

Podcast series: Leading for Interdisciplinary Creativity

IDBM programme at Aalto University

## Episode 7

Length: 47,41 min

Guests: Peter McGrory and Markku Salimäki

Host: Irina Viippola

**Peter:** [00:00:00] When you learn to know each other, you'd learn to also respect and trust each other and know that, okay, you're not trying to take me down. I'm not trying to take you down. I'm just trying to get the best result.

Aalto University Podcast

**Irina:** this is leading for interdisciplinary creativity, and I am your host Irina Viippola. In this episode, we explore the value of interdisciplinary study with insights from two distinguished guests that have a long history with the IDBM program. We'll dive into the evolving nature of teaching and curriculum development, explore tools for meaningful change, and discuss the dynamics essential for active effective collaboration.

Listen stories from the IDBM program highlighting unforgettable challenges and epic successes.

Welcome, Markku Salimäki and Peter McGrory. Nice to have you here.  
[00:01:00]

**Markku:** Thank you.

**Irina:** Before we start our discussion, uh, could you introduce yourself and share a bit about your background? Uh, Peter, can you start.

**Peter:** Yes, my background, um, I came to Finland some 35 years ago, actually pretty much this month. And I came to study in a program called Design Leadership, which was a new program.

It was the first kind of international master's level program where students, you could say it was kind of intradisciplinary program, not kind of multidisciplinary cross disciplinary. It was intra meaning that it was different design disciplines, uh, you know, uh, interior architecture, visual communications, graphics, industrial design, and so on.

We studied, there was about 10 students in, in, in the program, um, from different countries. There were a number from Finland and then the rest were from abroad. I had lived and worked in London for, uh, some years before that. And I had thought about doing a master's. Quite many of my friends had actually studied in the RCA, the [00:02:00] Royal College of Art and Design.

Um, but I thought that actually, 'cause I was working as an industrial designer, I thought it would be better to have an experience which was beyond. Industry design that it was actually something which was design leadership, which I really didn't have a clue what it really was. And, and uh, that was one of the reasons for joining it to figure out what, what does it mean to be a design leader.

And that's the reason why I came to Finland, like I said, 35 years ago, and, uh, have stayed here since pretty much. I have been on sabbatical for a number of times. Yeah. Um, to, to the states mostly. Hmm.

**Irina:** And you've been teaching at the IDBM program since the beginning?

**Peter:** Yes. Yes, because we had, we had, it was kind of the University of Industrial Arts, Helsinki, and then University of Art and Design.

So the name has kind of been reinvented a number of times, the precursor to Aalto University School of Arts, Design and Architecture. Um, I came to study in Finland primarily because I was interested in Finnish culture and Finn design culture. And [00:03:00] then also the topic was, was white. Different from, you know, what I had been doing before and also felt there was something that I needed to learn about how to influence people, how to kind of understand different disciplinary perspectives and then kind of negotiate your space.

**Irina:** Right? Yeah. Okay. Thanks. And Markku, would the father of IDBM, if I can call you, uh, could you introduce yourself too?

**Markku:** Yeah, I, I. Uh, my, my first, I, I, I first I went to study at, at the, uh, bus, no, the technical university, and got my, my master's, master's in, in industrial management. And that was a combination of, of tech, technology and business.

So that was like interdisciplinary background, what I, what I got from there. Then I went to work at Arabia. And it finished, uh, quite famous, famous, uh, ceramic and, and, and [00:04:00] glass companies. And, uh, there I worked with, uh, with different, different professionals also, also designers. And, and that was, gave me, gave me since I was, I was there for 20 years.

And, uh, and, uh, so I had like the normal, normal, like. Way of getting more and more or different, different, uh, responsibilities and a bit higher, higher positions in the, in the, in the organization. And so that might cut quite, quite, quite, uh, wide, uh, uh, uh, um, experience of different kinds of situations and, and, uh, like, like content wise and also also management wise.

So, so. And then after 20 years, I decided that I want to study more, and then I, I, I came to the business school and, and then made my, my licensee and, and [00:05:00] doctors, uh, degrees. And, and, and then IDBM was like in, in this process part of my, my what, what I was, what I was doing. And I would say that my studies.

Since, uh, I, I, first, first time I studied the, uh, competitive, competitive, uh, force of Finn, design companies and then in industrialization process, and that was the, uh, doctor's level. And so I got quite, I would think that quite, quite nice nice background for, also for IDBM taking IDBM like. Developing it and, and also being kind of leader type I like.

**Irina:** And then you worked in the IDBM program until you retired?

**Markku:** I was, I was, I was. They even paid me, so, so, [00:06:00]

**Irina:** yeah. Oh, good to know.

**Peter:** Happy days.

**Irina:** Yeah. Happy, happy. Okay, thanks. Uh, Peter, the first course, you, you told me that the first course you were teaching under the IDBM program was called Design and Creative Teamwork, right?

**Peter:** Yes,

**Irina:** yes. Uh, can you talk about the course contents and then what, what did the students learn?

**Peter:** Yeah, so sorry, I hadn't really the answered your previous questions. Oh, okay. Okay. Sorry. So, so I'll get to the point now. Um, the course that I taught was, was design and Creative Teamwork was also a course that was taught within the now called the Department of Design.

And, uh, so it was kind of in that way, multidisciplinary, but also interdisciplinary in the sense that there were a lot of industrial design students and participating in the course. The idea of the course was essentially to get people familiar with working with. People from different disciplinary backgrounds, so different knowledge bases, different approaches to, and processes, even different, different [00:07:00] cognitive models that they, so we, we taught about different team roles and how they relate to and effect team performance, including how different disciplinary perspectives, influence and effect on creativity and, and ultimately the kind of idea of synergy within and between different disciplines.

So you can kind of do more together than you would alone.

**Markku:** Right.

**Peter:** And that was the kind of foundation of the course. It was a quite an intensive course. We talked about team roles. We used kind of the Belbin or me and McCann team roles where there was nine different team roles, kind of resource investigator, plant, you know, and so on.

Um, implementer and then also different cognitive processes where we used the Myers-Briggs type indicator, which was, um, looking at 16 different types and people to amplify. Who's complimentary to you? And who will be a contrast to you. So the way to process information, the way to see and be, the way to judge or perceive something, and that were the kind of foundational tools that were [00:08:00] used, um, in the, in the course.

So it was essentially an introductory course, which I would say was a multidisciplinary course because it was so new. People were just different disciplines, ganged together. The IDBM program, of course, as a kind of intent, tries to be uh, uh, cross-disciplinary. So you actually cross the disciplines and you go beyond crisp disciplinary boundaries.

Um, I talked about kind of communication and collaboration and co creativity as a kind of common denominator in, in the course and also still in the program. And, uh, of course it's become more complex. There's more facets to design and designing. There's more facets. To the world. Uh, the degree of complexity and

uncertainty, of course, was to try and, um, address those and to embrace those and not to be kind of, uh, scared of them to be kind of saying, okay, this is inherent so we don't know what we're doing, so let's figure, let's co-figure.

**Irina:** Yeah, exactly. So in your view, what is the need for, [00:09:00] uh, effective collaboration between these different disciplines?

**Peter:** Yeah, I've been, I mean, like I mentioned earlier, um, the idea of collaboration is to kind of gain synergies.

**Irina:** Yeah.

**Peter:** And you can kind of coordinate different disciplines where you say, okay, well you do this and I do that.

Um, but there's very little shift in, in, in perspective, um, collaboration involves deeper co elaboration. So you're actually together creating something which. Probably alone as a industrial designer, you would not be able to do or not do as well as having another perspective from the kind of business model or from, from the technology.

**Markku:** Mm-hmm.

**Peter:** Um, so in that way I, I think the collaboration and then of course, also we could even talk about IDBM with an aspiration for, you know, we talk about radical creativity and so what, how does that relate to what, what makes it radical? Well, radical is relative. Um, as, as such, it has to be, um, but it means that you're doing something that actually is new.

Is something that's [00:10:00] novel, something that's meaningful. And of course the idea of collaboration also is we can also, we can talk about deep collaboration. And I've listened to some of the previous podcasts and, and the collaboration discussion kind of came up about kind of trust and respect and appreciation and, you know, a lot of things risk taking.

And I think that that's something where deep collaboration really only occurs when you have a longer time experience. I can't have a deep collaboration with you without knowing you. And likewise you with me. Um, but we learn to know each other. And then the industry project, I think is a very good way of which students go beyond the kind of, you know, nice to be with, to kind of struggling and even having conflicts, um, conflicts which are hopefully constructive, not destructive.

Yeah. And having different types of conflict. You know, different people, you know, respond differently in a conflict situation. Some people avoid. The conflict at all costs. Some people are very happy to attack and, and kind of, you know, go, go straight for the kill. Um, some people are kind [00:11:00] acquiesce and just kind of give up and say, okay, I'll just take it easy.

I'm not gonna make my point clear. Or you can be autocratic, you can be. So there's kinda different perspectives on, on conflict and how different types respond to conflict. So if you attack me. If I know you well enough, I know that that's nothing personal. It's just you. It's your approach to kind of interaction where somebody else, I know that's a deep conflict and that this is now at a stage where, you know, this could be destructive for all of us.

And they were the things really were trying to kind of address in the program. 'cause of course when you're confronting how you see something and somebody challenges your assumptions about something, then of course it can be easily defensive.

**Markku:** Yeah,

**Peter:** and, and that's a natural kind of human course that you kind of as such kind of defend yourself, but then you kind of, when you learn to know each other, you'd learn to also respect and trust each other and know that, okay, you're not trying to take me down.

I'm not trying to take you down, I'm just trying to get the best result or trying to rethink how I think about something and maybe the way I think is probably not the best way to [00:12:00] think could be different than it is at the moment. I think that's the big opportunity. The big challenge of the program is for people to be open minded, um, and understand that we have differences and there is inherent, inherent complexity in what we do and, and strategy typically.

When it's complex, it emerges. It's not planned. You can't say, okay, it's exactly this and this and this. 'cause then it's known. Mm-hmm. So then it's certain, but when there's a high degree of complexity, uncertainty and, and a need for change, then you have to deal with this ambiguity. And, and that can be very frustrating.

And some students in certain disciplines find that very hard to confront. They wanna know

**Irina:** Exactly.

**Peter:** And they say, well, you can't know something that. We can't know until we try it and see what we figure together collectively.

**Irina:** Mm. And of course, it's not only these different disciplines, but it's also different cultures.

And nowadays, IDBM is multicultural, uh, people from all over the world absolutely. Are attending the the program and that. In a way also then adds complexity to the [00:13:00] collaboration. Um,

**Peter:** yeah, and, and richness of course, because Yeah, of course. Yeah. But absolutely there and, and, and the program has been, uh, multidisciplinary and also multicultural pretty much from the start.

I think more than half the students are, are foreign students, including, like when I came to Finland, there were about three Finnish students of 10. So the rest were the seven. Were were non e, non non finished. And uh, then you learn the culture. And of course I've been here, it was quite long that I started to become.

Understanding Finnish mentality much more than I would've earlier.

**Irina:** Yeah.

**Peter:** I've actually partly become finished

**Markku:** and Wanted to learn.

**Peter:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Markku:** Much more than you wanted.

**Peter:** Yeah. Yeah. You were forced to learn sometimes, okay, this is how it works. This is how we communicate.

**Irina:** So you feel already a bit finnish?

**Peter:** Yeah. I've been more than half my life here.

**Markku:** He's also fluent, didn't finish language, so.

**Peter:** Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. That's the secret. That's that's why we're having this interview in, in, in English. Yes. But, um, it, it is something where of course, it influences over time and, and the way to see and be is, is different.[00:14:00]

This kind of idea of, of which was very popular at one point. The idea of kind of T-shaped, a kind of, you know, where you have a kind of a deep disciplinary understanding of one area, for example, from your bachelor's. And then you go into a program like IDBM, which was originally a minor's and then became a major, and now it's both is a minor and major, but the major is one of the main, main kind of focal areas.

Um, 'cause it's a two years master's program, but I do graduate from the University of Art, art design architecture in IDBM and somebody does it in engineering or mar marketing or business. So we, anyway, our degree is anyway still coming from your host, your kind of core. And that's important and that that's important.

But the idea of T-shaped, I think is important. And this idea, which actually only came to me through chat GTP recently.

**Irina:** Ah, okay.

**Peter:** Um, the idea of kind of pi shaped. Um, so you have two verticals on one horizontal and the vertical. The [00:15:00] vertical can be a kind of, for example, industrial design, but it also might be deciding it's, it's another disciplinary perspective.

Or actually it can even be ai. And then you have ethics, which will be kind of a horizontal one way. You kind of look at, you know, how to see and be, um, to collaborate and communicate. And I think that's one of the big challenges about the idea of synergy within yourself. So you can have synergy within yourself due to your education.

So if I. Study this and then study that. And then of course I can combine those things together. Two programs that actually have been very inspirational for me. Um, both are US programs because it's the information is English. Even though I was in Japan for a while at the University of Tokyo, um, they kind of, uh, Stanford have a program called Symbolic Systems.

And then people study computer science alongside psychology, philosophy, linguistics, and so on, which I think is very inspirational. And it, it goes more

towards transdisciplinary perspectives rather than [00:16:00] kind of, you know, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary. And the same with the MIT media lab.

They also have a program, which I would say it's more transdisciplinary, so it goes beyond disciplinary boundaries. And then you integrate people with. Outside of disciplines. Um, so you have kind of users, you have doctors, you have, you know, people who are not necessarily as such, designer, engineer, marketer as in IDBM,

**Markku:** what is then the base for this.

It's like, uh, thinking if you don't use or like basic, basic,

**Peter:** you have that as a core anyway. So like, I mean, my thinking very much, most of my education initially has been in industrial design, so I, I think so that's

**Markku:** still, that's core. That's the vertical. I think. I, I think that's the way it should be.

**Peter:** Yeah.

**Markku:** You should, when, when all the schools, uh, came taught on, I was, I said that it's not good that everybody will be small engineers.

**Peter:** Yes.

**Irina:** And that has, has not happened.

**Peter:** Yeah, definitely.

**Irina:** definitely not,

**Peter:** well, lot of, a lot of design [00:17:00] students actually were initially attracted to IDBM because of the business studies.

Probably not so much to do with technology or engineering. And, um, that's kind of partly changed because things have become more complex and we have things like service design and, and, and user experience design and so on. So

there's different, different, um, perspectives that are apparent now and relevant now.

But, uh, yeah, I think your core is our core. And, but there was a lot of discussion in the previous podcast about the kind of idea of being a generalist and you say, yeah, but a generalist and you can be Absolutely. I'm, I, I'm, you know. But still there's a core, like those programs you can say you can be transdisciplinary when you have a discipline.

**Irina:** Yes. Otherwise you can't thing

**Peter:** otherwise. It's very tricky. It's tricky. You need to have the discipline or you have to be a politician and just, you know, play the game and go with the power influence.

**Irina:** Yeah.

**Markku:** I personally find quite often that I'm an engineer.

**Peter:** Yes.

**Markku:** Like mathematics and natural sciences, like, have [00:18:00] formed my, my, my thinking so that I always start from there.

**Irina:** Yeah.

**Markku:** I try to find like figures or, or like. Like, like how, how things are developing or that kind of things and, and then try to find like the right answer. My problem.

**Peter:** Which also was interesting because I mean, there was a discussion about is design thinking now? You know, something that actually has dissipated and actually it's so diffused that it's hard to get a grasp of it.

But I think that there is kind of an interesting combination of com algorithmic thinking where it uses logic and of course there's limits to logic. Um, but there is kind of, you know, rational cause effect, routine right answer stuff, which AI is now really taking hold of. And that's why there's a lot of work which are routine right answers where even, even medical profession, um, law, because there's a root, there's a kind of a right answer.

The law is the law type of thing. And there are things which can be put into an algorithm and actually made as code and, and [00:19:00] actually, you know, constitutes our use of, of ai and why. AI is impacting on certain professions compared to others. And of course, creativity and AI is definitely a very good aid to creativity.

But, uh, it, it's an aid to creativity as such, you've gotta make a decision and you're make not making a decision alone, you're making a collective decision. And I think that's the complexity. So you're making a decision based on user centeredness, um, you know, ergonomics, um, empathy. And you're making decision based on can this be made?

You know, can we make money from this? Mm-hmm. And so they're the kind of different things that we collectively. Determine who, who's responsible for what, but then ultimately deciding Okay, it is, which was mentioned about this kind of, you know, desirability, feasibility, viability stuff.

**Markku:** Yeah.

**Peter:** Which Ideo made very popular, but actually that originally comes from the Dublin group actually.

They Ah, really? They're the ones who kind of, they, Ideo added to it. I made very, and made it very popular. But actually it comes from, um, I think it's Larry Keeley from, from the [00:20:00] Dublin group who kind of came up with the, that idea originally.

**Irina:** Yeah. Now, Peter, you've been teaching in the IDBM program throughout the history of IDBM, right?

**Peter:** Yes.

**Irina:** So all, all the, all the years, so to say. Yes. Uh, how has the, uh, how has the teaching changed or has, well, has it changed?

**Peter:** Of course, shifting from a minor to a major is different, and then you have to make sense that, okay, what will people do when they graduate? So you do a major in IDBM and yes, you come through the School of Business and you graduate through the School of business, but you have a kind of perspective from different schools and then you say, well, okay, what is it that you do?

And as was mentioned before, you know a lot of the IDBM is very much about community. People create longer term, deeper collaboration, um, ones which last multiple years and people support each other, um, in getting work and, and kind of. Also, uh, [00:21:00] socially just kind of interacting. So I think that's one of the big powers of IDBM is that people don't just collaborate in the program.

They actually, it becomes lifelong actually.

**Irina:** So it's a community on network. The

**Peter:** community. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. And, and, and, and something that you couldn't really necessarily plan for, but it just happens because people figure, you know this, I like working with this person. I know you and

**Markku:** yeah.

**Peter:** I like working with you and I, I can, you know, recommend to you.

Um, we're looking for a position, uh, for somebody and IDBM very much is a good kind of pool of resources. I don't know how many people have graduated from IDBM from the minor or major. It's certain. Certainly I don't either. Certainly it's, it's, it's more towards 700 or so. I, I would imagine,

**Irina:** yeah, 30 years.

And

**Markku:** you might know

**Markku:** no. Okay.

**Peter:** it was a little bit like a mafia.

**Markku:** Every year. Every year. How many? How many what? What is the year? Year or how many students.

**Irina:** 60 [00:22:00] per year.

**Markku:** Yeah. So,

**Markku:** more or less like 30 years, those 60 should like graduate.

**Irina:** Yeah. More or less.

**Markku:** Not everybody graduates, but, and then the times, time's 30 years, so

**Irina:** yeah. So nearly 2000 if we, if it goes like that, of course, in the beginning. Uh, I think that the student amount was less.

**Markku:** Yeah.

**Irina:** Um,

**Markku:** but one thing that I was, in the beginning, I was, I was trying to like, think about, and, and also also push forward was, was the idea that, or the question that what kind of people do, do we need or, or the industry or society need?

And, and my understanding is that. Everyone should not be like IDBMer. Like we, we need those, those, uh, guys who go deep into their own discipline and, and which is then narrow but deep. Mm-hmm. And then we need like IDBM type of the T-shaped, like understand, have own. [00:23:00] Like strong discipline or, or knowledge.

And then, but then can, can co uh, cooperate with, with like other, other, like, uh, experts.

**Peter:** Mm-hmm.

**Markku:** And then we have people who, who like know something about everything and, and, and then, and. I think it's, for me, that has been quite, I important, uh, that, uh, and, and that we, we, we tried, we tried for instance, like in the courses, but also also in, in the project, we try, try to give the students the, the understanding of how to deal with other, other ideas and, and, and, uh, and how to put them together, together.

Yeah, the decision, some, somebody has to make the decision. If if, I mean, if it's not like common Id, common understanding.

**Peter:** Yeah.

**Irina:** Mm. Yeah. And of course, uh, we can see the benefits of this interdisciplinary, [00:24:00] uh, way of, of working. Uh, but could you pre precisely, we still kind of, uh, say that why does it make sense to have this interdisciplinary, uh, study program?

**Peter:** I, I would say, because you can achieve more than you alone. So you also get the benefit of a different, uh, disciplinary perspective, different skills, different tools, different methods, different mentalities, and you embrace those and you have to embrace those because you can easily get frustrated. If somebody is just wants to close and converge and get a decision before we even open up the possibility.

Mm-hmm. So for me, one of the big challenges and one of the big opportunities of IDBM is, is setting the problem, not necessarily only solving it. Now solving it, of course is, is what it's all about ultimately, but deciding what is the problem, what is the opportunity, you know, what is the opportunity space

**Markku:** and what kind of knowledge we need to, to solve the [00:25:00] problem.

**Peter:** Yes.

**Markku:** In the best way.

**Peter:** Exactly.

**Markku:** Yeah.

**Peter:** And, and, and there are things where we have to know each other enough because I, I, I. Don't even know. I know some things and then, you know, you don't know, you know some things. And suddenly in a team situation you realize, okay, well actually yeah, I can draw upon this.

Which was kind of somewhat tacit. Not necessarily very explicit, but something that actually came to mind in the moment. And I think that's why it's very contextual. It's very cultural. It's very, in that way, cognitively, cognitively, um, conditioned. Um, of which we have to be simply curious. I mean, curiosity, I think is one of the real common denominators that you don't do IDBM unless you're open-minded and you're curious, otherwise you're gonna be just frustrated.

And curiosity, I think is, you know, with, with determination, of course, you can't just be curious and just, you know, open-minded and not go anywhere you wanna try to go somewhere. But being open-minded and, and having the kind of, um, [00:26:00] diligence and also, um. The energy to resilience to kind of overcome obstacles because of course in an industry project you're kind of, you start and it looks very positive and you're all very happy, and then suddenly you realize, come to a frustration, um, which is a natural part of doing something that probably is new.

'cause if it's all happy, happy, happy, then you're probably not doing something or you're just very fortunate, but it's very unlikely you're not really challenging your assumptions or you're challenging your team's members' assumptions. And I think that's where. This kind of openness and this curiosity, um, and, and, and energy to pursue something.

Because if you want an easy way, then there's easier ways than than working with people who think very differently from you.

**Markku:** Bring more knowledge to the decision making process than just through one discipline.

**Peter:** Yeah.

**Markku:** And then you have the problem that, how to evaluate the different, different positive minuses and, and pluses there, and then then. [00:27:00]

Made the decision.

**Irina:** Mm-hmm.

**Peter:** And, and I think this is where there's this difference between, and that's where there's a interesting cultural difference about kind of, you know, strategy as planning that you know in advance, you're making a very sure decision, yes, no, let's go one way. You say, well actually we don't really know what we're doing.

And so we got to experiment, we got to explore, we got to be creative in order to determine where we wanna go. And that's where the strategy is more kind of emergent. Um, you don't know. I can't say at the beginning of the, of the course or at the beginning of a project, you don't know where we're gonna go, and then you say, well, it's not hopeless, but we gotta figure as we go, but also be open-minded enough and converge enough.

And not diverge prematurely, which is often what happens when you have a different kind of say, let's be productive, let's get things done and say, well, let's get the right things done. So the idea of, you mentioned earlier about being effective and being efficient. I can do something fast and cheap and so on, but it may not be very effective.

And the [00:28:00] effectiveness is, is a key determinant of. And I think that's a big challenge, which was also mentioned in the previous podcasts about, you know, the kind of desire to be efficient when you say, but actually we cannot be efficient in something which is inherently complex and we don't know what we're doing yet, but we will make a decision.

But we gotta to envision different possibilities before we determine which is the best route to take. And I think that suspending judgment, I think is an important, uh, competence and capability. Um, as a, as, as a kind of Id bmr.

**Markku:** Yeah, in the real life you always have the time, time, the time issue, there constraints.

Yeah. I mean, you, you must know how much time we have. I have like, like to, to solve this problem.

**Peter:** Yes,

**Markku:** you have much time. Then you can take everything there around and start thinking I'm putting on together. And then if not, then you're just, somebody just makes the decision and that's, that's real life.

**Peter:** Absolutely. And then this, [00:29:00] this is why this Design Sprint

**Markku:** has, and unfortunately there are quite many people in the industry and there who, who think that now we always have that, and I am, I'm the guy who makes the decision. And that's not the idea of IDBM.

**Irina:** No.

**Peter:** Right? And, and I, and that's the big challenge, which, which is mentioned earlier, um, that, that, you know, you, you want to be seen to be efficient and, and, and in control.

And you say, well, you know, be effective and. Be in control to the extent that you can be in control.

**Markku:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Peter:** And, and acknowledge that, okay, you know, we're not outta control, but we're not able to control all the variables and we don't understand the complexity of the problem sufficiently well, so that we have to understand enough to explore and experiment and then, then make a decision.

And you still might be the wrong decision, but at least you're kind of given room for in opening up different, different paths or different streams or, or, or. Different routes to, to go.

**Irina:** And I guess that we are in a situation in, in the world globally that we [00:30:00] do need to make a change. And, and change is also, uh, expected, uh, from us, especially from our students that are graduating.

Uh, what do you see that then, what are the tools that we're giving to the students so that they can actually make meaningful change in the world?

**Peter:** If I understand, uh, correctly, um, Elina Hiltunen and who kind of has background in, in chemical engineering and actually is now a kind of futurist. And also, also

**Markku:** also a doctorate in, in military military science.

**Peter:** Now. Now, yes. So a double doctorate. Yeah. That's, that's kind of funny. But, uh, I think

**Markku:** IDBM as well.

**Irina:** Yes, yes, definitely.

**Peter:** I think having this, this kind of, uh, futures thinking, I mean, thinking about the future is quite limited. Yeah. Determine only through your own discipline. Yeah. It doesn't say your discipline makes, make, doesn't make a difference.

It does make a difference. But [00:31:00] futures thinking is transdisciplinary by nature. 'cause there's multiple factors, multiple variables, political, economic, social, technological, all the pest stuff on steep and whatever terms they use. Um, so you're looking at multiple things. And at the same time still, you have to determine which direction to go and, and help an organization decide.

These are a number of ways to go. And, and you know, this, this is the benefits of this approach, this is the drawbacks of this approach and so on. So you can make a kind of informed decision. Um, and you still might be wrong, like I said, but just, but at least you're making a decision, acknowledging complexity, uncertainty, and, and change.

And as you say, the world is definitely fully uncertain more than probably. I could say ever than ever before because of information and just, you know, flow of social media and you know, what's happening globally, geopolitically and, and so on. That, you know, things you couldn't have imagined not so long ago actually.

Mm-hmm. You would think, you know, can this be happening? And it [00:32:00] is.

**Irina:** Uh. Still going back into the, the IDBM program and the courses that you have been teaching. Uh, can you share any stories about the, the courses or the industry projects or the teaching the students throughout this 30 years? Is there something that comes to your mind?

**Peter:** I, I could maybe say about the, um, what's called mentoring.

**Irina:** Mm.

**Peter:** And I don't really think, I think actually the term is probably not correct to say that you have a kind of a mentor for the team. I think probably the best term is more, which actually the kind of, um, the, the IDP, the kind of industrial project that Kalevi Ekman has been doing. They call them coaches, and I think coaches is a better term.

**Irina:** Mm-hmm. Okay.

**Peter:** And in the early days, which I don't know how apparent it is now, but we always had two. [00:33:00] Domain experts. So

**Markku:** for each team.

**Peter:** For each team, yeah. And that maybe has eroded over over time that it tends to be probably a mentor, which I think is a coach anyway, but then it really only represents as such one point of view.

Whereas we kind of co-coach a team and so I would bring a design point of view. Markku would bring a kind of business. Technology point of view. And they were very complimentary 'cause we were competent in those areas and we had domain expertise you could say and experience. And I think that's something which I think was a real richness of the program.

Um, in the early days when it was a minor studies program and to which, how clearly apparent that is now as a major studies, I don't know. You been involved as a minor studies student, uh, a bazillion years ago. Yeah. Um, how has changed as a master's program? Um, is, is the mentoring coming from one perspective?

And I think if that's the case, I [00:34:00] think there's something then missing.

**Markku:** most important, uh, uh, responsibility for the coach or, or the whoever, like how do you call that? Or the teams was that make sure that everybody or each student had possibility to present their role, their ideas, not, not, so that one is like dictating the dominating Yeah.

Dominating, yeah.

**Peter:** Exactly.

**Markku:** Say what happens and, and that, that's, then otherwise we won't get the, the, the, the good things from the multidisciplinary.

**Irina:** Right. And wasn't So that there were two of these coaches or mentors I don't even remember. Yes. Per industry project.

**Peter:** Yes.

**Irina:** Right.

**Peter:** In, in, in Markku's days when I, in, when I was involved with, with, with it the kind of, um, mentoring or, or, or, or coaching.

Um, and I think that was very rich. Um, something that, that kind of, kind of reinforced the IDBM philosophy and concept. Um, in a very pragmatic way because mentoring is more long term and it's more individual. Whereas you're coaching a team with the project with the client, [00:35:00] and so you gotta keep the focus there.

Um, and of course people can develop their competencies and more long term capabilities, but as such, it's applied in a project and then the project succeeds or fails, or. Is in between. It's not either successful or, or

**Markku:** success. What I remember from, from those quite many, like 10 tens of, uh, teams teamworks, is that very often the, often the customer was like surprised or very happy about, about, about the, like how, how the students were, had been.

Dealing with the, with the problem and what kind of ideas they, they came up with, with and, and, and, and what was their suggestion then so that they, they see, saw the, the value of this, like having, having the team, this kind of team, like, uh, and, and not just one person to, to give his or her opinion or Exactly, yeah.

Know, but I, I don't, I don't remember any, any good. [00:36:00]

**Irina:** No stories,

**Markku:** no stories

**Peter:** about success or failure.

**Irina:** Yeah. Well, do you remember, uh, any, any, uh, kind of unforgettable mistakes or failures? That's always interesting.

**Peter:** I mean, the, the failing is part of a process. And I mean, you know, you ultimately learning is about figuring out, okay, well this doesn't work.

So the failing is, as was mentioned also in the other podcasts, um, the importance of embracing failure, not that you wanna fail. But did you realize, you know, failure is, is, is part of a process and, and failing is part of a process. And at the end you may succeed because you failed multiple times because you tried different roots and then figured there's a better way

**Markku:** taking that you learn something about your failure.

**Peter:** Yeah. You have to. No, no, absolutely. And, and that not to ignore, you know, not to be embarrassed by your failing. Yeah. Um, which, which also you can easily say, okay, this is not professional. I, I should be more professional. I shouldn't fail. Well, actually, if you're doing something really new, the chances

of not not doing it correctly, uh, are the best way at [00:37:00] first is quite obvious.

**Markku:** Yeah.

**Peter:** And I think that's something which it takes courage and confidence to, to kind of understand that that is part of the process. And, and yes, you don't wanna fail

**Markku:** ultimately. Yeah.

**Peter:** But, but it's, it is part of the process

**Markku:** and it's, it's good to learn, learn that when you're studying, not, not working in the, in the somewhere.

**Peter:** Yeah. And even when you're working, that's where we say, well, you know, certainly when you go to work, you don't fail. Absolutely. You do.

**Markku:** Yeah.

**Peter:** But, but it's harder because, you know, people are looking at you and saying, okay, Peter, you know, your career is not looking brilliant at the moment.

**Markku:** But when, when you asked about about stories then, then when you mentioned Elina, who is now.

Having those all decrease. And then Elina, after his, his, his year here at IDBM, he started as our assistant and Elina's kind of side role was to also sell, sell the projects. And Elina took the phone and said, can I speak to Jorma Ollila, who was the head of, head of Nokia? And, uh, we [00:38:00] have this student project that, no, sorry, we, we can't reach now, but this ours scientific director, is this, I don't remember his name now.

It's, is I on this phone there and, and we got the project

**Peter:** Yes. No, and just kind of being brave and, and, and kind of, you know, confronting not, not being afraid.

**Markku:** Yeah,

**Peter:** having a degree of, of confidence without being cocky. Of course you have to be, otherwise you get discarded quite easily. But if you're kind of, you like probe nicely.

Um, and, and, and she was the first, uh, kind of IDBM coordinator, wasn't she? For the,

**Irina:** I think so, yes. Yeah. At least she was saying so, but maybe at least she was,

**Peter:** I think she

**Markku:** was well assistant or the, or the assistant, yeah. Assistant of the program.

**Peter:** Yeah. So I think she was the first one because I remember her.

**Markku:** Yeah.

**Irina:** Yeah. But I guess nowadays the selling of the project is slightly different when it's. Not so easy to reach people by phone or by email, but by any, any medium mix. it has changed.

**Peter:** And a lot [00:39:00] of them come through word of mouth and through connections, you know? Right. A certain amount of the projects come because we've done a project before or some IDBMr is now working in a position in an organization and brings a project.

Yes. So, but it's also shifted from um, more kind of industry, business to uh, to kind of not-for-profit and so on, which I think is a new dimension. Of IDBM, which originally wasn't there. It was a kind of industry project. Um, and now there's probably, probably 50% of the projects are not for profit stuff.

**Irina:** Right.

**Peter:** Which I think is also interesting 'cause you need different capabilities, difficult political ways to persuade and influence. It's not all about the money. Mm. It's about the benefit. It's about the. Impact personally,

**Markku:** what do you, do you remember from your project and your like, uh, same times, like those that were done.

**Peter:** Would you say your project, which your team was successful?

**Irina:** I think successful. It was successful. Uh, we did come up with [00:40:00] ideas that were novel. Uh, in the end. I dunno if anything then was executed as such. Yeah, probably not.

**Peter:** Yeah.

**Irina:** Uh, so our team was working for Polar Electro and we went to Asia to find out if, if a heartbeat monitor could be sold to women in the Asian markets because, uh, women were not exercising in these specific market, uh, areas where we went.

So we were trying to find, uh, new ways, uh, to kind of get the, the product through.

**Peter:** And that was at a time when it was quite crucial to kind of rethink.

**Irina:** This was 97.

**Peter:** So pre Apple Smart watch and so on.

**Irina:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Uh, but what I remember quite well is that because our team was, uh, female only, we were three, uh, women in the team.

And, uh, then we were. Went off to, to Asia, uh, and we had a lot of meetings, uh, booked for us also [00:41:00] in academia, in companies, in different places. Uh, we needed, we needed a chaperone for us. So there was one professor from, uh, from the technical university ail that came with us because otherwise, uh, the doors would not have been opened.

Yes. In

**Peter:** Asia?

**Irina:** Yeah, like, like, uh, young, uh, female students.

**Peter:** So where in Asia?

**Irina:** Uh, we went to, uh, Shanghai, uh, Hong Kong and Tokyo.

**Peter:** Yeah.

**Irina:** And uh, it did really help that. Then we had a professor, Eila, she was female as well, but at that time it was, uh, quite, quite difficult. And then, uh, especially in China, people were looking at us and, and, and we were like a, in a circus.

Yeah. Uh. Why would

**Peter:** we talk

**Irina:** to blonde, tall, uh, women? So it was,

**Peter:** yeah. Yeah.

**Irina:** A bit odd. Odd, uh, to see.

**Peter:** Yeah. And, and there's a big cultural insight, you know? [00:42:00] Yes. That the kind of hierarchy and, and, and, you know, here the students, you know? Yeah. And you need some, somebody with authority, somebody with, with kind of.

They can kind of figure that this person is a professor, so that makes a difference. Yeah, and it does. It absolutely does make a difference. Yeah, it did make a difference sense, which more so than I'd say in Finland, even though of course people appreciate that if somebody's a professor and so on, but as such, it's not so important.

It's more what they think and what they say and what they do, whereas there it's quite, the doors easily don't open unless you have that kind of authority or kind of, you know, influence. Yes.

**Irina:** So now looking, uh, from your position of, of kind of this emeritus position, you can of course, uh, be on, on top of everything and, and, and say that you've done it all and you've seen it all.

But what would be your greetings, uh, to the, uh, people now studying in the IDBM or teaching in the IDBM?

**Peter:** I'm looking at you, Markku.

**Markku:** Yeah, I I can, I can feel [00:43:00] it.

**Peter:** Look at the bite.

**Markku:** Yeah. I would, well some, somehow I think that everybody should have some kind of idea what they want to be. I mean the, am I somebody who with go in a very narrow like letters.

Up to the sky. So learning everything about this and, and then using that for everywhere, like any kind of kind of problem. Well then, if you can, can accept that it's, it's not possible for me to, to understand and, and learn everything. So accept something, something also from the side. And then it, there are different, like, like, um.

Like how, how much you allow like, ideas who are not [00:44:00] like, same as, as what you have.

**Peter:** Hmm.

**Markku:** So, but I mean it's, it's, it's very, very difficult for, for the students to do this kind of decision. I think that's, that's something that the students should learn during the IDBM program that what benefits. There is that somebody has a wise idea that which size would consider and try to like link with my own and, and, and or then not.

That's

**Irina:** so to be conscious of the decision as well to make the decision. That's what

**Peter:** I think One of the biggest things that I think influences very much what I think, and I use it on a daily basis frequently, is using ai. I think that's something where you, you simply can't ignore it. You have to understand what its strengths are, what its potential weaknesses are, of course, ethical factors and economic factors and environmental factors.

Just with ai, obviously [00:45:00] it's using a huge amount of, of, of energy, um, but it's something that you kind of have to justify why. But I think for me it's, it's something that you can't not take it seriously.

**Markku:** I think I was, when you convinced us that AI is something good. So I was trying to think that what is actually the, the most important thing that we, we, we want to give to our students.

I think that it is that you must always be willing to understand, understand that uh, somebody else comes, other kind of information that you have, and, and somehow at least, uh, honor that

**Peter:** yes. Hmm. And, and challenging your own assumptions about something, I think that's necessary for being open-minded and, and, and developing a degree of trust and respect.

Yeah.

**Markku:** Well that's what, what we always learn at that, at home when you, you are [00:46:00] ladies. Telling you all that,

**Peter:** what's right and what's wrong.

**Irina:** Oh my God.

**Peter:** Now we gotta do, it's just where we, now, we can do this, we kind of go on a tangent where we say, okay,

**Markku:** yeah,

**Peter:** we're

**Markku:** in trouble now. This is, this is the ultimate.

Ultimate, like,

**Irina:** okay,

**Markku:** that's what I have learned. Like being together something like 55 years with the, with the same lady. So

**Irina:** yeah, it's like ai.

**Markku:** Yeah, it's my walking AI.

**Irina:** Okay, now our time is coming to an end. Uh, I warmly thank you for joining this discussion. Uh, it was really fruitful and interesting.

Thank you, Peter. And thank you Markku.

**Peter:** Yeah. And thank you for the invitation. Thank you. Thank you. Sorry, I always speak very quickly when I'm excited, so hopefully it's not too fast. Let's see.

**Irina:** Maybe I can,

**Peter:** slow it down. Slow it down. Use ai.

**Irina:** Use AI for the slowing. Yeah.[00:47:00]

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 the Aalto University.

**Markku:** We have known each other. Like how many years.

**Peter:** Pretty much. 30. Yeah. Yeah.

**Markku:** Yeah. So 35 years. That's always been so that I only get catch like one, say one third of your, what is,

**Peter:** even myself, I only catch what? What did you just say? You were saying something. It sounded fluent, but actually what were you saying?

**Irina:** Yeah.