stakeholder groups. The decision to use interviews to compile primary data from the international partner universities' representatives was made during these discussions. Based on their own experience as instructors of project-based theses, Vilkka & Airaksinen (2003, 63) state that a semi-structured interview is the most often used method of gathering qualitative data in project-based theses.

As both authors of this thesis have previously participated in two different implementations of ABC, the risk of formulating unintentional a priori hypotheses or a bias was acknowledged before proceeding with the interviews. An effort was made to keep the questions and the way they are

presented from leading the discussions towards any specific topics that the authors had subjectively observed as lacking, a risk stated by Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008, 84). Firstly, the ABC process had already been renewed in parts since the authors participated, so whatever issues were identified then may have already been addressed by the ABC staff. Secondly, it was important to maintain the perspective beyond individual student groups' issues arising from case-specific circumstances and focus instead on issues that are likely to affect projects in general.

4.1   International partner interviews

The primary qualitative research was carried out by conducting interviews with responsible personnel from the partner universities. Each university assigns a person – a facilitator – from their staff to provide oversight for their participating students. In this process, these persons were then contacted to inform them of the purpose of the thesis and what the desired outcomes of the discussions are. A timetable was compiled of when the interviews could be conducted. As the initial development points of the ABC project had been identified earlier during the discussions with the staff in Oulu, a list of preliminary questions was compiled and sent out to the interviewees once confirmation had been received of their availability for an interview. The aim of these preliminary questions was to allow the interviewees to consider the relevant topics beforehand and to give them an idea of the desired outcome of the interviews. As per semi-structured interview conventions, an interview guide was then created to be used by the authors during each interview in order to avoid deviating to off-topic discussions, to ensure all necessary topics are covered, and to have a level of comparability between answers from each interviewee (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 82). The preliminary questions and the interview guide are provided in Appendix 2 at the end of this thesis.

The interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes each and were recorded for transcription purposes with permission from each interviewee. After the interviews were completed, each interview was transcribed to have a convenient reference and also to help identify and highlight important themes, as well as issues that were common to two or more interviews. According to Eriksson & Kovalainen (2008, 85), in business studies it is often enough to simply transcribe the interviews word-for-word and possibly the pauses included. The interviews were analyzed by first compiling abridged versions of the discussions. The important topics that the interviewees identified were listed and

categorized according to the issue they regarded, such as schedule, communication, and commitment. This allowed to cross-reference and compile results in an organized manner.

4.2   Workshop for ABC staff

At the very beginning of the thesis process, individual discussions were held with three members of the ABC staff in Oulu. A need to have a collective discussion with as many ABC staff members present as possible was also recognized. For this purpose, a workshop was arranged with the ABC staff approximately halfway through the thesis process. The workshop session followed the structure of a group interview and was arranged as a semi-structured interview (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 82). The aim of the workshop was to get collective ideas for the stakeholder guides, so that the staff members would identify the most important issues. The information from the workshop session could be then compared and combined with the literature and the rest of the empirical data gathered. With a robust foundation of knowledge, the stakeholder guides can be trusted to contain all relevant information.

An outline of the themes for the workshop was prepared in relation to each stakeholder group – student, facilitator, and company guide. The initial plan was to have a free brainstorming period to begin with, followed by a more focused period where the staff members would identify the most important topics and discuss how they should be included in the guides. However, the discussion followed this format only at very top level – each guide was discussed separately – and topics were discussed immediately after they were brought up. Since a certain approximate amount of time was allocated for each guide, each topic was discussed roughly within set time limits and the schedule was maintained fairly well. Despite the fact that the discussion did not follow the planned format exactly, the staff members provided the necessary information and insight of the important topics they could all agree on regarding the guides. The workshop was recorded for research purposes with permission from the participants. As with the interviews, the workshop discussion was transcribed for reference purposes and to compare with the rest of empirical data as well as the foci of the literature.

4.3   Student feedback

A further method of developing the ABC project by gathering information for creating the stakeholder guides is analyzing the student feedback gathered by the local, Oulu-based ABC facilitators from students who have participated in the previous two pilot rounds of the project. Thus, the feedback is in a strict sense secondary data (see Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 77), but reanalyzed for the purposes of this thesis here. The analysis was completed after the international partner interviews and the workshop for the ABC staff. The student feedback data has been gathered in the fall of 2016. The feedback questionnaire consists of 14 open questions, of which 10 questions were found to be relevant to the study. The first 7 questions are analyzed separately from questions 8 - 10, as the nature of the questions is slightly different.

The method as to how the student feedback was analyzed was by first identifying the recurring themes and additionally identifying individual comments that can be recognized to correspond with the theory gathered regarding virtual project management, marketing, and communication. The aim was to identify themes that are the points of development about the ABC project from the perspective of a student participant, and these points can be reflected upon with the help of the theory found and combined to create the guidebook in a way that benefits the student participants and develops the ABC project process as a whole. Moreover, the second aim is to discover aspects that are found positive about the ABC project by the students to whom theory regarding marketing methods can be applied and can then be transformed into marketing material to be placed within the student guidebook.

The results will be demonstrated in the following manner: first, themes that recurred a few times in the student feedback will be revealed followed by explaining themes that were found to be most recurring in the student feedback, and secondly, individual statements that were found to correspond with the theoretical background are explained. The themes in the feedback that recurred only a few times within student responses are nevertheless mentioned due to the fact that they can still be identified as themes that are to be taken into consideration when developing the ABC process as a whole. The themes that recurred the most frequently are taken into closer inspection, and also a graph has been formed in order to demonstrate the ratio between negative and positive comments regarding the themes. The individual comments that have been found to correspond with the theoretical background, such as the recurring themes, aids in not only developing the ABC program but more specifically in creating the stakeholder guidebooks. The

questions of the feedback form gathering student participant responses from fall 2016 that have been used in this analysis can be found in Appendix 3 at the end of this thesis.

4.4 Company feedback

In order to improve understanding of the stakeholder group of the companies, an email questionnaire was sent in early March. The questions were open and devised to focus on each part of the project in a chronological order, beginning from initiation of the project and ending with the results and wrap-up. This way the questions would have a logical flow to them and it would provide the responder with a clear direction for how to determine crucial phases and the possible improvements for each or any of the phases. As was to be expected based on earlier experiences, the responsiveness of companies to student projects has a tendency to be low. For this reason, a decision was made not to dedicate as much resources for the company feedback and, consequently, the questionnaires were sent only once with no follow-up. Had the schedule been more forgiving and the focus more on the company perspective, interviews with the company representatives would have been arranged and conducted as well.

There was only one reply. The sole response was nevertheless included in this thesis to provide some insight into the company perspective. The answers were linked to the overall themes and combined with the rest of the information from the literature and from the empirical results. A similar approach to the student feedback analysis was prepared for multiple responses, where themes and topics could be compared and contrasted to gain a more comprehensive view. The company questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 4 at the end of this thesis.

Due to the limited number of people involved thus far throughout the ABC implementations, qualitative methods of compiling research material was determined to be the approach in this thesis. By utilizing semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with open-format questions, the information would help in understanding the perspectives of each stakeholder group. It was determined to be especially important to conduct interviews with the facilitators, both locally in Oulu as well as the international partner university representatives, as the facilitators' stakeholder group has insight into the other two stakeholder groups as well.

5   RESULTS

The following section provides a comprehensive look at the results of the interviews, the workshop, and textual analysis of the company feedback as well as the student feedback. The bulk of the material converges to form a view of the success points as well as the areas of improvement that is largely unanimous. The material gathered suggests that participants from each stakeholder group identify the same major topics where more work is needed to improve the ABC project in future implementations. The literature in chapters 2 and 3 is combined with the results presented here in the stakeholder guides with the aim of providing stakeholder groups with information that will best help them achieve a successful preparation, process, and result in the ABC project.

5.1   International partner interviews

The ABC staff in Oulu expressed their interest in having additional insight from the international partner universities and the representatives who had participated in ABC implementations. Their experiences and knowledge on the topic is considered helpful in understanding what the hindrances are that prevent the ABC project from reaching its full potential. The insight from the interviews would also be helpful in order to prepare for a meeting among all of the international staff in ABC that, at the time of writing this thesis, is planned for May 2017 and to be held in Oulu, Finland. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the future of ABC and its arrangement in detail, thus the interviews could help form a better understanding of the current situation between the participating universities.

A total of seven emails were sent to five universities and four people from three universities responded promptly. The four interviews were conducted over Skype at the end of February 2017. Each interviewee have varying positions within their respective institutions. Three interviewees have positions within the partner institutions, while one interviewee is the head of an organization that represents a cluster of businesses within their region. The interviewees had varying levels of involvement in the ABC project's latest implementation. One interviewee was involved to a large extent in coaching their team, while another could not participate as intensively due to their part-time position at their university. Finally, of the two other interviewees, who are related to the same university, one is the aforementioned business cluster representative and was more involved with

addressing the companies' issues, while the person at the university mostly oversaw the recruitment of students from their campus, but was not extensively involved during the project itself. The representative of the business cluster stood out among the interviewees due to their extensive knowledge on the company perspective. The discussion was very fruitful, but unfortunately much of the topics covered cannot be included here to maintain some semblance of a coherent thesis, but also due to low relevance to the guides - many suggestions were related to how the project is fundamentally run and planned.

5.1.1 Scheduling

All of the interviewees saw that the preparation for ABC has been too rushed thus far. The consensus from all discussions is that the preparatory work for the facilitators and the companies must begin earlier in relation to the start of the ABC project for the students and the start of the actual work on the assignment from the companies. Two interviewees expressed the need for the companies to spend more time on the assignments they are to give to the students. One interviewee especially, whose primary job is a business professional and teaching is part-time, reflected on the more general phenomenon of companies over-estimating what can be realistically achieved during a short-term project. The expectations of the companies need to be focused and restricted, and their assignments properly planned and reviewed before they are given to the students. Additionally, having the assignments already described during the recruitment of the students was seen as potentially ameliorating the recruitment process. In other words, students would be more inclined to join if they could be informed of the specific assignments before they sign up.

All interviewees described the schedule conflicts as having a negative impact on the implementation of ABC. The schedule was seen in general as too Finland-centric, in that other countries were required to adjust to the schedule created in Oulu. This was seen as clearly problematic, due to students having their own schedules in each country that they cannot adjust. Combined with the fact that the ABC project is additional work on top of their normal curriculum, the conflicting schedules create a very challenging workflow for the students and is seen as frustrating due to the fact that the schedule for ABC is seen as malleable, while other studies cannot be rescheduled. This issue must be resolved within the entire international facilitator team. As for the guides, the fact that every interviewee mentioned the time requirements, preparations, and

scheduling, highlights the importance of the schedules being clearly available for all stakeholder groups.

5.1.2   Recruitment

The ABC staff in Oulu expressed the difficult nature of recruiting students and companies as participants. Therefore, this topic was specifically discussed during these interviews. However, there was a slight difference in where the international partners see the problems of recruiting students lie and where the ABC staff in Oulu had identified them. All of the interviewees identified the problems in recruitment of the students as a matter of arrangement rather than lack of interest or motivation.

For all of the interviewees, the recruitment of students had been easy. Students were seen as very interested in the unique and practical nature of the ABC project. What made recruitment challenging, however, was the fact that the ABC was extra work for most students, the scheduling conflicts, and for some students, the project would not further their degree in any way, as they could not use the 5 ECTS from the project in their degree. Two interviewees also expressed the lack of need for multidisciplinary teams in assignments, thus rendering the need of non-business students irrelevant. In other words, the assignments from the companies should have a need for engineering work, for example, in order to make engineering students feel relevant and useful in the assignments. One interviewee stated that in a previous implementation engineering students felt that the assignments were incompatible with their skills in engineering. This issue is again related to the aforementioned need to work with the companies on their assignment. The interviewee added that if the need is to have multidisciplinary teams, then the assignment needs to be carefully focused to best utilize the pool of skills within the student team. One interviewee specified the desire to have multidisciplinary teams to also alleviate the investment needed from the company. The reason given was that if the teams have a wide spectrum of knowledge, the need for the company to fill knowledge gaps is less likely.

When asked about whether there is a need for recruitment or marketing material to assist in obtaining students for the project, all interviewees expressed an interest and considered such material beneficial, but not a definite need. Three interviewees mentioned the inclusion of

descriptions of the assignments as well as information about previous project implementations as useful material to help get students aboard the project.

Aside from recruiting students, it is the aim of ABC in the future to have more companies from the partner countries willing to enter the Finnish market as well. Recruiting companies from the partnering countries was seen as challenging by all interviewees. The most insight on this topic was gained from the interview with the business cluster representative. They expressed very clear requirements and plans for the longevity of the ABC project. Because the recruitment is demanding and challenging, it would be necessary to have the company participate in successive implementations, in a subscription-type service. They also expressed the need to gain recognition for the project in all of the regions of the participating institutions. The interviewee was emphatic about making the ABC a competition for businesses as well as the students. The competition aspect would help in gaining the aforementioned recognition and also enhance participant commitment. Another interviewee expressed similar ideas regarding the recurring participation of companies, but rather in a way that the companies would participate in several projects that form a kind of continuum across courses. This continuum would have student projects regarding the different phases of internationalization and each course would include a project targeted at the specific phase. The ABC could be one phase, focused on exploring the foreign market potential or a development plan to assist in entering a foreign market, such as product or service development.

The company cluster representative also expressed the need to have an organization that acts in between the university and the companies, such as Business Kitchen is in Oulu. The two other partner countries have organizations such as this, which can assist in spreading the message of the ABC project to local companies. One interviewee mentioned that a presentation about the Finnish market's opportunities and potential partnerships would be useful in getting the attention and interest of local companies.

Overall, the interviewees expressed great enthusiasm and positive expectations towards the future of ABC. The project is seen as unique in its combination of internationality, virtuality, and actual business cases. The aforementioned qualities were also seen as factors creating a unique level of complexity in the ABC project. Despite this complexity and the issues that ensue from it, the interviewees expressed positive attitude on their own behalf as well as on behalf of the students who had participated. All agreed that the responsibility of planning, executing, and overseeing of the project should be distributed more evenly between the facilitators, as most of the responsibility

has thus far fallen on the staff in Oulu. Likewise, the schedule also must be arranged to fit all participating institutions. All agree also that the person responsible for ABC at their university needs to be able to commit fully to the project and the students should get support as soon as it is needed and, therefore, the facilitators cannot be part-time staff members. While the facilitators do not need to work on ABC full-time, they should be available to help the student teams promptly during normal working hours and not, for example, two days out of the week. Interviewees had differing opinions on whether or not the project should be integrated as a part of an existing course in their university, but all agreed that it is necessary to be included in the curricula in order to avoid it being extra work in an already busy student and facilitator schedule.

Based on the interviews, the important topics that can and should be included in the guides are a description of the ABC project itself, scheduling, information about the assignments, and expected outputs as well as outcomes. The guides were seen as a welcome addition to existing project material, while not absolutely necessary.

5.2   Workshop for ABC staff

In order to ensure the contents of the stakeholder guides meet the requirements of the ABC staff, a workshop session was held with all ABC staffers in Oulu invited. The purpose of the workshop was to have a group discussion over the important topics and to brainstorm ideas regarding the ABC project, especially what should and could be included in the stakeholder guides. The workshop was structured based on the stakeholder guides, in that the first discussion topic was the facilitator guide, followed by the student and company guides and their contents, thus a similar structure is provided here.

5.2.1   Facilitator guide

The facilitator guide received the most input, as the ABC staff themselves have acted in the facilitator role in previous implementations. Hence, the facilitator guide was also determined as a logical initiation point for the workshop. Since most facilitators in upcoming implementations would most likely be persons who had already been in the facilitator role, the purpose of the guide is to act as reference for the facilitators. If there are new personnel coming on board as facilitators, the guide would be a tool for them to grasp the fundamentals of the project. The guides could also be

used to communicate the idea of the project and what is required of a facilitator to the upper echelons at the universities, so as to illustrate what resources teachers need in order to ensure proper implementation. Properly assessing the amount of work required was seen challenging by the workshop team and they expressed a frustration in trying to convey just how demanding the project is.

The first topics brought up during the workshop were related to the practicalities of the project: a chronological process description, the facilitator's role in the project, what is expected of the facilitator as well as the project itself, and the price of participation for the companies. What is expected and required from the facilitator was deliberated extensively, as the earlier implementations of ABC had seen problems arising from facilitators who had not been able to dedicate an adequate amount of time for the project, nor were necessarily entirely informed of what the facilitator is expected to do. The workshop team saw that in order to better illustrate the role of the facilitator, the roles of the companies and students would also need descriptions in the facilitator guide. In addition to helping define the role of the facilitator by contrasting and comparing it with the roles of the two other stakeholder groups, it would give a better overview of the entire process. One suggestion from the group how to best illustrate the situation was with a visual representation of the facilitator's relationship with all the other stakeholder groups, including other facilitators.

It was deemed necessary to clarify the role a facilitator has in the process of developing the educational materials used during student sessions and to clarify this, the guide should also include the pedagogic philosophy of ABC. Likewise, the facilitator's role in assisting the companies developing the assignments for the student teams was identified as needing more attention in upcoming implementations. All of this would tie in with having the learning outcomes explained in the guides, to inform the facilitators of how they should coach the teams and what they should emphasize during their discussions with the student teams. Knowing what exactly is the pedagogic nature of the project also helps in determining the kind of feedback the facilitator is to give regarding the work of the team and their reporting. Finally, an important topic regarding the expectations for the facilitator is the amount of time they should be able to dedicate for the project. Planning and preparing for the course takes time and the facilitator should be available for the student teams within a reasonable time during working hours.

Communication was seen as an important overarching topic that should be emphasized in the guides. Communication between facilitators was deemed important, because each team would

ideally have two facilitators working with them, one in each country. For this to work, both facilitators must have a clear common understanding of the assignment. Whether or not it is up to the facilitators to recruit the companies is at this time undetermined, as it is a time-consuming process and would be most effective if done by a third party. However, it might be necessary for the facilitators to at least communicate to a third party what kinds of companies are best suited to participate in ABC and thus a description the requirements for companies is necessary. The companies should be at an appropriate stage for internationalization, not have too complex of a product or service for the students to understand easily, and be able to dedicate enough time and resources for the project. Once the project is underway, communication should mainly be between the students and the company, with the facilitators providing coaching for the student teams and intervening with the project work when necessary.

Part of the pedagogic philosophy and objectives is for the students to build up their confidence in communicating within the professional environment and to initiate contact, for example with potential customer contacts. This also includes coaching the teams towards a proactive course, as previously some teams would send emails to companies and wait for up to two weeks just to get a response, and in a ten week project this could be seen as a major waste of time. Situations where the teams do not know what to do or do not communicate and co-operate as well as they could were seen as some of the common risks involved in ABC projects. An important section in the guides was determined by the workshop team to be risk management, predominantly avoiding common pitfalls within the teams and communication breakdowns. The facilitators need to be aware of common problems in advance to proactively work with the team to prevent issues stemming from cultural differences and lack of communication. The project does not have the adequate amount of time for conflicts to resolve themselves.

5.2.2   Student guide

Most topics discussed during the workshop regarding the student guide are similar to the facilitator guide and will thus not be discussed to the same extent here. As with the facilitator guide, important is to include a process description, including tasks before, during, and after the project. Since the students work on the project for only ten weeks, the entire process is somewhat condensed. The guides should include the timeline, purpose of the project, pedagogic philosophy, depiction of the students' role, deliverables, and expected results. One major way how the student guide differs

from the facilitator guide is that the students need to be 'sold' the project. In this sense the guides act as marketing material: they should convince students of the benefits they receive from participating in ABC. Therefore, the experience and knowledge that the students gain during the project take on a different emphasis in the student guide. The benefits are selling points that are aimed at attracting the appropriate types of students for the project. While the students are not expected to be experienced professionals, they should be willing to take risks, take initiative, and act outside their comfort zone.

The workshop team agreed that as with the facilitator guide, the student guide should include a collection of common problems student teams run into during the project. This kind of proactive risk management was seen as more pertinent to the ABC project with its short-term nature than traditional project risk management issues. It was seen necessary to provide the students either an opportunity to have a face-to-face meeting at the beginning of the project or provide the students with methods to strengthen the shared understanding within the team as well as decrease possible fault lines that could emerge. Problems have tended to occur when teams have not been able to communicate and coordinate adequately during the project. If the students are made more aware of these issues beforehand, they can take measures to prevent these issues from emerging, thus creating better chances for the project to succeed.

During the workshop, the participants acknowledged the benefit in approaching the topics from a positive angle. Instead of the guides focusing on highlighting the problems, the tone in the guides should be formulated in a way that gives the students the tools to make the project successful. By guiding the students towards a successful project by focusing on solutions, the team saw that students would be more engaged in making the project work and work towards the benefits the students are to gain from the project. In addition to learning and experiences, students gain new contacts and have the opportunity to work towards an internship placement, thesis assignment or even a job at the case company. The project is an apt opportunity for students to learn and display skills and qualities companies look for in potential employees.

5.2.3   Company guide

Even though much of the content is ostensibly similar in the company guide as it is in the facilitator and student guides, the company guide was seen in the workshop as having the most unique

perspective among the three. Similarities with the other guides include the process description, timetable, expected outcomes, depiction of the company's role and responsibilities during the process, and benefits gained during the project. The company's role was seen as especially important, because in previous implementations the companies often expected to give the assignment and not have any active participation during the project. However, the company should be available for the students, because of their tacit knowledge of their business and industry. When it comes to the company's business, the facilitator cannot provide the same information to the students as the company can. In order for the students to successfully complete the assignment according to the company's expectations, the student teams need a lot of information in a short amount of time. The company also needs to assign a representative with enough experience and knowledge to assist the teams, which has been another shortcoming in previous implementations. In addition, not only is the company's availability and willingness to share their knowledge a prerequisite for a successful implementation, but it is also a motivating factor for the students when the case company expresses interest in the project and the students perceive their own project work as significant for the company as well as having a real impact on the company's business.

The price of the participation fee for the companies was identified as an important singular piece of information that must be clearly available in the company guide. Companies need to be made aware of all the investments – time and money – they need to make while balancing the requirements with the opportunities and benefits the companies would gain. The workshop team agreed that the clearest way to signal the benefits is to convert the benefits into profits the company would gain by participating in the project. Not only do they receive the final reporting from the student team, but they have the opportunity to learn and gain a fresh perspective from the student groups. As stated earlier, some companies in previous implementations had not been entirely prepared for participation, which led to suboptimal results. In these kinds of situations, the companies have the opportunity to learn and correct their course. For example, if there are questions that the student teams have and the company cannot answer them in a satisfactory fashion, they can tackle that issue before it may become an issue on a larger scale.

Similarly to the student guide, the workshop team saw that it is important to approach issues from a positive angle in the company guide. Rather than listing out all possible and probable problems that usually face the participants in the project, the emphasis should be on providing the keys to a successful project. For companies, an important part is to clarify the scope of the project. The companies need to be aware of how much can realistically be achieved within the ten weeks of the

projects and not get too carried away with trying to make the student teams solve a slew of questions the company is likely to have. By understanding the scope and having realistic expectations, the companies are more likely to construct an appropriate assignment for the student teams. As previous implementations had seen companies give students hastily cobbled-together assignments that lack a clearly specified target and are too wide in scope, the workshop team identified this as one of the most important areas of development and what could be preliminarily addressed in the guides. When the companies have a proper understanding of the scope and realistic expectations, they can focus on the most important information the student teams can provide for them and maintain that focus throughout the project. This was seen important in also mitigating the risk that companies try to make drastic changes in direction or the amount of work once the project is already ongoing.

5.2.4 Development issues beyond the guides

Finally, some topics of discussion emerged during the workshop that cannot be addressed in the guides, but are deemed important in the general scheme of the ongoing development process of the ABC project. One of these was a similar sentiment that also emerged during the interviews with the international partners, that ABC should not necessarily be a stand-alone project, but rather a part of courses and projects that the universities offer companies as a service. Because some cases had displayed a certain level of immaturity in terms of the company's life-cycle – in other words, not yet quite at a phase where the company is properly ready to consider internationalization – the workshop team discussed the possibility of providing more help for companies in earlier stages of internationalization as well.

This discussion strongly reflects the idea of a continuum of courses described earlier. Related to this, but also helping in selling the project to companies, the team discussed having more concrete project templates for companies in the ABC project. The templates would include predefined scope of the project, such as market research, contacting potential customers, or finding potential strategic partners. With a clear set of templates of the 'products' that the companies can purchase, ABC was seen as being likely to be easier to sell and would also provide a clearer idea of the purpose, expectations, and scope of the project for the companies. The kind of a selection of courses that aim at more specific phases in a company's life cycle is also seen as important in

creating sustainability for the co-operation with companies, which is necessary to ensure the ABC project can be implemented in the future, once the pilot phase funding is no longer available.

Finally, some questions about practical arrangements of the project were discussed during the workshop. One dilemma the workshop group found difficult to resolve is whether they would keep the current model of using the funds gained from the company fees to enable the students to travel between the two countries in each team. When the students have done this, the experiences have been distinctly positive: the students enjoy traveling and meeting their teammates face-to-face and this is known to improve virtual teams' functionality, as described earlier in the teamwork literature.

The workshop team agreed that traveling arrangements take up a lot of the facilitator's time and it is not always possible for students to arrange time in their schedule for these trips. This then creates an imbalance between different teams, as some teams travel during the project while others do not. The teams that do not travel, do not get any compensating rewards instead. This problem could be solved by simply making the company fee into a reward that is paid directly to the students. The companies would be required to figure out how this can be done, as half of the team is from another country, and thus the facilitator would not need to intervene. However, there is always the risk of some member in the team not completing their tasks or freeloading, or the entire team fails. There needs to be a failsafe so that companies do not end up wasting the money and students having the responsibility to work towards the reward, while also making sure the companies do not take unfair advantage of this possibility and simply use free workforce.

5.3   Student feedback

There are numerous themes that emerged a few times in the student feedback responses that appear in both negative and positive sense. Themes that arose in a positive sense from the student feedback a few times are that the company cases were found interesting, the opportunity to build a network and gain personal contacts and the chance to learn new things, such as market research, working on an international project, and time management. Furthermore, students expresses their own personal interest, the support of their facilitators and workshops to support them in their learning process. Themes that arose a few times when being asked what was rewarding regarding the ABC project are being able to complete the project, receiving feedback throughout the process, learning about the cases of the other teams and the chance to travel during the project. Some

recurrences in themes that were expressed in a negative sense are the inequality in distribution of tasks within project team, a lack of time and local support, difficulties arising due to cultural differences, technical difficulties, and lack of prior knowledge regarding the industry the commissioning company operates in.

5.3.1 Central themes

From questions 1-7 in the student feedback it was found that the themes that recurred in most questions are communication, guidelines and instructions, working with real companies, and teamwork. The questions have been interpreted as either positive or negative questions, meaning the questions are gathering either positive feedback regarding ABC or negative feedback concerning ABC. The frequency of comments from the positive questions have been grouped together and comments from negative questions have been grouped together to set a comparison as to the amount of positive comments and the amount of negative comments. It can be identified if the theme in place requires improvement or is thought to be a well-functioning element of the ABC project. Anonymous comments from the feedback form are provided to indicate in a more detailed manner as to what aspects of the themes have for example been raised.

The chart in Figure 3 below demonstrates that student participants from fall 2016 find there to be more negative aspects to the overall communication in the ABC project compared to positive aspects. According to comments from the students, some reasons as to why communication is a lacking element in ABC are issues with internal communication within student team, lacking unofficial communication with facilitators, and issues with communication between two countries and the commissioning company. However, there are positive comments regarding ABC as well. A majority of the positive comments are related to how much the participants learned about the importance of communication. It is also stated by the student participants that the communication between the team and their facilitator worked well.
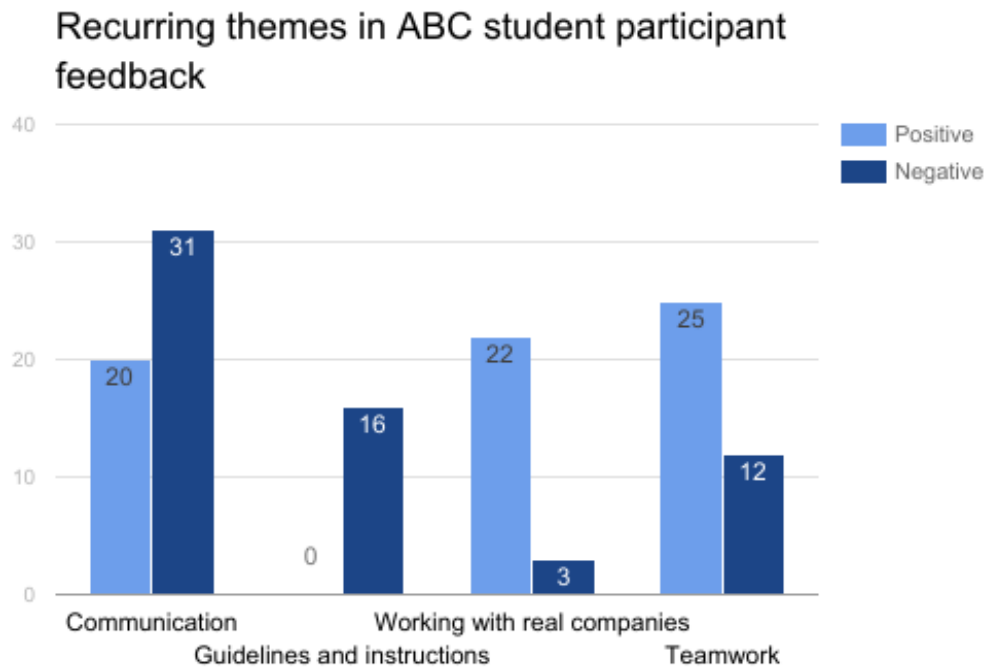
Recurring themes in ABC student participant feedback

FIGURE 3. Recurring themes in ABC student participant feedback

The feedback regarding guidelines and instructions of the ABC project were all negative. The feedback findings show that the participant students who commented the subject matter feel that the guidelines and instructions regarding ABC and the process were lacking. Additionally, comments made regarding guidelines and instructions stated that the information arrived later than would have been necessary, and the delay in receiving relevant information caused negative feelings.

Regarding the recurring theme concerning student participants being able to work with real companies, the difference with positive and negative comments is quite significant, as positive comments clearly seen in the chart outweigh the negative comments. According to student participant feedback, a good aspect about the ABC project is that it provides the students a chance to work with a real company thus allowing the participants to work closely to the real industry. The negative comments regarding the theme in question state that student participants were unhappy that commissioning companies were not all sufficiently prepared for the ABC project. The third theme, teamwork, has also received more positive than negative comments from student participants. Some examples drawn from the feedback comments provide reasoning for this, as student participants have wrote that the chance to work in an international team was a positive factor and they were able to learn valuable group working skills. Additionally, an example of a

positive student remark regarding teamwork is that the good atmosphere within their team supported their learning. However, discrepancies between workloads within teams, lack of freedom for project team and cultural issues were seen as challenges.

5.3.2 Co-operation with commissioner, facilitator, and tools

As previously mentioned, feedback form questions 8-10 will be addressed separately and reasoning behind the cooperation between either the case company and the student team or the facilitator and the student team being sufficient or lacking will be explained briefly. Student participants who answered the question "How would you describe the cooperation with the case company" by stating the cooperation worked well gave the following reasoning: the communication was smooth in the sense that the commissioner was easily accessible and provided answers to questions in a fast manner, that the commissioner was genuinely interested in the student team, valued their findings and provided support, the commissioner guided the project in the right direction by providing valuable information, and that the representatives of the commissioning company were friendly. The reasoning behind some of the student participants finding the cooperation between their team and the commissioning company to be lacking are the following: the amount of communication between the team and the commissioner was found insufficient, lack of information needed for conducting the project, unfocused tasks provided by commissioner, inability to answer direct questions presented by the student team, and the project not appearing to be a high priority for the commissioner. Overall, the divide between positive and negative experiences of student participants regarding the cooperation between student teams and commissioners was fairly even.

Furthermore, the divide between positive and negative experiences regarding student participant responses to the question "How would you describe the cooperation with the facilitator" was far less even as compared to the previous question. The majority of student participants stated with various reasoning that the cooperation between the student team and the facilitator of the team had been positive. This is due to the following characteristics: the facilitator provided the student team with guidance, support and ideas regarding how to proceed with the project, the facilitator replied swiftly to questions presented by the student team, the facilitator was easy to get along with, the facilitator engaged in good discussions with the student team regarding the project and gave good feedback, and that the facilitator was flexible. In terms of what student participants listed as

negative characteristics of the cooperation between the facilitator and student team are that student participants experienced uncertainty regarding requirements and content of produced material and that the communication in the beginning of the course between the facilitator and the student team felt intimidating.

With regard to feedback collected from student participants concerning tools used within team for work and communication, a table has been formed showing all different tools used by participants and comments characterizing the function of a certain mentioned tool for certain teams, seen in Figure 4. The mentioned comments are individual comments mentioned by student participants, therefore do not characterize the tool necessarily as it is to be used according to factual information. The experience regarding use of various tools by student participants contribute to the guidebook for the student stakeholder group.

Whatsapp - Fast and easy	Skype - Weekly and unscheduled meetings	Google Drive - Gathering and sharing work, documenting project process, writing documents together with team, task log
Facebook - Daily conversations	Dropbox - Uploading, organizing & sharing project documents and viewing progress of team members	Microsoft Word online - Writing shared material together with team members
Email - Contacting team members	Adobe Connect	

FIGURE 4. Tools used by student participants during fall 2016 ABC project

5.3.3 Correspondence with theoretical background

Additionally, it could be seen from a number of comments selected from the student feedback with a clear correspondence with the theoretical background that students identified general difficulties regarding project management and teamwork. These identified difficulties are not being able to develop a shared sense of understanding within the student team and additionally with the

commissioner, and the ability to identify roles within the student teams and the responsibilities that come with them. Furthermore, students were faced with either the lack of interest from the company toward the project work or lack of interest and faith from the student toward the company, which can be a sign of poor internal marketing from the company to the student team regarding their company and products or services. As emphasized in the theoretical background, a kickoff meeting sets a great foundation for virtual teamwork, which was also identified in the student feedback as being an important element in teaming up.

From the collected student feedback it can be concluded that the student participants found many aspects of the ABC project favorable, although there are many issues that require improvement. However, some factors that arose in the student feedback are more crucial than others in terms of creating the stakeholder guidebooks. Firstly, communication was a major theme that came up in a negative manner more so than in a positive one. Based on this it can be stated that it is necessary to include a communication guide within the student stakeholder guidebook, so that in the future of ABC student participants can recognize the importance of communication from the very beginning. Additionally, the lack of guidelines and instructions can be approached by including basic guidelines and instructions in the student stakeholder guidebook, which makes them available to student participants from the beginning of the project. This finding can also be implemented into the facilitator guidebook, so that facilitators know to provide sufficient instructions.

Moreover, teamwork is an aspect of the ABC project that was identified to be a central theme among student feedback, and it can be brought up in the student stakeholder guidebook. The recurring theme of students stating they find it positive that the ABC project involves working with a real company can be implemented as marketing material into the student stakeholder guide. In addition to central themes found in student feedback, feedback regarding the use of tools in virtual teamwork can also be implemented into student stakeholder guides, serving as advice on what tools student teams can use in future ABC implementations. Moreover, the feedback regarding the cooperation between student teams and their commissioner and student teams and their facilitator and how the students experienced the cooperation to work can be utilized by creating a student team - commissioner and student team - facilitator visualization of interaction in the student guide, so that in future implementations of the ABC project student teams are aware from the beginning of what kind of role facilitators and commissioners take on in the project.

5.4 Company questionnaires

Companies that have participated in the previous implementations of ABC have a unique perspective on the project and what elements require improvement in future implementations. Additionally, since a company stakeholder guidebook is part of the outcome of this thesis, it was seen as important to receive feedback from companies that have previously been involved in ABC implementations. Seven companies that participated in previous ABC implementations were contacted via e-mail with a questionnaire with the purpose of gathering information on what was considered to be favorable and, more importantly, lacking in the view of a commissioner in order to be able to apply that information to the company stakeholder guidebook.

Only one response was received from company representatives that the questionnaire was sent to. Consequently, answers received to what was asked in the questionnaire can be seen as the perspective of only one company. However, the feedback provided by the sole responding company can be compared to other material gathered for this thesis, and a correlation can be seen and it can be concluded that although received company feedback is from the perspective of a certain individual or individuals working for a single company, these persons have identified some of the same issues that have been identified by other stakeholder groups of the ABC project. Thus, the feedback received is found useful and can be incorporated into the company stakeholder guidebook. The responses received from the company are explained by stating first what aspect of ABC the commissioner found positive, followed by aspects of the project that the commissioner found to be lacking and in need of improvement.

The commissioner was satisfied with the ABC project and having participated in it, as the end result achieved by the student team assigned to their case was something that exceeded the expectations of the commissioning company. Consequently, the commissioner states that the project was found to be useful to the company. Moreover, the duration of the entire ABC project implementation was found sufficient by the commissioner. It can be concluded that the commissioner in question was overall satisfied with the work conducted on their case by the student team and the duration it took. However, the commissioner identified several factors that require improvement and change in the ABC project. Firstly, the clarity of the overall ABC project schedule was found insufficient. The commissioner experienced longer periods of time of waiting for something to take place in the project involving the commissioner, and consequently periods of time where suddenly many urgent elements of the ABC project required a fast response from the commissioner all at once.

In addition to providing a clearer overall schedule, the commissioning company in question found that prior to the start of the ABC project implementation, information and materials regarding costs and expectations of the project should be made available to companies. Information regarding costs refers to the participation fee collected from the commissioning companies. The commissioning company in question found the fee to be appropriate. However, information regarding the fee were not made clear to the company in the beginning of the project and this caused misunderstanding. A final point of improvement for the ABC project according to the commissioning company in question is the creation of guidelines and practices regarding meetings held during the project. The meetings lacked proper scheduling and common practices and information on how to prepare for certain meetings was not given beforehand. Additionally, the commissioner found that it would be important for the student team to be present in meetings with the company representative, especially in the beginning and end of the project.

The aim of the conducted qualitative research was to find the crucial development points of the Arctic Business Corridor as provided by representatives of the stakeholder groups in order to be able to create stakeholder guidebooks for future ABC implementations. The results of the conducted research brought forth an array of views regarding the project from the stakeholder groups, both in the positive and negative sense. As the focus was on the crucial development points, the results regarding them have been collected into Figure 5 seen below. The collected results presented in Figure 5 have not been separated as to which stakeholder group the view was provided by, as the source of each crucial development point can be seen in the previous analysis.

Crucial development points identified by stakeholder groups	Communication & development of shared understanding
	Schedule issues & guidelines and instructions
	Clarification of roles and distribution of responsibility within stakeholder groups
	Recruitment of students and companies
	Proactive inclusion of risk management
	Including ABC into curricula
	Student-case company cooperation

FIGURE 5. Summary of crucial development points of ABC

6   CONCLUSIONS

The Arctic Business Corridor project is an ambitious and challenging project that aims to bridge the gap between higher education and the expectations of employers. It connects students and companies from six countries within Europe to realize an internationalization project. The project is seen as having a lot of potential by the people involved, but its path to becoming an established educational project for students and a sustainable service for companies is fraught with challenges. Because the project involves a lot of work within a short period of time, its execution leaves little room for errors. Thus, the project requires careful planning and a proactive approach in order for it to produce results that can guarantee its longevity.

The main focus of this thesis was to uncover the most pressing aspects of the ABC project requiring improvement or change. These aspects were identified from the interviews held with representatives of foreign partner universities of the project, the response to the questionnaire sent to companies that have previously participated in ABC, the student feedback collected from previous rounds of ABC by the Oulu facilitator staff, and the results from the preliminary discussions and workshop held among the Oulu facilitator staff. All of these sources and their information led to the conclusion that there are a lot of factors of the Arctic Business Corridor project that these different stakeholder groups are very satisfied with, however certain points of improvement have been identified. In addition to identifying the main points of improvement for ABC, the focus was to combine the information retrieved from the above-mentioned sources to the theoretical background that was found to be appropriate in order to create stakeholder guides for the ABC project. Guides were created for students, companies, and facilitators. The guides are provided in Appendix 1 at the end of this thesis.

The main issues that were identified as needing improvement regarding the ABC project are marketing in terms of the ability to recruit student participants to the project, communication across as well as within stakeholder groups, and project management, specifically in terms of time management and scheduling. More detailed issues that were seen as lacking or in need of improvement or extreme awareness by the various stakeholder groups - such as the lack of focus in case descriptions from the commissioning companies to the student teams or varying levels of commitment seen in facilitators - have been taken into consideration in the creation of stakeholder guidebooks. It was seen as a natural fit to incorporate more minor issues discovered from

qualitative data collection into the guidebooks alongside the major issues requiring more attention and care. The guidebooks can be considered as preventative measures when it comes to the more major issues requiring improvement and attention in the ABC project.

6.1   Creating the stakeholder guides

The output of this thesis project are three guides, one for each stakeholder group involved in implementations of the ABC project. The purpose of each guide is to give the reader a general idea of what the ABC project is, a process description, who the project is meant for, the expected outcomes, and instructions how to proactively avoid general problems that people in the project usually face. Thus, the aim with the guides is twofold: to entice potential participants - students and companies - to take part in the project and to give each stakeholder the fundamentals of a successful implementation. The information presented in the literature part of this thesis and the qualitative material gathered from the stakeholder groups converge in the three guides created in this thesis.

The guides themselves serve the purpose of content marketing targeted towards students and companies. The ABC team needs to sell the idea of the project for these stakeholders and an effective way of doing that is by providing content in the form of these guides - individual guides for each stakeholder groups are a marketing approach in and of themselves, as discussed in chapter 3.3 (Pulizzi 2017, 120). The facilitator guide has a slightly different nature compared to the student and company guides, as its intention is not to convince facilitators in participation. For the facilitators, the project is a part of their job, most likely assigned by a higher instance in their respective organization. Nevertheless, a general introduction is included to convey the purpose and idea of the project to possible future personnel. The guide can help personnel of the universities to estimate the workload of the project, which was seen helpful by the ABC staff during the workshop session. The structure and layout are similar for each guide and are therefore presented here in a concise manner with guide-specific matters discussed when necessary.

The guide creation process itself was straightforward. Because the themes and topics that arose from literature and the qualitative data were congruent (see chapter 5, Figure 5), the contents for the guides were evident from the outset in the guide compilation process. All three guides were compiled co-operatively by the authors in order to ensure a level of uniformity in the structure and

to minimize risk of critical information being omitted from any of the guides. The first iterations of the guides were delivered to the ABC staff members in Oulu in order to have their input and assessment. Subsequent corrections were made in the final versions according to the input.

6.1.1 Introduction

Each guide has a cover page with a table of contents to give an overview of the topics covered. The introduction in each guide is aimed at giving the reader a general feel of the project and its purpose. For students and companies the introductions give an idea of what they can gain via participation. Facilitator guide contains both of these aspects, as the facilitators need to understand the benefits of every stakeholder group in order to effectively recruit new participants. For the companies the focus of the benefits is concentrated on information that will be useful for them regarding their internationalization process. For the students, the benefits are of a more immaterial nature in the form of experience, knowledge and skills, but also connections to potential future internship placements, thesis commissioners or even a job placement after graduation. These benefits can be identified as being of value to specific stakeholder groups. By marketing the appropriate benefits directly to the appropriate stakeholder group, these groups are likely to find the message in the material, and thus the project, valuable to them. Marketing the value of the project is aligned with the marketing theory discussed throughout chapter 3, as well as the results of the interviews with the facilitators, discussed in chapter 5.

Because of the general purpose and nature of the guides, the information was kept concise, clear, and easy to understand. In order to achieve this, summarizing lists of key topics were utilized when possible. The introduction section of the guides have a brief list of the key facts of ABC. These include the duration, the stakeholders, the purpose, and the outcome. Following the introduction, the student and company guides have quotes from participants in previous implementations to give them a feeling of their peers and what they have thought of the project. The quotes tie-in with the marketing nature of the guides.

6.1.2 Practical content

After the introduction and the more marketing-oriented material, the guides present the reader with the practical information regarding the implementation. The facilitator and company guides have a

process description to give the reader an idea of how the project is planned to progress, while the student guide has a bullet point list of the project description. The student guide has a more precise description of the process towards the end of the guide, detailing the milestones during the project when the students are expected to present their findings and hand in reports. This is due to the standardized nature of the student projects, while the process has a level of vagueness for the facilitators and the companies in that there is no standard process for finding companies and students, or creating the assignments. The ABC staff in Oulu recognized a need to conceptualize the ABC project for students and companies in an accessible manner. For this purpose, the process description was identified as a necessary component for the guides during the workshop session.

Proper scheduling is an important part of any project-type process and was highlighted in the literature (see Artto et al. 2006, 49; Kettunen 2009, 44) as well as in the data gathering. Especially the interviewed facilitators both in Oulu and at the international partner universities emphasized the need to improve the schedule, as discussed in chapters 5.1.1 and 5.2. Thus, the facilitator guide has two schedules: an annual clock and the project schedule. The annual clock illustrates the schedule beyond the ten-week ABC project that the students and the companies participate in. The facilitators are responsible for the planning, recruitment, and implementation within the project and thus their involvement regarding the project is more long-term. The project schedule is included all three guides, outlining the milestone dates when the ABC teams are meant to convene en masse and when the students are expected to have completed their work. While schedules obviously have been supplied to participants in all the earlier implementations as well, it is the aim of these guides to combine the schedules with a more detailed process description to give participants a more comprehensive understanding of what is expected at these milestone dates.

The rest of the guides provide information that will help members of each stakeholder group to prepare for and successfully execute the project. The guides give a description of the role of each stakeholder group both among their peers as well as in relation to the representatives of the two other stakeholder groups. The importance of project roles was discussed earlier in chapters 2.3.1 and 5.2. The role descriptions along with task descriptions are intended to give each stakeholder a better understanding of what they are expected to achieve during the project. In order for the guides to provide tools for risk management, some common problems are included to illustrate pitfalls that have thus far plagued the implementations of the project. By stating the common problems and providing suggestions how these pitfalls can be avoided, the guides give the stakeholders the means to take proactive measures against risks. The suggestions are based on the literature on

the topics and presented as methods of successful implementation in order not to paint too bleak of a picture for potential participants.

As mentioned in chapters 2.3.2 and 5, communication was identified to be an issue of the ABC project that requires improvement on many accounts, as communication issues arise both across stakeholder groups – such as between the facilitator and the student team – as well as within stakeholder groups – such as within the student teams. An indication of the fact that the guides can be used as preventive measures for the issues identified is that the success factors and risk management of communication have been included. The aim is that stakeholders are able to identify communication as an important aspect of the project prior to the project even beginning. Consequently, the purpose of this is to minimize the risk of communication problems arising during the project.

6.1.3   Tone and design

Members of the ABC staff in Oulu expressed during the workshop (see chapter 5.2) the wish to have a welcoming tone in the guides. Similarly, the staff articulated the preference of presenting the risk management aspect in the guides in an encouraging manner, as described above. Accordingly, the tone for the facilitator and company guides is rather official, while the student guide has a more personal approach to addressing the reader. A level of informality is kept in every guide to avoid a tedious or uninteresting read, while balancing with the appropriate amount of gravitas. The result is aimed at being light-hearted enough to spark interest in potential readers while portraying the necessary level of professionalism to spur participants to strive for best results.

The final visual design of the guides will be done by an advertising agency. Therefore, the guides produced during this thesis project have a tentative design to them. In order for the guides to work as marketing material, a certain level of effort needs to be put into the visual design as well, but that goes beyond the purpose of this thesis. The output here is the content, while the layout and design convey an idea of the style envisioned for the guides. Key elements of the information in the guides should be emphasized and presented concisely, such as highlighted with separate graphical elements, stylized lists, and imagery that reinforces the written content. The final products should catch the reader's attention from the outset and maintain their attention throughout.

The guidebooks were formed on the basis of combining the issues identified from the collected qualitative data and the methods of improving the issues found in theoretical background, and the issue of marketing is an indication of it. The choice for the content of the guidebooks is strongly influenced by the marketing theoretical background, especially the idea of content marketing. As content marketing is only valuable if one is able to identify the correct target group, separate guidebooks were created in order for each stakeholder group to gain the most value out of their own, target audience specific guidebook. The tone of the guides was also considered to suit the respective stakeholder group in order to provide the information in an appropriate manner, as well as to maintain the marketing aspect.

The focus in creating the guides was kept almost exclusively on the content: the visual aspect and layout was considered only as a reference to how the authors suggest the information can be presented. Clear presentation, highlighting important facts, and including visual reinforcement of the contents were the guiding themes for the tentative layout. However, because the guides created in this process were meant as templates that the ABC staff can customize for each implementation of the project, the superficial aspects of the guides were considered to be of secondary nature. The guides will be a part of a proactive approach to the execution of the project by providing as much non-implementation-specific information as possible for each stakeholder group before and during the project. Thus, the contents of this thesis and the guides will be a part of solutions aimed at making the Arctic Business Corridor a sustainable and permanent international co-operation that will help companies and give students much-needed practical experience.

7   DISCUSSION

We would like to extend our gratitude to the Arctic Business Corridor staff at Oulu University and Oulu University of Applied Sciences for this thesis project opportunity. We feel that ABC is among the forerunners of the type of studies that will become more commonplace in the future. Practical experience is always valued at companies looking to hire fresh talent. Furthermore, higher education should at all times be prepared to adapt to the changing needs of employers and better prepare students for entering working life. Because we have both participated in the ABC project ourselves and further explored its possibilities with this thesis, we have both learned a great deal about the complex nature of combining real project-based work with educational aspirations within an international context.

Even though both of us had participated in ABC earlier, there was nevertheless a level of ambiguity in the early stages of the process. Narrowing the topic seemed especially challenging due to the inclusion of the point-of-views of all three stakeholder groups and the international aspect. The scope of the thesis has perhaps somewhat hindered the depth of each perspective. During the project, we realized that the company aspect will be lacking the most and would likely be a suitable topic for a thesis of its own. The company perspective could have been more thoroughly explored had the spring 2017 implementation of ABC not been cancelled at the last minute, once this thesis project was already underway.

On the topic of further research, besides the company perspective we feel that the project itself and the international virtual teamwork aspect would be an interesting topic for further examination. While this thesis provides a somewhat general overview of the project, further research could focus on more specific areas and perspectives. Especially useful for the project would be the possibility to observe an implementation throughout the entire process of planning, preparation, implementation, and conclusion. We consider the results of this thesis as well as suggested future research as being applicable to instances beyond the specific context presented in this thesis. For example, the virtual teamwork and the problems related to it are very likely to be present in numerous working life situations, and in the future even more so.

We see that the empirical findings of our qualitative research are consistent with the literature on the topics of project management and virtual teamwork. While the results of our research did not

unearth surprising issues, we feel that we have achieved a clarification of what aspects of implementation require extra attention. Much of the risks and problems during international projects like these seem to boil down to inadequate communication, multilateral scheduling issues, and lack of preparation. It is our intention and hope that our work in this thesis and the guides will be part of the solutions addressing those issues that will enable the project to achieve sustainability and longevity in serving students and companies in the upcoming years.

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FACILITATOR GUIDE

CONTENTS OF THIS GUIDE:

WELCOME TO ABC

The Arctic Business Corridor is a unique international project between universities and companies. You will have a one-of-a-kind opportunity to guide students in an innovative project that paves the way to the future of business education.

As the facilitator, you will have a crucial role coaching an international student team in a unique project working with a real company in an internationalization case. It is your task to prepare the project with your fellow facilitators, oversee the implementation and coach the student work, and finally to review the work as well as provide feedback.

ABC will challenge you, your students and the company, but you will all gain something you cannot get from anywhere else. The rewards far outweigh the obstacles. This guide will give you the what, where, when, and how of a successful project. **Let's get to work!**

ABC QUICK FACTS:

- Project duration: **10 weeks**
- Company fee: **2000 €**
- Truly **international**
- Teams and facilitators in **two countries**
- **Real company** cases
- **Coaching** instead of teaching
- Practical **work & experience**

1

PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

The beginning is where you **make or break the project.** The planning process begins much earlier than the course takes place and the facilitator team must agree on an early starting date for each implementation. Finding the participating companies takes time and the **schedule** must fit not only the companies, but all the universities as well. You also need to agree how many companies and cases you take in for each implementation. Make sure the discussions between you and the other facilitator is initiated well ahead of time and that you maintain a **regular contact** schedule with one another throughout with the communication tools you have agreed on. If you get an email, reply even if just to confirm. You also need to work with the company contact to ensure the task from the company to the students is **focused, clear and of appropriate scope**. Once everything is set up, it's time to kickstart the ABC project itself. Make sure you have a clear and comprehensive picture of the process so you can communicate it to the students and the companies as well.

The project begins with the **Kickoff** meeting. This is where the students meet each other and meet up with their company. First impressions last for a long time and are hard to change afterwards, so make sure you, your students and your company are prepared to **make an impression**. Emphasize the importance of open, continuous **communication** between all parties. If you and the company act professionally and are available for the students, the students will perform to their fullest capabilities and provide excellent results. The project will **not** have the desired results, if the students feel that you - the facilitators - or the company does not care about the project.
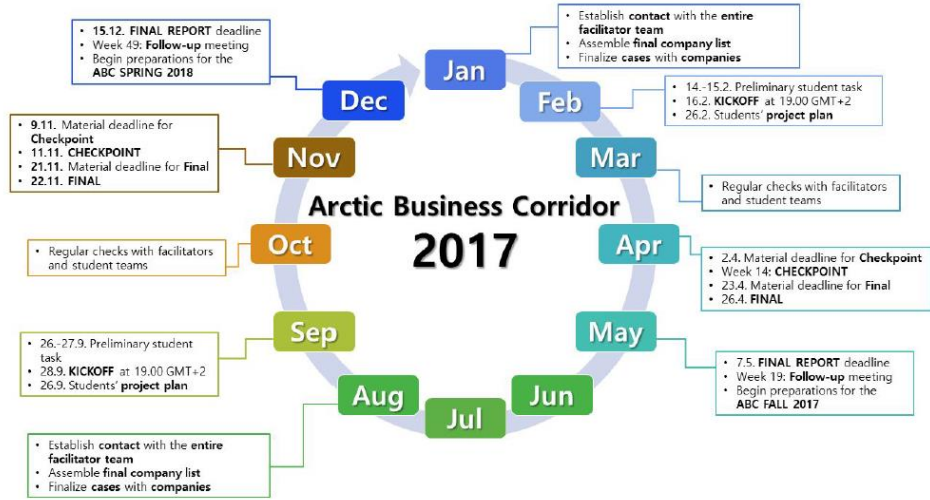
Towards the end of the project you will have the **Checkpoint** presentations. This is when the students present their progress to the company, you and other student teams. This is where the students can still make adjustments towards the final output of the project, based on valuable feedback from you, the company and other students. **The Final** is a couple of weeks later and this is where the student teams present their final results to everyone. The student teams will also write a **final report** and have a **follow-up meeting** with you and the company. In the follow-up meeting you go over the results presented during the Final and in the final report, and you will provide **feedback** for the student team, as does the company. The aim is that the students learn practical skills for future employment, therefore your insight into their work is of utmost importance. The companies also want **results** and they can only get them if the teams work well.

If the facilitator team is not well prepared, the project may come to a standstill or you will need to improvise. Create contingency plans, make sure there is wiggle room in the schedule for surprises (there are **always** surprises), and treat your students as professionals. Common reasons for project failure are lack of communication, inadequate planning & preparation, and lack of commitment. Students will be committed to work hard and provide good results as long as you and the company **lead by example**. Make sure the virtual student teams **communicate** frequently and be there to act as mediator when conflicts arise - do not take sides.

ANNUAL SCHEDULE

Arctic Business Corridor 2017

- **Jan** — Establish **contact** with the **entire facilitator team** / Assemble **final company list** / Finalize **cases** with **companies**
- **Feb** — 14.-15.2. Preliminary student task / 16.2. **KICKOFF** at 19.00 GMT+2 / 26.2. Students' **project plan**
- **Mar** — Regular checks with facilitators and student teams
- **Apr** — 2.4. Material deadline for **Checkpoint** / Week 14: **CHECKPOINT** / 23.4. Material deadline for **Final** / 26.4. **FINAL**
- **May** — 7.5. **FINAL REPORT** deadline / Week 19: **Follow-up** meeting / Begin preparations for the **ABC FALL 2017**
- **Sep** — 26.-27.9. Preliminary student task / 28.9. **KICKOFF** at 19.00 GMT+2 / 26.9. Students' **project plan**
- **Aug** — Establish **contact** with the **entire facilitator team** / Assemble **final company list** / Finalize **cases** with **companies**
- **Oct** — Regular checks with facilitators and student teams
- **Nov** — 9.11. Material deadline for **Checkpoint** / 11.11. **CHECKPOINT** / 21.11. Material deadline for **Final** / 22.11. **FINAL**
- **Dec** — 15.12. **FINAL REPORT** deadline / Week 49: **Follow-up** meeting / Begin preparations for the **ABC SPRING 2018**

4

Project schedule								
14. – 15.2.2017	16.2.2017 17 – 19.00	26.2.2017	2.4.2017	Week 14	23.4.2017	26.4.2017	7.5.2017	Week 19
First meeting between facilitator, team and company	ABC Kickoff	Students submit project plan	Students submit material for checkpoint	Checkpoint	Students submit material for final	Final	Students submit final report and reflection	Follow-up meeting
Students conduct independent teamwork & has regular meetings with the company and facilitator								
February		March		April			May	

5

WHAT SHOULD YOU EXPECT FROM THE PROJECT?

The aim is for the students to learn skills that they will need when they enter employment. The companies are paying for results that will aid them in their decision-making process during internationalization. You are there to make sure the tasks and processes are clear, the goals & objectives are achieved, and you will learn what it takes to coach international virtual teams in real company cases.

The students learn to take initiative, responsibility and to come up with solutions on their own. The philosophy of ABC is to have the students do the work, while the facilitators are there to provide support when needed. The students form international teams that operate in two countries and interact online. They will use and improve their teamwork skills by providing answers to questions the company has about a foreign market. These answers will be provided in the form of reports and presentations that must be done clearly and in a timely fashion. It is up to you as the facilitator to make sure the students understand and comply by these requirements - do after-action reviews frequently. You and the rest of the facilitators need to agree on what form you want the reports and presentations to be. You and the rest of the facilitators need to agree on what form you want the reports and presentations to be in, and inform the students. Make sure they understand the evaluation criteria so they know what they're expected to do.

The companies want results. They want information that will profit them directly or indirectly. After all, they are paying **2000 €** for participation. However, the company cannot simply give a vague task and then forget about the project for ten weeks. The company must be available for the students to provide company- and industry-specific information, because the students cannot find that out by themselves. The companies need to work with you to make sure the project gets to a good start once the students are brought onboard. Set realistic expectations, assist the company in creating a **well-defined and focused task with appropriate scope**, and support the students in their work to give the companies the best possible return on investment.

6

WHAT DOES YOUR ROLE AS A FACILITATOR ENTAIL?

First and foremost, your role as a facilitator of ABC is to ensure that the student team and their commissioning company have a shared understanding on the expectations and outcomes of the project. During the project, your role is to **coach** the teams and give them support, not tell them what to do. They make the decisions.

Before the ABC project actually begins and before the commissioning company and student team even meet each other, your role as a facilitator in communicating with the company is crucial. Your job is to collect a clear case description from the commissioning company **that is focused and has a clear target outcome.** It is important to the success (and sanity) of the student team that the case description remains the same throughout the project. Of course the direction may change, as is common for projects, but it is your responsibility as the facilitator to step in if the company tries to add too much to the workload or divert the plans drastically for no apparent reason.

The student teams are in charge of maintaining contact with their commissioning company and it is their responsibility to identify the situations in which they require support and information from their commissioner, and this should be made clear to students. They must lead their own project. However, facilitating a team means making yourself available to the student team and offering support when it is needed. You are there to coach them to get the best results for themselves and the company. A way of **ensuring the success of the student teams** is to clarify among the other facilitators that instructions and guidelines provided by each facilitator are the same.

Providing materials that support the students achieving the learning objectives of ABC is also your job, along with your fellow facilitators. Contribute to them and update them proactively. Your role includes **committing yourself** and staying committed to the overall objectives of Arctic Business Corridor - ensuring that the learning objectives for the students are fulfilled and companies achieve their goals.

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COMPANY AND STUDENT PROFILES - WHO IS SUITABLE FOR ABC?

One early decision for the facilitator team is to agree on how many companies and cases each implementation will have. Again, continual communication is **essential**, you have to agree who recruits which company. You don't want to end up with too many or too few companies and cases. Similarly, get students on board as soon as possible. Ideally, you will have companies on board at this point and recruiting students will be easier once they know what kind of cases they get to work on.

COMPANIES

ABC is looking for companies that have developed their business beyond the start-up phase. The company has to have established a clear picture of their business, otherwise their assignment will likely be too broad and attempt too many things at once. It is not up to the student teams to develop the business AND complete an internationalization research project. Discuss among the facilitator team about candidate companies and whether or not they would be suitable.

STUDENTS

Because the tasks come from established companies, they are not well suited for students in the early phase of their studies. Ideally, the students are at the end of their Bachelor studies or Master's degree students. This way you ensure that they do not need to spend time learning any basic concepts, but can rather apply their knowledge in an actual case. The priority is on business students, but some cases may require multidisciplinary teams. You will want to look for the most motivated, active, and enthusiastic students who you know can help the companies.

CHECKLIST OF KEY SUCCESS FACTORS - when in doubt, refer to this list to ensure the smooth sailing of ABC!

REFLECT - On your actions by contrasting them to the annual clock

COMMUNICATE - With your fellow facilitators, students, and the commissioning company

REVIEW - The case description with the commissioning company - is it clear and focused enough?

GUIDE - Be proactive in ensuring that the team works together as a unit

COACH - Instead of teach

DISPLAY - The guidelines and instructions in due time and in a clear, unified manner

ENSURE - That the team is aware of what issues you can help with and with what issues their commissioner should be contacted about

DISCUSS - The project with the student team regularly, but do not push your own ideas and opinions

PROVIDE FEEDBACK - For the progress that the student team is making

ABC
ARCTIC BUSINESS CORRIDOR

STUDENT GUIDE

CONTENTS OF THIS GUIDE:

WELCOME TO ABC.

Before going any further, answer the following questions.

- Would you feel fulfilled if you solved a challenge for an actual company?
- Do you think international & virtual teamwork and market research are things that could be valuable skills for your future career?
- Are you a global-minded, business savvy student who is ready to take on some responsibility somewhere other than a classroom?

If you answered yes to these questions, you guessed it - you have found the right project for you. The questions above give you an idea of what ABC is all about, but it is also much more. It is a project where six countries across Europe work together in order to utilize the skills of university students to advance the internationalization of companies. ABC partner countries are Finland, Sweden, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium.

ABC is a journey - it is 10 weeks of personal development, learning to work alongside different people, learning what it is truly like to work not only in an international project, but a virtual one, and tackling various kinds of challenges. ABC gives you the chance to grow your own networks before entering the working life.

ABC is an adventure and teaches you to deal with real-life, global business challenges, but let's break it down.

- **10 weeks** of hard work
- A **real company** looking to enter a foreign market
- Local students forming a **virtual team** together with students in the target country
- Working virtually **across borders**
- Finding **real results** for the company and presenting them

Does it still sound good? If yes, let's move on. Glad to have you on board!

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"I participated in the Arctic Business Corridor just to try it out. The end result? I am more aware of my own skills and confident in them. I gained new connections along the project, and because of those connections, I entered the working life in my own field before graduating. So would I recommend it to anyone with even the slightest desire to see how participating in ABC would change their lives? Yes. In a heartbeat."

- Former participant

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

- Working in **English**
- **5 ECTS**
- Your grade will be based on the **written report** and **level of activeness in participation**

What are your main activities?
- **Managing** the project as a team
- **Seeking** information and applying it to your case
- **Contacting** potential customers and partners of your commissioner
- **Structuring** your information and findings in a presentable way

After participating in ABC…
- Increased **business and industry knowledge**
- Developed **teamwork** and **market research** skills
- Ability to work in a **virtual, international team**
- **Increased working life skills** and the **courage** to operate in the business world

There is a team of **facilitators** there for your support, and you can freely contact them when a need occurs! They are **there to help you** throughout your project.

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TIMEFRAME AND DELIVERABLES

The ABC project progresses with the steps included in the schedule, but there is a lot of time for your team to work individually in the way you see best in between the predetermined steps. From the schedule you can also see the material that must be produced during different stages of the project.

Project schedule								
14. – 15.2.2017	16.2.2017 17 – 19.00	26.2.2017	2.4.2017	Week 14	23.4.2017	26.4.2017	7.5.2017	Week 19
Submit preliminary task in Moodle	**ABC Kickoff**	Submit project plan	Submit material for checkpoint	**Checkpoint**	Submit material for final	**Final**	Submit final report and reflection	**Follow-up meeting**
Conducting independent teamwork & holding regular meetings with the company and facilitator								
		February		March		April		May

ESSENTIAL FACTORS FOR PROJECT SUCCESS

There are certain factors and elements of a project that can **make or break the success** of the outcome. Read them, take them into heart, and apply them when conducting the ABC project with your team!

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Project management is a big part of ABC, as you practice it throughout the whole duration of the project with your team. You will come to realize after participating in ABC just how much you have truly learned about project management, as you are likely to face difficulties where project management comes into play. Typical situations that may end up being the downfall of a project are the lack of planning when it comes to outlining the schedule of the project and the lack of shared goals and expectations within the team, as that can then lead to team members working toward different outcomes.

With your team, **you are to create a project plan** in the beginning of the project. This project plan is supposed to live throughout the project, in the sense that it can and should be altered and updated as the project progresses. A project plan typically includes the following:

- Common goals and objectives
- Tasks
- Roles and responsibilities
- Resources
- Communication and documentation
- Timetable
- Risk management

This specific project involves managing a virtual project and virtual team. From working on an international, virtual project you can learn a tremendous amount, such as what is listed below.

- Learning to build virtual trust
- Polishing your virtual communication skills
- Understanding how cultural backgrounds affect communication and expectations in virtual teams
- Learning how to ensure a shared understanding between a virtual team
- Learning to be better at facilitating virtual meetings and teamwork
- Developing your feedback giving and receiving skills

TEAMWORK & ROLES

Achieving a successful outcome for your project means being able to function and operate well as a team. Best way to make teams work is simply by getting to know each other. Your team will have people from at least two different universities, cultures and countries. Your life as a team will be much easier if you know each other a little bit before you have to work under pressure as a team. Learn about each other and spend time in every meeting talking about everyday stuff before getting to the project work. There are certain tasks and responsibilities that enable you as a team to reach the goals that you have set for the project with your commissioner. These tasks and responsibilities may naturally form into certain roles for certain team members, such as the main communicator with your commissioner, the main contact person for target market, the team member in charge of the schedule, the team member in charge of project documentation, and so on. These roles do not necessarily have to be set in stone or mentioned at all, as long as all responsibilities are being taken care of. You may choose a project leader among you, but take your time deciding who it is. Do not volunteer as project leader if you won't be available or take the responsibility that comes with the role - that will only slow the project down. You can choose to have two 'project leaders', one in each country, who will make sure that your communication between countries remains constant and regular. More often than not teams find work challenging simply because they don't communicate enough. More on communication later!

ROLES AND COMMUNICATION - FACILITATOR AND COMMISSIONER

Remember that you are not alone in the project, as you have facilitators to coach you and your commissioner to turn to.

The **role of facilitators** is to guide the process along, so remember to keep your facilitators in the loop! They are not teaching you on how you should run your project, but guiding you and coaching you if you feel you need a nudge in the right direction when it comes to managing the project and e.g. conflicts within your team.

The **role of the commissioner** is to answer any questions you may have regarding their company and the industry they are operating in, as that is information that no one other than the commissioner can provide!

COMMUNICATION

Communication sounds simple enough. However, the reality is that communication is such an important part of working on a project within a team and the lack of communication could kill the project. The importance of communication is often underestimated, but a lack of communication typically means there is a lack of a shared understanding within your team. You must (MUST!) have a mutual understanding in your team about everything - what you want from the project, what responsibilities need to be taken care of, how and when you will communicate and document daily activities, and much more.

Take communication into consideration from the very beginning of your project and come up with a communication plan. Creating it and committing to it will help you in achieving the target outcome of your project and it will make the project process smoother altogether! Include the following things into your plan:

- Clarify the needs and wants of each team member regarding communication!
- Tools for communication - Whatsapp, Facebook, Skype, Google Drive, Microsoft Word Online, Dropbox, Adobe Connect, e-mail...
- Who you communicate to - core team, your facilitator, your commissioner...
- How often you communicate - a weekly videoconference meeting is a good way to stay on track of what is going on in the project!

Ps. Just for the sake of getting to know your team members, communicating about daily life and life outside of the project is advisable!

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MARKET RESEARCH

Market research is a key task in ABC and finding out information about the foreign market your commissioner is interested in. Research can be done in many ways and using various types of sources, but it is important to keep in mind what information is relevant for your case. Being able to identify which elements are important to your specific case not only keeps your project steered in the right direction, but saves you time from researching irrelevant information that is not useful for your goals and objectives. When researching the chosen market, remember to apply your previous knowledge in order to make your research more effective! However, a big part of your research is contacting potential customers and other stakeholder groups in the target market instead of digging around for information from other sources.

When doing market research with your team, keep the following elements in mind and see if they are relevant for your case:

- **Market** - size and structure of target market, trends in target market...
- **Customers** - buying behavior of customers, understanding the customer's motivation...
- **Competitors** - market entry strategies, market share, reputation of competitors...
- **Potential partners** - identifying them
- **Socio-cultural differences** - attitude and lifestyle trends, demographics...
- **Economic situation** - monetary and financial issues, public finance policies...
- **Political & legal environment** - barriers of entry, local legislation, funding...
- **Technological environment** - existing technological infrastructure, readiness to accept new technologies...

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MARKETING & CONNECTIONS

In ABC, you are essentially working for your commissioning company. This means that you represent the company when you promote their product or service in the target market to potential partners and customers. The duration of the project is no more than 10 weeks, which means you have to - with lack of a better term - haul ass. Where your marketing and connections can go wrong is when you lack the courage to contact people bravely and persistently. In such a short time frame, the contacting must be as efficient as possible.

Take a look at the following questions to ask yourself within your team when it comes to making a plan specifically for marketing and connections:

- **Who do I contact?**

Map out stakeholders and identify the key organizations and individuals that could be valuable to your company case. If a contact turns out to be of no use for your project, use them to identify new leads. "Can you recommend anyone I should get in touch with regarding this matter?"

- **Why?**

Try to get inside the person's mind who you are contacting - what is their motivation, what would attract their interest? It is important to approach the contact in the right way. This will make your selling a whole lot easier.

- **How?**

As mentioned, you need to be brave and persistent when it comes to contacting. Be direct. Remember that you are attempting to contact very busy individuals! Evaluate the effectiveness of tools that are available, for example e-mail and via phone call, and determine which works best for your team. In the end, make a clear call to action, meaning suggest something direct. In your case, this could be suggesting a certain date and time for an appointment instead of just making a vague statement about meeting in the near future.

ABC CHECKPOINT WEEK 14

The checkpoint is an important milestone in the ABC project. When you have reached the checkpoint, it means you are roughly halfway through the project. For the checkpoint, students in their home countries get together to join the checkpoint through a virtual tool in order for all teams to present their checkpoint presentations to each other. Although you are likely to be very focused on your own project, the checkpoint provides you a great chance to receive feedback about your project and your progress thus far from other teams and also comment on the work of other teams.

For the checkpoint, you have three tasks to complete with your team. First, **make a 5 minute video presentation about your progress and findings** so far. Also, **comment on the progress of other teams in Moodle**. You might have a fresh idea for their case that they have not thought of themselves! Lastly, **present your work to your commissioner**. Really soak in the feedback that you receive from your commissioner! It is important that your goals for the projects are still aligned with the ones the commissioner has.

Return your material as a group onto the Moodle platform on the 2nd of April!

THE END IS NEAR

You are fast approaching the final presentation of ABC. At this stage, let's hope you are coming to a conclusion with your findings and are reaching a solution that correlates with what you set out to achieve in the beginning of the project. Begin to get into the right mindset for the final, and begin identifying the most valuable and relevant findings that your team has collectively come up with for your commissioner, as they are the things that are to be focused on in the final. Since there is not too much time to be wasted between the checkpoint and the final, practicing the output of your final presentation may be a good idea. The final presentation is in the form of a pitch - you deliver a brief, clear and concise pitch that summarizes the findings you have discovered throughout your project and a clear conclusion. The conclusion may be, for example, a clear indication on whether or not your commissioning company should proceed with expanding their business operations to the target market you have been researching for them with clear arguments as to why your result is what it is. Remember, if the answer is no, it is still a very valuable piece of information for the company, as it may save them a great amount of time and money.

Quick tips for delivering a killer pitch:

- Choose one or a maximum of two people from your team to pitch
- Stick to the most important and relevant findings
- Give a clear result that is a direct answer to your main project objective
- Try to explain what value your project has created for the company
- Keep your pitch presentation material nice and clean - keep the text at a minimum
- Practice beforehand - it is surprisingly difficult to summarize a 10 week long project into 5 minutes!

ABC FINAL PRESENTATION WEEK 17

The moment you have been working towards for the past 10 weeks is finally here! Once again, all team members will gather in their home countries to join the final presentation session either virtually or physically present. The guidelines of the final pitch are as follows - each team delivers a 5 minute pitch, either a live presentation or a video (remember the quick tips for pitching - concentrate on the main findings and value created for your commissioner!) and after all of the pitches have been held, the audience votes for the best pitch.

Good luck! Remember to turn in your final presentation material and reflection sheet to the Moodle platform by the 7th of May!

After the final presentations have been held, you should focus on finishing the written report by the given deadline and preparing for the follow-up meeting you will have together with your team, your facilitator, and the commissioner. During the follow-up meeting you will go through your written report, receive final feedback from both your commissioner and your facilitator, and also receive your certificate for being a part of Arctic Business Corridor.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR FINAL REPORT

Write requirements for final report here.

THE WRAP-UP

First of all, thank you for participating in Arctic Business Corridor. We hope that having completed the ABC project, you are happy you decided to take the chance and come on this journey with us. The ultimate goal for us is that you have learned so much not only about project work and the ways of the real business world, but about yourself as well. It is our hope that ABC helped you find or strengthen the courage to take responsibility, to take initiative, to be fearless and trust your judgement but also learn to take in valuable feedback and become better because of it. You have conducted meaningful work and impacted the business decisions of a real company. We believe you will one day, sooner or later, utilize the contacts you have made and the network you have built in the ABC project. We gave you a challenge and you rose to it. Last but not least, we hope you keep rising to all challenges in the future again and again.

CASE DESCRIPTIONS

Place case descriptions for upcoming round here.

USEFUL MATERIALS

Collect useful materials and links here.

ABC

ARCTIC BUSINESS CORRIDOR

COMPANY GUIDE

CONTENTS OF THIS GUIDE:

WHAT IS ABC?

The **A**rctic **B**usiness **C**orridor is an internationalization project for companies looking to expand to foreign markets. If you are ready to begin looking at other markets or if you have already expanded to another country and want to know about expanding further, then **ABC is for you**. You will get an international team of students, who will provide you with valuable **local** information to give you exactly what you need during your internationalization process. Market information, customer contacts, potential partners, you name it.

The students are located in two countries, one half of the team always in Finland. This means that you will have **local contact** for yourself and for the target market. You and the team will also have ABC staff members in both countries, who will act as your **facilitators.** You will initiate the project in co-operation with your facilitator and then execute the project with the student teams. By the end of the project, you will have the information you need to expand your business.

Sound good? ABC is a project unlike anything else available before.

ABC QUICK FACTS:

- **International** student teams
- **Valuable** market information
- **Local** knowledge
- **Networking** and identifying **opportunities**
- **10 weeks** for the project work
- Working language: **English**
- Price: **2000 €**

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"We gained a lot of valuable information from ABC - even more than professionally made research projects we had commissioned before."

Sami Herrala | **CEO of 9Solutions**

"We recommend ABC for other companies who are looking to enter export markets."

Kari Koivikko | **Managing Director of Wind Controller**

PROCESS AND SCHEDULE

You will begin the preparation with your facilitator before the student teams come onboard. Together you will need to carefully plan the assignment you will give to the student teams to work on. The actual project begins with the **Kickoff** meeting between you, the facilitator and the students. Be prepared to give students the necessary information they need to succeed and to answer their questions - the better you can prepare them for the following ten weeks, the better results you will get. During the project, the students will do their work and it's very likely they will have more questions for you, so make sure you have someone in your company who can talk with the teams during those ten weeks. The **Checkpoint** is where the students give a presentation to you and the rest of the ABC teams an update of their progress and what their plan is for the last couple of weeks. Your feedback here is crucial. The project ends with the **Final**, where the student teams each present their results during their final pitches. You will also get a **final report** that details the student team's findings and results. After the final, you will have a **follow-up meeting** with the team and your facilitator, where you go over the results, discuss the findings and you can give your final feedback to the team.

Project schedule								
14. – 15.2.2017	16.2.2017 17 – 19.00	26.2.2017	2.4.2017	Week 14	23.4.2017	26.4.2017	7.5.2017	Week 19
Students submit preliminary task in Moodle	**ABC Kickoff**	Students submit project plan	Students submit material for checkpoint	**Checkpoint**	Students submit material for final	**Final**	Students submit final report and reflection	**Follow-up meeting**
Students conduct independent teamwork & have regular meetings with the company and facilitator								
February			March			April		May

ABC STAFF

The ABC staff is available to answer your questions regarding the project. They can provide you with more information about the project and work with you to ensure you **get the most out of ABC**. The facilitators can help you with defining and tailoring the project for your needs. During the project, the facilitators coach the students and guide them in their work, it is up to the students to do the project work itself.

You should dedicate a person in your company for the project who is available for the student teams. Remember that the facilitators and the students don't have the same level of knowledge and experience in your field as you have, nor do they have the knowledge of your company as you do. That's why it is important that you have someone in your company who is available during the project to answer questions and provide guidance. This way you ensure the teams do not waste time in trying to research information that is not available for them or looking into some option that you have already explored, for example.

This project is a chance for you to learn as well.

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WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT AND HOW TO SUCCEED

You will be surprised by the quality of the work the students can do for you. Every company that has participated in ABC has. The students are eager, motivated and bring **fresh, new ideas** to the table. The students in ABC are at the end of their studies and about to enter the working life, so you can expect them to be interested in getting their hands on some practical work. The students choose to participate in ABC, so you can be sure you are getting students who have a drive to **work hard and get results -** as long as you show them your motivation, drive, and passion. **The facilitators** are staff members of the universities and have experience in the business field. The facilitators make sure the students are working towards the goals and provide them with the tools and methods to reach the goals you have given them.

Before giving the assignment to the students, go over the specifics with your facilitator to ensure the **scope** is appropriate for a ten-week project and that it's something the students can do. Remember that the students don't have access to any special information you can't get. They're there to do the work for you so you don't need to. They will go through the information and find the relevant things for you - whether it is the **market potential**, gathering a list of **potential customers** or potential partners to **improve your value chain**. The facilitators help you in tailoring the project for you and the students do the work.

Once the planning is done, stick to it. Ten weeks is not a very long time, so you can't go changing the project or the students won't know what you really expect them to do and will most likely not be able to give you the results you want. That doesn't mean you can't push the team and guide them, just remember your responsibility as well. **Treat the students as professionals and you will get professional results.**

As soon as the project is underway, it is a good idea to set up **a communication schedule** with the team, such as an update on their progress every week or two weeks. If you can arrange meetings with the local students in your team, even better. During the project it is recommended that you have **someone in your company available** for the student teams to answer questions also outside the planned communication schedule. Ideally, this is someone with the knowledge in your company who knows **precisely** how your internationalization process is going and has a thorough understanding of the inner workings of your business. The most successful projects in the past have had the **CEO, Managing Director or the Export Manager** from the company as the contact person. Students are not mind-readers, so you have to be able to answer them. **The students will also be more motivated to work for you, if you show them that this project is important for you.**

By the end of the project you will have actual results you can use, new connections in your network and possible interns or workers with whom you have experience in practical work.

SUCCESS FACTOR CHECKLIST

PLAN THE ASSIGNMENT - Make it absolutely clear what you expect the teams to have for you by the end of the project

SCHEDULE - Arrange for regular updates with the team and be present during the **Kickoff**, **Checkpoint** and **Final**

COMMUNICATE - Be available for the team so you can answer any questions they may have in a timely fashion

MOTIVATE - Show the teams that the work they do is valuable and they will provide you with the results you want

PROVIDE FEEDBACK - This is a learning process for the teams, the facilitators, and for you

INTERNATIONAL PARTNER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND GUIDE   APPENDIX 2

Preliminary interview questions for the interviewees at partner universities to prepare for the discussion:

1. What have been the successes of Arctic Business Corridor? What are the benefits for the teachers and the students from your university?
2. What could be improved? What were the major obstacles you were confronted with in the entire ABC project?
3. Is there interest in having more involvement in the planning and implementation of the project/course from your university? How could this be achieved?
4. How would you improve student participation in your university in the project? What outcome would they find appealing?

INTERVIEW GUIDE:

What is your position/role at your home university?

How did you hear about ABC?

Could you describe the ABC student recruitment process at your university?
How was the ABC process for you; where did it start, who needed to be informed/involved, what kind of authorization was required?

What was the project like and what were the outcomes? What are desired outcomes for your students and staff?

Have there been considerations of the future of ABC at your university?

In five years' time, can you see the project still a part of your curriculum? Would the facilitators have a more equal role between different countries?

What kind of results do you expect the local companies to have? How is Finland as a potential market? What kind of industries are present locally that could have interest in the Finnish market?

STUDENT FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

Name?*

Team? *
Company and country?

What was good about the ABC project?*

What did you miss?*

What new did you learn?*

What supported your learning?*

What hindered your learning?*

What was particularly rewarding?*

What was particularly challenging?*

How would you describe the co-operation with the case company?*

How would you describe the co-operation with the facilitator?*

How the responsibilities and workload were divided among your team?*

Describe your own role in the team?*

What tools did you use for working and communicating (eg. Watsapp,Trello, Basecamp, Google Drive) and why?*

Can you mention any material that you found useful to your project?*
Text books, articles, Internet pages etc.

1. How did you originally learn about the Arctic Business Corridor project?

2. Do you feel that the student team understood the task well? What factors from your perspective are important to inquire from the commissioning companies with regard to the understandability of the task?

3. Was the schedule of the ABC-project suitable for you, was the duration of the project reasonable? Would you have needed further time to prepare the commission or was the time given enough?

4. What was the result of the project for your company and how did you feel about it? Would you have preferred closer cooperation with your local students?

5. What are your thoughts on the 2000 € fee collected from commissioning companies? Do you see the fee improving the quality of the students' work?

6. Which elements of the ABC-project did you find well executed or successful?

7. Which elements of the ABC-project did you find lacking and in need of improvement? What improvements could help future implementations?