Podcast series: Leading for Interdisciplinary Creativity

IDBM programme at Aalto University

Episode 8

Length: 45:36 min

Guests: Tua Björklund and Satu Rekonen

Host: Irina Viippola

Satu: [00:00:00] In creative context It's not only the educational professional background that comes, it can be very valuable. Uh, other kind of experiences that you have gathered through, uh, voluntary work or, uh, hobbies or other, other networks.

Aalto University Podcast

Irina: This is leading for interdisciplinary creativity, and I am your host Irina Viippola. In this episode, we examine how IDBM connects with its ecosystem to amplify impact. We explore how to build team cultures that unlock creativity, the practical leadership moves that sustain it, and the communication habits that make collaboration more effective from navigating the pitfalls of interdisciplinary teamwork to steering organizations Tuard a better future.

This episode offers sharp insights. You can apply. Let's hear the thoughts of two experienced creative leadership experts.[00:01:00]

Welcome Tua Björklund and Satu Rekonen.

Satu: Thank you.

Irina: Before we start our discussion, can you introduce yourself and tell a bit about your background, Tua? Yeah, if you can start.

Tua: So, my name is Tua. I'm the director of the Design Factory. That's a multidisciplinary collaboration hub for product development, research, and teaching and impact.

Um, I'm the teacher in charge of a industry project course, product development project, which like IDBM is 30 years now. So, um. Long shared history across the years, even before Alta was created there. So I lead the unit, but also do the teaching and research and kind of practical outreach there. Okay.

Irina: Thanks. And you Satu.

Satu: Yes. Um, so my name is Satu Rekonen and I'm currently a lecturer at the Department of Industrial Engineering and Management. I am actually IDBM alumni as well from the year 2012, if I remember correctly. I was also working as a [00:02:00] researcher for years at, at Design Factory, where I maybe got more, uh, engaged in this, like facilitating creative collaboration in different industry projects and multidisciplinary projects.

Which is still my, one of my, uh, research interest today as well.

Irina: Okay. What kind of courses are you running at the moment?

Satu: Currently I'm running a master's course on organizational, renewable, uh, and I'm, I'm also developing a bachelor course on design thinking in organizations. And then I'm doing a lot of this collaboration skills in various, various project courses.

Irina: Okay. It sounds like core IDBM studies a bit.

Satu: That's true. Yeah.

Irina: Okay, thanks. Um, now to, uh, you already mentioned that then, um, IDBM and Design Factory have something in common. But at the moment today, what is the connection between the two, uh, programs or instances?

Tua: So Design Factory, and I wear two hats.

I'm also a professor in product development, so product, product development and Design Factory. [00:03:00] Compared to IDBM, we're all multidisciplinary programs, so bringing together students from different, uh, backgrounds, but as well teaching teams from different backgrounds. So sharing a focus on interdisciplinary development.

Where the differences come a bit is that Design Factory is focused on. Physical, including elements in product development. So we don't do software business model innovation only projects, whereas IDBM has really great courses in that.

And then Design Factory has, is not only a, uh, teaching unit. Uh, our courses are actually embedded in a number of different units.

So anyone in auto can take our courses. And then we focus on physical hands-on prototyping. So we have prototyping facilities, which IDBM. Then for example, in the industry project students often utilize those.

Irina: Okay. Yeah. And is it, so this is now out of the question list, but just out of curiosity, uh, do you think that there [00:04:00] is, uh, enough emphasis on this multidisciplinary, uh, courses and programs within the Aalto context?

Tua: I think it's a very kind of, how would I say, uneven distribution. Mm-hmm. So there are programs such as product development and IDBM where there's a how kind of very generous helping of interdisciplinary collaboration. But it is also possible to do auto studies with fairly little exposure. So I think both IDBM as well as a lot of subtles work as well as the design factory are pushing for.

How can we actually benefit so that there's not just exposure to different disciplines, but so that you can benefit from those perspectives.

Satu: True. I agree. So, so if I think about our department, industrial engineer and management, it's not so visible there, for example. But then at the design factory, most certain.

In different places, in different, different levels, I'd say.

Tua: So students can kind of opt in. Yeah. So from whatever [00:05:00] program you are in, you are able to pursue these interdisciplinary experiences, but it is possible to also. Kind of stay in your silo. Mm-hmm. Uh, if you seek to do so. And maybe that's something that I think, uh, design factor in Id bm like share a focus on.

We think that whatever your disciplinary focus is, it would be good to have at least a dash of understanding. Because of course, when you graduate, the reality is that you're not exactly going to be in a exactly single discipline or single functional group. You have to be able to collaborate with others.

Satu: Hmm.

Irina: Yeah. Exactly. Okay. Uh. To my first question, so getting there slowly. Um, what do you think, how to foster a culture that promotes creativity in these teams and communities?

Tua: There's many roots for that. One of my favorite studies is about the co evolvement around different practices and culture. So Elsbach & Stigliani did this review study looking at you can either start changing culture and then practices and artifacts and methods [00:06:00] will change.

Or you can bring in new methods and practices and artifacts and that starts to change culture. And if I think from a practical point of view, I think it's often easier to start with those artifacts and methods and they start to shape the way that we actually perceive culture. 'cause most of the organizations are geared Tuards more kind of perfecting execution and reliability in their culture, whereas creative culture requires that.

Exploration, collaboration, and maybe some of these a tad less, uh, easy to measure facets. So often I think bringing those different practices and tools, they're baby steps. It's not yet a cultural change, but that makes it easier to start to think about it as a practical example. It's very hard to be, for example, user centered.

If you have no interactions with users, so it can be a value, but if you want to actually practice that, you would need to know what the users are thinking you would need to meet them. So if you start doing, for example, uh, user testing or user [00:07:00] interviews, it's a lot easier to start being user centered once you actually know what's going on.

Irina: Mm-hmm. That's a good example.

Satu: Exactly. I think also, uh, acknowledging that creativity is not something that only happens in, in like well planned, uh, workshops or formal meetings, but it's actually something that can happen in these more fleeting moments, in everyday and everyday interaction. And, uh, one of my favorite research is, is the one from, uh, Hargadon and Bechky, where they look at the like collective creativity and how it takes place in organizations.

And actually they found that there are certain, like behavioral. Patterns that often proceed this creative, uh, or collective insight or collective creativity. And it comes down to help seeking and help giving behaviors, which then foster this kind of reflective reframing of the problem. So someone providing a new

perspective on a challenge at hand that you have and then, then you can move forward with with that one.

So, um. Fostering the kind of, well, if we understand culture, like, uh, [00:08:00] what is, uh, what, how are things done here and what is valued here? Then of course, making it explicit that we value and, and we want to foster creativity and that creative lies in, in, for example, help seeking, help giving behaviors, and how do we then, uh, foster the kind of culture that does not think that help seeking is something that kind of.

Communicates that your ignorance or you're not professional, not enough, but it's actually actually something that you are encouraged, encouraged to do in order to get the best possible outcome with the complex, complex challenges that you have at your table.

Irina: Hmm. Okay. So this is like one strategy that then leaders can use to encourage a culture of creativity.

But what are then the other kind of strategies, uh, can be utilized here.

Tua: Well, if we look at, for example, design integrations, that's usually connected to a kind of, um, organizational goal of developing [00:09:00] user-centered creative, uh, outcomes. There you have both the organizational level aspects, so kind of formal organizing actions such as what are the KPIs, what are the development projects and these formal structures, but then.

Building on Satu's point on these micro behaviors that help seeking and help giving. Uh, study upon study highlights the legwork that, for example, designers do or, uh, even product developers when you're pushing a new idea that kind of championing issue selling, uh, looking at how do you get people excited, uh, how do you get their input, whether it's.

Bring a colleague in on board and getting their, uh, kind of unofficial, informal remarks to help you develop your idea further or start to kind of lay the groundwork that you might be needed to change the way that you are doing things here, uh, in order, for example, to adopt a new method at the company.

So that kind of human to human layer on it. Uh, looking at what are the [00:10:00] opportunities to actually showcase. The value of new ways of working showcase, uh, the progress that is made. So if we do, if we're able to get you on board, what did your input actually bring? Uh, show getting that

collective excitement that things can happen because often creativity does require challenging norms.

It requires rethinking things. It requires putting a bit more extra effort. You can't just comply with creativity. You have to kind of be proactive about it. So that means. We need to find ways to keep you engaged and get all the relevant stakeholders engaged, not just the kind of core developers.

Satu: And maybe building on that, if we consider, where does creativity consist of, according to Amabile, it's about expertise.

It's about the, in intrinsic, intrinsic and, uh, certain external motivational aspects. It's a, it's about creative thinking skills. So, um. Also considering, like, do we have those in place? [00:11:00] Uh, do we have people who have enough amount of expertise that they can actually recognize opportunities or innovative, uh, avenues regarding the challenge at hand?

Are they capable? Uh. Uh, thinking creatively. So considering the point of view from different angles and, and bearing uncertainty and also rec, uh, recognizing that these creative thinking skills are not something that we are born with, but they can be taught and they can be, uh, supported by the organization as well.

So, so are those resources in place is also one question.

Irina: Sounds good. And actually it sounds, uh, quite logical as well, and I especially like this leg work. So that you really have to do work in order to be, uh, to get these creative solutions out there. Okay? Um. Now to the next question, um, what are the fundamental elements of, uh, effective communication in a team setting?

[00:12:00] So Satu, you are maybe the more expert on this, uh, uh, what are your thoughts on, on this?

Satu: I think I have several thoughts. I, think, okay, where do you start? But first of all, it's that, that, um, ah. Certain practices needs to be in place. So, so really starting from, from really like why are we a team?

What are we trying to achieve? Um, and then considering like how do we establish the certain kind of, uh, behavior norms or culture that we wish that we will then cherish this. Uh, effective communication or, or, or creative, uh, collaboration. And what I have noticed during the years of, of facilitating and coaching in the disciplinary teams is that the teams often feel a bit rushed at the

beginning to really fast proceed with the tangible, uh, deadlines or outcomes of the project.

So really taking the time to, uh. Create the, the team practices and getting [00:13:00] to know the, the, uh, backgrounds and expertise of, of different disciplines and, and members in the team, and remembering that, uh. In, in creative context, it's not only the educational professional background that comes, it can be very valuable, uh, other kind of experiences that you have gathered through, uh, voluntary work or, uh, hobbies or other, other networks.

So the better you know, the skills and knowledge better you have awareness of that at the beginning of the team, the better you are. Uh, also able to kind of create the open, open, uh. Communication culture and also utilize the diverse skills throughout the, throughout the course. Um, and then also recognizing that there, in creating work there are maybe two different type of the different, the definite different, uh, types of, uh, like faces, but maybe two main modes.

So the divergent mode and convergent mode. So the divergent, when we are still in the face of, of considering what all is possible and generating options, not time for. [00:14:00] Critic critical, uh, evaluation or not so much time for analytical thinking. Uh, but then the convergent phase is more about that. And these both phases, they really require each member, uh, to rationalize their point of view.

Why do I consider this option to be value, more value valuable for us? Um, and also. They are, each discipline is, is, is, uh, responsible, bringing their own, uh, skills to the table because others do not know that if they're coming from, from other disciplines. So recognizing at which phase of the creative process are we at?

Also, maybe considering which is my stronger phase, am I more more into. Creating, uh, or analyzing or being more in the analytical phase, and then, uh, kind of forcing yourself into the right, right mode of communicating and, uh, like, uh, a way of working. Regarding the phase as well.

Tua: And I think something that can [00:15:00] help in this on a practical level is also sign posting.

So for example, in courses we teach the convergent and divergent phases. Are we creating choices or are we making choices? And something that we, for example, typically verbalize for students that in between these, there is a grown zone where, you know. It's not clear are we now converging or diverging?

Maybe I'm still diverging, but you are already converging and being able to have that kind of vocabulary that you in a team can discuss, where are we, um, becomes perhaps a bit more important in this interdisciplinary collaboration where there's less shared kind of discipline wide norms of this is how we always do projects.

But on the other hand, I would say that even in kind of single discipline projects. In the creativity or innovation context, all projects are unique, so you need that kind of reference to have a conversation of where are we? Then you can disagree and have a heated and productive debate on where you are.

But having that kind of terminology to talk about where are we? Mm-hmm. So that we can [00:16:00] kind of. Come to a shared conclusion on what are we trying to do right now?

Satu: Mm-hmm. And maybe also being aware at the beginning that in interdisciplinary settings there's, uh, the starting point is information asymetry.

So there's like distinct unshared information and knowledge, uh, among the team members. And people are not always aware of that. The others are not aware of the same issues that I am. It can. Show, uh, in, in how we are referring to, uh, the, the we, we are using or, or how we are referring to, to certain, certain things.

But, um, being aware of that and, and research shows that teams have a tendency to keep discussing among things that everybody can attend to and everybody can kind of. You know, the shared ground. Shared ground, and, and then maybe having even that this, it'll somehow visually in your mind that how can we then try to divide the space, uh, where we can actually bring in the kind of the knowledge that that is [00:17:00] distinct within the team so that we can pull.

And then build on that as a team.

Tua: Mm-hmm. And another point in communication that I would highlight is that there's this kind of beginning phase of, yeah, trying to understand where we are and kind of making sense where we are in the project, but then something that we run in time and time again, doesn't matter if you are a student or if you're a development professional, but in organizations it's difficult to fit iteration because you would so happily.

Get kind of stuck with that first solution or first idea or first pilot. How are you actually able to kind of have that expectation already and as a norm that the first workable thing is not go going to be the thing that you'll continue exploring. You're going to be continuing iteration.

Satu: Exactly. Yeah.

Tua: And you also did a very nice study on this.

Satu: Yeah. It was actually very interesting, uh, uh, an organization that was not, um, uh, familiar with this creative process or experiment, it [00:18:00] iterative experimentation. And the main outcome was the, uh, like huge amount of frustration that this iteration required. So there needed to be a very strong facilitation.

It was an action research approach, so facilitation from the researchers side so that they actually. Admitted to go on iterating their ideas, then reflecting on it later on, they realized the value, but, but it felt nonsense at the, at the time that they were required to do that.

Tua: Yeah. As a first timer, it's really difficult to kind of emotionally grapple that.

We're not done yet. We're only kind of halfway there now. Now we have first results, but you're supposed to learn your way forward and not just stick with that.

Irina: Yeah. And it takes time as well. So that's of course time and resources. Yes. And then if the companies are not ready to invest or the organizations are not ready to invest that time and, and, and maybe even money for, for the iteration process.

Satu: True. And also we, I think we human spare answer that at different levels. So that's also one thing that [00:19:00] comes down to this teamwork. So it's good to know that some are more comfortable with with it than the others. And it may actually have impact on, on the dynamics as well. 'cause it may, uh, bring forth urgency to close, close down on I ds prematurely.

Yeah.

Tua: And similarly, some people might be kind of okay with. Outcome uncertainty, but require a certain process or vice versa. So there's, in addition to

the degree of uncertainty, what's okay to be kind of up in the air and what do you need to lock?

Satu: Hmm.

Irina: And of course, iteration is always challenging because then you need to develop further and further and further.

And, and, and of course, for some people it might even be challenging to do the ideation of the brainstorming or developing on others ideas.

Satu: Absolutely, skills that need to be taught and learned, I think.

Irina: Yes. Yes.[00:20:00]

So, Satu, you mentioned "I like I wish" tool. Uh, how is, how does that work?

Satu: Hmm. Maybe a bit about the background, where it all Yes, all, all began, um, it was when I was, uh, collecting data for my PhD, I was interviewing students, taking part in this interdisciplinary, uh, project courses, uh, and in those interviews.

Uh, what what came really strongly true, true was this kind of, uh, need for this kind of reflection or feedback discussion within the team that how do others see my role as a team member? What are the kind of, uh, value that I'm providing, or is there something that I go to. Could provide even more, more, uh, to the project at hand.

So they, they were kind of reflecting on this with me in the interview, but they did not have this discussion within, within their project teams. So that's where the idea for, for kind of creating this kind of tool that then gently forces the teams around this, uh. I like I discussion, which is a feedback discussion where each team member [00:21:00] provides support, the, like the strengthening positive feedback and then the constructive feedback on a individual and team level.

So that is basically the, the main idea there. And they have been really insightful for many, many students. So they have really realized certain, um, like learned things from themselves that they had not. Known before.

Irina: Hmm. So then they tell that what they have liked about the collaboration and then what they wish that could.

Satu: Yeah. Or I wish that you would. Yes. Be more, uh, active when we, when we meet or bring more, uh, active ideas to the, to the table.

Irina: So it's quite concrete tool and, and easy to use.

Tua: Yes. Makes sense. Yeah. And this is something that, uh, in the product development project course that we do, uh, it has all the disciplinary teams, uh, working together on industry projects.

So similar to the IDBM challenge, uh, or industry project, sorry. Um. That's something that we do roughly midpoint in the course of a few weeks [00:22:00] back. Um, all the teams had a team level specific session. There's an external facilitator who kind of helps to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to get heard.

Um, and um, what that helps is that you get recognition for the things that you are already doing. Like you might not realize that others value this. So time and attainment time again, we hear that the students really appreciate that. Yes, you hear what you could improve, but also you get kind of validation for the things that you are doing well.

And especially in creative projects where different phases have different needs. I think this kind of feedback helps you to adapt during it so you are not only providing feedback on the project content, but also looking at how those roles are. Of course, it's important to also just give positive feedback and construction feedback on the go, but I would almost say that the I like I wish is like a.

It almost like a retrospective, but it's in the kind of [00:23:00] when in the project you can still do things about it and focusing particularly, or zooming in on that collaboration. So you have other sessions looking at the project content, but then actually taking that time and talking about the collaboration, so pays off and actually finding a way that the collaboration goes smoothly forward.

Irina: Sounds really good. I've been working in the industry for many, many years, and I have to say that even though that I've been working in this project based, uh, way, uh, this kind of reflective, uh, sessions, uh, have been totally missing. Like there's no, I don't even remember one time of course, afterwards, yes, but not during the actual process.

Tua: Positive comment from your boss, or you might have a 360 degree performance review later on, but in the project, often it's left. Yeah. To kind of maybe for the manager, project manager to comment on it. But there is rarely

this kind of [00:24:00] systematic, uh, taking the time to reflect and that helps to get so much more out of the project.

Irina: Uh, then you have experience on, on all these, uh, different kind of courses and students and projects, within the, in interdisciplinary, uh, teamwork. In your, point of view, what are the main challenges in this kind of, uh, interdisciplinary teams?

Tua: different levels of prac, uh, challenges. I would say that on a very concrete level, it doesn't matter if it's a student project or a real development project. Time is always an issue, uh, finding time to come together, whether it's students across different courses or in an organization when you have, uh, cross-functional or cross unit collaboration, how do we create that time and space that we're able to come together and not just physically come together, but actually create that kind of mental space that we're [00:25:00] able to share effectively?

Um, a lot of the pitfalls come into either. Not find the time to come physically together or not finding the right motivation, right atmosphere, right culture to effectively, uh, collaborate when we do come together. That's one key.

Satu: Maybe related to that is also, how do we come together? Are we mindfully engaging or are we just co-located? So something that's really challenged at today, I think, in this online, online world that we are living, living in. Um, so there, there's some somewhat uh, uh, I think very interesting research on co-presence. So how do we are mindfully present and how we are mindfully available for the task at end.

With the people who are present. And, and previously I was referring this to this, uh, my, uh, fleeting moments where this creative collaboration can have a, a happen in, in this [00:26:00] informal, informal interactions. Uh, and one enabler is exactly the mindful engagement in that moment that you are actually there, uh, available for the person who is seeking for help at your then mindfully provided that help.

Pinpointing one more challenge, um, regarding the, the team is decision making. So, so when we are coming from different backgrounds, it takes more time usually to make decisions because we need to understand the, the viewpoints of others. So, um, one challenge is that, uh, there might be persons who tie, uh, like hold onto tightly on their decisions or ideas, again, are not able to let go.

So I think one, what whatever context, teamwork. I think it's, it's very important to recognize that when you are part of a team, then the team kind of be, benefit of the team always goes in front of like individual preferences. So that's, that's one thing that you, you need to learn to let go of your own, own, [00:27:00] uh, like this size in, in that sense.

And then another one is the, uh, possibility to draw into this kind of like, uh, group thinking. So conceptualize by, by. So, uh, that, that means that team is team is looking for harmony or conformity. Uh, and then come up with like, uh, uh, irrational decisions, for example. So they do not dare to bring forth this.

Diverse or contradicting, uh, uh, viewpoints, for example.

Tua: yeah, and that's where really the value of interdisciplinary teams come for, or inner functional teams that, that unique learning. So if you just focus on that shared element, then you're kind of losing the potential that the team would have.

Satu: Yeah. So the task related conflict is quite important actually in their, in the disciplinary teamwork. But when it gets personal related, that's when people. Tend to like [00:28:00] defend themselves or withdraw from the collaboration or, and it kind of gets the focus away from the real issue.

Irina: And is it then better for the teams to make the decisions within the team and not that it's given from above, for example, or what, what, what's the decision making process that actually then enhances the, the results?

Satu: I think always better if it's within the team, but if they're not able to do it, then somebody has to help them tell me that.

Tua: yeah, and I would also highlight that it's more about being mindful of how the decisions are being made. It's really rare that you would have a team that makes all decisions democratically. Usually you will have a team where, I don't know, the project manager makes some decisions.

The upper management makes some decisions, or in a course context, the teachers make some decisions. The sponsors make some decisions. So it's more about being mindful of which decisions. Which, which kind of decision is this and what's our mechanism for doing it? Uh, if we would do development so that it's only consensus, I don't think that [00:29:00] would be a very effective way of doing it.

Um. So thinking about where do we want, what kind of input from whom and what are we okay with? Because again, there are different team expectations. Uh, maybe someone sees discussing everything as overloading, as some, and someone would see not discussing it as exclusion. So again, being clear about what that process is and why it is how it is.

Ideally, I would say that teams would decide the processes and options themselves, not necessarily make all the decisions themselves. Or collaboratively.

Satu: Mm-hmm. Maybe the important thing is that, uh, there's a feeling that I have been heard, that I have, I've had, I have had the chance to like bring forward my viewpoint that okay, maybe that was not the decision we, we went on with, but anyway, had the possibility.

Tua: Yeah. And I have to say, as a manager, one of my pet peeves is this misleading involvement. Don't involve or participate people when [00:30:00] they're not actually heard. Like that's the worst thing if you ask for opinions and don't listen to them. That's, in my opinion, even worse than not asking from them. And, and giving irrational of course.

Of why you would not ask. Yeah. But, but you wanna make sure that you didn't discuss it just for the sake of discussion. Like if you are asking for opinions, then show. How was the decision made based on that? Mm-hmm. Um, was this like, did we vote? Did uh, did I now as a manager. Weigh these different op options?

Or did someone else kind of say that, okay, now we need to do this, and then I sell it to my staff that, okay, we need to do this because of reasons X, Y, Z.

Satu: Mm-hmm. Or underline that there's autonomy in developing ideas, and then you micromanage everything. So it's also kind.

Tua: Yeah. Yeah. And also in reality, there's very few things that we could purely control.

And very few things that we could not influence at all. So if you get a decision made above, there's still usually a lot that you can decide as a team and how you execute it. [00:31:00] When you execute it, what exactly is it the same and, uh, within the team, like some things are maybe a sub team made a decision on a specific solution, but then, uh, it comes together in the kind of team level, uh, collaboration.

So thinking about what those are and um, kind of being honest about what is. Happening. I think a col successful collaboration is a lot about. Managing expectations.

Irina: Mm-hmm. And then of course there are cultural differences in this decision making process and, and different kind of expectations. Uh, you work in a very multicultural setting.

Uh, is that then, is that a challenge or is it then. More, uh, a positive issue?

Tua: I would say it's definitely a strength, but then it does require, because it's similar to different disciplines, of course, when you add not only different functions and disciplines, but different cultures, of course, that's more diversity and more diverse perspectives means that you have more lived experience to draw from.

Awesome. But [00:32:00] then again, it does mean that the need to. Find a shared understanding and find a common vocabulary and so on is heightened. Um, but still, I think again, it's a positive thing to have that, but then you can't kind of, sometimes you almost get this misconception that it's enough to gather diverse people together and then somehow the magic will automatically happen.

But rather like if the more diverse people you have. The more effort you have to actually put into finding a way to make that work. One thing that we actually haven't talked about yet that I think draws both the kind of culture and communication and this diversity together is that, uh, in my experience is having different kind of prototypes or boundary objects, shared artifacts makes it so much easier.

It's almost like a third language, so. Whether we're talking about design factory strategy or a student team talking about a specific product development project, [00:33:00] having something tangible that we're working on, whether it's a Miro board with Post-Its and process notes, or, or a, a paper prototype or a 3D printed something, having that object, I think gives a kind of external point of reference.

It gives a new language. It also means that we can talk about the object rather than a viewpoint. My viewpoint, because that's subtle versus me, but when we're talking about the shared object, then it's kind of us against the object almost. It helps to somehow make it less about. Me as an individual.

Mm-hmm. Uh, I've noticed this, especially when we have large, um, hierarchical differences. So, you know, if, if it's the, you know, director and

intern in the same group, you wanna make sure that there are these kind of, um, how would I say? I. Leveling the playing field type of artifacts. Mm. Same if you have nine engineers and one industrial designer, like having that shared object makes it perhaps a bit easier to have [00:34:00] a balanced conversation versus this us versus them.

Yeah.

Satu: It neutralizes it. Yeah. Yeah.

Irina: We could change into a little bit different kind of subject. Now you are educators. And you're working with people who are highly creative in many different ways. And, uh, at the al level, we, we promise that we are actually educating, uh, future change makers. Uh, that's a kind of a very ambitious, uh, but how, how do we do that?

Tua: Yeah, I would say of course the answer is super long and super varied. Yes. But one thing that I would highlight is that what are we actually trying to educate? Uh, I've been working together with one of my colleagues at re school from Elec thinking about how traditionally universities look at reflection and the expertise skills.

Yes, that's absolutely needed, but I [00:35:00] think the game changing focuses on what I would say. Kinda shaping skills. So looking at are you able to take initiative, be proactive, uh, are you able to collaborate effectively and actually making that change? So kind of, yes, you need the skills to kind of diagnose what kind of changes would be beneficial, have that expertise in there.

But I think one of the kind of special ingredients that I think auto education highlights is that impact bit. So how do you effectively make a change, not just. Um, kind of theorize it or formulate it. Uh, universities around the world focus on that, but I think we combine that kind of diagnosis and reflection type of theorizing with actually looking at what are the opportunities and how do you take that step, and especially in project based courses, taking that step while you're studying.

So impact isn't something that you do after you graduated, but already during your studies when you learn. How does it actually benefit the society around you? Whether it's working on sustainability projects or industry, uh, [00:36:00] challenges practicing that change also during the studies, not just after in some kind of magical future where you've graduated as a fully formed human being.

Satu: Absolutely, so fully supporting what you said. So definitely having the deep expertise in, in, in, in some, some area. Uh, but then realizing also that the expertise is not only, uh, like deep knowledge, but it's also how you collaborate and utilize that knowledge with other experts. So that's definitely how you can facilitate the kind of usefulness of, of the expertise that you have learned.

Irina: Hmm. And maybe this requires also the legwork.

Tua: Yeah. So I have a very nerdy analog, uh, where you kind of, I would say the expertise is that kind of, that's the processor, like whatever machine you have. But then you have the user interface, which actually depends, determines how much of. That kind of processing power do you get, so then that collaboration skills and [00:37:00] interaction skills, legwork skills are the user interface to the wonderful expertise and deep thoughts and reflection and whatnot you possess.

Irina: Yes. Um, and how, how do we then support the change, uh, towards a better future? So we are now educating these change makers, but then what is the, the kind of the direction where we want to guide them?

Tua: To me, it's a lot about empowering the students. Yes, we want to provide the skills to diagnose and analyze and kind of identify opportunities, but I think it would be a bit kind of ivory tower towered for us to say that we know what that change would be like.

No one knows if we knew that it would be easy, all the worlds of the problems of the world would be solved. So I think it's more about having these. Critical, uh, thinking skills and the kind of impact skills and how when, when you have an idea, how do you take it forward? [00:38:00] Um, so more giving the tools and mindsets and frameworks and theories that help you to advance in the world, even though we don't yet know what kind of solutions are needed, we can teach frameworks and help you in that pathway, but that's where the kind of.

Need for these interdisciplinary teams comes because we don't yet know what the solution is. So we want to kind of equip students so that they're able to work in these kind of teams, that they can use their disciplinary lenses to spot opportunities, help develop solutions, but we just don't know yet what those solutions would be.

Satu: Hmm. Maybe one thing also is to, to kind of, um, collaborate already doing the studies with, uh. Um, public organizations, so not only with business organizations and also then highlighting the importance of these more like

wider societal problems. So utilizing the skills that we learn here to tackle, tackle those, uh, problems that, for example, relate to loneliness of [00:39:00] elderly people or, or whatever, uh, or, or the environmental issues or, or so forth.

So. Somehow maybe in incorporating those more explicitly also in the In the courses.

Tua: Yeah, and I would say it doesn't matter if you're working on a public organization case or if you're working on a kind of in industrial technology case. Nowadays you have to think about sustainability in any case. So our students do need to be able to think about not just environmental, but social economic and, and so on, diverse responsibility and, and sustainability where there are some disciplinary specific information that we can already, uh, equip the students with.

But then it is again, learning how to learn when, when you are engaging in this. Whether it's creative collaboration or just the fields progressing, being able to kind of update yourself so that you're not stuck with the education that you got, for example, 20 years ago. I think the key [00:40:00] role of education is to give you a good boost and give you the tools to be able to kind of keep updating, um, give those foundational frameworks, but then.

Basically, in no profession would you be able to just kind of execute for the next few decades. You would be able have to, regardless of whether you're working in r and d or just execution, fields are changing and if we want to have a sustainable impact, uh, shape the world for a better direction, being able to keep up with the developments that are being made.

Hmm.

Irina: This is really interesting. And I think that then it's also to do with, uh, ethics and moral and, and maybe we should be teaching our students more, uh, philosophy and, and reflection and thinking. But of course then it's about, uh, choosing, uh, what kind of skills they, they need.

Tua: But one thing that I would highlight here is that what we can teach is actually making these assumptions visible and how do you discuss these? [00:41:00] So we might not be able to provide all the answers on what is more sustainable. These are complex issues, or what is the right ethical consideration in a future scenario where we don't know the variables, but if you realize that

there's a need to discuss this, and you realize what are effective ways of discussing it with your team, that makes it so much more likely that you don't.

Accidentally end up making decisions that have implications, but rather they're mindful choices. You're always gonna have trade-offs, but being able to have an informed discussion so that you can make a mindful or informed decision rather than, whoops, I noticed that this now had these unintended side effects.

So building that into the creative process.

Irina: Yeah,

Satu: very true. Coming back to the philosophy point of view, there's a course. Called philosophy and ai, if I remember, remember correctly, a new course study in our department. I think it's super interesting. I'm thinking about attending myself as well.

Tua: That's a good, nice thing about university jobs.

Yes. That kind of, [00:42:00] we are paid to learn more. Um, and there's a lot of, uh, little threshold op opportunities to learn from various experts and that also makes it so much interesting. So I think. We talk a lot about the benefits of interdisciplinary collaboration for the project or the outcome, but honestly, from an individual trajectory, also, even from my personal experience, when I'm co-teaching with others or doing research together with others, it's so much more interesting when you learn from those more diverse perspectives than just kind of focusing in your own area.

So I think just from a personal motivation and kind of. Career meaningfulness perspective, uh, that collaboration has huge benefits.

Irina: Yeah, definitely. Uh, we are now, uh, coming to the end of the, of the, uh, discussion here, but I have two questions for you, and two, I have this, this question for you. Now, if you, uh, could grant every team one superpower, what would it be?[00:43:00]

Tua: I would want to grant them 10 things, but if I had to pick one, I would take initiative. And that's honestly also as a manager, good. If I had to hire for one single thing, I would have initiative or proactiveness, doesn't matter how you call them, because I think everything else you can compensate for. If you do stuff and take the initiative to suggest something, then you'll get feedback, you'll have results.

You can always iterate. Uh. But it's really hard if you don't take that first step. So like if everyone in the team takes initiative, bring voices up issues, I notice something isn't work. Should we do this? Or like, Hey, I noticed you were really quiet today is something bothering you? Mm-hmm. So I think that kind of initiative translates across different areas, whether it's the interpersonal relationship side or the project work.

If everyone takes initiative proactively, kind of does that. Uh. You, you will sidestep a lot of the pitfalls and you'll [00:44:00] see that kind of potential challenges earlier when it's easier to address them.

Irina: Good. Now, Satu question for you, uh, one piece of advice, uh, you'd leave with tomorrow's change makers, what would it be?

Satu: It would be a bit related to you. Uh, ask questions and show interest because I think that's, that's something you reach out, you show interest. Ask questions, you learn and you, you can move forward so much easier than just staying with your own mind and, and thoughts.

Tua: Makes sense. So not rocket science in the end, but, but they are so impactful. Little things that makes all the difference.

Satu: Yeah.

Irina: This is good, uh, place to end our discussion. Thank you very much.

Tua: Thank

Irina: you. Thank you. It was really, really fruitful. Very interesting.

Tua: Thank you.

Irina: Yeah, thanks.

[00:45:00] 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.

Adi: I think her mic stopped looking. Okay.

Satu: Oh, lovely.

Irina: Oh my God.

Satu: Has it been like all the time?

Irina: No,

Adi : no, no, no. Just, yeah.

Satu: Is it, am I

Irina: what? No, I think it's maybe,

Adi: I think it is the, probably the mic. The thing is the mic, which we have booked, they didn't have it, so they give replacement. I don't think it's,

Irina: it's not working.

Adi: No, it just stopped transmitting.