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INTERNATIONAL TEAM MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES' DEVELOPMENT DURING BUSINESS STUDIES

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Abstract. In today's globalised business environment, effective team management competencies are fundamental. These competences represent a multidimensional framework that integrates knowledge, skills, abilities, and behavioural attributes necessary for guiding and coordinating collective efforts toward organisational goals. As organisations confront growing complexity, cultivating team management competencies has become a central priority in business education, especially in international and multicultural settings. This study examines the application of a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project in fostering international team management competencies among undergraduate business students. The research was conducted through an online collaboration among higher education institutions in Lithuania, Ukraine, Kosovo, the Czech Republic, and Finland, in which students engaged in cross-cultural teamwork, structured discussions, and joint academic assignments. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected through semi-structured student interviews to explore participants' experiences and perceptions of international collaboration. The findings reveal that students significantly enhanced their international team management skills, intercultural awareness, and ability to function effectively in multicultural business environments. Moreover, participants broadened their understanding of foreign markets, international trade practices, and business strategies through sustained interaction with peers from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds. The results demonstrate that COIL represents an effective learning approach for strengthening intercultural competence, promoting collaborative problem-solving, and preparing students for professional careers in a globally interconnected economy. Integrating virtual international collaboration into business studies can therefore improve students' employability, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability to diverse professional environments, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Keywords: international team management; AI fluency; collaborative online international learning; sustainable development goals

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary global business environment, effective team management competencies are paramount. These competences encompass a multidimensional construct involving integrated knowledge, skills, abilities, and behavioural attributes essential for leading and coordinating collective efforts toward organisational objectives. As organisations increasingly face complex challenges, the development of team management competencies has become a critical focus in business education, particularly in international and multicultural contexts.

The central **scientific problem** addressed in this study is formulated through the following research question: *How can international team management competences be enhanced within business studies programmes?*

This **research aims** to examine the implementation, challenges, and outcomes of the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiative at Vilniaus kolegija/Higher Education Institution, with particular emphasis on the development of international team management competences and practical professional skills among business students.

To achieve this aim, the study pursues the following **objectives**:

- To analyse the conceptual foundations and key dimensions of international team management competencies.
- To present the core principles and structure of the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project.
- To evaluate the outcomes of COIL implementation through an analysis of semi-structured student interview data.
- To assess the impact of the COIL project on the development of international team management competencies and practical skills in business studies.
- To identify the main challenges and benefits associated with the implementation of the COIL project in business education.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Defining team management competences

Team management competences represent a multidimensional construct comprising integrated knowledge, skills, abilities, and behavioural attributes required to lead, coordinate, and synchronise collective efforts toward organisational objectives. They are now conceptualised as integrated capabilities that synthesise frameworks with behavioural, social, artificial intelligence and emotional intelligence (Hwang, 2024). Furthermore, these elements function as integrated capabilities that synthesise behavioural and social frameworks with artificial intelligence (AI) and emotional intelligence. This integration is vital as AI emerges as a “teammate” necessitating new digital socialisation strategies within organisations (Deloitte, 2024; Lu, 2025). Team management competencies extend beyond mere task and resource optimisation. They encompass the relational capacity to cultivate synergy, mitigate interpersonal conflict, and sustain member motivation through adaptive leadership styles contingent upon situational demands. Unlike isolated functional skills, these competences are inherently socially constructed; they manifest and evolve through iterative interactions within specific organisational and cultural ecosystems. Recent analyses confirm this evolution, with demand for AI fluency – managing virtual tools collaboratively – surging sevenfold in job postings by mid-2025, underscoring the need for virtual team management competencies (Florea & Croitiru, 2025; McKinsey & Company, 2025).

The 2026 World Economic Forum underscores a pivotal shift in professional value, now defined by a balanced 50/50 synergy between AI fluency and human-centric “superpowers” (World Economic Forum, 2026). Success in the current landscape is determined by the intersection of technological proficiency and uniquely human attributes (World Economic Forum, 2025). Specifically, organisational excellence now rests on three core competency pillars: analytical and creative synergy, seamless AI-human collaboration, and adaptive resilience (Kelly, 2025).

In the sphere of international and multicultural management, these competences encounter a heightened layer of complexity. Managers are required to navigate the “intercultural friction” arising from divergent communication protocols, varying cultural value orientations, power distance, and heterogeneous work-related attitudes (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). Consequently, contemporary academic discourse emphasises a dynamic, context-dependent perspective, viewing these competences as fluid capabilities rather than static individual traits, evolving post-mobility through returnees’ professional adaptations (Hanley & Chankseliani, 2025).

2.2. Theoretical framework for team management competences development conceptualisation

An analysis of the scientific literature revealed diverse theoretical frameworks for conceptualising and categorising the dimensions of team management (Katz-Navon & Naveh, 2026).

A foundational approach is the competency-based model, which categorises these attributes into distinct yet overlapping domains: cognitive competences (e.g., systems thinking and strategic reasoning), interpersonal competences (e.g., cross-cultural communication and empathy), leadership competences (e.g., vision articulation and empowerment), and emotional-social competences (e.g., self-regulation and social awareness) (European Commission, 2024).

Complementary to this view is the T-shaped competence model, which has gained significant traction in management education. In this framework, professionals possess deep vertical expertise in a specific discipline integrated with broad transversal competences, such as adaptability, interdisciplinary collaboration, and communication (World Economic Forum, 2025). Within this architecture, team management competences act as the critical horizontal link, enabling individuals to bridge functional, cultural, and organisational silos, especially in international, virtual and AI-augmented teams (McKinsey & Company, 2025).

Shifting from the individual to the systemic perspective, team effectiveness is a product of complementary skill sets, mutual accountability, and a shared purpose. Consequently, modern team management competences are no longer viewed as isolated individual proficiencies but as the capacity to foster collective efficacy, the shared belief in a team's joint capability to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment (Chawla & Jain, 2021; Olanathan, 2024).

Effective *communication* serves as the operational bedrock of team management. It transcends mere information transmission, encompassing active listening, formative feedback, and strategic message modulation for diverse stakeholders. In the context of international teams, this competence requires a high degree of linguistic and paralinguistic awareness, particularly regarding the tension between direct and indirect (low-context vs high-context) communication styles (Leigh et al., 2018). Managers must proactively mitigate “semantic noise” and cultural friction to prevent cognitive dissonance within the group (Leigh et al., 2018).

Coordination involves systematically aligning idiosyncratic contributions with overarching collective objectives. This requires robust mechanisms for role clarification, progress monitoring, and the institutionalisation of accountability (Weekes & Harvey, 2025). Coordination breakdowns rather than deficits in technical proficiency constitute the primary catalyst for team dysfunction and "process loss" in complex organisational settings, a finding echoed in recent virtual and AI-team studies (Olanathan, 2024; Lu, 2025).

2.3. Team roles in competence development

The development of team management competences represents a core objective of contemporary business studies, particularly in programs that prepare students for work in international and multicultural environments (Tse, Wright & Burdett, 2024). Effective collaboration across cultural, organisational, and disciplinary boundaries requires not only technical knowledge but also well-developed interpersonal, leadership, and coordination skills (Mindeguia et al., 2021; Belbin & Brown, 2022; Abualfath & Messadia & Ali, 2026).

Belbin and Brown (2022) propose a model identifying nine team roles, defined as recurring patterns of behaviour individuals exhibit when working in groups. Unlike role classifications based on formal organisational positions, roles in the suggested model emphasise behavioural contributions to team performance, making the framework particularly suitable for competence-based education.

From an international team management perspective, applying this model contributes to the development of several key managerial competencies. First, it supports self-awareness and interpersonal competence, as students learn to identify their preferred roles and recognise how these behavioural tendencies influence communication, collaboration, and leadership within diverse teams. In multicultural learning environments, such awareness is essential for reducing misunderstandings and enhancing mutual respect among team members. Second, this framework facilitates the development of team composition and coordination competencies. International teams benefit from a balanced distribution of roles that support idea generation, evaluation, implementation, and social cohesion. Exposure to this framework enables business students to allocate tasks strategically and to recognise potential gaps in team functioning, which is a critical managerial skill in global business settings (Mindeguia et al., 2021). Third, the model enhances leadership and decision-

making competencies. Roles such as Coordinator and Shaper illustrate different leadership orientations, ranging from facilitative and delegative to performance-driven and task-focused. Understanding these behavioural differences enables future managers to adapt their leadership approach to situational demands and cultural expectations, particularly in international and cross-cultural teams. Many teams' conflicts stem from incompatible working styles rather than personal disagreements (Schlaegel & Richer, 2021). By providing a shared, non-evaluative language for discussing behaviour, the model enables teams to address tensions constructively and supports the development of ethical and reflective management practices (Smith & Bond, 2022).

Through group projects, simulations, and reflective exercises, students develop transferable competences such as teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and cross-cultural sensitivity, as seen in competency-based MBA programs that emphasise real-world application (European Commission, 2024). Consequently, group work with role attribution functions as an effective pedagogical tool for preparing students to manage international teams in a globalised business environment.

2.4. Leadership, motivation, and modern challenges in team management

Team management competencies align with contemporary leadership paradigms. Perera (2025) discusses adaptive leadership as a critical competence in managing global teams and the role of education in developing these skills. Wang, Hae-Ryong & Byung-Jik (2021) highlight the importance of ethical leadership in fostering team cohesion and enhancing performance. Finally, transformational leadership theory, for instance, posits that effectiveness is derived from intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration, and the articulation of an inspiring vision (Siangchokyoo, Klinger, & Campion, 2020). This approach is particularly salient in heterogeneous, knowledge-intensive teams, where formal hierarchical authority is often less effective than cultivating shared meaning and psychological safety (Cahyono, 2024).

Motivational competences involve a sophisticated understanding of expectancy theory and the ability to foster an inclusive climate. Leaders must navigate diverse cultural expectations regarding power distance, reward allocation, and participatory decision-making. In international settings, this requires the capacity to identify and leverage diverse motivational drivers, ensuring that autonomy and recognition are dispensed in a culturally congruent manner.

Nowadays, business education must focus on the human ability to apply creative thinking to complex, unstructured problems. This remains a primary differentiator for students, allowing them to provide the strategic intuition that machines lack. Proficiency in a management context is no longer measured solely by digital literacy. Business studies must now cultivate AI fluency, the specific ability of a future manager to direct, audit, and refine AI-generated outputs to ensure they meet professional and organisational standards (McKinsey & Company, 2025). In a volatile global economy, agility and lifelong learning have evolved from extracurricular "perks" into essential survival skills (World Economic Forum, 2026).

The development of these modern skills directly influences traditional team dynamics. For example, conflict management is amplified within culturally diverse environments by divergent cognitive schemas. Consequently, team management competencies necessitate the diagnostic ability to differentiate between task-oriented (functional) conflict and relationship-oriented (dysfunctional) conflict.

Intercultural meta-competence serves as a core meta-competence. It is conceptualised as the capacity to negotiate meaning and interact effectively across cultural boundaries, grounded in a combination of cultural self-awareness, openness, and cognitive flexibility (Fantini, 2023; Huang, 2023; Hanley & Chankseliani, 2025). This includes "tolerance for ambiguity," the ability to remain effective in uncertain social environments, and the behavioural adaptability to switch codes as the context demands (Chen et al., 2026; Hanley & Chankseliani, 2025).

Ethical competence serves as a critical counterbalance, guiding managers through the "moral mazes" inherent in global operations. International leaders must reconcile pluralistic value systems while upholding organisational standards in a manner perceived as legitimate by all stakeholders.

The development of these skills in future managers primarily occurs within higher education institutions, which act as key agents in their professional socialisation and identity development. Moving beyond the traditional role of "knowledge provider," modern business schools have embraced competence-based education (CBE) models. These frameworks focus on measurable learning outcomes that combine theoretical expertise with behavioural skills and ethical attitudes.

The development of these competences is facilitated through pedagogical scaffolding, which includes project-based learning (PBL), high-fidelity simulations, and problem-based inquiry. Furthermore, the internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC) manifested through student exchange programs, dual-degree initiatives, and COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) exposes students to the techno-structural and cultural complexities of real-world teamwork. These immersive experiences are essential for developing reflective, adaptive, and ethically grounded leaders prepared for the volatility of the global market, integrating AI tools ethically and collaboratively (Cai & Leask, 2024; World Economic Forum, 2026).

3. Team management competences development during business studies: COIL project

The COIL project was centred around a real-world business case involving UAB "Maxima LT", the largest retail company in the Baltic region. International student teams will work together to develop innovative solutions that enhance Maxima's operations in four strategic areas: management, marketing, logistics, and e-commerce.

The main goal was to identify and address inefficiencies or growth opportunities by applying knowledge and skills in innovation, project management, international trade, supply chain management, and data-driven financial strategies. The project helped achieve the following learning outcomes:

1. *Effective international relationships.* Students demonstrate competence in building and maintaining international relationships through clear communication, cultural understanding, and adaptability. Beyond language skills, effective interaction requires intercultural awareness, sensitivity, and empathy. By collaborating virtually with international peers, students engage with diverse communication styles, work ethics, and decision-making approaches. They are expected to apply accurate communication, active social interaction, and cultural sensitivity to build meaningful relationships while identifying key elements of effective international collaboration.

2. *Understand cultural differences.* Collaborating with peers from diverse cultural backgrounds exposes students to varied perspectives, approaches, and ways of thinking. Frequent interaction helps students navigate differences in communication styles, attitudes, behaviours, and expectations. To demonstrate understanding, students engage in collaborative activities, show openness to diverse viewpoints, and describe cultural norms, values, and behaviours across nations. They recognise the importance of respect, open-mindedness, and adaptability in multicultural environments.

3. *Analyse innovations in the retail industry.* Students research retail innovations across countries and sectors, analysing and describing various applications and systems. They examine cross-border trade of retail technologies and components to identify international challenges and barriers (e.g., standards, data privacy, logistics, and regulation). Working on a real case study, students develop a proposal for a specific retail innovation and explain how market trends, government regulations, technological adoption, and societal perceptions shape outcomes. Finally, students reflect on how cultural contexts influence retail practices globally and how this learning broadens their understanding of cultural differences.

4. *Apply online project management skills.* Students formulate, plan, develop, and execute projects to achieve individual and group goals while working remotely. They demonstrate proficiency in using digital tools to communicate, collaborate, and complete tasks in an online environment. Key competencies include project and time management, communication, problem-solving, and organisational skills such as setting deadlines, creating project plans, prioritising tasks, and tracking responsibilities. Students also apply online project management techniques, including managing virtual meetings, allocating tasks, and monitoring progress.

During the project, the students were obliged to:

- Form teams (5-7 members) consisting of students from Vilniaus kolegija/Higher education Institution (Lithuania), National University “Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic” (Ukraine), Universum International College (Kosovo), Mendel University (Czechia) and Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences (Finland); exchange contact information and determine how to best communicate with each other.
- Conduct the research and exchange information to learn more about the market; spend time exchanging information with each other; come up with suggestions; based on results, provide suggestions for UAB “Maxima LT”.
- Summarise learning experiences and business suggestions in a written report, along with the answers to the survey.

3. Research objective and methodology

The study employed a project-based, collaborative learning design to investigate the development of intercultural competence and innovation skills through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). A mixed-methods approach was used, combining quantitative self-assessment surveys with qualitative analysis of student reflections and project outputs.

The managerial intervention was structured around a real-world business challenge posed by UAB “Maxima LT”, a major Baltic retailer. The project was grounded in Kolb’s experiential learning theory (MacLeod, 2025) and in the principles of constructivism, in which students co-create knowledge through shared inquiry and social interaction. The COIL framework served as the primary vehicle for international collaboration, embedding intercultural exchange directly into the curriculum.

The study involved students from five partner higher education institutions:

- Vilniaus kolegija/Higher Education Institution, Lithuania (47 students);
- National University “Yuri Kondratyuk Poltava Polytechnic”, Ukraine (7 students);
- Universum International College, Kosovo (6 students);
- Mendel University, Czechia (3 students);
- Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences, Finland (5 students).

Students were organised into 11 international teams, each consisting of 5–7 members. The composition of each team was intentionally diverse in terms of nationality, academic discipline, and cultural background to maximise exposure to different perspectives.

The project was divided into four distinct phases over an 18-week semester:

1. Formation and orientation (week 1-2). Teams were formed and provided with a project brief. Students established communication protocols (e.g., Slack, Zoom, Microsoft Teams) and shared contact information.

2. Problem identification and research design (week 3-4). Each team selected one of the four strategic challenge areas: management, marketing, logistics, or e-commerce. They collaboratively formulated specific research questions to investigate inefficiencies or growth opportunities within Maxima’s operations.

3. Collaborative research and analysis (week 5-12). Students conducted market research relevant to their chosen area, focusing on comparing practices in the Baltic region with those in their home countries. This phase involved:

- Data collection on local consumer behaviour and retail trends.
- Analysis of cross-border challenges (e.g., regulation, data privacy, supply chain logistics).
- Regular virtual meetings to synthesise findings and co-develop preliminary recommendations.

4. Synthesis and reporting (Week 14-18). Teams consolidated their findings and recommendations into a joint project report. Additionally, each student submitted an individual reflective essay of approximately 500 words along with a post-project survey.

Data collection instruments. To assess the project's effectiveness in achieving the stated learning outcomes, multiple data sources were used:

- Joint project reports. The final reports were evaluated using a rubric to assess the quality of the proposed innovations, the integration of diverse cultural perspectives, and the application of theoretical knowledge (e.g., supply chain management, marketing strategy).
- Individual reflective essays. The 500-word reflections were analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to learning outcomes, cultural challenges, personal growth, and the application of theory. The reflections were guided by specific prompts (learning experiences, challenges, and future application).
- Post-project surveys. Students completed a survey at the end of the project. The survey measured self-perceived competence in intercultural communication and collaboration, digital and remote project management skills, and understanding of innovation in the retail sector.

Data analysis included a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data:

- Quantitative data from the post-project surveys were analysed using the sample size Taro Yamane formula when the population is known and finite:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \quad [1]$$

where n – required sample size;

N – total population size;

e – margin of error (5%).

- Qualitative data from the reflective essays and project reports were coded and analysed using MAXQDA software. An inductive thematic analysis approach was used to identify recurring patterns, challenges, and evidence of intercultural learning.

Ethical considerations. All participants were informed of the research purpose and provided informed consent. Data were anonymised, with students identified by code numbers in all written analyses to ensure confidentiality. Participation in the research component was voluntary and did not affect students' project grades.

4. Results and discussion

The analysis of the collected data commenced with its systematic processing into a unified text document, following established qualitative analysis procedures: familiarisation with the provided information, data coding, thematic review, and the integration and definition of themes. The qualitative data derived from the iterative search process comprised participants' expressed thoughts and shared insights, supplemented by a semi-structured interview conducted in accordance with established guidelines (Ambrusevič, Išoraitė, 2025).

MAXQDA software was used, and qualitative thematic coding was applied, resulting in the identification of thematic clusters and their frequencies (from high to low-medium). Table 1 presents the main challenges faced by project participants, categorised into seven sub-categories.

Table 1. Challenges faced by project participants

Category	Sub-category and its frequency	Empirical study statements	Empirical study summary
Challenges faced by project participants	Scheduling & time management issues (High frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty finding common meeting times. <input type="checkbox"/> Time zone differences. <input type="checkbox"/> Different academic calendars. <input type="checkbox"/> Meetings cancelled or rescheduled. <input type="checkbox"/> Conflicts with personal commitments.	Scheduling was the most frequently coded challenge, indicating that coordination across institutions and countries required high flexibility.
	Technical & infrastructure problems (High frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Electricity outages (Ukraine). <input type="checkbox"/> Internet disruptions. <input type="checkbox"/> Limited access to online meetings. <input type="checkbox"/> Dependence on asynchronous communication.	External technical conditions significantly affected synchronous collaboration, forcing teams to rely on written communication.
	Communication limitations (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of face-to-face interaction. <input type="checkbox"/> Misunderstanding emotions or intentions. <input type="checkbox"/> Slower explanations through text. <input type="checkbox"/> Need for clearer written instructions.	Purely online communication reduced emotional clarity and sometimes slowed teamwork efficiency.
	Different working styles & academic expectations (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Different writing styles. <input type="checkbox"/> Different task approaches. <input type="checkbox"/> Different standards for formatting and structure. <input type="checkbox"/> Need to unify the final document.	Cross-institutional cooperation required extra effort to harmonise outputs into one coherent academic product.
	Unequal participation & responsiveness (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Some members are inactive or non-responsive. <input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawal from the project. <input type="checkbox"/> Increased workload for active members.	Uneven engagement affected task distribution and required stronger leadership and follow-up.
	Language & cultural barriers (Low-medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Misunderstanding idioms. <input type="checkbox"/> Different communication norms. <input type="checkbox"/> Need for clarification.	Although not dominant, language and cultural differences occasionally caused confusion and required patience and adaptation.
	Personal responsibility & delays (Low-medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Delays during holidays. <input type="checkbox"/> Waiting for individual contributions. <input type="checkbox"/> Impact on group progress.	Individual discipline and accountability were identified as critical factors influencing overall group performance.

The main challenges faced during the COIL project were related to coordination, communication, and differences in working conditions and styles. It was often difficult to schedule meetings that suited all participants because of different academic calendars, personal commitments, and time zone differences, which led to cancellations or rescheduling. In addition, electricity and internet disruptions, particularly in Ukraine, limited real-time communication and increased reliance on asynchronous collaboration. Text-based communication sometimes made it harder to understand emotions, intentions, and complex ideas, slowing feedback and clarification processes. Differences in task approaches, writing styles, formatting standards, and deadline habits across universities and countries required extra effort to harmonise the final document. Unequal participation also emerged as a challenge, as some members became less responsive, increasing the workload for others and complicating coordination. Minor misunderstandings due to language use, idioms, and varying communication norms required additional patience and clarification, while individual delays, especially during holiday periods, slowed overall progress and emphasised the importance of discipline and accountability in teamwork.

Overall, the key challenges centred on coordination, communication, scheduling, and consistency, rather than conflict – most teams overcame these issues through flexibility, written communication, and mutual support. Despite the challenges, participants reported several benefits, categorised into improved skills, strong international relationships, and increased flexibility. Table 2 highlights the main measures for building team cohesion across geographical divides, categorised into ten sub-categories.

Table 2. Measures for building team cohesion across geographical divides

Category	Sub-category and its frequency	Empirical study statements	Empirical study summary
Measures for building team cohesion across geographical divides	Open & regular communication (Very high frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Continuous interaction in Telegram / WhatsApp / Instagram groups. <input type="checkbox"/> Sharing ideas, questions, and concerns freely. <input type="checkbox"/> Regular online meetings (Zoom, Microsoft Teams). <input type="checkbox"/> Transparent discussion of progress and problems.	Frequent communication emerged as the most dominant strategy for building cohesion, creating a sense of presence and shared responsibility among geographically distant members.
	Supportive & respectful team climate (High frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Friendly and non-judgmental atmosphere. <input type="checkbox"/> Empathy and mutual understanding. <input type="checkbox"/> Absence of conflicts. <input type="checkbox"/> Psychological safety in giving and receiving feedback.	A respectful communication culture reduced social and cultural distance and strengthened trust within the teams.
	Clear role distribution & shared responsibility (High frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Transparent task allocation. <input type="checkbox"/> Division of work based on strengths. <input type="checkbox"/> Equal involvement in project activities. <input type="checkbox"/> Collective problem-solving.	Role clarity ensured that each member felt valued and accountable, reinforcing a unified team identity.
	Early relationship building (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Self-introductions and sharing personal backgrounds. <input type="checkbox"/> Initial Zoom/online meetings. <input type="checkbox"/> Getting to know each other informally.	Early socialisation created comfort and trust, which supported later academic collaboration.
	Inclusive decision-making & participation (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement of open discussion. <input type="checkbox"/> Equal voice in decisions. <input type="checkbox"/> Democratic planning of tasks and schedules.	Inclusion promoted ownership of the project and strengthened team cohesion.
	Informal communication & social bonding (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Casual conversations in group chats. <input type="checkbox"/> Humour and friendly messages. <input type="checkbox"/> Non-task-related interaction.	Informal exchanges helped humanise team members and foster interpersonal closeness despite physical distance.
	Recognition & positive reinforcement (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Praise for completed tasks. <input type="checkbox"/> Encouragement messages. <input type="checkbox"/> Celebrating milestones.	Positive feedback increased motivation and contributed to a supportive team environment.
	Respect for cultural & academic diversity (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Valuing different national identities. <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptance of different writing styles. <input type="checkbox"/> Learning from diverse academic traditions.	Diversity was reframed as a resource for collaboration rather than a barrier.
	Shared goals & common vision (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Agreement on project objectives. <input type="checkbox"/> Common deadlines and expectations. <input type="checkbox"/> Collective sense of purpose.	A shared vision strengthened unity and alignment across institutions.
	Flexibility & understanding of local conditions (Low-medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Patience regarding time zones and schedules. <input type="checkbox"/> Sensitivity to technical problems. <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptive coordination.	Flexibility reinforced trust and maintained cooperation under unequal local conditions.

Teams relied on group chats (Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram) and regular online meetings to maintain constant interaction. These channels allowed members to freely share ideas, ask questions, discuss problems, and provide updates, creating transparency and a sense of presence despite distance. A respectful, non-judgmental

communication climate was intentionally fostered. Members showed empathy, Encouragement, and mutual understanding, which reduced cultural and geographical distance and helped prevent conflicts. Tasks were distributed transparently and often based on individual strengths. This ensured that everyone felt involved and valued, strengthening accountability and trust within the group. Teams introduced themselves, shared personal backgrounds and interests, and used initial Zoom or online meetings to create familiarity and comfort before focusing fully on tasks. Coordinators encouraged open discussion and made sure all voices were heard. Democratic planning and joint problem-solving helped foster trust and a shared team identity. Casual conversations, humour, and friendly messages in group chats strengthened interpersonal relationships and created a psychologically safe space where members were not afraid of feedback. Celebrating milestones and giving positive feedback (e.g., "well done", "great job") increased motivation and reinforced a sense of unity and achievement. Differences in national identity, writing styles, and working approaches were treated as strengths rather than obstacles. Some teams intentionally highlighted each member's cultural style, thereby enriching collaboration and strengthening mutual respect. Teams agreed early on common objectives, deadlines, and expectations. This shared purpose helped maintain cohesion and alignment across institutions and countries. Members showed patience toward different schedules, technical problems, and local challenges (e.g., electricity or internet disruptions), which strengthened trust and cooperation.

Team cohesion across geographical divides was built through a combination of regular communication, mutual respect, inclusive collaboration, informal social interaction, and shared goals. These measures fostered a unified team identity and strong relationships, enabling students to function as a supportive, motivated international team despite physical distance.

Table 3 investigates the main measures for improving international teamwork, categorised into eight sub-categories.

Table 3. Measures for improving international teamwork

Category	Sub-category and its frequency	Empirical study statements	Empirical study summary
Measures for improving international teamwork	Meeting participation & accountability (High frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Minimum two representatives attending meetings. <input type="checkbox"/> Written updates from absent members. <input type="checkbox"/> Stronger responsibility for shared progress.	Ensuring participation and accountability was coded as a key requirement for improving coordination and information flow.
	Clear communication rules (High frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Early definition of communication expectations. <input type="checkbox"/> Clear response norms and channels. <input type="checkbox"/> Reduced message loss and misunderstandings.	Structured communication from the beginning was seen as essential for effective international teamwork.
	Unified digital workspace (Medium-high frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> One main communication platform (e.g., WhatsApp/Telegram). <input type="checkbox"/> Shared project management or file repository. <input type="checkbox"/> Centralised deadlines and meeting notes.	A single digital workspace increases transparency and accessibility for all team members.
	Regular short online meetings (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Weekly or biweekly video meetings. <input type="checkbox"/> Key-stage meetings for clarification. <input type="checkbox"/> Improved personal connection.	More frequent short meetings support clarity, engagement, and relationship building.
	Clear leadership & role definition (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Explicit task allocation. <input type="checkbox"/> Defined standards for contributions. <input type="checkbox"/> Stronger guidance from coordinators.	Clear leadership and role clarity reduce uncertainty and uneven workload distribution.
	Time management & fair scheduling (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of scheduling tools (e.g., Doodle, When2Meet). <input type="checkbox"/> Time-zone-sensitive planning. <input type="checkbox"/> Fixed timelines.	Fair scheduling practices promote respect for international members' availability and improve consistency.

Informal interaction & team-building (Medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Ice-breaker sessions. <input type="checkbox"/> Virtual coffee breaks. <input type="checkbox"/> Casual non-task communication.	Informal interaction was identified as a strong factor in building trust and interpersonal bonds.
Continuous feedback & reflection (Low-medium frequency)	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular reflection meetings. <input type="checkbox"/> Constructive feedback loops. <input type="checkbox"/> Shared evaluation of progress.	Ongoing feedback helps identify challenges early and supports continuous improvement.

Results show that to improve international teamwork, teams should ensure structured participation by requiring at least 2 representatives at each online meeting and written updates from absent members, to prevent information gaps and strengthen accountability. Clear communication rules, contact details, and expectations should be defined early to reduce confusion and misunderstandings, supported by the use of one main communication channel and a shared digital workspace for deadlines, files, and meeting notes. Task trackers with clearly assigned roles and deadlines can enhance transparency and coordination, while fixed weekly or biweekly video meetings help build clarity, engagement, and personal connection. Strong leadership with explicit task instructions and well-defined responsibilities reduces uncertainty and uneven workload distribution, and scheduling tools can support fair, time-zone-friendly meeting planning. In addition, informal activities such as virtual coffee breaks, ice-breaker sessions, and casual conversations about hobbies foster trust and interpersonal bonds, while introductory sessions that highlight members' backgrounds and working styles promote cultural understanding and mutual respect. Finally, periodic reflection meetings and stricter adherence to timelines and expectations enable teams to identify problems early, recognise achievements, and continuously improve collaboration.

Improving international teamwork requires a combination of structured coordination (clear tools, roles, and deadlines) and human-centred practices (trust-building, informal interaction, and intercultural understanding). Together, these measures can enhance clarity, accountability, engagement, and team cohesion in future cross-border collaborative projects.

For the qualitative analysis, 58 students out of 68 participants took part in a survey. It meets the requirements for 5% of margin of error in sample size according to Taro Yamane formula. The respondents were asked to indicate whether they agree or disagree with statements on the main international team management problems (1-strongly disagree; 2-disagree; 3-neither agree nor disagree; 4-agree; 5-strongly agree). The average evaluations are given in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Evaluation of international team management problems

No.	Statement	Average evaluations:
1.	While working with students from other higher education institutions, we did experience a language barrier (varying proficiency levels and idioms can cause misunderstandings).	2,33
2.	Scheduling meetings and ensuring timely feedback becomes difficult, leading to delays because of different time zones.	2,74
3.	Without non-verbal cues, emails and chats can be easily misinterpreted.	2,93
4.	Inconsistent access or skill with remote tools created issues.	2,77
5.	Due to different work styles, varying approaches to deadlines, hierarchy, and decision-making.	3,16
6.	Direct vs indirect communication, and differing comfort levels with giving feedback.	3,06
7.	Physical distance and lack of face-to-face interaction make building strong bonds harder.	3,61
8.	Remote members feel disconnected from the team and the project goal	2,91
9.	The measures applied to ensure team unity were not effective.	2,32
10.	Team members had varying cultural views on recognition and work-life balance	2,95

Overall, respondents showed moderate to low agreement with most problem-related statements, indicating that international teamwork was generally perceived as manageable and effective. The strongest agreement was with the statement that physical distance and lack of face-to-face interaction make building strong bonds harder (mean = 3.61). This suggests that social connection remains the most significant challenge in international virtual teams. Moderate agreement was observed for differences in work styles and approaches to deadlines and

decision-making (mean = 3.16), and differences in direct vs indirect communication and comfort with feedback (mean = 3.06). Lower agreement scores were reported for language barriers (mean = 2.33), ineffective unity measures (mean = 2.32), time zone difficulties (mean = 2.74), tool-related issues (mean = 2.77).

These results indicate that technical and linguistic barriers were not perceived as major obstacles, while relationship-building and cultural communication differences posed more noticeable challenges.

Similarly, the respondents were asked to indicate which international team management competences, in their opinion, are most important for success in international project team management (1-not important; 2-slightly important; 3-moderately important; 4-important; 5-very important). The average evaluations are given in Table 5 below.

Table 5. Evaluation of international team management competencies

Competences	Average evaluations:
Solid grasp of scope, time, budget, and resource management.	4,54
Identifying, assessing, and mitigating risks in a global context.	3,88
Aligning diverse stakeholder needs and expectations across cultures.	3,82
Analysing complex situations and making well-grounded choices of possible decisions.	4,02
Clear, concise, culturally aware communication, overcoming language barriers, and using diverse tools (video, software).	3,93
Understanding cultural norms in communication, hierarchy, and decision-making.	4,14
Recognising and managing emotions within diverse teams.	4,02
Adapting leadership styles (democratic, analytical, etc.) to fit team cultures.	4,40
Adjusting approaches for different regions, time zones, and challenges.	4,16
Building trust, fostering collaboration, and resolving conflicts across cultures.	4,53

Respondents rated most competences as important to very important, highlighting the need for both managerial and interpersonal skills. The highest-rated competences were solid project management skills (scope, time, resources) (mean = 4.54), building trust, fostering collaboration, and resolving conflicts across cultures (mean = 4.53), adapting leadership styles to fit team cultures (mean = 4.40). Other highly valued competences included understanding cultural norms in communication and decision-making (mean = 4.14), adjusting approaches for different regions and time zones (mean = 4.16), recognising and managing emotions within diverse teams (mean = 4.02), clear and culturally aware communication (mean = 3.93).

These findings show that success in international teams depends not only on technical project management skills but strongly on cultural awareness, emotional intelligence, adaptive leadership, and trust-building abilities.

Conclusions

In the current global business landscape defined by volatility, uncertainty, and profound cultural heterogeneity, team management competencies have emerged as a cornerstone of managerial efficacy. These capabilities transcend rudimentary administrative coordination, evolving into a sophisticated repertoire of leadership, dialogic communication, intercultural dexterity, and ethical discernment. As organisational structures become increasingly fluid and decentralised, the ability to maintain cohesion across geographic and cognitive boundaries becomes a primary source of competitive advantage.

For institutions of higher education, the systematic cultivation of these competences represents both a pedagogical exigency and a strategic mandate. By embedding experiential team-based learning, cross-border collaborative initiatives, and structured reflective practice into the core curricula, business schools bridge the gap between theoretical abstraction and professional practice. Ultimately, this integrated educational approach is vital for developing a new generation of "global citizens" leaders who are equipped to navigate the complexities of international teamwork and drive sustainable, inclusive organisational success.

Collaborative Online International learning (COIL) is a tool to enhance global and virtual teamwork, global learning and intercultural collaboration skills in global and virtual teams, which is aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG):

- COIL strengthens relationships with our existing and valued partner network, aligning with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise global partnerships for sustainable development.
- COIL broadens the lecturers' and students' international networks, knowledge, and skill sets. This addresses SDG 4 (Quality Education) by ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.
- COIL contributes to a sustainable and inclusive form of international collaborative education. This corresponds to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by reducing inequality within and among countries and ensuring equal opportunity for all students to access international experiences.
- COIL is a cost-efficient method of internationalisation that supports SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) by ensuring the sustainable management and efficient use of resources through digital-led educational alternatives.

The research results support the statement that improving international teamwork requires a balance between:

- Structured coordination (clear tools, roles, deadlines, and project management skills), and
- Human-centred practices (trust-building, informal interaction, emotional intelligence, and intercultural understanding).

While operational challenges such as language, tools, and time zones were rated relatively low, the data highlights that social and cultural dimensions of teamwork are the most critical factors for long-term effectiveness and cohesion in cross-border collaborative projects. Recognising that the human dimension is the most critical factor for success, this research paves the way for further investigation into cultural codes, offering a pathway to refine international management strategies in an increasingly digital and globalised workspace.

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