Podcast series: Leading for Interdisciplinary Creativity

IDBM programme at Aalto University

Episode 1

Length: 47.10 min

Guests: Virva Brax and Kairan Fernandez

Host: Irina Viippola

Virva: [00:00:00] One day you're at a cemetery doing some data gathering for data visualization. Then one day you're doing your industry project for an actual client and traveling somewhere, and then another day you're learning about business model designs.

Aalto University podcast.

Irina: this is leading for interdisciplinary creativity, and I am your host Irina Viippola. This episode is a must listen for anyone curious about interdisciplinary learning as we dive into the insider stories of the challenges and surprises of studying on an unknown territory. Whether you're eyeing the IDBM program or simply interested in insights on design, innovation, and business, this episode unlocks some of the secrets.

We have now two guests who are current IDBM students. Welcome Virva Brax and Kairan Fernandez. [00:01:00]

Virva: Thank you. Thank you.

Irina: To start with, I would love to hear who you are. Virva. Can you tell a bit about yourself?

Virva: Yes. Thank you for having me here. My name is Virva. I am a IDBM student from the IDBM Chem Track, so I did my bachelor's in chemical engineering and then I minored in design.

And I figured out that there's more to life than just chemical engineering, and I applied to IDBM and I'm so happy to be here today.

Irina: Okay. That sounds really interesting. Did you do also chem arts?

Virva: I didn't do it. You didn't? Okay. Yeah. Yeah. That's an untapped territory for me. Yeah. Okay.

Irina: The future.

Virva: Yeah.

Irina: Okay. Kairan, what about you?

Kairan: Yeah, so a pleasure to be here. Um, my name is Kairan Fernandez, and, uh. This is a disciplinary change for me to come to IDBM because my, my first degree was in engineering. So I have a background in, uh, logistics engineering. Um, studied that for four years, worked in the industry for around another four [00:02:00] years.

Uh, but during that time, I, I figured out that there is more to life. Uh, there are bigger systemic challenges, uh, uh, and strategic problems that, uh, would be worth solving. And, uh, you know, I thought. Let me go back to school. Let me, uh, let me learn some new skills, uh, and figure this out. Yeah. So that's why I'm here.

Irina: Okay, that sounds great. Like you are the ideal IDBM students. I'm sure. Uh, the first question I would like to, to hear is it, it's that, what is it like to study IDBM at the moment?

Virva: Oh my God. I'm not sure if there is like an average day of studying IDBM, for example, because one day you're at a cemetery doing some data gathering for data visualization.

Then one day you're doing your industry project for an actual client and traveling somewhere, and then another day you're learning about business model design. So it's like [00:03:00] there's so much to it

Kairan: and sometimes you're getting your hands dirty. You're building things from scratch. Yeah. Um. So it's, uh, it's a lot of different things going on.

Um, I would describe it as being, uh, fun. I think it's fun and exciting. Uh, primarily just, you know, working together with such talented, uh, classmates and learning skills from them because everyone comes from different

disciplines. Uh, I think you learn new ways of approaching problems based on those disciplines, uh, methodologies.

And because people study different disciplines, they use different tools. To, uh, solve problems, and then I think you get exposure to those tools. So, yeah, it's fun, it's exciting. It's, uh, inspirational to say the least. Uh. Uh, but there can be some challenges, right?

Virva: Yeah, for sure. And they're related to multiple different things.

It's like you're working in a multidisciplinary environment. You're, you're constantly like bridging gaps between different fields and disciplines, [00:04:00] and it's something that you only learn by doing.

Virva: And I feel like that's where some of the challenges arise from because we're like learning while studying.

Yeah. Like. All those hard skills, but also soft skills at the same time.

Irina: Now looking back a little bit, uh, Kairan, you already talked about this, that, why did you choose the program, but maybe a bit kind of, maybe you can open up a little bit more. What were the main reasons then, then to choose this specific program? There are also other disciplinary interdisciplinary programs in AAalto.

But why IDBM?

Virva: We were discussing this with Kairan before, before coming in here and we were, uh, both saying things like. It's so hard to put your finger onto it, like, what's the exact reason why did we even choose this program? And, and depending on the day [00:05:00] or the person who I speak to, I feel like the answer tends to change a little.

I had heard, uh, great things about the program and uh, I specifically remember seeing this like advertising video of the program where someone said. We don't work in silos, so why should we study them? Mm-hmm. And that like really was imprinted on my brain and I was like, yeah. I like, I can agree with that.

Yeah. How about you?

Kairan: Yeah, I completely agree. I think, uh, uh, what you said in the end, so we don't work in silos. Uh, sorry, we don't, yeah, we don't work in silos. So why

do we study in them was like the selling point for me. I'm like, absolutely right. Like, and there was no other argument against that. So I'm like, this is the place for me.

Um, so like I said, I was working in engineering, uh, supply chain and logistics for a couple of years, uh, and it was great. Uh, but I, I wanted to see the bigger picture to see how, you know, strategy is thought about and at an organizational level, or how do we think [00:06:00] about like business problems more holistically rather than just like.

Thinking about it from an engineering or logistics perspective, and that was like the, the starting point. I, I got very interested in entrepreneurship about strategy, holistic thinking, and, uh, well, when you're interested in entrepreneurship in Finland, uh, there's no question that Aalto University is the place to be.

So, uh, I, I, I went onto the website and tried to find out what programs could be interesting for me. And the Design business management program particularly stood out, um, mainly for its transdisciplinary. Uh, environment. I knew that this is a place where I can learn, uh, not only from teachers, but also from my, my colleagues for sure, from their expertise and skills.

Um, and uh, moreover, I think learning design is helpful for any entrepreneur, whether you're learning to build a better organization, better services, or better products. And I, and I thought that this is exactly the place where I need to be.

Virva: Hmm. And like there's as many reasons to study in [00:07:00] IDBM as there are students, and I feel like what you described really, um, it really emphasizes how this program like opens all the doors but doesn't close any, like you can really do with it what you want and.

It's amazing. Yeah.

Irina: And of course the openness might be a challenge for some of the students. Yeah. When there is no given track to, to follow. Mm-hmm. And actually about the silos. I think that in working life there are still silos, unfortunately. So we have a lot of work to do still so that we kind of get out from the silos also in, in working life.

Virva: Yeah. But like there is a need for experts, but there's also a need for generalists. So yes, some silos are good and. Uh, we just need to come up with ways to bridge the gaps between them.

Irina: Yes. Now, looking back at your, uh, studies in the IDBM, what do you think, what have you learned?

Kairan: Well, I think, like I mentioned earlier, uh, [00:08:00] you have classmates coming from different disciplines.

Um, and some of the key things I've learned is how to use different tools. Because I've been in my own little bubble. I've used only a handful of tools, for example, Microsoft, uh, presentation. But, uh, coming to this program and working with designers, I've learned to use tools like Figma, Conva, um, more, uh, open canvases for creating ideas.

So. This is something I've, I've learned, uh, but more than these hard, uh, skills that were also these softer skills. So, uh, learning empathy was something, uh, that I did not expect to learn, uh, at the IDBM program. I, I didn't expect that to be a soft skill. I would like, uh, that would be spoken about quite a lot by the professors throughout the year, and I think that's very important for designers to have this, uh, empathy in order to relate to problems.

Uh, really get into, uh, the crevices of problems.

Virva: 100% agree with the combination of, uh, [00:09:00] hard skills, with soft skills. Like you can do amazing things that are completely wrong if you don't understand who you are building the solutions for. Or even if you build a great solution that exactly answers the problem that you're trying to solve, but you don't communicate it, right?

Mm-hmm. That's a huge issue. Mm-hmm. And I feel like those are, uh, some of the like, softer skills that come along the way. During IDBM, like during, for example, our, uh, one of the courses, uh, networked partnering in innovation, uh, we were at the same time building IOT devices and coding with Arduino computers.

But we also had to like, come up with the whole concept and brand and, and how to like actually make it, uh, something that people. Want.

Kairan: And I think, uh, empathy is also particularly useful, like I mentioned earlier, to dive into the problems, to understand it at its root, uh, because this enables you to look at problems in new perspectives.

So you can reframe a current problem, uh, to unravel a different [00:10:00] perspective to approaching the problem. And that's where empathy, uh, plays a big role.

Irina: Yes, I, I agree. Um, during the studies, uh, what has been especially rewarding.

Virva: Rewarding. Oh, I feel like always at the end of the course when you look back and realize all the things you have learned and done with your peers, and then you actually come up with an end result or a deliverable.

Mm-hmm. It's really rewarding to see like the whole thing coming up together.

Kairan: Yeah. Particularly because when you start a project, uh, you never know where it's gonna go or Yeah, how it's going to evolve over time. Um, and there were many, uh, moments where I felt completely lost and I'm like, wait, why are we doing it this way?

But, uh, it was very rewarding to trust the process.

Kairan: Um, uh, with, you know, creative ideation and I mean, we are with smart colleagues. Yeah. So, um, you know, no [00:11:00] idea is not worth exploring. Uh, but I think it's been also particularly rewarding. Um. To work with our classmates. Um, they are incredibly talented, uh, in different ways.

And it's, it's, it's, uh, it's incredible to see how fast you can build things when you have different expertise, gather in a room together and just shoot ideas at each other, criticize, uh, build upon. So, yeah.

Virva: Yeah. And during one of the, uh, first courses that we took at DBM Challenge, I remember that we had a, a reading assignment.

And in the paper, uh, they were talking about how, uh, like diverse, multidisciplinary teams are really good at this, like diverging processes. So, so like brainstorming, coming up with ideas, but they are not always the best ones to converge things, so to like set up on something. Mm-hmm. But I feel like our.

Studies have proven that wrong. Like I feel like we're, we're amazing at also converging [00:12:00] process and, and some of the, the projects that we have done and, and ideas that we have come up with are really incredible. It's, yeah, it's rewarding to see.

Irina: And is it also that in many of the projects, you need to have some concrete end result too, so it's just not going to be in the, in the thin air.

Virva: I think a, a reoccurring theme is that we need to love the problem, not the solution. Mm-hmm. So we really take our time to dive into the problem space before even starting to think about the solutions. But, um, yes, we oftentimes do need to come up with something concrete. Uh, and it doesn't need to be something ready.

It can be an idea or a framework that describes better the problem or, or guides, uh, the end user to dive deeper into it if they want, or, or something like that. So

Kairan: yeah, it can be about even creating a vision.

Virva: Exactly. Yeah.

Kairan: A vision for the [00:13:00] future. How does, how does our solution, um, reshape the way people think about things or do things?

And, uh, when we talk about how concrete we need to get with our ideas, I think. Our professors really, uh, encourage the most, um, crazy thoughts. Uh, they want us to get outside our bubbles. Yeah. Uh, and I think they very heavily emphasize, uh, the importance of these ideas being feasible, desirable, and what's the last one?

Virva: Viable

Kairan: and viable. Mm. Yeah. So the trifecta, when you can do all these things, that's when you have come up with a great solution. With a unique selling point.

Irina: Hmm. Uh, along the way, has there been any failures or projects where you, or courses where you have felt that, okay, I, this was not good at all.

Virva: There has been some times when the feeling of frustration has been the, like, main thing on top of my head, probably yours [00:14:00] as well.

Mm-hmm. Um, the courses that we take and the problems that we tackle during them are so. Like wicked so big. It's like sometimes it feels like it's impossible to find solutions for them, and I think it's a matter of trial and error. Like we shoot our ideas, we're like, how about this? Then we test it out. We, we do some interviews or, or some like fast prototyping to test it out, and then some of them.

Don't work out, but that's like part of the process of figuring out the best solution at the end,

Kairan: right? Like, uh, studying this program program really changed my views on failure. Yeah. Because, um, I think you encounter failure, failure quite a lot, especially when you're ideating, prototyping and trying new things.

Uh, and the way it has shaped my perspective on failure is that, uh, you can retranslate this failure into a win because when something fails. You learn from it, you, you get insights. [00:15:00] There's been a number of times where we've created prototypes that did not, uh, result in a success in the sense that it's not what we expected our end users to, to play around with, but it helped in generating other insights, things that we as designers were blind to, that the end user ended up liking more.

And we, and those were like, you know, uh, interesting moments for us as designers where we looked at our solution and we thought, whoa. We were not even thinking of testing that, but it's been so interesting to hear that this is something that resonated with the end user. So failure can also be a good thing if you, you know, uh, pick up those insights and channel it into something more productive and iteratively develop your prototypes and solutions for sure.

Irina: Yeah, definitely. And I know that there's a finished gaming company that, uh, celebrates more the failures than successes. So if there's a. Success, uh, with a, with a project, then they will take a few beers, but if there's a [00:16:00] failure, then they will have champagne. So maybe there is the same idea that from failures, you can actually learn something totally new.

Then more about kind of not only the failures, but challenges. What kind of things that you have you found challenging during the IDBM studies?

Kairan: Well, I think, uh, Virva touched upon it earlier. The, the whole idea of, you know, expanding and then converging on different ideas. That's been quite a challenge. Uh, when it comes to, uh.

Members of the team who want to stick to the expansion phase, while other members want to converge already. So you have, uh, clashes of opinions, uh, clashes on the final vision of the different prototypes, uh, or designs you're coming up [00:17:00] with. And, uh, it can be a challenge to figure those out because, uh, well, obviously, you know, you trust your teammates.

Uh, but I feel like everyone has their own, uh. Vision of what they want the prototype to be. And they can get fixated on that and may not necessarily agree with another perspective. So that can be a challenge to navigate. Uh, but I think it's a recurring problem with designers and that's something we learned to deal with, uh, in the IDBM program.

Virva: Yeah. And it's, it's not just that we first start to like, expand on ideas and then converge, but it's like a cycle. Like you revisit the expansion phase quite a lot and then you converge and then you test them out, maybe fail, maybe succeed. Mm-hmm. And then start to expand the ideas again. So, uh, it's really different, uh, difficult to balance sometimes the, the pace, uh, of doing things.

And also with, uh, different team members, they might be, uh, at different. Phases of, of the same, same process. And [00:18:00] uh, sometimes it's really hard to let go of ideas that you love. Right? Right. Like, for example, during our IDBM challenge, we were really set on one idea for many weeks. We were loving it. We thought it was the best thing ever.

Why has no, no one else come up with this, let's go with it. And then all of a sudden we, we, um, encountered. It'll bump on the road. And, and we realized that, oh, we cannot actually go further with this idea for reasons X, Y, and Z. And, and we had to come up with something else. And it was so hard to let go of the original thoughts mm-hmm.

That we had built and loved for so long.

Irina: Yeah. You usually fall in love with some of the ideas and then you just can't turn your head around. Yes. And for designers that, that happens quite, quite often as well. Yeah. And, and when you are ideating and then you kind of. Have maybe some of the first ideas are the ones that you fall in love with and then you don't even look, uh, outside of that little box of those ideas.

And, and [00:19:00] then maybe IDVM is something that, that teaches you to kind of see also outside of that. Mm-hmm. For sure. Yeah.

Virva: Another thing, uh, that I have found challenging is sometimes connecting, uh, the topics that we learn to a broader. Context. Uh, an example of that came to my mind was during our business model design course, we were learning about business models, of course.

Um, and at one point I remember vividly writing my, uh, reflection essay, and I was writing about how I feel like I'm. Learning on how to become this skilled,

uh, capitalist who can manipulate customers like puppets with my value propositions. And, and I was like, this feels wrong. But then I flipped the coin around and I, I started thinking that, oh, because I have learned all these things, now I can start applying them in a context that feels.

More comfortable [00:20:00] for me. I can, I can take these ideas and, and turn them into something good or valuable. So, um, that was a really big learning moment for myself at least. Hmm.

Kairan: It was a huge surprise for me to come here, uh, and realize that most of our courses don't even have exams, but they rely on these, uh, reflection journals.

Uh, and at first I was thinking, like, my initial thought was. Like, what are we, are we in eighth grade where we are writing, like learning diaries, uh, and stuff like this? But, uh, over time I, I saw the value in it because, um, you think you understand a topic until you actually go writing it out, and then you realize, hey, there are some gaps in my knowledge that I did not realize.

So writing those thoughts out really helps you articulate, uh, your own thinking, but most importantly, learn where the gaps are and then go about solving those gaps and figuring out, okay, how do I. Make the most of this, uh, learning what are the things I can learn about a bit more, for [00:21:00] example?

Irina: Hmm. And then you could also challenge yourself a little bit when you realize that, okay, here is the gap. Yeah, I don't really want to go into that area. This is not my comfort zone. But then you kind of need to go there, otherwise you don't. You don't learn.

Kairan: Exactly.

Irina: uh, that, so that has been a bit surprising for you so that there are these reflection diaries or whatever in the courses.

Has there been something else that has surprised you, for example? Do, is there something that during the studies has been surprising?

Virva: For sure. Like most of the courses have surprised me in a way or another. But one thing that that comes to my mind is that, um. I have read, have you read the book, the Creative Act by Rick Rubin?

No, no. It's okay if you haven't. It's this like really pretentious, uh, coffee table book that, that is full of things that are not relevant in my opinion. But there's one thought that I really like and it's, uh, where Rick Rubin [00:22:00] writes that when you turn ideas into reality, they become smaller because you take something that's like unearthly and make it something earthly.

Virva: And um, I feel like sometimes during our IDBM courses, when. You are working with a problem for so long. Some of our courses are weeks long. Some of, uh, them are like months long, and you need to then put all those things, all those learnings and knowledge into a five minute pitch, for example.

It makes, it really, it makes it look small and, and when you're, when you're delivering the pitch, you're thinking like, oh. Was this, it like all these months of learning and, and digging into this problem and, and we now have a five minute pitch about it. And, and that's it. So that was, that has been a really surprising moment for me.

And, and it's this, uh, feeling of overwhelmingness at times, but also, um, [00:23:00] it really helps to look back and see like, oh, but it was the like. It was the journey, right. Not the like end result that we, we, uh, learned the most from. Yeah. So, yeah.

Kairan: It's like you said earlier, it's about falling in love with the problem, not the solution.

Virva: Exactly.

Kairan: the journey matters. Just as much as the final five minute pitch that you are gonna present after.

Virva: Yeah.

Kairan: Six to eight months.

Virva: Exactly. And I'm, I'm not saying that it's, uh, underwhelming what we do or, or deliver at the end, but uh, it sometimes feel like it doesn't really capture the whole journey, for example, with industry project course, so, mm-hmm.

Irina: We could actually now go into the industry, uh, project that's, uh, one important part of the IDBM. Uh, what was it like to, to work with that industry project?

Virva: It was the best.

Kairan: Mm-hmm.

Virva: I, uh, do you agree? I agree. [00:24:00] I think,

Kairan: I think one of the best ways to learn is to do something. Yeah. And what. Better way to do something than doing it with real companies, uh, with real problems and real money involved.

So these companies put a lot of money to the program to help us, uh, well first of all, first of all, learn, but also then develop solutions for them or insights for them. So, yeah. Um, yeah, real companies or real problems.

Virva: Yeah. So the whole course is about, uh, teams of students, uh, answering a real clients.

Problem and figuring out how to best approach the problem and then maybe come up with suggestions mm-hmm. To solve it. And the course lasts for half a year, almost like five to six months. Um, and it's a really long learning journey. My, my team, we did a project for if insurances, shout out to, if they were a lovely partner company to work with.[00:25:00]

Um, and we were tackling this, uh, you know, just the problem of the future of insurances.

Speaker: Small problem.

Virva: Yeah, it's just a, a little, little problem there. Um, so our, uh, it, it was a really broad topic and we were encouraged to approach it from the direction that we felt. That was the most motivating and inspiring and where we saw that there could be potential for, for interesting findings.

Uh, so yeah, that's, that was our topic. You had a bit of a different experience with your. Yours.

Kairan: That's right. I had a different experience. So, uh, I did something outside the classical IDBM track. So I did this, uh, program called Sugar and uh, well it's quite similar, uh, except that we build many more prototypes and we have, uh, five credits more I believe.

So it was a bit longer hours. Um, our case company was Sanoma Media and, uh, huge shout out to Sanoma Media [00:26:00] because. Uh, our contact person from there was really encouraging us to go above and beyond with our idea creation. Uh, when we started working on the project, uh, we set a goal for ourselves as a team that, hey, uh, the solutions that we want to create, we want these things to be out there and, you know, published by Sanoma that they are real products.

So we set a high ambition for ourselves. Uh, but Sanoma was more interested in not only working on things that sound feasible, but really pushing the boundaries and. Getting out of our comfort zones to think of the most radical ideas out there. And, uh, it was excellent because you would expect a case company to, you know, especially when they're putting money into the program, you'd expect them to expect an ROI, uh, on their investment or that there's something tangible that comes out of this.

But Sanoma Media very heavily encouraged, uh, or sorry, or emphasized how much they wanted us to learn and grow as students. Yeah. Uh. And of course, within the [00:27:00] most important takeaways were the insights that we come up with rather than the final product. Um, anyhow, because, uh, we did the sugar track, um, there was a lot more prototypes, uh, involved.

We built so many prototypes, uh, over the year or over the six to eight months. Yeah. Uh, and what I particularly enjoyed was that each prototype thought of something new. So we, our final solution was. Built on the different insights from various prototypes that were either built iteratively or then some that were radical departures from, from, uh, where we were initially going.

Irina: Hmm. I have learned that in some cases when industry is working, uh, with the universities and this kind of collaboration, uh, collaboration projects, especially in the AL context, uh, they want to be inspired. If they want to kind of be exposed to new ideas, to new things, not, not so that they want something to be [00:28:00] executed.

Because if they want that, then they will go to, I don't know, uh, visual Communication Agency or design Agency or some other partner. So from universities, uh typically they kind of expect something else, but I'm really happy to hear that then they have given kind of pushing you also to that direction that be open-minded.

Yeah. Do something new, different, exactly.

Kairan: Yes.

Irina: So that's, that's really a nice thing to, to hear.

Virva: Yeah. And it's like, at the same time, it's giving you a lot of freedom. Freedom, but it also, at the same time, a lot of pressure like, okay, I need to think outside of the box. And then you start to think of what is the box or what is the outside, how, how do I deliver this like radical new idea that they are expecting from me?

So, so

Irina: you first have to create the box. No, exactly.

Virva: Exactly. And then. Yeah. And

Irina: then think outside. Um, do you have any, anything that you could share with us, like a favorite memory [00:29:00] or happening or something that kind of, uh, during this study years has, has happened?

Kairan: Well, I think, uh, I've spoken a lot about my classmates and friends, so for me, this is the favorite memory.

Mm-hmm. Uh, which is just like collaborating with them, uh, on different projects. Uh, so not just the IDBM industry project, but then smaller class activities and assignments and, uh, yeah, just seeing how different disciplines can bring different tools and ideas together and create something totally new. So that's, that's the memory.

Virva: And also because I feel, I feel like, uh, I think you told me this before, that the IDBM students, we are all kind of outliers. Like we are united in being different. We, we like to think outside the box that we, we build and um, and that's really something that brings us together. Even though we're from all parts of the world, we're from all kinds of disciplines, it's something that really [00:30:00] unites us.

Kairan: Yeah. I have a, I have a. A visual image, uh, to describe what it's like to study in IDBM. And it's, uh, an image that we took on our strategic design class last year, uh, where, uh, we had two different classes, right? One was our own class and one was like another class. And there was a huge contrast in like the environment of these classes.

And the other class that was not our, uh, IDBM class, they were all, you know, sitting as you would in a. A typical school looking forward at the board and kind of like making notes or listening to the teacher. But then you looked at our class and it was filled with movement and excitement and like cheer.

There was just a bunch of people gathered together pointing at, uh, maps that we made off the graveyard. Yeah. And like telling each other what we liked about it, what inspired us, what were some challenges. And it was just so much more collaborative, uh, exciting, energetic, and I think that's the memory I will [00:31:00] always.

Leave with, uh, from this program

Virva: for sure. And, uh, whereas in my bachelor's studies. Teamwork was also, uh, always something quite tedious. It was like, oh, not another teamwork. And it left me with like some good, but also some not that great memories of teamwork, whereas IDBM was a healing experience. It's like, oh my goodness, this is what teamwork can be.

And it is because we are like, uh, we are given all the right tools and we're given the, the necessary freedom to, to explore. And, uh, we are trusted by default. Like our professors really trust that we, we will figure things out. Mm-hmm. And uh, that's just something that I'm really, really grateful in the ID band project.

Yeah.

Irina: I really like this, uh, healing, healing experience. So that can be because teamwork is difficult and yeah. And we see that with our bachelor's students. Uh, in design. They do, [00:32:00] uh, suffer a little bit from the teamwork. They always ask like, why don't we do also individual work? We do that, but we have quite a lot of the team teamwork, uh, happening.

Uh, but of course it's something that you learn, uh, by doing as well.

We have been looking now from the kind of the inside, but then looking from the outside, do you think that the IDBM program is relevant? For the world or in the world,

Virva: imagine us being like, no, not really. No. But for sure I think it's so relevant and now more than ever, I feel like, um, it's important to, to learn how to bridge those gaps between different disciplines.

And uh, I think, like I already mentioned before, we do need. Experts in [00:33:00] this world, we need people who are really passionate about just like one thing and they're amazing at it. But we also need the generalists. And I'm not saying that IDBM would, uh, only produce generalists, but it does teach us how to be the bridges between different fields and, and people so.

I think it's so relevant.

Kairan: Yeah, yeah, exactly. As Vivo mentioned, and, um, I'd wanna point out to why IDBM is relevant, uh, especially now because, uh, systemic challenges are increasing, uh, every year, uh, things are more interconnected than they were before. Um, and to after that, we have already crossed seven out of nine planetary boundaries.

If my, uh. Something like that. Correct? Yes. Uh, so we need to rethink new ways of approaching problems because clearly the ways that we've been approaching problems in the past has not maybe yielded the results we were hoping for.

Kairan: Uh, a good example of this [00:34:00] that we've learned in class was when you think about, for example, plastics and plastics recycling, we've had solutions where we've, uh, well increased the amount of plastic recycling, uh.

Well bins around a community, we've increased, uh, or funded plastic recycling companies to make new products out of these materials. But then the question comes down to, uh, is this really the right systemic, uh, solution, uh, that we want to be going forward, that we want to continue doing? Because another way of looking at it is that we are still enabling the production of plastic with these solutions.

Kairan: So are we really solving the plastic? Crisis or the plastic pollution crisis, so to say

Virva: for sure. I had this one course, uh, materials in a world of design, uh, no in a world materials in this whatever. I had this course where we had this, uh, professor from chemical engineering background who was talking [00:35:00] to us about the same exact issue, and the professor was saying that, uh.

For example, the case of circular economy that was a hot topic for quite a while and still is, is quite silly if you think about it. It's like. We continue to do the same things we have been already doing, but now we do it in a circular motion.

It's like it's not solving anything. Mm-hmm. It's just making the, the practices we are doing make in a go in a loop.

Virva: And, and actually recycling, for example, is the last thing that we should do. We should like focus on the prevention more than the recycling. So exactly like breaking down these, these issues that we, we are having and really looking at the core. Problems that exist mm-hmm. Is so crucial. And we talk about tar and we talk a lot about, uh, radical creativity in IDBM.

I dunno how we haven't mentioned the world radical creativity at, during this interview. Right. But essentially it's like, uh, looking at the really core issue and [00:36:00] fixing, uh, things from the root right. Rather than putting a plaster on a huge wound.

Kairan: Yeah. Yeah. I, I think what you mentioned about this circular economy, challenges are very, very telling of the times because, for example, we, uh, we are promoting a lot of electrification of our cars and other mobility, uh, but electrification is coming at a cost because we are mining precious materials.

Uh, to enable this, this movement. So then it's a paradox. So we, we have to think now, uh, are we really creating a sustainable future in a sustainable way? Yeah. Or are we adding something unsustainable to the, to the, to the mixture. Um, another thing I want to talk about is ai. It's hard to, uh, skip that topic.

Yeah. Uh, in the world we live in right now, and, and this is why I think IDBM is also. More relevant now than ever because, uh, AI helps us do tasks faster, right? But we [00:37:00] still need people to create, uh, to be creative, uh, in solving problems. Because if you look at like ai, they are language models that, uh, basically deliver results, um, on predictability, uh, on predict, predicting what the next sequence of language will be.

But they're not inherently creative in themselves and like generating new and novel ideas. And that's something that's still up to us as humans. We play a big role in adding context to, uh, like the solutions that AI creates, uh, to validate these solutions. And I think I read yesterday that over 50% of all companies in the world have already adopted ai and it's only gonna keep growing.

And I think, uh, creative minds, uh, who are able to. Look at like, solutions from new perspectives are, are very valuable in that sense in order to not repeat, uh, processes and methods that [00:38:00] we've been doing and feeding into the AI systems for many years.

Irina: Hey, that's something that I totally agree with.

So we as creative minds are still needed also in the future. And I guess that with ai, what happens often is that it, it kind of, um, creates mediocre. Solutions.

Kairan: Right.

Irina: Uh, I think that then this is a nice moment then to ask maybe Virva you can, uh, you can, uh, answer first, what are your future plans? Do you already have some plans for the kind of. Beyond studies.

Virva: Oh my goodness. Like my future plans at the moment are to survive this winter in the darkness than to graduate.

And then, um, I don't know. Um, I attended a few weeks [00:39:00] ago this mentoring session about future plans, uh, and it was a one-on-one with me and this, this career coach. And the coach encouraged me to, to think about three alternative future scenarios for myself, where two of them needed to be like realistic, quote unquote, and, and one of them could be like completely out of the box, like if money and, and all the other constraints wouldn't exist.

What would I like to do in the future? And it was really funny to see how, um, the first two were quite aligned with what I do at the moment. I actually, I work as a UX designer at this IT consultancy company. And, and I study IDBM. So the first two were really, um, making sense in those, uh, parameters. Uh, and then the third one was me, like, I don't know.

Uh, or running a coffee shop or, or a flower shop or whatever. And uh, the coach really encouraged me to think like, what are [00:40:00] the common things? Like you have these two really real, realistic ideas, maybe continuing as a UX designer, maybe being a strategic designer in a company, whatever. What are the common things between that dream or scenario?

And then running the coffee shop and. I, I still don't have the answers. I'm trying to figure it out. Uh, but I'm sure that, that I will find. Something that, uh, motivates me and, and makes me feel like I'm doing something good in this world.

Irina: Mm-hmm. Hmm. And of course, coffee is something that is very important for the Finns also, maybe for, for others.

I don't know if Iran, are you a fan of coffee?

Kairan: I have become, since I moved to Finland. I have become,

Irina: yeah. Are we still the kind of the, the highest coffee drinkers? The number one Yeah, the number one in the world?

Virva: I think so.

Irina: Yeah, so if you come to Finland, you really need to learn to drink coffee. Yeah.

There are people who kind of try to drink tea, but it's. Doesn't work that well.

Virva: we're not big tea drinkers. [00:41:00] Yeah. So maybe

Irina: ux uh, knowledge. And then this, uh, coffee can somehow be, uh, combined. I'm not sure. It's not like a really, yeah,

Virva: a really great experience in a coffee shop like that. That would be maybe one way to see it.

Irina: Yeah. Yeah. Something like that. But what about you, Kairan then? Do you already have some future plans?

Kairan: Uh, nothing. Uh. That I've completely like, well, nothing that I'm solely focused on. Um, however, uh, being part of this program has inspired me to want to solve problems for our world, for our planet that has a real impact, uh, a more holistic impact.

So in that sense, uh, I, I think entrepreneurship would be the way to go. I would, I would like to see what kind of. Tools, services, et cetera, I could come up with that could encourage, uh, better society. [00:42:00] Um, but then there's also been consultancy, like going back to the generalists. Yeah. Uh, in the IDBM. Uh, I think consultancy is a great place where you can learn, um, from different fields, uh, different industries, uh, different companies.

Uh, so that's been a very attractive, uh, career path for me as well, like. Thinking about the future where I can continue learning. Yeah. Always. And, uh, being part of different teams to tackle different problems.

Irina: Hmm. And it's a fast paced world, the consultancy world. So if you really like the dynamic, uh, feeling, uh, then maybe that is the right, right way to, to go.

Kairan: Yeah.

Irina: Do you think that you will stay in Finland or are you kind of open to relocate?

Kairan: Uh, I'm, I'm pretty open to, uh, relocate temporarily. Um, I've been now living in Finland for 11 years, uh, which is pretty telling, uh, that I stayed this long. Um, and I think Finland [00:43:00] has a great society, um, organized, um, like around like the people, uh, the way they look at equality, uh, quality of life, so.

There are very few countries out there that would be a strong competitor, uh, to like these benefits you get here in Finland. Um, having said that, I do want to experience different cultures. Um, I want, I would like to live somewhere else temporarily, but I, uh, I think I do see myself returning back to Finland, um, in the long term, especially thinking about family and settling down and so forth.

Irina: Hmm. Yeah. What about you?

Virva: I don't wanna say no to anything, so definitely open to, to different possibilities. Uh, but wherever I end up, uh, I do think that, um, keeping myself up to date with, with whatever happens in the world and maybe working in an international, um, environment is something that I really, really wanna, [00:44:00] uh.

Do.

Irina: Yeah. In the future. Yeah, of course. And that's really something that you have been now, uh, learning in the IDBM. Yeah. So it's a very international setup. Now, wrapping up the, the discussions, uh, I think that it has been really, uh, interesting to hear this, uh, for example, this notion of, uh, the IDBM being a little bit like the outliers, the, the, maybe the misfits of, of al uh.

Of course, there's a lot of, uh, uh, focus put on the collaborative and, uh, uh, kinda interdisciplinary, uh, learning. I think these are excellent, uh, excellent points. And then the failure translating into, uh, success. Now you, this comes maybe a bit too quickly for you, but can you make a short pitch? On the IDBM.

So if the listeners here are now interested in the IDBM program, [00:45:00] uh, what should they know?

Virva: For anyone who is a curious person, curious about different fields, curious about different people, uh, curious about the world and how it works. IDBM is just the right thing. Um, and also if you want to travel with some company money during industry project course, then that's a bonus, but yeah.

Excellent.

Irina: Sounds really good. I I might apply.

Kairan: Yeah. Hmm. Uh, there are so many positive things I could say about the IDBM, but stressing transdisciplinary interactions, what you can get out of them, uh, especially what I've mentioned earlier about learning new ways of doing things from different disciplines, learning new tools, learning from people who are smarter than you.

Uh, different tasks. Uh, I think this is a great place where you can come to just learn to open up your mind. If you are a very open-minded person and you want [00:46:00] to challenge the way, uh, you've been taught to look at things, I think this is a place where they really break down your perspectives and, uh, leave you coming out of the program as a better person, a more critical minded person, and a more optimistic person, I would say.

Irina: This is an, uh, excellent, uh, place to end. So thank you, Virva. Thank you, Kairan. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Thank you for listening. I am your host Irina Viippola. This episode was edited by me and Aditya Parekh. And produced by the IDBM program at Aalto University. Stay tuned for more.