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## The Intercultural Challenge of Building the European eSports League for Video Gaming

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*Volker Stein and Tobias M. Scholz*

### 1 Possible answers

#### 1.1 Why does it seem to be a promising idea to build up a European eSports league rather than national eSports leagues?

In a virtualized environment such as the “world of (online) video gaming”, it is commonplace for gamers to interact transnationally or, more precisely, in a “nationless” way. They are just not interested in where the other gamers live, as long they are playing seriously. On the internet it is possible to play in Poland against a competitor in Spain. The existence of game players acting without borders reveals the underlying emergence of a “prospective reality” that only lacks organizational reality in the real world. A European league would be solely a manifestation and institutionalization of something which already exists virtually.

Besides, while European integration continues it would not make sense for the industry to abandon the option of forming a pan-European business model. According to the economic forecasts, the European video gaming market will continue to grow. Attractive European eSports offers will be promising investments and bear the opportunity to generate intercultural synergies.

**1.2 Building a European eSports league means aligning gaming community development, tournament organization and customer service administration to the locally different preferences of the gamers. What procedural advice would you give the ESL in order to create (inter)cultural synergies among its employees? And what procedural advice would you give the ESL in order to create (inter)cultural synergies among the gamers?**

Within the ESL organization, cultural synergy will be created by bringing together developers, designers, project managers and testers from different cultures. First, they should describe the joint challenge from their different perspectives. Second, they should talk about their own personal as well as cultural preferences in gaming, such as the significance of competition, playing, winning, emotionality, time sensitivity and risk orientation. Third, having found cultural overlaps, they should look for implementation options by bundling specific viewpoints together. Regarding their different cultural advantages, they have to decide together in the team which nationality should be in the lead with respect to which cultural aspect. In the end, the combination of the various competitive advantages is supposed to create a pool of competencies that allow unique, creative, cooperative solutions to problems. It is important to state that intercultural synergy is not something that evolves automatically. Intercultural synergy does not mean that one culture adapts to the other; nor does it mean that one culture dominates the other. Rather, everybody has to integrate her/his own culture into the creation of something new. Intercultural synergy must create additional procedural value that is also economically beneficial. In contrast to other intercultural projects, this cultural synergy extends from national cultures towards the gamer culture, which has a strong influence on the process of building a European eSports league. Therefore, it will be essential to find the appropriate cultural mix between the convergent stream of the gamer culture and the divergent streams of nationalities in order to stay innovative and creative.

Going beyond the ESL organization, the gamers from different countries can be integrated in the development of new tournament and community ideas. There are two main options:

- In the sense of a “community of practice” (COP), virtual communities with members from different countries can be built.
- In the sense of “open innovation networks”, the ESL systematically benefits from the adoption of outside ideas that are provided coincidentally from externals.

One open innovation network which has already become essential for ESL is the partners' conference, held on a yearly basis. In that conference, internal as well as external partners come together to exchange information and experiences face to face:

Present were the ESL partners from Europe, USA, Australia, CIS and South East Asia, representatives from Riot Games, Wargaming, Nadeo and Blizzard. The #ESLIPC is a yearly international conference only for ESL's executives from all over the world and ESL's most eSports-supportive business partners. At the conference, we teach each other our latest experiences and skills and try to make the global eSports experience more stunning – but first and foremost, we aim to be as close to the community as possible and create an environment in which professional eSports associations, clans and players can grow and in which they can benefit. ESL has been holding this conference for about 7 or 8 years ([www.esl.eu](http://www.esl.eu)).

### **1.3 How can the ESL use the “virt.cube” framework to stabilize its international virtual team building among its employees across the different European spin-offs?**

The ESL can use the “virt.cube” framework by systematically addressing all of its three dimensions. The more activities that take place on the individual dimensions, the higher the probability that virtual teamwork will be effective.

Strengthening the “core competence differentiation” means searching for employees who will be able to contribute high-level competencies in their field, such as developing tournaments, managing processes, controlling progress, implementing service, raising financial resources, etc. Taking these competencies together, the ESL has to be able to depict the entire but modularized value chain of building gaming communities by using these single “pieces of the puzzle”. From the strategic point of view, at the overall ESL level, the best available solution is to be chosen in a cooperative way.

Strengthening “soft integration” means supporting a process in which the employees bring together their contributions with minimal bureaucratic effort. In particular, an overall ESL vision and a specific shared understanding of what game culture is could facilitate this. It will be very helpful to ensure that the employees develop a similar understanding of “the sense of gaming” across their national cultures. A shared cultural base will not only lead to integrated services in a locally distributed gaming context, but will turn employees in the same mental direction. The employees are more likely to come up with joint goals as well as trust in their work relationships. Culturally, it prevents employees from behaving unethically in teamwork, violating the written and unwritten rules of collaboration or insulting colleagues in internal forums. Meetings within the ESL such as “partners’ conferences” where the shared vision is reaffirmed are appropriate platforms that help to improve intercultural interaction among employees.

Strengthening “multimedia communication” means orientating towards advanced communication technologies. Throughout the ESL, “rich” multimedia communication supports everyday virtual collaboration. Moreover, gaming community development can help improve the Europe-wide technological compatibility of multimedia communication.

Since the ESL is a European venture, the “participative configuration” seems to be promising. The national cultures of the ESL employees are different. Therefore, the conditions of virtual teamwork have to be negotiated rather than set from the top down. Who wants to be responsible for which core competences? Who should be a joint leader of the virtual team? Will everybody be able to cope with different multimedia communication so that they can stick to their own preferred way of communicating? As part of this negotiation process, the cultural strengths of the employees involved can serve as a guide for the allocation of tasks.

#### **1.4 How can the ESL business model become sustainable in a market where the preferences of gamers are continually changing?**

This core managerial problem addresses the question of dynamics in the industry. To meet dynamics-related challenges, there are in general two options:

- to counteract the dynamics by stabilizing structures, processes, culture and environment, or
- to go with the dynamics and re-use it for one’s own purpose.

The ESL chooses the second way. In the case study, some examples can be found of how ESL tries to keep pace with the rapid changes in and around its organization. One is the Intel Extreme Masters Series as a chance to explore new markets. Another is ESL-TV, trying to provide real-time products for gamers who have a demand for dynamics and interactivity.

#### **1.5 What does the critical question “Where should the finals take place?” tell us about the ethnocentricity of the ESL strategy?**

Obviously, building a European eSports league is theoretically open to ethnocentric strategies where the ideas and approaches of one country dominate the developing international eSports system. In the example of the ESL, this would be the German way of managing the gaming business. There is, however, the same likelihood that the game culture – as a chosen trans-national culture – becomes the dominant idea in the European convergence process of the ESL and leads to regiocentric or even geocentric strategies. In such a setting, the dominance of the country of origin can be broken, creating equality of opportunity for all subsidiaries (such as Poland) in the ESL network.

## 2 Further reading for the lecturer

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