

Virtual Internationalization – we did it our way

Åsa Tjulin¹, Ellen MacEachen², Stig Vinberg³, John Selander⁴, Philip Lloyd Bigelow⁵, and Robert Larsson⁶

¹Department of Health Sciences, Mid Sweden University, Östersund, Sweden. ORCID: 0000-0001-7266-7865; ²School of Public Health and Health Systems, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. ORCID: 0000-0001-6477-7650; ³Department of Health Sciences, Mid Sweden University, Östersund, Sweden. ORCID: orcid.org/0000-0002-5935-5688; ⁴Department of Health Sciences, Mid Sweden University, Östersund, Sweden; ⁵School of Public Health and Health Systems, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada; ⁶School of Health, Care and Social Welfare, Division of Public Health Sciences, Mälardalen University, Västerås, Sweden. ORCID: 0000-0002-1965-7147

Using virtual internationalization as a key concept, this article adds to the body of experience-based knowledge on how to build partnerships and develop courses within higher education. The purpose of this article is to disseminate knowledge about the collaborative process that took place when Swedish and Canadian universities created an international online course focused on work and health. The article presents the challenges and mitigating strategies during course implementation and preconditions that enabled the co-production of the course. The conclusion provides critical reflections, questions and lessons learned that arose from the instructors reflections in relation to virtual internationalization. The self-reflexive experiences were analysed through the lens of internationalization in higher education and virtual internationalization literature, and the theory of social coordination and bureaucracy to enable an understanding of how we did it our way.

Keywords: virtual internationalization, online learning, public health, collaboration, course development

INTRODUCTION

Research (Larsson et al., 2005; Ryan et al., 2017) and policies (de Wit et al., 2015; SOU, 2018:3) related to online learning pose the question, How can we find ways to stimulate internationalization through information and communications technology and online learning in higher education? One answer is through virtual internationalization. This concept begins with the notion that students and university departments do not necessarily have to physically cross borders to be part of an intercultural exchange of knowledge in higher education (Bruhn, 2017). Virtual internationalization is described as enabling academic development between universities (van den Berg et al., 2016) since it facilitates internationalization at home and/or internationalization of the curriculum, e.g. internationalization of learning outcomes, pedagogical development, education and assessments (Beelen & Jones, 2015), and may stimulate institutional competitive improvement on the global educational “market” (Heffernan & Poole, 2005). Thus, internationalization is presented as a tool for academic development where a range of approaches to virtual internationalization can be applied (Bruhn, 2017; Critelli et al., 2017; Ryan et al., 2017).

Correspondence to: asa.tjulin@miun.se

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COLLABORATION IN VIRTUAL INTERNATIONALIZATION

This article adds to the body of experience-based knowledge on how to build a partnership and develop a course within higher education using virtual internationalization as a key strategy. Three universities, two Swedish (Mid Sweden University and Mälardalen University) and one Canadian (University of Waterloo), implemented a co-owned and co-produced international online course. Our partnership started with an interest in creating a unique international online educational opportunity for students through which they could work directly with international peers. Establishing an online course would facilitate students' international participation without the need for travel and the additional expenses that accompany a period abroad. Research within the area of internationalization in higher education emphasises the need to promote intercultural competencies for students and stimulate global knowledge exchange regarding different subjects (Deardorff, 2006; Morong & DesBiens, 2016; Stier, 2003). One rationale for this is that students are future decision makers and different subjects, e.g. fair employment conditions and decent work for all, are viewed as global concerns, with consequences for workers' health (CSDH, 2008; United Nations, 2015). Therefore, students need an awareness of their main subject from a global or international learning perspective in order to apply it in their local context (Burt et al., 2019). This aligns with each university's internationalization strategy (Mälardalen University, 2016; Mittuniversitetet, 2018; University of Waterloo, 2018).

Further, these approaches are in line with national objectives in both countries. Both the Swedish Higher Education Act (SFS, 1992:1434) and the international education strategy in Canada (Government of Canada, 2019) encourage international collaboration as a key strategy for higher education as well as research. The partnership and the course would enable platforms for knowledge exchange about international online learning and structures for collaboration between universities. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this way of implementing existing practices in our universities provides a good example for the future of the internationalization of higher education. Besides, the challenges faced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and closed borders also show that student mobility decreases if there is uncertainty about the academic benefits of studying abroad, e.g. a challenge in transferring credits between universities. Additional factors that decrease mobility are uncertainty regarding monetary costs of studying and living in another country (German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science, 2008; Government of Canada, 2019) and students being unwilling to leave personal relationships, especially family bonds, behind (German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science, 2008; Engwall, 2016).

Our process, and how we did virtual internationalization our way, can be described as an engaged model combined with the right prerequisites for internationalization at home. This article sets out to add to the body of experience-based knowledge by using the authors' involvement with a self-reflexive story-telling approach. Thus, the purpose of this article is to disseminate knowledge about the collaborative process that took place when three universities created an international partnership with the aim of developing an international online course within the work and health subject area.

METHODS AND THEORETICAL LENS

The article is based on meeting notes, reflective journals and discussions between instructors, i.e. the authors of the article, student surveys and a written evaluation report from the project (MacEachen et al., 2019). The article will present the challenges and mitigating strategies during course implementation and preconditions that enabled the co-production of the course. The

conclusion specifies critical reflections, questions and lessons learned that arose from our reflections in relation to virtual internationalization.

The self-reflexive experiences were framed by the literature of internationalization in higher education and virtual internationalization literature (e.g. Bruhn, 2017), and reflected upon through the theoretical lens of social coordination and bureaucracy (Gittell & Douglass, 2012), to enable an understanding of how we did it our way. The theory of social coordination and bureaucracy can be helpful to understand underlying values in different social relational organisations, for instance in this article between our universities. The underlying principle in the theory suggests that highly cooperative work is most effectively coordinated by front-line workers (i.e. university instructors and administrators), their customers (i.e. students) and their leaders, through a relational process of finding shared goals, shared knowledge and shared mutual respect and expectations. The relationship is supported by frequent, timely, accurate and problem-solving communication (Gittell & Douglass, 2012; Williams, 2002).

DESCRIPTION OF THE COLLABORATIVE COURSE

The initial idea for our partnership was to build a public-health course offering focused on work and health. This needed to be suitable for students with a range of interests in the topic, such as international policy comparison, social security systems, and equity in work and health. The result became a course, created during 2017 and 2018 and implemented in January 2019, with the title “What Is Fair? International Perspectives on Equity in Work and Health”. The core of the course takes an intersectionality lens to understand international systems and policies in relation to health, work and equity impact on workers’ health (Vinberg et al., 2020). The content is divided into four modules: theory and concepts, disability management, occupational health and safety, and workplace health promotion. The course is provided to graduate students and runs annually for ten weeks at the MSc- and PhD-student levels.

A critical aspect of the course is that it is designed so that students could register for the course at their home university; i.e. the universities enrolled their own students according to their own educational systems and regulations. In this way, the universities avoided the bureaucratic challenges associated with students having to register for a course at a different university. In addition, no extra fees are incurred for the students and credits are awarded within the home institution. Furthermore, each instructor’s salary is handled by his or her home university. However, we have a common syllabus for the course: the content of the course, the assignments given, and the interaction between students through discussion posts and group work are the same for everyone. We share a common learning platform for the course content, administration, learning and teaching practices. The platform is hosted by the University of Waterloo, which offers technical support for students and instructors. So far, we have offered the course three times, in 2019, 2020 and 2021. We had seven registered and graduated students the first year, 15 students the second year and 20 the third year.

CHALLENGES AND MITIGATING STRATEGIES DURING COURSE IMPLEMENTATION

There was no *gold standard* for how to create and deliver this kind of collaborative online course. The instructors involved had to negotiate different educational and university systems during the development and implementation process. The prominent challenges and mitigating strategies are reflected upon as legal, course organisation and pedagogical issues.

In research literature, managing international collaboration in online courses is increasingly addressed (Heffernan & Poole, 2005; Larsson et al., 2005; van den Berg, 2016; Critelli et al.,

2017; Ryan et al, 2017), and the literature points to challenges with managing virtual international collaborative initiatives. For instance, cultural variances in languages between nations can require time-consuming efforts to translate learning material and to find a language that is interpreted in a common way by both faculty and students (Critelli et al., 2017; Ryan et al., 2017). Differences in views on learning and expectations of students can create uncertainties for students regarding how to act in learning situations; this notion is especially visible in studies that compare different intercultural backgrounds of students (Harrison et al., 2018; Lee & Bligh, 2019; Pisutova, 2016). Administrative issues such as signing partnership agreements and merging educational systems, for instance how to grade and give credits when setting out from different system logics, can create both frustration and sometimes new innovative solutions (Larsson et al., 2005; Ryan et al., 2017). These challenges became evident during the development process of our online course as the course creation process and the structure of the partnership were formed and grew in design and structure (MacEachen et al., 2019).

Legal issues

One particular challenge that complicated course implementation was the legal agreements needed between the universities. Just as we were about to launch our course, the EU 2016/679 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Europe's new EU privacy legislation, came into effect (Europaparlamentets och rådets förordning, 2016). The GDPR required clarifications regarding the safeguarding of student privacy on the common learning platform and during course interactions. This created a hectic period, as we were late getting this process started. The legal agreement was completed by engaging with our respective legal offices and lawyers, which we realised are vital functions at the universities when it comes to implementation of virtual internationalization.

Future projects on virtual internationalization should start the process with the legal prerequisites first, followed by educational and course developmental issues. The one fundamental question to ask here is whether it is legally possible to collaborate. In addition, the faculties need to work closely with their international offices at their respective universities to anticipate legal issues. This is particularly the case from a European perspective, where the GDPR legalisation needs special attention.

Course organisation issues

Different term times, term breaks and course intensities created challenges for the design of the course. The Swedish universities' terms do not fully overlap with the Canadian terms; Swedish terms are a little shorter. As well, Swedish students do not have breaks in the middle of a term; in contrast, the Canadian universities have a Reading Week break in February.

We managed these issues by making our course a 10-week course in accordance with the Swedish term length and course length, which is a little shorter than the Canadian 12-week term. This allowed all three universities to fully overlap since the Canadian system leaves more leeway in locally managed courses, as opposed to the Swedish regulation where term lengths and course weeks are fixed. University of Waterloo graduate students are expected to spend approximately 7 hours per week on a .5 credit course (for readings, essays, course participation), and they normally take 3 courses at a time. However, Swedish courses are either full-time or half-time. Therefore, a half-time course for a Swedish student involves approximately 20 hours per week of their time. We managed this challenge by making the course equivalent to one .5 credit University of Waterloo course and one 7.5 credit half-time Mid Sweden University and

Mälardalen University course. We reasoned that, as the course is delivered in English, the Swedish students need extra time to manage the English-as-a-second-language issues.

We conformed to *different grading conventions* within the same course. This creates inequities across students within the course but maintains equities within the universities. Swedish doctoral students are graded on a pass/fail basis for their course work in both universities. For Swedish master's students, in-course assignments are assigned a pass-with-distinction/pass/fail grade at one university and pass/fail at the other. In contrast, the Canadian courses are graded numerically, out of 100%. We managed the disparate grading conventions by having instructors grade their own students according to the local grading convention. This worked well, because each of the students were registered for the course via their own universities, so were subject to grading rules of their own institutions. The course is designed in four modules (Vinberg et al., 2020). For each module we paired Canadian and Swedish instructors, and they jointly reviewed and ranked assignments for all students (Swedish and Canadian) before applying the appropriate local grades.

Further, we conformed to *different course failure and sick note conventions*. Swedish students have the right to re-write assignments and final papers within the course up to five times. In contrast, Canadian students are usually graded for all submissions and penalised for late assignments and usually cannot re-write a final paper or examination. Therefore, we ended up with separate course failure policies for students at each university. Sick notes and related permission to miss an exam or test and write it later were other areas of difference. Again, we opted to apply local policies for this issue. The policies for each institution were available on the learning platform (LEARN) course site. To accommodate the Swedish student re-examinations, the online learning unit at the University of Waterloo (CEL) agreed to always archive the previous 5 years of our course on LEARN, which is a procedure that is not normally done.

Several of the *assignments were due* on a Sunday. While Canadian students have appreciated having some weekend time to complete their assignments, a cultural difference was that Swedish students felt that it was unfair for instructors to expect submissions on a weekend. We managed this by having assignments due on weekdays only.

The first year the course was offered the challenge was *low course registration*. A total of 9 Swedish and 6 Canadian students registered in the course, of whom 7 dropped early in the term, leaving a total of 4 Swedish and 4 Canadian students in the course. The Swedish universities may have had low registration because information about registering for the course was made available to students at the last minute, while we grappled with whether the course would be able to be offered in the winter term due to slow-moving legal agreements between the universities. Only one Swedish university could make the offering as well. The University of Waterloo had low registration because that first year the course was offered as a "special topics" course and therefore may have been difficult for students to find in university course listings. Feedback from students indicated that Swedish students dropped out because of concerns about workload, group work and different student time zones (MacEachen et al., 2019). The Swedish students were unfamiliar with the process of setting up a guest account for the learning platform at the University of Waterloo and accessing LEARN. In Week 1 of the course, this created some disruption as students lacked access to the course while they worked through setup problems. It is possible that complications around connecting via LEARN were also discouraging. Feedback from some Canadian students indicated that they dropped out because the course did not suit their schedule. It is also possible that Canadian students left the course when they couldn't access it immediately at the start of the term, as the course started two weeks after the official

term start and wasn't visible on LEARN until then. Students may have thought the course offering was no longer available. We managed these challenges in several ways. The second year, the course was made available to Swedish students on time at both universities. As the course was fully created and legal agreements were in place, no delays occurred. The course on LEARN was made available to all students at the start of the Canadian term. The front page provided a reminder to students of the condensed course start date and let them know that activities would start two weeks later. As well, we made changes to reduce the amount of group work in the course and reduce the numbers of readings to ease the workload. We managed the problem of accessing the LEARN platform via a guest account for Swedish students by creating a clear, step-by-step information sheet that details the setup process.

Pedagogical issues

To facilitate *international interaction* between the students, we organised student groups so that each included Canadian and Swedish students. The idea was that students could learn from each other about each other's social security and work and health systems while they conducted their assignments. Student feedback indicated that they appreciated the group work, but found meetings difficult to organise due to time zone differences. We created a less intense form of student interaction by re-designing some assignments to make them asynchronous. For instance, we replaced some group work with discussion board comments that could be added any time during the week.

The Swedish students all spoke English as a second *language* (ESL), and all assignments were due in English. In student evaluations, Canadian students indicated that they had the extra burden of tidying up their Swedish peer's assignments, in order to correct spelling and grammar. We managed this challenge by stating explicitly to all students that, for this course, we are cognisant of ESL challenges and will not apply penalties to assignments for poor spelling or grammar. The issue was also highlighted in the group contract that each student group forms at the start of the course.

Overall, the challenges encountered and the mitigating strategies used show how co-production and collaboration requires negotiation, mediation and decision models based on consensus and win-win outcomes (Williams, 2002). Consideration given to different national educational systems (Larsson et al., 2005), including grading conventions, credits and term lengths, syllabus, and pedagogical issues, involved a "give-and-take" process from our three universities. During 2020, we enrolled 7 Swedish students and 8 Canadian students. The challenges, and how we managed them after our first round of the course, resulted in positive outcomes during the second course offering. The student evaluation feedback showed that the content, literature and individual examinations were relevant and worked well in relation to workload. However, there are still some issues concerning group work that need to be improved, especially how cultural differences and different time zones affect Swedish as compared to Canadian students. There have been reflections from students about different cultural views on when it is appropriate to work on assignments during the week, i.e. during office hours or also during weekends and evenings. Different time zones further complicate this issue, and students have asked for more time to manage the assignments to overcome these barriers.

Digital pedagogies

The three universities had different approaches to the format of online teaching, ranging from synchronous with face-to-face contact, to asynchronous and largely a text-based approach with

brief instructor videos, to narrated PowerPoint slides. At the start of our development process of choices made around digital pedagogics, we found common pedagogical tools to use through dialogue supported by an online learning consultant at the University of Waterloo. In the absence of face-to-face contact, it was important in this course that students be exposed to each other and to international instructors. We exposed students to each other by requiring group work, which led to them interacting across various mediums. For instruction, we opted for narrated slides so that students were verbally exposed to instructors' voices, terminologies and vocabularies. As each section of the course was co-hosted by a Swedish and a Canadian instructor, we worked together to ensure that all content was fully culturally understandable. Looking forward, in the context of pandemic-induced ease of access to audio-visual mediums (e.g. TEAMS, Zoom), we are exploring adding more video content.

THE PRECONDITIONS IN PLACE FOR DOING VIRTUAL INTERNATIONALIZATION OUR WAY

Previous research shows that a lack of long-term financial resources for courses and programs may result in program shutdown once the grant period is over (Loisel et al., 2009). Additionally, it is important to take into account the time required as well as the extent of the online learning competence of the faculty and administrative colleagues when it comes to developing and implementing virtual internationalization courses (Ryan et al., 2017). This online learning competence is likely greatly enhanced following most universities' experiences of expanded online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, the need to engage the faculties involved in the collaborative initiatives has to be considered (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Heffernan & Poole, 2005). Thus, more studies are required that move beyond ideals and carefully problematize the processes and concerns related to virtual international collaboration between institutions (Ryan et al., 2017). Doing virtual internationalization our way, some necessary preconditions were identified and reflected upon, primarily through the theoretical lens of relational coordination and relational bureaucracy (Gittell & Douglass, 2012).

The aspect of time and (financial) resources

The process is not just about designing the course but also about understanding how each other's educational systems work, working with legal agreements and finding ways to communicate, reflect, document and share thoughts and ideas along the way. Drawing on the theory of relational coordination and relational bureaucracy, the creation and development of a mutual international course is characterised by a complexity of interdependent cooperation and coordination through social relationships (Gittell & Douglass, 2012; Gittell et al., 2010). We found different ways of organising the work methods internally for our virtual internationalization process, for example working with tools like Skype, Dropbox and Padlet, as well as becoming familiar with the learning platform. Further, to enable equity in the work process, we identified how to arrange meetings and set up continuous meeting agendas and how to come together as a group to facilitate the social contract represented by mutual beliefs, perceptions and informal obligations between parties. The developmental process takes time.

Our process was undertaken with a lot of face-to-face contact, both online and through physical visits, to make the virtual online forum work and to build social relational bonds. We visited each other's universities, supported by a start-up grant from the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT), and we also met during the process of development and evaluation thanks to grants from our universities. We

met at the University of Waterloo for one week during the course development phase to enable our academic and administrative colleagues to examine the opportunities and challenges of the partnership and the course. Further, academic and administrative colleagues met once at Mid Sweden University and the University of Waterloo once the course had been made available, to review the course implementation and make remaining changes. Instructors met regularly online during the development of the course, as well as during the course and after the course to evaluate and make revisions.

The grants enabled us to build trust and social interaction supported by frequent, up-to-date, problem-solving communication. This facilitated the relational process of finding shared goals, shared knowledge and shared mutual respect and expectations (Gittell & Douglass, 2012; Williams, 2002). Early in the process, our own heads of the university departments and faculty colleagues were supportive of the idea of implementing virtual internationalization using our approach. The partnership became feasible through our universities being willing to take risks and being open to innovative approaches. They enabled the partnership by investing resources such as grants for knowledge exchange, allowing access to administrative colleagues within our respective university structures (librarians, educational developers, lawyers, international relations officers), and by providing time and institutional legitimacy.

The aspect of social relational bonds

Internal social agreements between the instructors were formed based on co-ownership and shared workload, shared responsibility and shared design of the course. The time invested in terms of the social contract between the instructors also made clear how the instructors could draw on each other's strengths, such as expertise in specific parts of the subject and course content, and each university's strengths such as identifying which learning platform was best suited for the online educational tools used. The process was characterised by innovation, risk taking and entrepreneurship rather than a search for the one single right solution or one way forward (Williams, 2002). These findings related to the ideation process are in line with previous research within innovation science. That research emphasises knowledge creation as a process which takes place in a specific social context that is dependent on conscious social interaction and communication (Björk et al., 2011). Thus, the core of creativity is built on more than individual commitments and thought processes since it is also situated within and between organisations such as universities (Heffernan & Poole, 2005). Future projects on virtual internationalization need to be aware of the need for a social contract as well as for funding for the start-up and sustainability of the effort in relation to time investment for social interaction, online or face-to-face, for those involved. This should be emphasised and acknowledged in the intersection between policy statements and practical reality.

The aspect of administrative support

According to relational coordination theory, personal relationships between people involved in a network are contextualized as professional links between work functions rather than personal ties between individuals who possess work functions, since dependence on personal ties limits sustainability (Gittell & Douglass, 2012). Further, organisations with structures that promote relational coordination create cohesion and broader contextual awareness, i.e. the participants' awareness of how their work fits in and affects the organization and its results as a whole prevents the reinforcement of functional silos that result in weak links between work functions (Gittell & Suchmann, 2013). Although relational coordination theory can be helpful to understand

underlying values in different social relational organisations, e.g. health care in earlier research (Gittell et al., 2010), one has to reflect on what social bonds or ties between individuals mean within our educational setting and academic culture. In terms of the concept of boundary spanning, this involves crossing boundaries within our own universities and also crossing borders to other universities in other nations. The borders might refer to professional roles or functions within the university setting and also to crossing administrative and legal borders with the aim of building a social network in order to manage complex problems, i.e. virtual internationalization (Williams, 2002). During our partnership development process, we realised that our administrative colleagues (librarians, educational developers, lawyers and international relations officers) played an essential role. Our social ties and our social coordination networks, i.e. functions within universities, expanded throughout the development process and course implementation since we crossed several borders. From our different universities we involved administrative colleagues from the international relations office, educational development, library support and lawyers during different stages of the process. As instructors, we learned that our administrative colleagues want to be involved early in the process. Sometimes they feel that they are asked for support too late in different development processes, resulting in a heavier workload for them. Including administrative colleagues early in the process also creates the conditions for commitment, motivation and the opportunity to build strong inter-institutional ties. Further, the combination of our different areas of expertise has helped us understand each other's educational contexts and importantly improved how the course instructors deal with international students. It helped instructors to understand the academic culture of the students and what they are accustomed to in terms of access to the library, learning platforms used and educational methods, grading conventions and credit accounts in different international contexts.

CONCLUSION – REFLECTIONS ON LESSONS LEARNED

In line with social coordination and bureaucracy (Gittell & Douglass, 2012), our experience shows that social relationships and continuity of interaction have been crucial to the virtual internationalization process and course implementations. For those of us who work in an academic setting, individual social relational bonds and ties are essential in many aspects of our work. Within our networks we share the same work culture, the academic world, and have an understanding of the hierarchical circumstances of our respective professions in each educational institution. The academic work culture is characterised by independence in idea generation and knowledge processes; however, it is strict when it comes to boundaries such as laws and rules for how education is formulated in legalisation and laws in each nation. Part of the process has involved letting each individual's professional excellence enrich, not hinder, the development of both the partnership and the approaches to virtual internationalization. In this regard, the literature on boundary spanning suggests that networks that build sustainable relationships will enable social capital, e.g. build trust, improve levels of cognitive ability to understand complexity and be able to operate within non-hierarchical environments with discrete alignments of power relationships (Williams, 2002). However, future virtual internationalization collaboration efforts with more unequal resources may present challenges to both academic and administrative staff. Therefore, from the administration perspective, a *gold standard* or organizational routines and institutional standards (Pluye et al., 2004) may not always be a given in enabling sustainability from one virtual internationalization to another. Nonetheless, this particular course and partnership, and the knowledge exchange involved through the development process, has facilitated a deeper understanding of the different aspects involved in

the process of virtual internationalization on an organizational and institutional level. We hope that the experiences we gained can inspire and be of value for others who seek to develop virtual international courses or initiatives.

Virtual internationalization initiatives take different forms and are shaped by different pre-conditions, depending on factors such as the goal of the intended activity or/and resources available. The approach we took to virtual internationalization fostered a sense of willingness to *take the risk* and be open to innovative ways to implement the internationalization of higher education rhetoric stated in national and university policies. In light of feasibility, the organizational learning that can be drawn from this particular example of how to implement an international virtual course resulted in a number of critical questions. The critical questions should be asked in the initial phase – to test an idea of virtual internationalization. For instance, Mid Sweden University has drawn on learnings from our experience by providing other faculty members the critical questions posed in light of feasibility – What does it mean in terms of resources such as the time, structure, competence, social relations and professionals (work roles) involved? How does the intersection between policy and practice facilitate virtual internationalization? Do preconceptions exist about virtual internationalization? What would be the added value of virtual internationalization and for whom? Are any structures in place for creation, implementation and sustainability of virtual internationalization? How are structures set up and how adaptable are the structures to different educational jurisdictions and contexts? How much can each university push their boundaries when it comes to time, legal issues and commitment to the process? Further, the learnings we have drawn and how we did virtual internationalization our way have been an inspiration to two other initiatives implemented at Mälardalen University. However, for future development processes, we acknowledge that universities need to find their own way of how to operationalize virtual internationalization.

Our main message, based on our approach to virtual internationalization, exemplifies that a significant time investment is required for the creation process of the course content and structure, as well as to build social relationships (whether offline or online or in combination) and find common legal agreements for our partnership. We also had external funding during the development process, which was vital for implementation. However, this early investment of time led to later efficiencies such as smooth running of the course made possible by the strong engagement of the three universities. This investment also led to course sustainability, with instructor commitments to the course continuing amidst changes such as sabbatical absences. In addition, we can see that enrolment in the course grew from the first year to the second and third. The students experienced that the course functioned well and had added international value (MacEachen et al., 2019; Vinberg et al., 2020). As such, we will continue to offer the course.

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AUTHOR PRESENTATIONS

Åsa Tjulin is a senior lecturer at Mid Sweden University, department of Health Sciences. Main research interests concerns social relations and learning within the context of working life and health. Åsa Tjulin is an awarded and recognized university teacher at Mid Sweden University and have an interest in disseminating knowledge about learning and pedagogical practices.

Ellen MacEachen is a professor in the School of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Waterloo, Canada, where she enjoys teaching international groups of students. Her research examines return to work after injury and illness, vulnerable workers, and the growth of precarious employment. Her 2019 edited book, “The Science and Politics of Work Disability Prevention” provides an international picture of social security systems, work and health.

Stig Vinberg is a professor in Health Sciences at Mid Sweden University, department of Health Sciences. Main research interests are workplace health promotion, leadership and small business development with emphasis on organizational factors and employee health. Stig has been working as a researcher, project leader and consultant in several research- and development projects with a focus on interactive research and learning issues for practitioners.

John Selander is professor in Rehabilitation Science at Mid Sweden University, department of Health Sciences. Main research interests are disability management and vocational rehabilitation. That is also his primary area of teaching.

Philip Bigelow is an Associate Professor in the School of Public Health Systems at the University of Waterloo. He has a background in occupational hygiene and occupational epidemiology. His research interests include understanding and reducing occupational exposures as well as chronic disease risk factors in vulnerable employee populations. His recent work has focused on finding ways to improve the implementation and uptake of health interventions in the construction and transportation sectors.

Robert Larsson is a Senior Lecturer in Public Health Sciences at Mälardalen University. His primary area of teaching is work and health, health promotion and implementation. His research interests are workplace health promotion, organisational health interventions, and leadership and management in public organisations.

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