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Creating Learning Communities through Flipped Classes: A Challenge, an Answer, or an Opportunity for Teaching Strategic Human Resource Management?

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Abstract

Teaching strategic human resource management to postgraduate students is becoming a challenge in countries like Australia, particularly due to the students undertaking postgraduate studies without relevant professional work experience. To address this, we used flipped teaching and learning activities and attempted to develop a learning community among multi-cultural postgraduate students who had no (or minimal) professional work experience. Using duoethnographic technique, we recorded our observations and reflections over three semesters in teaching strategic human resource management at postgraduate level in an Australian University. Our reflections demonstrate that community-based learning environment allows students without any relevant work experience to put strategic human resource management theories into practice whilst it allows students with previous work experience to gain leadership, mentoring, and advisory skills by acting as experts. Hence, this paper contributes to human resource management pedagogy by highlighting that flipped activities reflecting strategic human resource management principles contribute to: a) expansion of student learning practices and community boundaries, and b) expertise development.

Keywords

teaching and learning, strategic human resource management, communities of practice, postgraduate students, flipped classroom

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Creating Learning Communities through Flipped Classes: A Challenge, an Answer, or an Opportunity for Teaching Strategic Human Resource Management?

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Teaching strategic human resource management to postgraduate students is becoming a challenge in countries like Australia, particularly due to the students undertaking postgraduate studies without relevant professional work experience. To address this, we used flipped teaching and learning activities and attempted to develop a learning community among multi-cultural postgraduate students who had no (or minimal) professional work experience. Using duoethnographic technique, we recorded our observations and reflections over three semesters in teaching strategic human resource management at postgraduate level in an Australian University. Our reflections demonstrate that community-based learning environment allows students without any relevant work experience to put strategic human resource management theories into practice whilst it allows students with previous work experience to gain leadership, mentoring, and advisory skills by acting as experts. Hence, this paper contributes to human resource management pedagogy by highlighting that flipped activities reflecting strategic human resource management principles contribute to: a) expansion of student learning practices and community boundaries, and b) expertise development.

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, student enrolments in Masters by coursework qualifications (referred to here onwards as postgraduate students) have increased significantly with a substantial percentage of international students¹ contributing to the growth in numbers (Morgan, 2014). For example, in 2016 postgraduate students in Australian universities increased by 3.9% to 401,858 (Department of Education and Training Australia, 2017). In addition, 21.4% of the total students in Australian universities in 2016 were international students, with a majority coming from Peoples Republic of China, India, Brazil, South Korea, and Malaysia (Australian Education International, 2017; Department of Immigration and Border Protection Australia, 2016).² The new generation of students, compared to previous cohorts of domestic students who generally work a few years in a particular profession prior to undertaking postgraduate studies, seem to show a greater tendency to undertake postgraduate studies immediately after completing their undergraduate degree. This trend may be due to several reasons. First, young people may assume a relationship between being qualified and having a lasting professional career (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001). Second, the labour market in Australia is currently over-supplied with graduate students, and only 68% of Bachelor's graduates from the class of 2014 had a full-time job four months after graduating; this was the lowest full-time employment rate for new graduates since 1982 (Graduate Careers Australia, 2014). As a result, it may be a commonly held view that an undergraduate degree is a minimum level of qualification for an increasing number of jobs, and that employers are raising the qualification levels required for particular jobs in response to the "over-supply" of graduates (Brooks & Everttt, 2009). Third, it could be due to the perception that there is greater potential for graduates with a secondary postgraduate degree to gain higher salaries than graduates with an undergraduate degree (Morgan, 2014). Regardless of the reasoning, increase in student numbers, changes in student demo-

graphics, and lack of practical work experience pose challenges to postgraduate teaching and learning.

This study focuses on strategic human resource management teaching and learning activities amongst a community of postgraduate students and how these teaching and learning practices can provide opportunities for students without any prior work experience, to gain practical management experience. Although lack of work experience in undergraduate strategic human resource management teaching and learning has been highlighted (Coetzer & Sitlington, 2014), human resource management pedagogy has explored neither the effect of work experience on postgraduate students nor the demographic changes in student cohorts. This paper attempts to address this gap by using our experience and reflections in teaching strategic human resource management and answers the following main research question:

How can academics develop and deliver strategic human resource management based knowledge effectively at postgraduate level and contribute to learning when students: a) do not have any (or have only minimal) professional work experience relevant to business? b) originate from diverse cultural backgrounds?

This study draws on our efforts and experiences of forming a community of learning using flipped classroom approach at the postgraduate level in one Australian university. Using a "community of practice" and flipped classroom techniques, this paper provides recommendations and suggestions on effective strategic human resource management teaching and learning practices to better cater to students of multi-cultural backgrounds, with minimal or no work experiences, in postgraduate coursework settings in Australia. Particularly, we argue that planned activities resembling strategic human resource management practices are

needed to provide work experience, explain theories, and develop expertise. We also provide critical analysis of challenges in using a flipped class approach in developing a community of learning.

Communities of Practice

A “community” comprises of people coming together around ideas or topics of interest (domain) and interacting with each other to learn (Smith, Hayes, & Shea, 2017). Communities form the basic building blocks of social learning systems where learning occurs due to the interplay between social competence (i.e., what it takes to act and be recognised as a competent member), and the individual’s personal experience in the context of a community and beyond (Wenger, 2000). Hence, both the topic of interest and interactions with each other are key factors of learning, and form the foundation of communities of practice (Smith et al., 2017, p. 211).

Communities of practice are defined as “system[s] of relationships between people, activities, and the world, developing with time, and in relation to other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Events, leadership, connectivity, membership, projects, and artefacts within a community of practice: a) develop a sense of purpose, b) help the community to develop, c) cultivate support structures and interest groups, d) generate a sense of responsibility for learning, and e) produce their own documents, tools, stories, symbols, and websites, which in turn increase learning energy, the depth of social capital, and the degree of social awareness (Wenger, 2000). However, negative stereotypes, prejudice, and staid or destructive practices that are characteristic of a community could also become a part of the learning (Wenger, 2000).

The notion of a community implies a boundary and restricted access (Wenger, 2000). Community boundaries are fluid and less clearly defined than ever as information technology and internet-based tools contribute to networked learning (Fox, 2005). In addition, there is a need to bridge boundaries by having brokers across communities. These brokers can develop tools, documents, and models using a common discourse to communicate, negotiate meaning across boundaries, and share processes, routines, and procedures (Wenger, 2000).

A person’s identity influences their participation within communities of practice. People define who they are, by what is and is not familiar; thus, people identify themselves with some communities more strongly than others (Wenger, 2000). Therefore, activities and processes developing local connectedness, global expansion, and social effectiveness help individuals to develop their identity over time (Wenger, 2000). However, as communities include members with various levels of experience, expertise, age, personality, and authority, power differences limit individual members’ participation (Fox, 2000; Roberts, 2006). Trust and predispositions influence how members negotiate with each other and participate in the learning process (Roberts, 2006). In addition, individuals participate in multiple communities, with distinct practices and identity structures; the differences between the expectations that define these communities can create tensions and conflicts (Handley, Sturdy, Fincham, & Clark, 2006). They can also determine whether there is peripheral participation (i.e., the legitimate process of newcomers becoming full members) or full participation (Fuller, Hodgkinson, Hodgkinson, & Unwin, 2005; O’Donnell, & Tobbell, 2007).

Communities of practice assist students to develop their abilities in self-directed learning in a collaborative environment, connect theory and practice, and bridge the gap between formal management education and continued professional development (Monaghan 2011). However, it also requires clear goals, adequate preparation, and use of appropriate methods (Beaudoin, 2012). Similarly, within educational institutions, context, policy, and changes in budgets could influence the design of communities of practice and ultimately the learning outcomes (Howlett, Arthur, & Ferreira, 2016). Hence, when developing communities of practice within universities, institutional context, student characteristics, and learning objectives need to be considered.

Flipped class approach

We used the concept of flipped classroom to create a learning community when teaching strategic human resource management to postgraduate students. Flipped class approach is defined as “a specific type of blended learning design that uses technology to move lectures outside the classroom and uses learning activities to move practice with concepts inside the classroom” (Strayer, 2012, p. 171). It includes providing instructional materials prior to students attending classes and using face-to-face interactions within the class to engage in more active and enquiry-based activities (Comber & den Bos 2018). According to Burke and Fedorek (2017) flipped classrooms generally utilise class time for theory application and knowledge building, while some course content may be delivered through the use of online lectures. Hence, flipping the class allows the class time to be used for more active learning opportunities. (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015). The success of the flipped classes depends on opportunities provided for engagement and peer learning, the degree of staff moderation, and the availability of the technology (Comber & den Bos 2018). In addition, success of flipped classes depend on staff attitude and students’ willingness to undertake and work outside the classroom (Comber & den Bos 2018).

Among students there are “flip endorsers” - those who embrace flipped classroom environment, and “flip resisters” - those who are neutral and who do not endorse flipped classrooms (McNally et al., 2017). Flipped classrooms provide opportunities for students to gain knowledge of subject content and prepare prior to the class, and engage in active learning during the class (Abeysekera & Dawson, 2015; McNally et al., 2017; Strayer, 2012). In addition, flipped classrooms have increased student autonomy and enable students to control their pace of learning (Boevé et al., 2017). Students are also able to revisit the lecture materials (particularly videos) and discuss the ideas with other classmates (Roach 2014).

However, there are potential pitfalls and challenges of using the approach. For example, Comber and den Bos (2018) found that it discourages students from attending classes, while McNally et al., (2017) did not find any differences in final grades between the flip endorsers and resisters. Flipped classroom approach can also result in students perceiving the course to be disorganised due to lack of understanding of the flipped approach (McNally et al., 2017), or student dislike of collaborative tasks (Stover and Holland, 2018). The positive outcomes of student collaboration can only be realised over time and require a greater degree of in-class and social activities (Gomez-Lanier 2018). In addition, students may also struggle to cope with the changes in the teaching and learning environment as there are preparatory

tasks involved (Boevé et al., 2017). Such evidence suggests that academics need to design flipped classes carefully for effective teaching and learning.

THE COURSE: SUBJECT DESIGN AND DELIVERY, ASSESSMENTS, AND STUDENT DETAILS

We taught strategic human resource management at postgraduate level in the Faculty of Business at an Australian university.³ The subject is typically offered once or twice a year. This subject is a core subject for students undertaking Masters in Human Resource Management and optional for others. All the enrolled postgraduate students were generally contacted via student email system two weeks prior to the semester start by the subject coordinator. The students were informed of the key journal articles and book chapters that must be read and were provided with the course/subject outline and online access to the readings. Students were encouraged to reflect on the pre classroom/semester preparation and to assess whether they have the capacity to allocate relevant time for subject preparation prior to the semester commencement. Some students came to meet the subject coordinators before the semester to discuss the nature of the course and collected hardcopies of the required readings. Hence, it was assumed that students, at least most of them, were aware of the curriculum and partially-flipped nature of the course.

The curriculum consists of both strategic concepts and human resource management practices and was delivered in an intensive mode over six full days (usually on weekends) (Table 1):

Day	Class structure	
	Lectures	Tutorials
One	Context of strategic human resource management, basic human resource management concepts, resource-based view of strategy, the human resource balanced scorecard (4 hours).	Academic writing and referencing workshop, practice case-study analysis (not marked) (2 hours)
Two and three	Strategic view on employee-performance management and organisational performance, strategic staffing, international strategic human resource management (2 hours in the morning and 2 hours in the afternoon)	Group work – four tasks (assessment 1) (1 hour in the morning and 1 hour in the afternoon)
Four	Employment relations and employee voice (4 hours in the morning)	Group presentations (assessment 2)
Five and six	Final assessment parts 1 and 2	

As indicated in Table 1, we used lectures to discuss theoretical concepts. We used multiple methods of teaching such as presentations, lecture notes and real life business scenarios occurring worldwide and in Australia, generated class discussions about cross cultural strategic human resource management practices and its application, and used thought provoking videos in subject delivery. The subject references include both book chapters outlining the theory and journal articles that highlight empirical applications.

In tutorials, we used flipped teaching and learning where students were required to form groups of four or five members.

Students were asked to form their own groups, after an activity similar to speed dating (see group formation section for more details). Students were not allowed to change groups and they remained in the same group throughout the session. Students were required to read subject material, and come prepared for the class, and evaluate one another's contribution to the group. The group work included answering two questions related to a case company; their responses were based on their pre-class readings and application of concepts to the case company. Students were expected to prepare individually before class time, discuss their individual perspectives during tutorials, agree on a group answer, and write the answer during the specified tutorial time. In addition to written work, on day four we also held the student presentations which formed their second assessment. Presentations were about their reflections on how they used strategic human resource management principles to manage their group performance and team. For both written tasks and student presentations, members were required to provide peer evaluations about one another's contributions.

Students were assessed on a scaffolded set of group and individual work assessments. Assessment 1 (written answers resulting from group work) is about the application of the theory to a case company. In assessment 2 (presentation), students reflect on their own groups' activities and performance using strategic human resource management principles. Both assessments are group-based. However, depending on peer evaluations, supporting documents, and observations of the teaching team, the individual marks were adjusted to reflect individual student contributions to the team. The final assessment (assessment 3) consisted of two individual written tasks (essay part 1 and essay part 2) to be completed in an exam environment. The students were given feedback on essay part 1 prior to undertaking the final assessment (essay part 2).

Due to the intensive nature of the subject delivery mode, we taught on alternating days. In terms of strategic human resource management teaching, one of us (the second author) had taught the subject for five years, while the first author had taught the subject for only one to two years. Both of us had worked in industry (private and not-for-profit sectors) and our professional work experience provided the basis for the class discussion. Hence, our own 'identities' shaped how we approached and delivered the teaching material and how we linked strategic human resource management theoretical concepts to real life practical examples.

The student cohorts consisted mainly of international students (Table 2 gives the demographic data for the last three

		Cohort 1 (2015)	Cohort 2 (2016)	Cohort 3 (2017)
Number of students		40	19	29
Male: female ratio	Men	20	10	11
	Women	20	9	18
Domestic: international student ratio	Domestic	4	5	7
	International	36 (China: 23, India: 0, other: 13)	14 (China: 5, India: 2, other: 7)	22 (China: 14, India: 4, other: 4)
Age range	Older than 30	10	7	8
	Younger than 30	30	12	21
Number of students with professional work experience after undergraduate studies		6	5	7

cohorts).

Most of the class students were from China, India, Thailand, Malaysia, and other Asian regions. Less than 10% of the international students came from North America, Europe, and Africa. Over 70% of the students were born after 1990, and the average age was around 25 years. Less than 10% of the cohort had professional work experience. Hence, the students' life and work experience were limited.

METHODS: THE REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

This paper, an account of our reflections and observations in and outside the classroom, is autoethnographic in nature. We perceive that it is our professional responsibility to engage in critical self-reflection of our own teaching in strategic human resource management, which would enable us to advance our understanding and enable our professional development (Kuchinke, 2015). Although both of us had separate autoethnographic accounts, the method resembles duoethnography — “a collaborative research methodology in which two or more researchers of difference juxtapose their life histories to provide multiple understandings of the world” (Norris, Sawyer, & Lund, 2012, p. 9). Duoethnography, although a form of autoethnography, differs from it in that it provides multiple collective perspectives on phenomena and creates “dialogic transactions (between others and within themselves) in the pursuit of critical tensions, insights, and perspectives” (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012, p. 630). Hence, duoethnographers, through dialogue with their co-inquirer/s, create new constructions of meaning within a social context (Sawyer & Liggett, 2012).

These actions of the authors were consistent with the duoethnographic principles. For example, during the subject delivery (i.e., before, during, and after classes), we individually kept notes and discussed them with each other. We had a number of conversations face-to-face, via email, and by telephone about the subject design, delivery, student concerns, group performance, and assessments. As we taught on alternating days, it was necessary to discuss things to understand the progression of groups and students. These conversations created insights and different perspectives, and provided the basis for this paper; this practice of creating meaning with others aligns with the concept of communities of practice as well. We also used peer evaluations and student group presentations (assessment 2), subject and teacher evaluations conducted by the university, in addition to personal observations, as primary data. Although it is common in duoethnography to report findings as a conversation, what is reported here is a synthesis of our conversations.

Reflection — Teaching and learning in practice

Group formation

Most of our students did not know each other prior to the first class; hence, during the first day we facilitated several opportunities for students to get to know each other before forming groups. We created a quick speed dating session where students were asked to speak to 10 different students and each interaction was limited to a 3 minutes. During the speed dating activity, we particularly asked students to ask questions around expectations, goals for performance, work ethic, and their strengths. However, preconceptions and prior experience played a major role in this group formation where students who had completed similar subjects and students from the same country/continent usually formed groups together. Domestic and international students

rarely formed groups together. However, there were exceptions. When international students were from an English-speaking country, such as exchange students⁴ from Europe, domestic students formed groups with them. This was mainly due to their similar backgrounds and level of English knowledge, and the exchange students' tendency toward extraversion. Whenever domestic students perceived that another student's English-language competence was not adequate to complete written assessments and that this could affect their grades and workload, they formed groups with others who could speak English. This group formation reflects the similarity-attraction paradigm observed in recruitment where employers hire people with similar characteristics (Ajzen, 1974). The similarity effect explains that when individuals share similarities, they will attribute feelings of attraction and favour each other. Meta-analyses examining the similarity effect have found that people are more likely to associate feelings of “liking” with people who resemble themselves in some way (Singh & Teoh, 1999).

Self-management of the groups

Given the assessment objectives and short turnaround time from one group assessment to another (intensive subject delivery mode), groups allocated tasks to its members (for example, who is responsible for summarising which readings or finding additional information), and needed to manage group meetings and group performance standards/evaluation (for example, whether they were meeting after the class, what performance they were targeting, and how to improve based on the feedback for previous group assessment). Specifically, when student groups received feedback (student groups received feedback for their first assessment during the lunch break before their evening assessment, and they received feedback for the evening assessment the following day), they readjusted their work strategy to improve performance. The quick feedback turnaround process helped student groups to improve their performance:

Giving feedback in a short time that helps (sic) to get better results in the next assessment.

(A comment from a students' teacher evaluations)

Some groups accessed the university library to find additional materials, met after class, used Facebook groups to work on the assessment, or met face-to-face during the week (before days 3 and 4). These strategies closely aligned with the self-managed work teams and multi-skilling required in the workplace. In addition, group tasks and assessment processes reflected the performance management cycle in strategic human resource management (with goals, actions, evaluation, feedback, and modification of strategic goals), although most students only realised this before and during their student presentations during day four.

Development of leadership in groups

Although we did not specify having a group leader, individual students' leadership qualities emerged during their group work. Students with planning and organising abilities took on the responsibility of managing group tasks, facilitating the discussion during the tutorial time, and obtaining verbal as well as written feedback. This was predominant among students with work experience; hence, it reflects the progression from novice to expert.

In international student groups, where all members were usually from the same country (especially from China), the extraverts and those who could communicate best in English emerged

as leaders. These extraverts or the ones with better English language skills sometimes interpreted concepts and information, and translated them back to the group. Thus, these members emerged as the experts within their own groups. Members mostly communicated (verbally and over social media using platforms that were distinct to their country of origin) in their first language within the group. This was perceived as both having positive and negative implications. Using their native language and their own social media platforms (Such as WeChat) allowed students to feel more comfortable and help their team members to understand theoretical concepts. However, in many instances the student leader misinterpreted material; consequently, the whole group shared similar misinterpretations. At the same time, if and when these student groups were communicating in English, we could overhear what they were discussing, and could correct misinterpretations. Hence, all the students were strongly encouraged to communicate in English, as this approach would improve their confidence in talking and interacting in a second language.

Managing performance

Due to the intensive nature and the in-class scaffolded assessment structure, there was 100% attendance throughout the period. Students were committed to engage in class activities during the four days. If the students were unable to attend all the classes, they consciously made the decision to withdraw from the subject on day one. This was seen as a significant difference from other postgraduate classes where attendance is generally very poor, especially during the latter part of the semester.

Intensive classes put personal pressure on students to be more engaged and be responsible not only to themselves but to their group members. If they did not attend classes or did not conduct their preparatory work, that impacted the performance of the other team members. When there were incompatibilities in expectations and individual contributions to group work, performance-management issues were reported in peer evaluations and students needed to manage conflicts that occurred in their groups (Table 3).

Table 3 illustrates that goal incompatibility, work ethic, motivation, quality, and standards affected the group. Often, some members lacked understanding about performance standards required from one another. Although group members supported one another's learning at the initial stage, some later realised that others were "free riding" and did not contribute to the group work. In addition, lack of technical and business English seems to have hindered some students' pace of learning. Although the group had a mix of both domestic and international students, problems were mainly related to work ethic, and in one case to English comprehension. Hence, although some group members learned key lessons, in terms of understanding the subject content, answering questions, and managing work, high achievers felt disappointed at times when the other members dragged their group performance down.

Forming a group identity

There was evidence of student groups having their own artefacts. For example, groups had unique names, formed their own Facebook groups, and had specific notes and summaries when they came to the class. They also used these forums to go beyond the academic work - for example, by sharing food unique to their cultures with other members. These activities seem to have helped the groups to build their own identity and improve

connectivity. One group member who loved his team and whose hobby was composing music even wrote a song about his group members.

Managing group interactions online and within the classroom

Although our expectation was that group members would come prepared for assessments individually and then discuss their work during the allocated tutorial time, students exceeded our expectations. Group members used social media such as Facebook, Whatsapp, and WeChat and worked virtually before the class. Their use of information technology also went beyond preparation. For example, although one group member missed the class, he still contributed to the assessment, albeit in a limited way:

*HH was not present for the first assessment this morning due to sleeping in, which resulted in our group having less "brain power". However through the use of Whatsapp he was able to write down some key ideas which did help in our response. In saying this it was a stressful experience and did affect our group response.
(A student from cohort 2).*

Hence, community boundaries were fluid where students were able to interact outside the classroom. However, this had some negative implications. For example, the above quote highlights that multi-tasking by communicating with online members while writing the answer can be a distraction. In one group, a student did his preparations at night, and sent continuous messages/texts to the other group members throughout the night and expected his members to respond to his comments while he worked, without concerning himself with his team members' time boundaries. This escalated to a level of abuse where the teaching team needed to get involved and separate this student from the group to avoid any further negative consequence to the other group members' wellbeing.

Communications across groups

Students were encouraged to communicate with other groups and learn from each other. However, due to each group having a different case company, it was not possible to compare work. Besides, each group had its own unique strategy for answering questions. However, we observed that, some group members approached members from other groups and become peripheral learners who engaged across various groups to learn best practices from one another.

Bridging boundaries across groups

Due to limited communication across groups, instructors facilitated discussions between groups. For example, multiple techniques were used to explain theoretical concepts to groups during lectures:

A good mix of pictures and videos as well as words, including time for discussions/examples.

*Clarify the theory and gave more examples.
(Comments from students' teacher evaluations).*

During the lectures, all groups participated in the discussion. Instructors also encouraged and motivated every student to share individual thoughts and experiences:

*Good interactions with students. Motivates everyone to participate
(Comments from students' teacher evaluations)*

Table 3. Peer evaluation of a selected group

Background: The group had five students (one domestic, one exchange, and three international students) with three females (AA, BB, and CC). The two males were both international students who came from the same country (DD and EE). AA and BB were high achievers and were motivated to perform well in the subject.		
Evaluation number	High achievers (AA and BB)	Others (CC, DD and EE)
1	<p>I had a bit of an issue with the punctuality and the preparation of the two guys [DD and EE] and felt like even [the] other team member [CC] contributed only a little to the assessment (student AA).</p> <p>Good team, first admittedly a rocky start but setting goals and gaining commitment is key to success. DD admitted struggling with understanding, working with him to get through case analysis but not outrightly doing work for him (student BB).</p>	<p>The entire group worked really well and did equal parts and moreover I was lacking behind and they helped me a lot to catch up. So I am confident in this group. They worked way more than me and thanks to BB for helping me to be clear about the task (student DD).</p> <p>I am fully happy with the group contribution as we worked together with full support. I learned a lot by working with people from different backgrounds (student EE).</p>
2	<p>Most of the group work is done by BB and myself. DD seems to be struggling a lot with understanding the articles and he relies heavily on us doing the work. EE missed internal deadlines which we set to discuss our contributions before actual assessment. He has shown poor preparation and did not show up for group meetings. In total punctuality is a big issue for all three of them. Most group meetings are led by BB and myself on our own. We tried to give them specific tasks so that they can contribute to our work as a group but they did not seem motivated. It is a real struggle for me to work as a group that way because I feel like BB and I have double the amount of work to manage now (student AA).</p> <p>Very disappointed in EE's contribution this time. For this case analysis both DD and EE did not provide materials. From an industry point, this is unacceptable. Working on trying to improve EE's performance. Concerned that he does not care. DD has some issues understanding the context. Reading and comprehension issues, and recommended him to see learning and development support. CC has sound comprehension of context. She really needs to read the journals and wider text to improve. Do not believe English is the issue, just time management and motivation (student BB).</p>	No comments
3	<p>They seemed a bit more prepared but the overall work is still done by BB and me. CC tries to help as much as she can but understanding of the articles is still an issue (student AA).</p> <p>This case analysis saw [that] the team is motivated to improve a bit. Again we still have understanding issues but they are wanting to be involved. The strength of the team is still only on two people but we hope next study we can have a little more contribution (student BB).</p>	<p>I am glad to be in this group because in addition to the course, I am learning a lot from them too and they are very helpful as I am bit behind in how to actually write the answers and they help me a lot and this would help me to perform better in my individual assignment (student DD).</p> <p>Everybody is working hard and playing their role according to expectation. Good learning and development is going on. Working in a team whose ultimate goal is success by any means (student EE).</p>
4	<p>The main work and discussions was still done by BB and me but the others contributed their parts after asking them to. Overall there was an improvement! Clear instructions are still needed to get them do something (student AA).</p> <p>The team has marginally improved. Again concerns around comprehension of assessments and concepts. A lot of guidance is still provided by AA and [me]. Was a very frustrating experience initially, managing their learning and motivation; however, we have managed to get over this hurdle and hope the three team members have learned some things from AA and me (student BB).</p>	<p>During four cases, I have same comments about my team members. AA and BB are two awesome members to contribute to group work. I learnt a lot from them. The other two guys [DD and EE] are quite lazy and just have a little bit concentration in group work (student CC).</p>

These activities ensured that students share processes, routines, and procedures across the groups and bridge the boundary between groups.

Developing competencies in diversity management

Students' individual identities, as reflected in their demographic diversity and work experience, influenced their level of participation and provided a foundation for class discussions and their group work. Groups compared their work experience, and differences across cultures facilitating cross-cultural learning.

Nevertheless, lack of work experience and lack of peers and family members with professional backgrounds limited some students from contributing effectively to the discussion. On one

hand, students without work experience learnt from their peers about the work culture, strategic human resource management practices, and professional challenges. On the other hand, this made group discussions more a one-way rather than a two-way process, as only students with work experience could comprehend and critically analyse implications of the theory and concepts to real life work organisations.

Having a heterogeneous class meant that discussions had to be facilitated effectively. For example, one of the classes contained one student in his 50s, while most of the other students were in their early 20s. A younger student questioned the value of training older workers given that their contribution for the workforce is often assumed to be short-term; this caused offense to the older student. However, we interpreted that the younger student's

arguments and discriminatory views were due to lack of exposure and work experience and ignorance of workplace policies. It was also possible that in many countries, such discriminatory views may still be the norm and that the students did not comprehend that within the Australian context, their views would be considered discriminatory.

DISCUSSION

This paper, by critically evaluating authors' reflections, examined how academics can design and deliver strategic human resource management subject material effectively at the postgraduate level and contribute to learning when students: a) do not have any (or have only minimal) professional work experience relevant to business, and b) and originate from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Our reflections highlight that partially flipping the classroom activities, in conjunction with scaffolded assessment structure and a purposely designed intensive delivery mode provides opportunities to teach strategic human resource management, especially to students with limited work experience. These activities also

concepts. Consequently, as Fuller et al. (2005) note, both novices and experts learnt from the communities of practice. The process also assisted the students with professional work experience, who had been out of the formal education environment for some time, to move from the periphery of communities to the centre (O'Donnell, & Tobbell, 2007). However, our experience reveals that most students only realised that they were applying strategic human resource management concepts when they were required to reflect on their own group performance for assessment 2. This suggests that students should be given explicit opportunities to interact, explore, discuss, and, more importantly, reflect on practical and theoretical implications to help them 'connect the dots' between their group actions and strategic human resource management concepts.

At the same time, sense of community and effective learning practices were facilitated by the intensive subject delivery. Intensive classes reflect the project-driven environment in a professional workplace, in that students had to achieve both individual and group goals during a short time. However, within the commu-

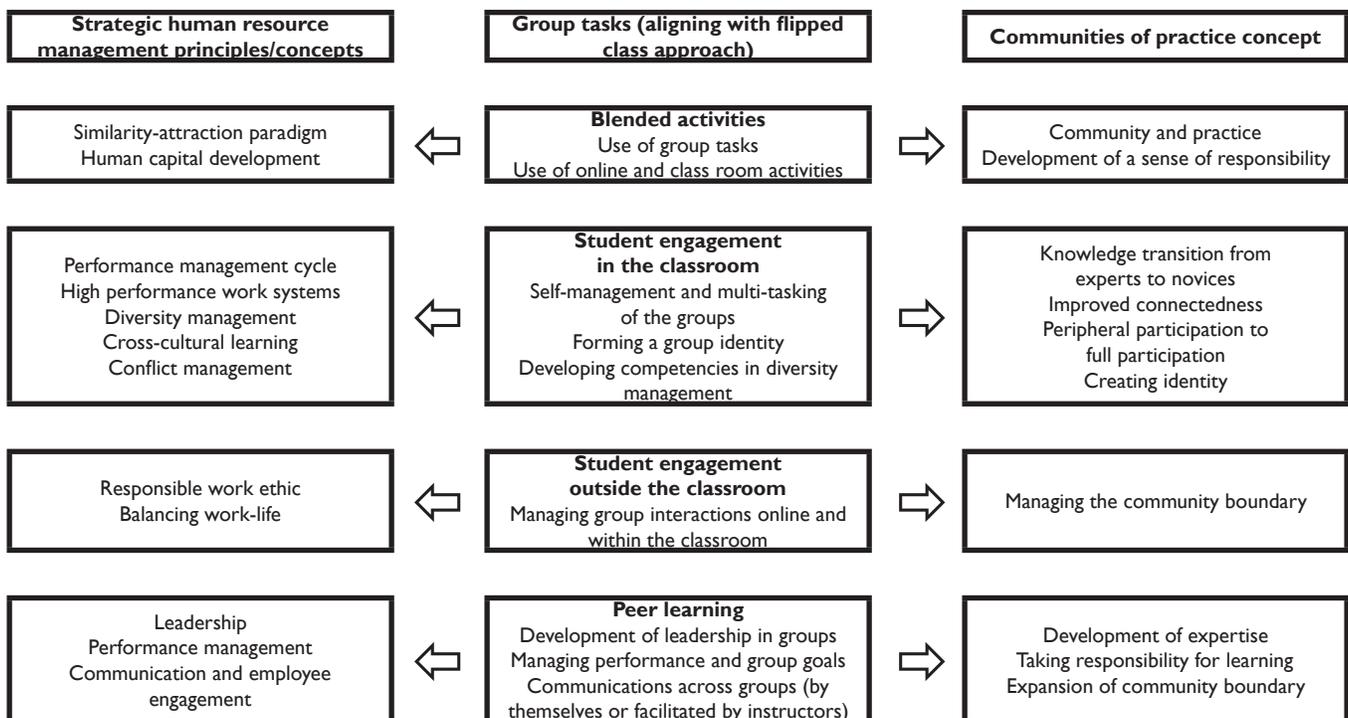


Figure 1: Flipped class strategies that align with strategic human resource management and communities of practice concepts

provide the foundation for communities of practice (See Figure 1). As Figure 1 illustrates, partially flipped class activities assisted students to apply strategic human resource management concepts and function as a learning community and develop their self-directed learning abilities (Monaghan, 2011). Interactions, both face-to-face and online, with each other and with instructors formed the foundation for the students to share their experiences. As highlighted by Smith et al., (2017), this assisted students without any previous work experience to gather knowledge and practical skills in applying strategic human resource management concepts. Students with previous work experience used groups and activities to develop their advisory and leadership skills. Hence, professionally experienced students managed to gather knowledge beyond basic strategic human resource management

concepts, as identified by Fox (2000) and Roberts (2006), previous work experience determined students' degree of participation. Additionally, students' identities, shaped by culture and age, determined how and in what ways they participate in their learning tasks. Although student diversity is an opportunity for learning, differences in work ethic, motivation, and work standards can lead to problems. Hence, setting clear goals and cross-cultural understanding help groups to achieve learning objectives.

We also found that partially flipping the class (with both lectures and self-directed learning) as we did, in combination with scaffolded assessments, suit multi-cultural students groups. Specifically in multi-cultural class rooms, where some students are used to different teaching and learning, we were able to discuss subject materials in detail, as students had gone through the content and

had the opportunity to discuss practical applications and examples. This strategy also satisfies both flip endorsers and flip resisters. According to McNally et al. (2017) flip endorsers have a more positive attitude towards pre-class and in-class activities, unlike flip resisters, and they engage more with the content. They also have higher expectations in terms of participation in group activities, use of innovative tools in the class and interactions with other students (McNally et al. 2017). The same authors also found that flip endorsers are usually/generally older students. Hence, within the postgraduate space, with both older and younger students, partially flipping the class could be the viable option to achieve learning outcomes.

Our findings provide theoretical and practical implications for both communities of practice and flipped classroom approach. First, our reflection demonstrates that by designing group activities and scaffolded assignments, teaching and learning practices can contribute to practical learning of strategic human resource management theories and contribute to develop a sense of community within the postgraduate teaching and learning space. These also help in expanding community boundaries and transforming participation of the students from periphery to full participation. Second, we contribute to the expertise development of students by demonstrating that group work that closely resembles strategic human resource management practices can help to develop both experts and novices within a learning community. Students who have professional work experiences prepare inexperienced students for professional work and experienced students benefit by developing their advisory or leadership skills; hence, novices and experts both gain from learning communities. Third, we highlight that multi-cultural student cohorts benefit from having learning communities as it allows them to manage learning according to their own pace, link with students with similar backgrounds, and expand their knowledge by linking with students from different backgrounds. By doing so, domestic students learn strategic human resource management practices in different cultures and the way certain strategic human resource management practices are interpreted differently in other countries. This would prepare international students for work environments in multi-cultural countries like Australia, and prepare domestic students for multi-national companies and international markets.

However, we also have several challenges to address. First, although having experienced students in a group compelled other students to raise their participation and contribution, some students with professional work experience felt that they were doing all the work, as they were able to apply theory to case study scenarios using their practical knowledge. These feelings could act as a barrier to their willingness to explain things to other group members, contrary to the learning objectives associated with a community. Second, international students preferred to be in groups with others from a similar cultural background, mainly due to their ability to communicate using a common language. Hence, although multi-cultural classrooms reflect global and Australian multi-cultural work environments and provide opportunities for learning, interactions and sharing across groups were limited. Therefore, instructors need to focus more on classroom discussions in a way that overlaps different communities (student groups), by inviting individual students to share their experiences and explain how strategic human resource management is practised in their countries. Finally, we conclude

that facilitating communities of practice using a partially flipped class approach, although a challenge, could be an answer or an opportunity to teach local and global strategic human resource management concepts. However, we did not evaluate students' expectations using pre/post methods or examine their performance (in terms of grades) or engagement in the class by comparing with other types of subject deliveries. Hence, future studies can use the process we outlined, and combine it with experimental or quasi-experimental methods, to comprehensively answer whether creating learning communities through flipped classes help to achieve better teaching and learning outcomes among diverse and multicultural postgraduate student cohorts.

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Notes

1. Domestic students are citizens or permanent residents in Australia or New Zealand. International students are citizens of any country except Australia or New Zealand learning in Australian educational institutes.
2. This could include the school sector, vocational education and training sector, postgraduate research sector and other visas granted in sub-categories 570-576.
3. The first author no longer works in the university where data was collected.
4. International students who come to Australia for one or two sessions under student exchange programs.

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