

## Chapter 8

# Behind the Online Course: The Strategies in a Diverse Self- Managed Group in Pandemic Times

**Luis Antonio Orozco**

*Universidad Externado de Colombia, Colombia*

**Erli Margarita Marin-Aranguren**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1779-7138>

*Universidad Externado de Colombia, Colombia*

**Roberta F Favaro**

*Universidad Externado de Colombia, Colombia*

**Gina Alejandra Caicedo**

*Universidad Externado de Colombia, Colombia*

**Heidy Johanna Ramírez**

*Universidad Externado de Colombia, Colombia*

### ABSTRACT

*Higher education institutions' success in providing online courses at the beginning of the pandemic depends not only on their infrastructure and organizational units for virtual education but also on diverse teams composed of professors specialized in pedagogy, researchers, and professionals in digital technologies for education. The authors describe their experiences in the bargaining process, tensions, ways to solve controversies, the management of time and resources, pitfalls, problems, correct guess, and hits to create new knowledge-based products for the Colombian National Ministry of Education (MEN in Spanish acronyms) platform's "Colombia Aprende" within a high pressure against time and the reputational risk of failing in the pandemic chaos. Results show that the psychological contract theory explains the capacity to compromise to overcome several difficulties such as an extra load of work, and the knowledge creation theory provides a helpful model to understand how the team innovated.*

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8275-6.ch008

## INTRODUCTION

The pandemic stresses the importance of facing virtual education seriously. Many higher education institutions have created capacities in terms of infrastructure and organizational units for virtual education, resulting from strategic plans or decisions oriented to support their academic programs. Previous research before the abrupt changes due to COVID-19 revealed that universities that stated components of digital transformation in their strategic plans do not advance more than provide infrastructure instead of creating conditions for a new business model (Kozu, 2020). The introduction of digital technologies in higher education served more as a marketing strategy to increase students' inclusion with cost reductions and scale economies achieved as assembly lines (Munro, 2018). Finally, the lack of incentives to increase the digital transformation at universities to serve a wider community and go beyond the provision of environments like e-campuses failed to create pedagogical and flexible methodologies to enhance learning and research (Xiao, 2019). In the pandemic scenario, virtual education innovation looks like a new and unique strategy to steer the teaching activities. Still, it is straightforward for organizations that, as the paradox of Robert Solow's stress for productivity, in organizational innovation, digital technologies' sole investment does not assure better performance (Orozco et al., 2021).

The authors stress that virtual education's innovation process needs diverse teams to combine the capacities on R&D of academic contents with pedagogical methodologies and technical requirements. The teams need to be able to overcome several challenges in self-management projects. The ways to solve differences in demographic terms and epistemologies, backgrounds, knowledge, skills, and abilities rely more on psychological compromise than on a set of incentives, like payments. Diversity in organizations is a double-edged sword. It can increase creativity and open the possibility of generating misunderstandings and dissatisfaction in the group members (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998; Harrison and Klein, 2007; Van de Ven, Rogers, Bechara & Sun, 2008). Diversity can create difficulties for performance due to the differences between ages, sex, race, nationality, among other demographic characteristics (Williams and O'Reilly, 1998). Also, features such as organizational position and status, tenure, access to resources and knowledge, and experience in educational and labor backgrounds can create separation and differentiation between group members (Harrison and Klein, 2007). Finally, convergence and coordination depend on group members' mental models and identities that belong to different organizational units with their priorities, interests, and ways to do the work (Riketta and Nienaber, 2007). The research that addresses diversity in team management tends to be quantitative. Moreover, the literature on diversity in academic work used to study R&D teams and research collaboration (Orozco, 2015). To our knowledge, research that addresses the diversity in workgroups at universities to design and create pedagogical material has been neglected in the literature.

The chapter presents a case study of a self-management team at Universidad Externado de Colombia (UEC) that developed an online course contracted by the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI, in Spanish acronyms) and the Colombian National Ministry of Education (MEN, in Spanish acronyms) in the pandemic challenges. The case gives several learning about the issues relevant to help the practice of management in developing online material for education. The difficulties in managing a diverse team (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998) within a heterogeneous network of collaboration in a contractual agreement (Orozco and Villaveces 2015) can be overcome with the content of psychological contracts (Rousseau, 1995) in the process of knowledge creation (Nonaka, 2005). These elements explained the compromise created against adversities due to a common laudable goal: to contribute to creating new leaderships in

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