

**Bridging Vietnam and America: Cooperation between the
National Economics University and Boise State University**

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Abstract

National Economics University (NEU) in Hanoi, Vietnam, and Boise State University in Boise, Idaho (USA), have been partners since 1994, very likely the longest running business education relationship between any university in Vietnam and any university in the US. It began when Boise State was invited to offer its MBA program in Vietnam, as part of a Swedish funded project, to develop university teachers able to lead Vietnam into a market oriented economy. The relationship has since flourished for nine years to include activities such as joint teaching, training, research and cooperation in creating and building the NEU Business School. The development and capacity building stemmed from the financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID).

The paper examines three critical aspects of the relationship: (1) the beginning of the National Economics University-Boise State University relationship – how a state university in Idaho became involved in a \$2 million Swedish funded project to deliver a “train-the-trainer” MBA to 30 lecturers at the NEU, which ultimately became a nine year \$8.5 million project to create a business school and build capacity at the National Economics University; (2) the process that the universities developed for joint project management, which helped build the relationship and provided learning for both institutions; and (3) the variety of ways the universities built a cooperative relationship, through exchanges and internships, joint teaching and research, training programs offered in the US and Vietnam, university and college administrative support and advice, and professional staff mentoring and support. Finally, the paper comments on “Lessons Learned” from the relationship, from organizational and individual perspectives.

Key words: International business education, transition economy business education

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Introduction

The National Economics University (NEU) in Hanoi, Vietnam, and Boise State University in Boise, Idaho (USA), have been partners since 1994, very likely the longest running relationship between any university in Vietnam and any university in the US. It began when Boise State University was invited to offer its AACSB accredited MBA program in Vietnam, as part of a Swedish funded project, to develop university teachers able to train Vietnam's future managers who would lead the country into a market oriented economy. The relationship flourished for nine years and has included joint teaching and research, training, and cooperation in creating and building the NEU Business School. The project's first phase was described elsewhere (Napier, Vu, Ngo, Nguyen, and Vu, 1997) so this paper summarizes the near decade cooperation between the two universities.

The present paper has three sections, which examine critical aspects of the relationship: (1) the history of the National Economics University-Boise State University relationship; (2) the processes that individuals and the universities developed for joint project management; and (3) the variety of ways the universities built a cooperative relationship, through exchanges and internships,

joint teaching and research, training programs offered in the US and Vietnam, university and college administrative support and advice, and professional staff mentoring and support. The paper closes with comments on "Lessons Learned," from organizational and individual perspectives.

Vietnam's recent history

Prior to the relationship between the universities, Vietnam had taken dramatic steps to move toward a market oriented economy. The change started formally in 1986, with the introduction of *doi moi*, or market renovation. Prior to and just after this change, Vietnam had traded with and depended heavily upon the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for raw materials and goods, as well as job and educational opportunities for its people. With the fall of the former Soviet Union in 1989, the exchange of goods, materials, and people dwindled, forcing Vietnam to look to other markets and to learn to conduct business elsewhere in the world.

The movement toward a market-oriented economy progressed slowly until the early 1990s. As in other former socialist countries, Vietnamese government and communist party officials began to realize the need for educational reform to prepare managers for a global economy (Van Kopp, 1992).

The NEU created a Centre for Management Training in 1990 to provide training for managers of state owned firms in areas of business, accounting, finance, and marketing. Subsequently, the government of Vietnam designated the NEU to be the initial site to begin developing managers trained in modern

management and business approaches. As a result, the NEU hosted a \$2 million project, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), to train 30 lecturers at the Centre for Management Training, managed by Hong Kong University's Poon Kam Kai Institute (PKKI). The objective was to train these lecturers to an international standard, so they would be capable of developing their own MBA program for Vietnamese managers. The degree granting institution was a Canadian university, in part because the US embargo prohibited American universities from operating in Vietnam.

The Sida MBA Project started in 1993, with intensive English language training for the lecturers, many of whom spoke other languages (e.g., Russian, Bulgarian, German) but had never studied English. Following the language training, the MBA began with functional courses in fall 1993. In spring 1994, the program called for a workshop on training. Two Boise State University professors participated in the workshop for the 30 NEU lecturers, which was the seed for the NEU - Boise State University relationship.

History of the relationship between

Boise State University and National Economics University

In fall 1993, an opportunistic "fax introduction" between the onsite project co-ordinator of the Sida MBA project and one of Boise State University's College of Business and Economics professors led to a 12 week, train-the-trainer workshop for the Vietnamese lecturers – on adult learning, training program

design, presentation style, and training evaluation. Two of the four professors who ran the workshop were from Boise State University, got along well with the project co-ordinator, and offered to help if they could after the workshop.

When the relationship between Hong Kong University and the Canadian degree granting institution encountered difficulties, the project coordinator and manager approached Boise State University in July 1994 about taking over the MBA granting responsibilities. By mid-August, the deal was done: Boise State University's MBA degree would be offered at the NEU in Vietnam.

Boise State's quick reaction time is a clue to why the Boise State University-NEU relationship worked well. Boise State's tendency toward academic entrepreneurship, which includes a willingness to take risks that are likely to pay off and that support the institutional mission (Glassman, Neupert, Moore, Rossy, Napier, Harvey, and Jones, forthcoming), and Idaho's small size, making it relatively easy to reach influential players, worked in its favor in this venture. In fact, within two weeks of the offer, the Dean of the College of Business and Economics (COBE) and the university Provost contacted the key players in the state (i.e., about 30 key business leaders, the US Senators and representatives, the governor and key officials, the State Board of Education members, and representatives of the MIA and POW groups) to gauge their reactions to the university taking on such a project. The positive reaction led administrators to accept the offer.

The relationship then began to build in earnest. During the 1994-95 academic year, nine COBE faculty members taught in Vietnam and five NEU senior administrators visited Boise, where they met with the governor, the Chamber of Commerce, the Department of Commerce as well as Boise State administrators and staff. During summer 1995, twenty-six Vietnamese MBA participants spent six weeks in Boise, taking a class and serving in month-long full time internships at firms such as Boise Cascade, Hewlett-Packard, Ore-Ida Foods, the YMCA and others, from banks to construction firms, advertising to consulting companies, as well as several university departments (e.g., Human Resource Management, Executive Development, Physical plant and facilities). They charmed the City of Boise, leading to a closing ceremony at which each internship sponsor spoke, many admitting that the visit of Vietnamese interns, especially those from the former enemy region of the north, was a watershed experience for them.

Following a successful first phase, Sida decided to continue the project, ultimately funding two more phases for a total of \$7.0 million. Boise State was asked to continue as the MBA deliverer and principal contractor for the final phase of the project.

The relationship strengthened during two more MBA cohorts, bringing the total to 84 graduates by 1999. When Swedish funding ended in 2000, the USAID stepped in to fund a final two years of building capacity and sustainability within the NEU Business School and university.

Over the project's nine years, Boise State sent four professors to teach for at least one semester in Hanoi; nearly twenty others taught in shorter courses, either in Hanoi or in Boise, benefiting Boise State by giving professors an opportunity to learn about another country and culture. Over the years, the cooperation comprised many other activities that strengthened the relationship:

- Helping to place NEU faculty members in internships in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Thailand, the Philippines, and the United States. The faculty members were visiting lecturers and researchers, participated in administrative positions, and conducted specific projects for companies.
- Supporting several faculty members pursue doctoral studies in the UK, Australia, Singapore and the US; the Sida and USAID projects funded six faculty members in doctoral degrees outside Vietnam and another four within Vietnam.
- Facilitating visits by internationally known scholars to NEU to provide lectures, workshops, and individual mentoring to faculty members.
- Financing seven research projects between faculty members at NEU and in universities in the US, the Philippines and Thailand.
- Creating and publishing a collection of teaching cases and notes for MBA programs in Vietnam and North America.
- Supporting a distance learning masters of research program, delivered by the Graduate School of Management at Macquarie University, Sydney Australia,

which allowed fourteen faculty members to develop research skills and prepare for further doctoral study.

- Supporting the design and development of other academic programs at NEU (e.g., its Vietnamese language MBA and English language MBA programs (the first of their kind in Vietnam) as well as two foreign programs – the Henley MBA and Swinburne Masters in International Accountancy) -- and numerous executive education programs.

Interestingly, while not the original intent, the project nevertheless ended up helping each organization support development of critical competencies among faculty and administrators in each organization (Silins, 2001). Skills that seemed to emerge in both NEU and Boise State included improved abilities to communicate in a variety of ways, use technology, solve problems, work in teams, and develop cultural understanding. For example, culture demands that Vietnamese meet face-to-face and build relationships before they are comfortable doing business with strangers. Learning to use email, especially with people they do not know, has become a needed skill they enter research and other conversations but continues to be difficult for them. Likewise, while the Vietnamese are group-oriented, collective people, they rarely work in teams as most North Americans think of them (i.e., a group of people who may not know one another well who work toward a common defined objective). Thus it was critical for both groups to realize that the term "team" had different

meanings and expectations so they could learn to work together. (Vu and Napier, 2000).

The design and implementation of Boise State University MBA in Vietnam program: Cornerstone of Cooperation

Boise State University delivered its Vietnam MBA three times, graduating 84 participants by 1999. Four issues were critical in the design and implementation of the MBA: (1) program structure and implementation; (2) problems and solutions that emerged during the program; (3) critical factors that helped it succeed; and (4) what each university gained from the MBA experience.

Program structure and implementation

The Vietnam MBA program structure and implementation comprised four dimensions, discussed briefly: (1) students; (2) teachers and teaching method; (3) program schedule and format; and (4) program management.

Students. The primary audience for the Vietnam MBA was lecturers at the National Economics University. In all cohorts, however, there were scholarships for four to seven outside managers. In addition, in the second cohort, four lecturers were from universities other than the National Economics University. The mix was about 50-50% men - women, given the Swedish sponsor's commitment to furthering gender equality. Of the first group, which began in 1993, most had Russian as their "second language" (i.e., having studied in

school or done masters work in Russia), a few spoke German, Czech or Romanian, and all had studied some English. To supplement this, they completed a six months intensive English course before beginning the MBA. The third cohort's English competency was dramatically higher, since all had some exposure or study in English. Average group ages varied as well – the first cohort tended to be older, averaging about 30-35; the second group was slightly younger (27-30 years) and the last cohort was quite young, with average age about 26.

Finally, general sophistication and exposure to "the west" differed greatly over the five years of the program. The first group had met few Americans before 1994, when the first Boise State University professor arrived. Their foreign professors had been Australians, Scots, Canadians, and New Zealanders. Most had never traveled outside of Vietnam, or only to Eastern Europe and Russia. The third group had several members (typically the managers) who had traveled in Asia, America, and Europe. Thus, in four years the nature and make up of MBA participants changed remarkably.

Teachers and teaching method. Initially, foreign professors did all of the teaching (1993-1995) and because this was a "train-the-trainer" MBA program, methodology was part of what the participants learned. In 1994, even "technology" like an overhead projector was new for NEU participants. Some visiting professors used lectures, but many used interactive, discussion and case oriented approaches. This was surprising and difficult for some participants

initially; they were used to “talk and chalk” teaching (and learning), and thus were bewildered by classes that seemed to have no “outlined structure.” In fact, one participant said that he used the “ABC method to teach.” When the instructor asked what he meant, he said, “you know, A for advertising, B for brand, C for customer, and so on. This way students (and I) know where I am in the lecture.” Thus, a key learning for participants was the notion of student centered, more discussion oriented teaching methods.

With the second cohort, the teaching format changed: the foreign visiting professor led the class and the Vietnamese (now MBA graduate) lecturer acted as “tutor,” in the British style. He or she sat in the back of the room, followed the class and then answered student questions later, in “tutorial groups.” The next step was when the foreign visiting professor and Vietnamese lecturer worked as “co-teachers,” requiring a significant shift in the relationship (Napier, Ngo, Nguyen, Nguyen, and Vu, 2002). At first, students rebelled, refusing to adjust to a “team teaching format.” Yet, given the program’s goal of training teachers, it continued. By the time the third cohort began, team teaching was generally accepted, both by teachers and students.

Program scheduling. An unusual feature of the Vietnam MBA was the experimenting that occurred regarding scheduling. The program used a wide range of approaches, supported by administration on both sides. The formats ranged from five and six week modules (two classes at a time), to 15 week semesters, to two week intensive courses (all day, one course). Finally, the

third group of participants who spent a full semester in Boise had another schedule format. They completed ten weeks of course work that was divided into two parts: they were in classes the first five weeks, then completed a four-week full time internship with local organizations, before completing their last five weeks of course work. Each format had advantages and disadvantages; the important point was that students, teachers, and administration in Boise and in Hanoi supported the variety. That each side was willing to cooperate with experimenting further strengthened the trust and relationship.

Program management. Finally, the MBA program management shifted over time, from being run by a Boise State University manager (who visited Hanoi regularly but was not based there full time), to a jointly run program (when the Boise State professor was full time in Hanoi) to being managed mostly by a NEU professor, with input where needed from the Boise State person. Since a project goal was building capacity in program management, this process of shifting responsibility allowed that to happen and in the process build more trust between parties.

Key problems and solutions that emerged during the program

Like all development projects, problems arose as Boise State University and NEU cooperated on programs in the project. Three particularly difficult problems emerged as the NEU faculty members became more involved in teaching.

English language skills of NEU lecturers. Although the first group of participants learned English before starting the MBA program, they lacked confidence when they taught in English. The issue was especially sensitive when students in the second and third cohorts had stronger English skills than their NEU teachers. Thanks to the strong relationships among NEU lecturers and their foreign counterparts, several solutions emerged. First, the NEU instructors worked closely with visiting professor counterparts in class preparation, grading and evaluating, writing and reading student assignments, and in leading classes. This helped the NEU lecturers gain discipline-related vocabulary and knowledge, and boosted their confidence when they asked about phrases or ideas before class that might come up in class.

Limited business/organizational experience of NEU lecturers. A second challenge for the NEU teachers was their relatively limited experience with business (especially since most “business” in Vietnam had meant state owned enterprises). Most had graduated from the National Economics University and immediately became instructors there. A few held part-time jobs with state owned enterprises. Only the “outside managers” who participated in the MBA had worked for private or foreign firms. This was another challenge for the NEU instructors, who felt their experiences were more limited than those of their students.

Again, the solution was multifaceted. First, each of the NEU Business School instructors experienced an internship (three to five months) abroad, in

the UK, Australia, or North America. Many went to universities where they taught, worked on training programs, or conducted research with counterparts. They felt their experiences subsequently supported better teaching (e.g., Sandgren, Ellig, Hovde, Krejci, and Rice, 1999).

Others worked in business firms, such as Boise Cascade. All of the faculty members also did research projects for firms in Hanoi, for foreign firms (e.g., Electrolux, ABB, KPMG, British Petroleum, Citibank, American Express) and Vietnamese organizations (e.g., Vietnam Airlines, Ministry of Forestry). These experiences gave the instructors more insight into other organizations' and universities' operations, improved their English, and built a set of networks for future contacts. In addition, the NEU faculty members conducted training courses for foreign and Vietnamese organizations and worked on research and consulting projects with such firms. Each experience gave instructors knowledge and skills about how business and organizations work, in and out of Vietnam.

Cross-cultural Team Teaching. Team teaching is daunting under the best of circumstances (Fukami, Clouse, Howard, McGowan, Mullins, Silver, Sorensen, Watkins, and Wittmer, 1996). It is even more so when teachers come from different countries, cultures, languages, and methods. The NEU – Boise State teachers developed team approaches teaching in the second and third MBA cohorts. While many of the bi-cultural teams succeeded quite well, others experienced frustration and (near) failure.

Working through the problems and challenges build stronger relationships among individual professors. Problems ranged from different teaching methods (e.g., comfort with lecturing versus discussion) to cultural misunderstandings (e.g., level of casualness with students) to different work styles (e.g., preparing way ahead of time versus at the last minute). The solutions, again, developed over much time and effort, ranged from systematic meetings of team members, of the entire group of teachers, but mostly from building trust, adjusting on both sides, and recognizing the impact of actions on the class setting and students (Napier et al., 2002).

Critical factors that helped the Vietnam MBA program succeed

Several factors contributed to the success of the program and relationship between universities. This section discusses three. First, the continuity of program managers (from Boise State University and from the NEU) helped to speed the learning curve on both sides. The chance for things to go wrong in a program managed in Boise and Hanoi demanded constant vigilance: meeting university and college accreditation guidelines, insuring professional delivery of courses, monitoring student progress to meet regulations and expectations, and even organizing the GMAT and TOEFL exams long distance caused headaches.

Even though much did go wrong, the project managers had an attitude of “finding a way to make it work,” which carried the program through many mistakes. The managers used fax, email, phone, couriers and visits to keep

things working. But, at base were personal relationships that supported the organizational relationship.

A second critical component was the internal staff support from Boise State University to achieve work done “behind the scenes.” When the opportunity for the program first emerged, the Provost gathered all the internal staff support units within the university that would be involved (e.g., public relations, registrar, graduate school, admissions, visa processing, continuing education, housing, health care) to ask if they were able and willing to support the program. This was a major commitment because in the first phase of the program, there was no “indirect cost” support; the expectation was that this could be a positive experience for the university – staff and faculty – and would be worthwhile to pursue. From the start, staff support was consistently positive: staff members did whatever it took to make the program succeed.

Finally, community support in Boise and Hanoi was a major force to help this program and relationship thrive. The Swedish and US ambassadors came to the NEU to “send off” students to study in the US; the media in Vietnam, the region and in the US (e.g., *Vietnam News*, National Public Radio’s Marketplace, *Wall Street Journal*, CNN Radio, *The New York Times*) profiled the project and the MBA program. Further, organizations sponsors in Boise and Hanoi repeatedly welcomed the Vietnamese for internships and research projects.

What each university has gained from the MBA program experience

The initial MBA project, and subsequent creation of a business school, gave the Vietnamese faculty members and university the confidence and ability to start the country's first internal MBA programs; the NEU initiated its Vietnamese language MBA in 1996 and its English language MBA in 2002, patterned after Boise State's accredited program. The methodology and skills that NEU lecturers now use developed from their experiences team teaching with Boise State and other foreigners and from experiencing an MBA program themselves.

Other NEU Business School programs have also benefited from the initial Vietnam MBA program. The Business School has offered other graduate programs in conjunction with foreign universities (e.g., the Henley MBA program, UK and an international accountancy degree through Swinburne University, Australia). Furthermore, in cooperation with Boise State professors and other foreign contacts, NEU professors have developed case studies, delivered training programs, conducted research, presented conference papers, and published several research and practitioner articles jointly, ranging from comparative research on entrepreneurship, to bi-cultural team teaching, to transition economy management.

Boise State University has also gained enormous experience – both in terms of faculty teaching and research and administrative experience. A mid-sized state university, Boise State has gained knowledge and skills to manage

large-scale educational projects far away from Boise, which benefit students, the university, the city and state.

Cooperation in creating the NEU Business School

The cooperation between Boise State University and the NEU Business School extended far beyond the delivery of the MBA program to include creation of the business school in Hanoi – ranging from building skills and mindsets for research, academic and executive education programs, to developing administrative practices and policies, to building capacity in management, faculty and staff. In the final phase of the nine-year project, the NEU Business School also developed a sustainability plan to help it identify areas of greatest need and impact for the future.

While the relationship between the universities began and grew largely because of the generous Swedish and US funding that supported the creation of a business school at the National Economics University, the funding has now stopped. This section of the paper discusses three key outcomes of the cooperation and the challenges of maintaining a relationship and cooperation “when the money runs out.”

Results of the cooperation

A goal of the project was to extend NEU’s relationships with universities beyond Boise State. It has done that by creating links with numerous institutions worldwide (e.g., Durham University (UK), Seattle University, Utah State University, University of Nancy (France), Indiana University, Bemidji State

University, Macquarie University (Australia), Washington State University). These relationships have supported the NEU Business School in several ways: (1) developing clients and programs and co-teaching in executive education programs; (2) developing research projects; (3) providing opportunities for teaching and research internships outside of Vietnam; and (4) providing university and business school level administrative support. A brief discussion of each follows with emphasis on how the NEU can continue to build relationships and cooperation, even without significant donor support.

Executive education and training. Since 1995, the NEU Business School has developed an extensive array of management education and training programs for state and private/foreign customers. Such programs are critical to the business school's long term sustainability, since additional long-term development aid may not be viable. Further, since universities throughout Vietnam are facing cutbacks in national funding support, the business school needs to build its revenues from other means.

The training programs have benefited from cooperation with visiting foreign faculty members in several ways. First, foreign faculty have transferred modern training methods to NEU trainers. Team teaching and training, student centered learning, gaining confidence with Vietnamese AND foreign customers, understanding and pursuing more effective marketing approaches in executive education have all been valuable lessons for the NEU that have come from cooperation with Boise State and other universities.

Research. Research practices in Vietnam do not typically follow international approaches. In Vietnam, senior administrators within a university usually choose the topic and assign (often up to ten) faculty members to a project. The younger faculty members do the work (which uses secondary data, if that) and the more senior faculty members' names appear on the finished product. The notion of faculty members choosing their own topics, submitting proposals to a review board, conducting primary data collection and empirical analysis, and then submitting the results to a journal or conference with blind review, is unheard of. Simply reaching the point where NEU Business School faculty members and administrators understood, accepted, and then supported such approaches took years of discussion and convincing.

Yet, ultimately, the project was able to help instill a research mindset within the NEU Business School. Nearly all of twenty-seven NEU Business School faculty members, in all disciplines (e.g., finance and accounting, operations, management, information systems, human resource management, marketing) have participated in joint research projects with faculty members from outside Vietnam. Over half have done research with Boise State faculty members; many have also worked with the more than 40 visiting faculty members who visited NEU over the years. About 50% have presented one or more papers abroad; two thirds have published in academic or practitioner journals outside of Vietnam, in journals such as *The Journal of Management Inquiry*, *Human Resource Management Review*, *Organisation*, and *the Journal of International*

Business Studies. All faculty members and some of the manager MBA graduates have published in Vietnamese academic or practitioner journals and many have written textbooks in Vietnamese for the NEU MBA program.

The benefit to Boise State faculty members is that they have been able to extend their existing research to Vietnam and beyond or have begun new streams of research (e.g., on entrepreneurs in developing countries). Lastly, several jointly written cases have come out of the cooperation. An unanticipated but necessary outcome as well was the shift to a partner / colleague status between researchers (Canto and Hannah, 2001), rather than a mentor-student relationship, which had been typical until the last two years.

Faculty internships. Another outcome from the cooperation has been NEU faculty internships, in Boise and elsewhere, many of them found through Boise State's network. NEU faculty members have worked in Scotland, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, and the US. They have done teaching and research internships at Washington State University, the University of Oregon, Utah State University, Weber State University, Oklahoma University, Mahidol University, the Asian Institute of Management, Indiana University, Bemidji State University, and Boise State University. Finally, several worked in corporations that specifically sought the knowledge of Southeast Asia as they wanted to find new raw material sources or markets for products.

Administrative support. Through the project, Boise State has supported the NEU university and business school administration, primarily through study

tours and visits, workshops, and informal “training” that the Provost and other vice presidents (e.g., finance, student services, institutional advancement) have offered. In addition, other Boise State units provided information about executive education, grants and contracts, auxiliary services, and community boards.

Finally, Boise State has supported the professional/technical side of the NEU Business School, in the area of technology and library science, through joint efforts with information and library experts from Boise State.

Future Challenges for the NEU-Boise State relationship

The strong cooperation between the two universities started from and has depended very much upon external funding, which ended in December 2002. Nevertheless, the relationship can thrive in at least three ways, assuming both parties work to continue it. A fundamental shift in the nature of the relationship and the type of cooperation does seem to be occurring, however. The focus is more at the individual faculty or program level: faculty teams conduct research or programs (e.g., executive education or English language graduate programs) provide the reason for continued cooperation, rather than administrator incentives.

Specifically, faculty members within the universities have continued their joint research or started new projects. Also, the program directors have explored executive certificate programs or other training programs, doing market research for Vietnamese industries and/or US firms or trade associations or

conducting study tours for student or executive groups. Finally, foreign faculty members have worked in Hanoi on Fulbright Fellowships, sabbaticals, or to teach in executive education or academic programs, and we expect this to continue – again on an individual level.

Lessons learned

Although the focus of this paper is on the cooperation between the two universities, the relationship cannot be divorced from the project, which fostered and nurtured it. Working and living together for so long gave plenty of opportunity to realize lessons of cooperation.

This section discusses two levels of “learning” that occurred (Table 1) -- individual versus organizational – and lessons from project management as well as from the universities’ relationship.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Lessons from the Capacity Building and MBA Project – Organizational level

Prior to 1994, Boise State University had never been involved with, let alone managed, a large development aid project. Its willingness to work in Vietnam was a huge step for the university. For its part, the NEU had been involved in donor projects, but none this large or complex. Over the nine years, working with project managers on and off site in Hanoi, faculty, administrators (i.e., Director and Dean, Rectors and Provost, support staff in Hanoi and Boise) learned to manage the process in terms of identifying key issues to deal with and

how to solve them. The process was experimental and iterative but by the third and fourth phases of the project, fewer problems arose and those that did were relatively easy to reconcile.

Furthermore, each organization learned how to deal effectively with its internal and external constituencies. For instance, Boise State University's senior administrators dealt with the university and business school accrediting agencies, the State Board of Education, key business and government supports. Likewise, the NEU dealt with Ministries for approvals of academic programs, the official creation of the business school, and formal links with other universities. Also, the university administrators in Hanoi had to deal with rivalries and jealousy of other faculties within the university that did not receive the financial and other support that the NEU Business School did.

Lessons from the Capacity Building and MBA Project – Individual level

The complexity, frustrations, exhilaration and differences in work and life styles among people in Vietnam and foreigners generated many learning opportunities for individuals. For example, several NEU faculty members and administrators commented over the years that, watching and working with the foreigners, allowed them to gain more confidence in managing their personal and work lives and situations. One faculty member commented that she had learned to "take more control" over events that occurred in her life. Before the project, she would have given up and "cried because I could do nothing;" but in

dealing with the visitors, she learned to think through what actions she could take to achieve what she wanted rather than "letting things just happen."

By the same token, some Type A Americans (!) learned to accept certain events or influences or limitations without exploding. Rather than expecting to achieve 20 things in a day, the more realistic number became two or three, given problems with fax machines breaking, computers dying, power outages, construction projects in offices, and people not appearing at all or late for meetings.

Finally, individuals in both organizations learned about the limitations and cultural challenges of working together. While Boise State University faculty and administrators have long used email, the Internet and even fax machines were new for the National Economics University. Learning how to communicate with others without seeing them (Barrett, 2002), as well as learning how to build and sustain relationships (for research, teaching, etc.) with strangers was a new skill for the Vietnamese group. Further, many people from both universities had never worked abroad and certainly few had been in the other's country. Through the project, faculty members from both universities came to know each other as well as colleagues from Australia, Europe, Hong Kong and North America.

Lessons from the NEU-Boise State University relationship –

Organizational level

The NEU's basic needs were to reform subject curricula to move toward a market economy orientation, as well as to learn the new and more effective teaching and learning methodologies. Training NEU lecturers in Boise State University's MBA program was only one way to achieve above objectives. The cooperation between universities allowed them to identify and carry out more ways to "train" faculty members, especially when each organization thought of the other as a "client." Boise State sought to match student interests with company internships (in Boise); the NEU tried to provide opportunities for Boise State students and faculty members through internships and teaching opportunities.

Also, in working out academic requirements (from the Boise State perspective) and meeting goals of graduating as many Vietnamese students as possible, both sides had to be flexible. Boise State allowed two students from the second cohort a "second chance" after they improved their English skills, so they could participate in the third cohort. Despite a desire to want to find a way to keep two students who plagiarized, NEU accepted Boise State's final decision to expel them. Thus, each university learned to try and understand the others' needs and goals and adjust to them.

As mentioned earlier, the need for support inside the universities was critical for both. Such support, especially from within Boise State University,

was tremendous. Groups ranging from the admissions office, graduate school, international office, continuing education, housing, meal service, physical education, health center, MBA program office, registrar, and Public Relations pitched in to support the program. Problems arose in almost every area, yet the people in them repeatedly and generously helped solve them. The program would not have succeeded otherwise.

Within the NEU, although the project directly involved the NEU Business School, the project's success required favorable conditions and support from the NEU Board of Rectors and cooperation from the related functional departments (e.g., those where the faculty members had previously taught). At times, conflicts emerged but ultimately the rector board supported the project's overall direction.

Finally, a lesson for both organizations was the importance of having (or not) an internal champion for the program. For the MBA program, it was the co-authors of this paper. They had taught together, managed the program and its research projects together, and each had support of managers within their universities to make the program success. As the project progressed, champions emerged for specific program areas (e.g., the English language MBA, executive development, and research).

Lessons from the NEU-Boise State University relationship – Individual level

The NEU faculty members reported that learning about new teaching technologies (other than “chalk and talk”) was most useful for them. In the process, they experienced a transformation common in professional teacher development described by Fwu and Wang (2001) about a science teacher in high school-university setting. The NEU faculty members learned how to use case studies, student projects, discussion and participation, alternative approaches to student papers, exercises and simulations. The Boise State faculty members, in turn, learned about ways to design and deliver training to non-US audiences and to understand the challenge of working in countries where English may not be the primary language.

Related to this, both sides learned – sometimes painfully – about the challenges of bi-cultural team teaching. Learning to create a balanced and more equal relationship was challenging for Vietnamese and Americans alike. The American faculty members had to learn to “give away” some in-class control and treat Vietnamese counterparts as equal partners. Vietnamese faculty, likewise, had to learn to take initiative, and move into a partnership role, which meant they had to lead the class at times, instead of their more traditional approach of following the lead of the foreigners.

Conclusion

As people on both sides of the ocean admit, the relationship between the two universities has been frustrating and fulfilling, quirky and perhaps unusual. Still, the benefits of building such relationships and cooperation, regardless of how or how much in depth, have rewards that go far beyond a research paper or training program. The friendships, the learning, and the broader views and perspectives have affected people within and far outside the universities.

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Table 1. Lessons Learned from the Sida MBA Project
and the NEU-Boise State University relationship

	MBA Project	NEU-Boise State University relationship
Organizational level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to pursue and manage a large aid project; role of the consultant • How to interact with many stakeholder institutions (e.g., funder, ministries, consultants, each university). • How to develop and manage executive education, consulting and research programs • How to manage a business school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thinking of each other as partners and "clients" • Developing and running academic programs • Importance of inside support • The need for internal "champions"
Individual level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability "take more control" and "give more control" in work (and personal) settings • Networking internationally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching and training cross-culturally • Team teaching

Bio sketches

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