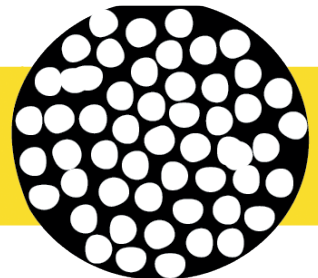
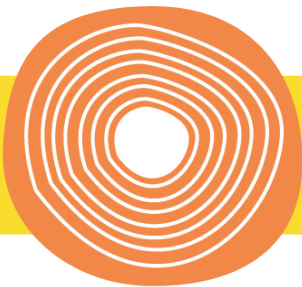


Teresa Chen, Minttu Merivirta & Galina Smirnova (eds.)

# Practice Future

A platform for international cooperation and cross-border entrepreneurship learning





Teresa Chen • Minttu Merivirta • Galina Smirnova (editors)

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A platform for international cooperation and cross-border  
entrepreneurship learning

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# FOREWORD

Young people, who benefit from entrepreneurial learning, develop business knowledge, essential skills and attitudes including creativity, initiative, tenacity, teamwork, understanding of risk and a sense of responsibility. This kind of entrepreneurial mind-set helps students as future entrepreneurs to transform their ideas into action. At the same time, investing in entrepreneurial education can also significantly increase employability. (Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan 2013, 6.)

According to the European Commission's Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan (2013, 5), investing in entrepreneurship education is one of the highest return investments Europe can make. In order to support productivity and growth in Europe, investing in education and training seems to be a key factor as there is a constant need for creative and innovative entrepreneurs (Entrepreneurship Education – A Guide for Educators 2013, 3).

Entrepreneurial competency and skills can be built only through hands-on, real-life learning experiences (Entrepreneurship Education – A Guide for Educators 2013, 5), and therefore it is valuable to create innovative cooperation environments for students of all disciplines. It is important to

differentiate theory and practice in entrepreneurial education; books offer merely theoretical knowledge, whereas practical real-life learning experiences can build an entrepreneurial mind-set and innovative skills.

The Kolarctic ENPI -financed Practice Future project, implemented during 2012–2014, is a cross-border project in the Barents Region aiming to connect higher education and business.

The Barents Euro-Arctic Region is Europe's largest region for interregional cooperation, and it includes the northernmost parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Northwest Russia (Barents Region 2014). The Barents cooperation, established already in January 1993, aims to strengthen East-West infrastructure, establish people-to-people contacts and thereby contribute to the economic, cultural and social development of the Region. It also creates good conditions for interregional exchange in many different fields, for example culture, youth work, education and trade. (Cooperation 2014.)

At the start of the Practice Future project it was noted that many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Barents Region have limited resources, for example, for international marketing or



innovation activities. Another challenge to the development of the region was the depopulation of rural areas and the lack of a cross-border and cross-cultural competent workforce. The Practice Future project evolved from the idea that an open innovation approach with minimised risk and costs could be a way to overcome these hindrances. (Practice Future 2011.)

Regarding entrepreneurial education, teachers and schools will not be able to realise their ambitions without cooperation and partnerships with colleagues, businesses and other stakeholders (Entrepreneurship Education – A Guide for Educators 2013, 5), and the cooperation between various parties gives extra value to the Practice Future implementation too. In order to succeed, it was vital to involve not only several higher education institutions, but also municipalities and local entrepreneurs, as well as other local organizations.

In the Practice Future project undergraduates from several higher education institutions within the Barents Region worked in teams to find innovative solutions to business cases presented by local stakeholders. In general, an entrepreneurship teacher is more of a coach than a lecturer and he/she

supports students' individual learning processes and development of personal competences. To teach entrepreneurial competences in education, it is important to utilize active methods of engaging students which enhances their creativity and innovative output. (Entrepreneurship Education – A Guide for Educators 2013, 5.) In the Practice Future project, the teachers' main role was to coach the students to find their own strengths on their own terms.

This publication introduces to the reader an overall view of the Practice Future project implementation. Emphasis is laid on the practical execution of the project's core activity, Business Innovation Workshops, and, of course, on the students' feedback and experiences.

The publication is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the project and its backgrounds. Chapter 2 offers a theoretical insight into the issues involved. In Chapter 3 all six Business Innovation Workshops organized during the project are described. Chapter 4 includes some shared experiences and feedback gathered during the project. And finally, Chapter 5 concludes with the

main results and takes a look at the future of the Practice Future implementation.

The writers of the articles include project staff and students who participated in the workshops. The information can be useful, for example, for other higher education institutions, especially those running similar project or having an intention to arrange a similar activity, business students and other students in general, entrepreneurs and municipalities, as well as for financiers and other support organizations.

On behalf of the editorial team,  
**Minttu Merivirta**, Project Planner, Lapland UAS  
29.10.2014, Tornio

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1.

# INTRODUCTION

# Is it possible to Practise the Future?

Peter Fischer

Practice Future is a cross-border innovation project in the Barents Region connecting higher education and business.

Practice Future targets business students, as well as non-business students; it is a programme for undergraduates from universities in three different countries. The project involves teachers from different fields of studies and from five universities with different study designs and standards of higher education. It's a multi-layer experiment in distance learning and cross-cultural communication, in cooperation with public institutions like municipalities and local business associations.

Practice Future is an experiment, starting from the assumption that it is necessary to leave the classroom to experience business life challenges in the fields of innovation and entrepreneurship. However, the designers of the experiment were uncertain about what exactly students should practise in an international entrepreneurship education programme. The experiment started with a high level of uncertainty for all parties involved, i.e. with students', teachers' and clients' skin in the game, at least in terms of time expenditures and of reputations at stake. No proven tool was available to help cope with the complexity of different cultures, business traditions, languages, and standards of higher education.

The aspiration in the beginning was to identify the factors and features of a basic learning environment that would facilitate experiencing the characteristics of innovative and entrepreneurial behaviour and to come as close as possible to real-life conditions.

Practice Future is founded on a simple test arrangement, a network for open innovation consisting of undergraduates from five universities from three countries, who are motivated to compete to design the best business solutions for international and local case companies. Teachers too would be learners, in order to answer the question, whether it is possible to practise the future.

## WHERE IT ALL STARTED – BIS IN KIRKENES

In 2006 the Norwegian government declared the High North a vital area of interest (Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006). As a contribution to this development, Finnmark University College in Alta established a three-year project, the Barents International School, in Kirkenes the year after. Target groups of this new department included Norwegians from eastern Finnmark and Russian students from neighbouring communities and from

Murmansk. On offer was a Bachelor programme in cross-border business.

Kirkenes at that time had gone through a serious reinvention from being a mining town to a service point on the Norwegian-Russian border. Over a period of two decades, the town with no more than five thousand inhabitants shifted its industrial basis from mining to maritime supply, mostly to Russian fishing vessels, and to services for the off-shore oil and gas industry. Kirkenes, part of a developed economy, but geographically remote from Scandinavian centres, proved highly dependent on cooperation with the emerging Russian market economy. A network grew of small firms that competed with each other in the beginning, but that eventually learned to cooperate in order to benefit more efficiently from cross-border opportunities. This development, accelerated by a Twin Cities agreement between the two municipalities of South Varanger in Norway and Pechenga in Russia and by numerous international annual conferences and festivals, made Kirkenes a testing ground for higher education focused on cross-border business.

The Barents International School took the initiative to cooperate with Murmansk State Technical University (MSTU), the International Institute of Business Education in Murmansk (MIBO, the former MHI) and later with Lapland University of Applied Sciences (formerly Kemi-Tornio UAS). Courses like “Cross-border Entrepreneurship in the Barents Region” and “Business across Cultures” were implemented and students of 12 nationalities and teachers from the partner colleges in Kemi-Tornio, Murmansk, Alta

and Kirkenes worked together with entrepreneurs from the Murmansk region in the autumn of 2009. Petrozavodsk State University joined the network, adding knowledge and competence from Karelian-Finnish cross-border cooperation. In autumn 2010 another workshop week in Alta was held as the 2nd edition of this cross-border event, completing the project period of the Barents International School.

With those experiences in mind, the network partners decided to continue their cross-border cooperation with a clear focus on practical entrepreneurship education that should involve local companies as mentors, partners, and clients.

## BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

Many SMEs in the Barents Region are hampered in their growth by limited resources for international marketing and research into innovative business models, products, and services. An open innovation approach in a pre-defined network and with minimised risk and costs could be a solution to overcome this hindrance. Depopulation of rural areas and the lack of a cross-border and cross-cultural competent workforce pose further major challenges for the development of the region. However, the need to strengthen entrepreneurship as a main driver in regional development revealed the overall problem of a lack of higher education in entrepreneurship and innovation. Therefore, apart from small local firms in the region, the target groups of Practice Future had to encompass entrepreneurship students and academic and

administrative staff at partner universities, as well as local intermediaries like municipalities and business associations. (Practice Future 2011.)

Future entrepreneurs in the region were identified as final beneficiaries, who would have the use of an established business–university network for open innovation. Local communities might profit from internationally active local business and municipality partnerships. Future entrepreneurship students could benefit from an open international learning and development environment, while academic staff and programme designers could build future efforts on an approved tool for entrepreneurship education. (Practice Future 2011.)

## OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

Practice Future was launched in July 2012 as a thirty-month project granted by the European Union within its Kolarctic Programme on Cross-border Cooperation, including particular support from Finnmark County (Norway) and The Norwegian Barents Secretariat.


Each semester, the international student teams work on assignments for their case companies (firms or municipalities). After an on-line work period, the teams and case company representatives meet each other for a week-long Business Innovation Workshop on one of the partner university campuses. During the workshop business proposals and plans are completed and presented to the case companies. These workshops each semester also incorporate representatives of local business associations and

municipalities and serve as a platform for evaluation and successive improvement of features or methods of the entrepreneurship education tool.

The specific objectives of the project are to develop practically relevant business ideas and business models for small and medium-sized local firms that have limited resources for marketing and research. The access of firms to potential business partners abroad is to be facilitated and procedures of open innovation are to be tested and developed in order to assure benefit for participating entrepreneurs. On the educational level, a practice-proven internationally applicable tool of entrepreneurship education for (non-business) students has to be developed, i.e. “hands-on” proven curricula and joint international programmes. Furthermore, the establishment of stable, cross-faculty groups specialised in entrepreneurship and innovation at the partner colleges is intended, as well as educating qualified faculty staff in the field of entrepreneurship, innovation and business culture.

Enhanced commitment of higher education institutions to business-related practices is another important objective of the project. A further aim is to integrate local entrepreneurs, representatives of business associations and municipalities in the network. The project also contributes to reducing national disparities in higher education systems and rural disadvantages by creating platforms for basic entrepreneurship education applicable in the Barents Region.

By May 2014, some 150 students had participated, many of them more than once, in five Business Innovation Workshops in Russia, Finland, and



**Practice future offers opportunity to be able to research as a practical step in promoting business. That may mean the more the heads, more the inflow of ideas.**

- Suman Acharya, student, Lapland UAS

Norway. The case companies have been small enterprises, such as the Tourist resort Sorrisniva and the Aronnesrocken Festival in Alta, the Internet gallery and shop Art From Barents, the non-profit youth organisation Mr Pink in Murmansk and the extraordinary family firm Varyag in Petrozavodsk, but also a large international company, the steel manufacturer Outokumpu in Tornio, as well as the municipalities of Tornio in Finland, and Kirkenes and Kvalsund in Norway.

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- Practice Future 2011. Practice Future – An Open Innovation Local Business and Students Network in the Barents Region. Project Plan. Alta, Norway, 13.11.2011.

# Cross-border cooperation between project partners

Peter Fischer

Geographically, the Practice Future project area ranges from Finnmark County in the North of Norway, to the Republic of Karelia in the South, and to the Kola Peninsula in the East. Students from two large cities in Russia, Murmansk and Petrozavodsk and from two rather small towns in Finland and Norway make the project not only a meeting place of different nationalities and cultures, but also of urban and rural youth.

The large variety of study fields represented in the project teams does enrich cooperation rather than pose a challenge. Participating students have been enrolled in Entrepreneurship (UiT), in Business Management and Business Information Technology (Lapland UAS), in World Economy, Marketing and International Relations (MSTU), Linguistics and Journalism (MIBO), and in Management, Economy and Accounting (PSU).

Different adoption levels of the Bologna process of adjusting higher education in Europe did not cause any obstacles to the cooperation between the participating organisations.

## COOPERATION IN PROJECT COORDINATION

The project is led by UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, and managed by five coordinators representing the partner universities. They coordinate the project work in the respective countries. Coordinators are responsible for cooperation with local business organisations and municipalities, and for agreements between partners on different project levels, e.g. between the universities and public or private clients. They coordinate the work of team coaches and students, and also represent the project in the media and to the general public. They are responsible for linking the project to their universities to ensure a sustainable implementation of Practice Future as entrepreneurship education tool.

### UiT Alta – Lead partner

Lead partner is the former Finnmark University College, nowadays part of UiT- the Arctic University of Norway, after a merger with the University of Tromsø in 2012. UiT, Campus Alta is Norway's northernmost institution of Higher education with some 1000 students. As a separate campus, the



academic profile of the school includes teacher training, social work, nursing, sports education, business, tourism, and Northern Studies. Located in a sparsely populated but vast region, Campus Alta puts much emphasis on internet-based and off-campus teaching. The proximity to the Russian border has made it natural to develop strong relationships with a number of Russian institutions in the North in educational and entrepreneurship programs as well as in research and development activities. (UiT 2014.)

### MIBO

The Institute of Business Education (MIBO), the former Murmansk Humanities Institute, acts as the main Russian coordinator. MIBO was established as a private institution of higher education in Murmansk in 1994. Four faculties (Law, Economics, Foreign Languages and Journalism, Psychology) are involved in several long-term projects with partners from Western Europe, Canada and the USA, but the focus is especially on intense collaboration with institutions in the neighbouring countries: Finland, Norway and Sweden. MIBO has been a member of the University of the Arctic since 2003. It has been a partner of the network since 2007, advanced in implementing common courses and the adaptation to the Bologna process. (MIBO 2014.)

### Lapland UAS

A long tradition in cooperation with local companies in business education is another key factor of the

project, with expertise contributed by Lapland University of Applied Sciences (Lapland UAS). Lapland UAS, with premises in the towns of Kemi, Rovaniemi and Tornio, produces experts in the development of working life. The degrees are vocationally oriented university degrees. After graduating, students can go on to earn a Master's degree, or further develop their skills in a particular vocational field by taking part in specialization studies. (Lapland UAS 2014.)

### MSTU

The close relationship with Murmansk State Technical University (MSTU) stems from a joint research project on cross-border fisheries in the Barents Region. MSTU, founded in 1950, is one of the oldest higher education establishments on the Kola Peninsula. The former High Marine School first became the Russian State Academy of the Fishing Fleet and in 1996 it became the Murmansk State Technical University, a prestigious educational centre in the Far North of Russia. The main purpose of the University is to provide all branches of industry with well-qualified specialists. (MSTU 2014.)

### PetrSU

Petrozavodsk State University (PetrSU) became a network partner in 2010 in order to use its experience from participation in projects for Nordic-Russian Entrepreneurship Education and Training with a

focus on best practices of entrepreneurial education in the partner countries.

PetrSU is the largest educational institution and the leading university in the European North of Russia. The university comprises 13 faculties and has a high status as a large research centre in the field of programming, information technologies, plasma research, microelectronics, mathematics, physics, and medicine. PetrSU runs joint scientific research projects with universities in Finland, Sweden, Great Britain, Poland, the United States and Canada. PetrSU takes an active part in international programs of the Baltic region and the Barents Euro-Arctic region. (PetrSU 2014.)

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# Planning the Practice Future process

Peter Fischer

Looking back, the word planning could be considered a misleading term. The process starting with a manifested aspiration by all partners might rather be comparable with what Sarasvathy would call an effectually run start-up (Sarasvathy 2008); or, in other suitable terminology, the project partners started Developing by Learning. Over time, some routines of stage-related planning evolved, but to understand what actually happened, it might help to sketch the general framework of a single project session.

Such a session usually lasts three months of an academic semester. The host of each semester's workshop will be looking for local companies as appropriate cases to be studied; other partners do the same in their respective locations. Together with company or municipality representatives, the coaches or coordinators elaborate two case assignments per semester.

At the same time, coaches encourage students from different fields of study to apply for the project: In Alta, students are enrolled in an elective course called Enterprise Innovation Practice. Up to ten students per partner are nominated; the workshop host is often able to recruit some more, because they have no travel expenses. The selection is mainly based on individual interviews assessing the students' motivation and their command of the English language.

One or two weeks prior to an official on-line kick off, teams are acquainted with the case assignments. They prepare interview questions for the case companies. The kick off meeting serves to introduce rules and work requirements and it is also a platform for interviewing case company representatives. The interviews are recorded, so that all teams start their ideation with more or less the same level of information. Over the following weeks, in local meetings or during scheduled classes, coaches discuss the case assignments with their teams and guide them through the process of developing valuable proposals.

The teams are provided with theoretical and methodological tools, such as Business Model Generation, SWOT analysis, lean start-up principles, etc. In the beginning there are blank spots in knowledge, especially for non-business students. All teams finally meet during a workshop week, where they familiarise themselves with the ideas of their competitors. Teams have the opportunity to visit the local case company. They refine their proposals, or sometimes create completely new ones. At the end of the week, a jury of case company representatives, local academics and external experts nominates the winning teams.

## THE STARTING POINT

In the beginning in 2010 there was no project master plan, as there had been no similar cooperation between higher education institutions (HEI) and business with cross-border, cross-faculty, and cross-cultural aspects to learn from in the High North. However, partners had already cooperated on the level of shared lectures and annual student exchanges between Russia, Finland and Norway and they shared the aspiration to improve the outcome for students, as well as for teachers, by integrating real-life business into higher education, as had already been done at local level in Kirkenes and Tornio.

In 2010 an opportunity arose during a Kolarctic meeting in Murmansk. Partners decided to apply for grant money to start the cross-border entrepreneurship-learning platform that would later come to be called Practice Future.

The starting point was that the representatives from the five universities, both faculty and staff members, possessed a wealth of experience in business education and could call on business-related networks off-campus. At first, time constraints, teachers' workloads and the merely informal incorporation of the project into the curricula of the participating institutions, required an exceptional course of action. During the grant application period in 2011, there was no detailed plan beyond the above-mentioned roughly designed activity framework: local team-based and in-class case studies and one joint workshop week per semester.

## BREAKING COMFORT ZONES

The partners established a fixed curriculum. The formal integration of the project into the education programmes of all participating institutions happened over the two first sessions in 2012 and in the beginning of 2013, rather than prior to the start of the project. The flexibility of the partner institutions, after the experience of the first project sessions, was a major condition for the success, and could not have been planned.

Furthermore, the selection of case companies and cooperating municipalities was based on the personal networks of faculty and staff; even one student's relationship with a particular enterprise led to the recruitment of a case company.

The partners chose a multi-loop learning approach of testing and improving the platform features. Student team competition may serve as an example. In the beginning, there was pure competition among the teams for the best business ideas. Later teams were encouraged to share information. During workshop weeks, even though vague, this sometimes led to moments of cooperation between competing teams when they deemed it appropriate to make their own ideas more feasible. Primarily, the experience of taking teams out of their local comfort zone into the more challenging and often chaotic on-line communication led to the building of purely on-line teams towards the end of the project.

The particular conditions of running a "project" gave teachers the freedom to start with coaching

tools they were familiar with: tools useful in such different fields as business, linguistics, journalism, marketing, and communication. Entrepreneurial soft skill training was the focus of the project, rather than motivating students to create their own business; although some students, especially entrepreneurship students, were inspired to do so. They experienced the case studies as a motivation. For the majority, the project provided an experience of the challenges of innovation work, rather than dedicated entrepreneurship. That meant that one teacher's cross-cultural communication competence was as welcome as another's business background, language skills, experience in creative work, or expertise in the field of journalism. What mattered was the competence to guide students outside their comfort zone of daily academic life through multi-level challenges like time constraints, unfamiliar communication requirements, misunderstandings, different levels of education and, in fact, "amateurism" in making a commitment to real-life case companies. External experts, mostly hired as lecturers for the workshop weeks, proved enrichment of the experiences for students, as well as teachers and staff.

Communication in general proved such a crucial issue in entrepreneurial and innovation-focused work that cross-border communication experience did not make a real difference. Paradoxically, in the process of developing Practice Future over several years, partners did not focus on any particular cross-border oriented plans. It almost felt like the Barents Region, where the partners are located, and

the common educational intention provided the project with a corporate identity, despite the fact that it crossed national and cultural borders. Regional beneficiaries and target groups of the project reinforced the sense of regional belonging and of the partnership between education and business. Practice Future took the aspiration of a border-less region for granted!

## STUDENT WORK IN THE PROCESS

As described above, students worked in two stages; first on-line for some weeks and at the end during a week-long face-to-face innovation workshop. Students had to deal with a variety of assignments. Case companies were looking for products, for marketing measures, for business partners abroad, for appropriate ways to modelling a financial relationship with new foreign customers, for ideas to develop community life, etc.

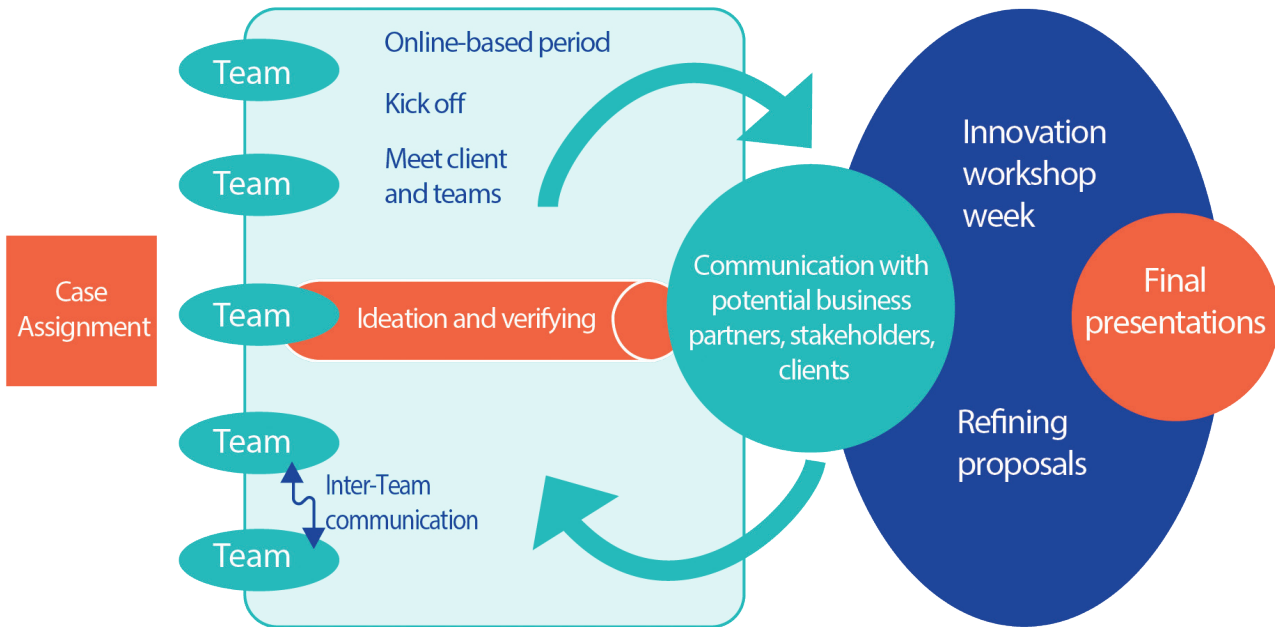
Nevertheless, the process of ideation and testing ideas, turning them into business-relevant proposals, was basically the same: Ideation was carried out in teams, applying different approaches, like a SWOT analysis of the case company, or application of the Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder. The latter was mainly used as a check-list for the scrutiny of ideas in terms of resources and potential partners required and for the formulation of value propositions and definition of customer segments.

In some cases, students were also provided with the basic principles of lean start-up. The aim was to

reduce the effort needed to get valuable feedback from potential customers and business partners. In-class seminars and meetings served as a stage for practising pitches and complete team presentations. Teams could have the advantage of being located in the same area as the case company, but they were challenged to share general information with competing teams. Iversity.com, an on-line platform provided during the project, proved not to be the favourite communication channel between teams, nor between team members. Students found their

own channels, mainly Facebook, Dropbox and Skype.

Figure 1 shows the overall process. It commences with analysing the case assignment, meeting case companies and other teams on-line for the first time. It then proceeds with interviewing case company representatives, the in-class ideation process, establishing contacts with external experts and potential stakeholders in order to verify and develop ideas into opportunities for the case company. It concludes with the final presentation of proposals at



**FIGURE 1.** Practice Future Work Session

the end of a workshop week at one of the partner universities.

## COMPETITIVE BASELINE

Competition is a critical driver in business innovation, and therefore became an inherent feature of the Practice Future learning platform. Team competition was considered to be a main motivator for students to commit to the case study, especially during the workshop weeks. On the other hand, the teams were encouraged to cooperate with their competitors, e.g. by exchanging relevant but only locally accessible information; but also by merging ideas during the workshop week in order to come out stronger. The overall aim was to increase the potential value added to the case company and to increase the probability of creating a winning proposal.

In the beginning of the week, teams present their provisional proposals. Attending case company representatives, sometimes on-line, provide teams with critical feedback. Afterwards, teams get three more days to visit local case companies, or potential local business partners, to refine their ideas or even develop new ones. A jury, a panel of case company representatives, academics and local business people, evaluate the final presentations at the end of the week. The jury ranks the team proposals, based on pre-defined business and education (presentation) criteria.

Self-assessment is a significant part of the Practice Future learning environment. Therefore, after the innovation workshop, students are required to

deliver a completed individual work diary. Beyond being a tool for self-reflection, the journals provide the staff with feedback and research relevant data. At the end of each semester's cycle, coaches and coordinators evaluate the work and decide upon further development of the learning platform for the following stage.

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# Organizing a Business Innovation Workshop – case Tornio

Teresa Chen & Magda László

With an eye on the project objectives, the main focus behind the workshops was on targeting and bringing together regional, Kolarctic, interest groups to meet on a common platform to share and gain from each other. The interest groups being the regional HEIs, their students and SME's from the region.

The workshops made it possible for the interest groups to converse, exchange, collaborate and benefit from each other. A “profitable” series of innovative exchanges where the students acquired an insight into the real workings of regional enterprises and the regional entrepreneurs acquired fresh innovative ideas, with the HEIs bridging the two parties.

The following is a student's perspective on the workshop activities and their organisation. Magda László worked as project assistant and helped organise and execute the workshop in Tornio during week 12 of 2014.

- Teresa Chen

## HOW TO PLAN A WEEK-LONG BUSINESS INNOVATION WORKSHOP?

Firstly, I am very glad I was provided the possibility to participate in the Practice Future project as a part of the organization team of the workshop in Tornio and my thanks go especially to Ms. Teresa Chen. It offered me valuable professional connections and a great experience in project organization that could have not been achieved otherwise without the help of the project.

The implementation planning process started at the beginning of January 2014 and the workshop was held in the middle of March, so the planning took more than two months. In the early weeks of the project work some meetings were organised to discuss the main tasks, challenges and general details of the workshop. Our main tasks included creating project materials, looking for new ideas concerning the project and preparing for the events of each day.

During our first meetings we took into account our previous experiences with the Practice Future project. We discussed in detail the previously implemented good solutions during the project and the way how those could be useful to us. Ms. Teresa Chen introduced us to our roles, tasks and the



expected process of the workshop. She also highlighted the challenges based on her experience. With this in mind we prepared for previously experienced difficulties. We also collected our ideas about positive experiences and challenging situations concerning the previous workshops from a student point of view.

Based on Ms. Teresa Chen's advice we created a plan for the implementation. The scenario included prioritised tasks, deadlines and some ideas about the implementation. This scenario was improved several times during the planning process. The preparation also included creating printed material for the participants of the project and also for the jury, such as a booklet, an evaluation form and an attendee list.

During the planning we paid particular attention to preparing for the presentation seminar on the first day of the workshop. One of our first tasks was planning the settings for the presentation seminar room and making sure that the seminar would go smoothly. One of the main requirements of the presentation seminar was to manage the required IT tools for the first presentation of the teams. Also the preparation for the last day of the workshop took a lot of attention. We provided the required IT environment to allow the Norwegian jury to join the final presentation seminar session. All of these IT settings required prior consultation with the IT specialist of the building. From an IT point of view, the preparation of the project material took a very long time and it needed a lot of editing.

## ABC OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

The planning process included preparation for each day of the workshop. We started the planning with the first day, which included presentation of the teams, teamwork in separate classrooms and an ice breaking event in the evening.

We had to prepare a welcome speech to kick off the first day. We also had to prepare the project material for each participant. The project material included the booklet, name card and some presents for the students. We prepared a bag of these project materials for each participant in advance.

Personally, I found the ice breaking event very challenging. We agreed to organize a competition among the student groups. It took a long time and a lot of planning to collect ideas for the tasks of the teams. Many student-tutors of our university took part in planning and organizing the event. We had a tutor meeting before the workshop week concerning the ice breaking event. We practised all of the tasks of the competition and we collected tools for the tasks.

The second day of the seminar took place in Kemi. It included a visit to the case company's factory and some professional presentations. For this day, some project material had to be made, but otherwise, from the project assistant point of view, it did not require a lot of preparation.

The third day of the seminar took place in Rovaniemi with some fun activities including a visit to Santa Claus. It also included some professional presentations.

The fourth day too required a lot of assistance and planning. On this day the student groups had independent teamwork in separate classrooms. Our school provided coffee for the teams, so we needed to prepare for that. The teams also needed help with their own hand-outs. Those needed to be printed out and in some cases re-edited. It took a lot of time until the evening.

The last day, the final presentation day, was very challenging. Even though we prepared in the best possible way, some problems arose that needed to be solved immediately. The previously arranged on-line connection with the Norwegian jury was perfect and the evaluation process went very well.

The last event of the work shop week was the award ceremony in a restaurant. We prepared in such a way that all of the certificates were ready for

the award ceremony, which was a challenging thing with almost fifty participants and just two hours to manage it. All of the different presents, attentively selected by us, were given during the ceremony to the winners. The award ceremony also went very well.

## THOROUGH PREPARATION IS THE KEY FOR SUCCESS

We kept in touch with the partner universities during the planning process. We asked some additional information for the booklet, pictures of the teams and information about the participants.



Besides the previously mentioned tasks, the planning included administration tasks, such as searching for awards, i.e. presents, and creating certificates. It also included planning the ice breaking tasks, editing and designing the booklet, and setting up the meeting rooms for the teamwork.

In the middle of February we started to work on the booklet of the workshop, which was meant to provide detailed information about the project to the participants beforehand. The booklet included a timetable, an introduction of the partner universities, as well as detailed information about the project and the competing teams. The design of the timetable formed an important part of the planning process. The timetable was modified several times during these months.

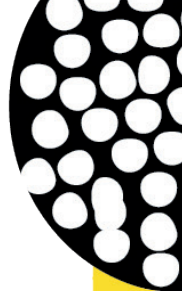
I found it very important to prepare as perfectly as possible during the planning process, because, as

Ms. Teresa Chen said, during the project workshop some changes can happen and we need to focus on them. Since we prepared very well for all possible eventualities in advance, the project workshop was very successful.

During the planning process we focused on providing a professional environment for the teamwork of the participants. It included well-prepared project materials, name cards, a well-equipped working environment and a poster representing the project week. We also paid attention to making place for fun while experiencing the beauty of Lapland.

- **Magda László**







**BACKGROUND**

# Nexus of the Arctic

Esa Jauhola

This article discusses the importance of networking on different levels, from nations to students, in the development of the Arctic region and the cross-border cooperation.

## THE FUTURE IS IN THE NORTH

The Arctic is still one of the cleanest regions in the world, but it is influenced by a number of rapid and controversial changes. Climate change and technological change are transforming the nature of the region. New sea routes, the energy and mineral reserves and increasing tourism will pose new threats, but also open up opportunities.

Professor Laurence C. Smith (2012) from UCLA, Los Angeles, California, is one of the leading researchers in the development of the Arctic and author of the book *The New North - The World in 2050*. He "turns the world literally upside down" and shows how the role of Northern regions will be changing sooner than we can imagine. The forces are demography, growing demand upon the natural resources, climate change and globalization. Professor Smith states that Northern Rim countries are the beneficiaries of this new development of immigration, global trade and bonanzas of natural gas, oil, minerals and water.

According to a report from Aalto University, for the next 30 years, the world's operational focus will be on the Northern Hemisphere. Mika Aaltonen and Michael Loescher (2013) describe in their article *Arctic Storm* that Finland's focus will change from the periphery to the centre of global logistics. First of all, the Northern Sea Route will open new logistics routes, Secondly, global warming will give easier access to energy resources in Northern Canada and Russia. The third change is caused by technical reform of the Trans-Asian railway across Russia. This railway could give a fast route to Asia. All these mean that Finland could become the global logistics centre in near future. If the port of Kirkenes or the port of Tromsø will be selected as a hub, Finland will have the possibility to build a new railway line from Norway to Helsinki and thence through a tunnel to Tallinn, a railroad leading to the Mediterranean. Thus, state, Aaltonen and Loescher, Finland and the Baltic countries will be directly linked to each of the world's major economies, Germany, USA, Japan and China.

## ROLE OF THE HIGH NORTH

In this development, the horizontal cooperation in the Barents area and the whole Arctic region between national and regional governments, Arctic council,

public and private organizations, enterprises and universities plays a central role. It is important to remember that the economic development must be done in a sustainable way due to the vulnerability of the Arctic nature.

In Finland's Arctic strategy the vision is that Finland is an active Arctic player, capable of sustainable coordination of the constraints set by the Arctic conditions and business opportunities while making use of international cooperation. The objectives of Finland's Arctic policy are to strengthen multilateral Arctic cooperation, to take part in the shaping of the EU's Arctic policy and to raise Finland's profile as an expert in Arctic issues. This means that the Finnish government and parliament have understood the value and the necessity of the Arctic cooperation. The strategy addresses local residents, education, research, the economy, infrastructure, the environment, stability and international cooperation in the Arctic. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland 2013.)

According to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign affairs, the High North will be Norway's most important strategic priority area in the years ahead. Norway's High North policy is intended to protect the environment, maintain settlement patterns and promote business development. The Government will further develop cooperation with Russia and the other partners in the north. The seas north of the Norwegian mainland contain considerable fossil fuel and renewable fisheries resources. They have enormous economic potential which, if managed properly, will have great significance, both for the

region and for the rest of the world. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway 2012.)

The Arctic Council is a high-level intergovernmental forum (Intergovernmental organization 2014) that addresses issues faced by the Arctic (2014) governments and the indigenous people (2014) of the Arctic. It has eight member countries: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States. The Arctic Council coordinates the cross-border cooperation in the North.

Sweden, Russia and Canada too stress the importance of cross-border co-operation in their long-term plans. Due to the vulnerability of the environment, it is extremely important to set rules for the game. Regional Councils and Chambers of Commerce are good examples of organizations that have been actively promoting the Barents networking for more than 20 years.

## **ROLE OF HIGHER BUSINESS EDUCATION**

In the Barents Region the cooperation between the institutes of higher education has been lively already since the early 1990s. In addition to student and teacher exchanges, many joint research and development projects have been accomplished. In the development projects businesses, mainly SME's, function as partners too with the aim to build cross-border networks and to learn how to do business with the neighbours.

One good example is Young Innovative Entrepreneurs (2014), which is a business development project aiming to make it more attractive for young entrepreneurs to stay and do business and initiate projects in the Barents Region. The project will develop a support system for the implementation of innovative business ideas by young active entrepreneurs in the Barents Region and to facilitate cross-border cooperation. The partners come from Russia, Norway, Sweden and Finland and examples of activities are match-making, training and mentoring.

Practice Future is another great example. More than 250 students from five universities have been involved in six workshops learning about the Barents Region as a business environment. In each workshop two case companies have been involved. Key elements in the strategy of Lapland University of Applied Sciences concern the service industry, entrepreneurship, Arctic cooperation and cross-border competence. In Practice Future these factors are put into practice and the students get familiar with entrepreneurship in the Barents Region by

innovating new business models for such case companies as Kirkenes Port and the wooden ship building firm Varyag in Petrozavodsk.

According to the feedback from the students, this kind of practical learning methods brings the studies closer to real-life business. In addition, they have developed creativity, innovativeness and team working skills. The students also stated that their language skills have improved and that the pros and cons of entrepreneurship have become more evident to them. Many students said that the best thing was the many new friends they made, the networking.

Practice Future is a good example also from a pedagogical perspective. In transnational teams students study real-life business in the Barents Region in an open learning environment developing competences they need in future business life. The teachers involved have been very active in planning and implementing the new pedagogical model and will plan new collaboration ideas such as joint curricula and joint research after the project has ended.

**According to the feedback from the students, this kind of practical learning methods brings the studies closer to real-life business. In addition, they have developed creativity, innovativeness and team working skills.**





Internationalisation is one of the focus areas in all participating universities in the development of the competences of students but also of companies. Educational projects, student exchange and internship abroad enhance the competences mentioned above and give the students courage to find a job in the international markets after their studies.

In cross-border networking, the University of the Arctic (2012) aims to be the hub coordinating the cooperation. The Thematic Network on Managing Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in the North seeks to develop knowledge that will enable managers of small and medium-sized enterprises to better identify, describe, envision, manage and develop viable and sustainable business models for SME's in the high North. The objective is to develop new knowledge on managing SME's in the North, to contribute to the development of new educational material (cases) and courses on managing SMEs in the North, and to reinforce SME's in the region through new, updated and relevant knowledge about managing SME's in the North.

In addition to the horizontal cooperation, it is important that the institutes of higher education as a network take on the function of a link to Central Europe, the US and Asian countries. In these networks the universities could train people in businesses and universities to learn more about the opportunities of the business environment in the High North, including sustainable development. This kind of Gateway role could be a good way to export training and to finance research in the Nexus of the Arctic.

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# Teaching innovation skills and character through International Innovation Workshop

Anthony Okuogume

## WHY STUDY INNOVATION?

The answer to this question was highlighted over half a century ago when the father of modern business management, Peter Drucker invented the term “knowledge worker” (Bryan & Joyce 2005). The term was coined by Drucker to describe a fundamental transformation in the value creation process of the modern economy and the competitiveness of enterprises. According to this view, this transformation is bringing in a “new class of professional worker for whom the basic means of production is no longer capital or labour but rather, the productive use of knowledge” (Bryan & Joyce 2005). These knowledge workers are talented innovators, whose primary task is innovating business ideas that make it possible for companies to compete in the uncertain and dynamic business environments of today. They also manage the intangible assets of companies and how these should be exploited in the way companies create value in their respective industries (Bryan & Joyce 2005). These knowledge professionals are responsible for driving the growth of the service industries. They create value through brands, networks and enterprise innovation, industry innovation, or business and revenue model innovation to mention

but a few. According to Bryan & Joyce (2005), the knowledge workforce now constitutes twenty five percent of the workforce in the service sector.

## CHANGING PROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS IN WORK-LIFE AND EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

In a knowledge-driven economy education needs to meet companies’ expectations of competence-ready graduates. Competence-ready students have the value creation and value innovation competences that are the critical competences needed in today’s marketplace. Integration of research, development and innovation in the learning process makes it possible for students to develop a more generic competence for innovation and educational delivery that fulfils a more genuine closeness to working life and the production of more competence-ready graduates (Okuogume & Jäminki 2011). This also stimulates knowledge transfer from the university to the case company and contributes to the development of the company and the regional economy and competitiveness.

## WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO TEACH INNOVATION SKILLS?

So what is our most important proposition when we teach innovation? Simply speaking, it concerns: knowledge about innovation, innovation skills and motivation. Motivation is about interesting learning experiences and about knowledge and skills that are important to the students and most needed in the marketplace. Motivation is the foundation for two other things to happen. Without motivation it will be hard to develop the knowledge, skills and passion for innovation. According to Friedman (2013), play, passion and purpose are the three most powerful ingredients of intrinsic motivation. Wagner in his book, *Creating Innovators: The Making of Young People Who Will Change The World*, believes that teaching the skills of innovation should be about learning how to “add value” and when we do this, we are “teaching the skills that matter most in the marketplace” (Friedman, 2013). According to Friedman, the “goal of education today is not to make every child college ready but innovation ready – ready to add value to whatever they do”. Now a days , knowledge is “available on every internet-connected device, what you know

matters far less than what you can do with what you know”. Therefore, “the capacity to innovate – the ability to solve problems creatively or bring new possibility to life – and skills like critical thinking, communication and collaboration are far more important than academic knowledge”. (Friedman 2013.)

## WHAT IS AN INNOVATION WORKSHOP?

An innovation workshop in Practice Future is a competitive innovation event. This is because the innovation workshops are carried out in a competitive spirit. Competition is healthy, but the main reason for it is that many teams innovate for one case company. The company must choose the innovative idea that makes the best proposition for value improvement. The chosen innovative idea becomes the winning idea and the team behind the innovation becomes the winning team. Our experience has shown that the case companies have

found ideas from other teams to be good and implementable and sometimes, they have combined ideas from different teams to form a completely new innovation. This is why in innovation

**“WE CAN TEACH NEW HIRES THE CONTENT, AND WE WILL HAVE TO, BECAUSE IT CONTINUES TO CHANGE, BUT WE CAN'T TEACH THEM HOW TO THINK - TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS - AND TO TAKE INITIATIVE.”  
(Friedman 2013)**

workshop events, we emphasise that everyone is a winner! The purpose is to help stimulate innovation in local companies through the input of new innovative ideas invented by students. In an innovation workshop event, students from different units and universities form teams with a high variety of knowledge. The case companies participating in the innovation workshop are drawn from different business sectors. An international innovation workshop is an innovation competition where university students from different countries innovate for companies and organizations. Winners get prize money or other tangible and intangible benefits.

Innovation is about two things: The idea and the implementation of the idea. To win a team's idea must be highly innovative and must be seen to be implementable by the case company. This is why knowing the customer's requirements and fulfilling those requirements to the delight of the customer is one of the core value and quality measures of the innovation workshop events.

Innovation workshops are “inspirational learning environments that stimulate creative thinking and pose challenges for problem solving and team work. Furthermore, they expose students to the creation of new business opportunities and the possibility to work in a multi-disciplinary, multi-skilled and multi-cultural work context (Forsman 2006). An innovation workshop is based on learning innovation integrated into project tasks and work. The teachers assume the role of coach and are committed to a “consultative management style”. The students on the other hand, must be motivated and are recruited among promising students committed to hard work and creativity, who

furthermore are in it for an unforgettable learning experience. (Forsman 2006.)

Knowledge sharing is everything: The innovation workshop provides a good ground for value creation and innovation. To achieve the ultimate level, an environment must be created that stimulates the circulation of knowledge, thereby fostering a culture of knowledge sharing and eliminating the fear of knowledge sharing among students. The international innovation workshop event is also an expression of (or defined by) context (culture, personality or character and even economic resources) and the type of innovation task at hand. When students meet in the innovation workshop, they bring with them many things; personal resources, character, ideas, experiences, culture and personalities. Irrespective of people's cultural background, the innovation workshop event is a connection point and a great opportunity for young talents to meet, complement, share knowledge and collectively innovate, co-create and have fun while doing it (Okuogume 2009)!

## **WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO DEVELOP IN STUDENTS THROUGH INNOVATION WORKSHOPS?**

Innovation skills and character can be fostered through enhancing the connotative and affective competences of students and can be implemented through authentic and problem-based learning processes. According to Biloslavo & Cagri (2010) enhancing students' belief in themselves and their readiness to take on bigger challenges in life can be

achieved through enhancement of ‘positive self-belief (Okuogume & Jäminki 2011).

A positive perception of self is very important for achieving self-observation, self-assessment, or for achieving a positive self-reaction (Biloslavo & Cagri 2010). Positive self-perception is connected to connotative competences. This form of competence is very important in acquiring the skills and character for innovation and this type of competences is best taught through the innovation workshop learning approach. An innovation workshop as a process is student directed and requires the motivation to achieve specific objectives. Also, learning through innovation workshops is based on developing real-life innovation projects that are challenging, based on discussions and questions. Investigative, generative and exploratory practices and connotative competences are important in this learning context.

The innovation workshop’s learning approach also stimulates the development of students’ affective competences. According to Biloslavo & Cagri (2010), affective competences are about:

- “Recognizing one’s own feelings and those of others, expressing one’s own feelings and distinguishing between the emotions expressed by others.
- The use of feelings for alleviation and for the priority ordering of various ways of thinking.
- Characterizing and distinguishing emotions, understanding the inter-linkage between various feelings, and devising the rules relating to them.
- Controlling and directing emotions within the context of personal objectives, self-

knowledge and social awareness. (Biloslavo & Cagri 2010.)

Affective competences are important in the learning approaches of innovation workshops, because the process involves a real-life company case and working with a case involves “cultural value systems and expectations” (Biloslavo & Cagri 2010), problem-based learning and applied real-life development projects that are challenging and are most likely to be carried out in a multicultural environment that may well test student’s value systems and emotions.

Benefits of learning through the innovation workshop approach:

- Better student motivation improves their commitment to their studies.
- Development of generic knowledge is done alongside the development of skills and character needed in the workplace.
- Knowledge transfers from university to firms are made more effectively and can contribute to the development of the company and the regional economy and competitiveness (Okuogume & Jäminki 2011).
- Students are encouraged to achieve specific objectives and self-actualization leading to more motivated and committed students with better study experience.
- Student retention is higher.
- The number of graduating students is higher.
- Relationships with companies are stronger.
- The partnership building skills of students are enhanced.

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**3.**

**PRACTICE MAKES  
PERFECT –  
BUSINESS INNOVATION  
WORKSHOPS**

# Business Innovation Workshops – the core of the project

Minttu Merivirta

Between 2012 and 2014 the Practice Future project connected education and business in the Barents region. Through students' innovative work and thinking, local businesses and municipalities have been offered a chance to expand their minds about their existing practices and future business opportunities. At the same time, the students got a chance to leave the classroom and experience real-life business challenges.

The lead partner of the Practice Future project is UiT – The Arctic University of Norway. The other partners are the International Institute of Business Education (MIBO), Lapland University of Applied Sciences (Lapland UAS), Murmansk State Technical University (MSTU) and Petrozavodsk State University (PetrSU). All of the partners have had a chance to host the Business Innovation Workshop.

The final beneficiaries of the Practice Future project are the students, and most of them are future entrepreneurs. Participating students came from the five partner universities and represented various nationalities.

## SIX WORKSHOPS WERE ORGANIZED

Each semester a group of students worked in teams to find new and innovative solutions to assignments offered by the particular case companies. The innovation process was each time highlighted

during the Business Innovation Workshop week that took place after a long period of online work. In this last week, the international student teams finalised their ideas and gave a presentation to the case company representatives, as well as to other honourable members of the jury. The best ideas were awarded and some were even put into practice in the case companies.

During the project implementation, altogether six Business Innovation Workshops were organised:

1. The first workshop was held in Alta, Norway. The lead partner university, UiT - The Arctic University of Norway, was in charge of the practical arrangements. Case companies were SORRISNIVA from Alta (Norway) and ART FROM BARENTS from Murmansk (Russia). Solutions offered by the student teams were appreciated by both case companies.
2. In the second semester, the workshop was organized in Murmansk, Russia. The responsibility for the organization was shared equally by the two local partner universities: the International Institute of Business Education (MIBO) and Murmansk State Technical University (MSTU). The cases for the students were offered by Tornio Municipality (Finland) and MR. PINK, a youth centre from Murmansk (Russia). The



- case companies were very satisfied with the workshop results and the outcomes they got and Mr Pink Youth House even implemented one of the ideas presented by a student team.
3. The third workshop was in Petrozavodsk, Russia. This time the host was Petrozavodsk State University (PetrSU). Assignments for the student teams came from the Wooden Shipbuilding Shipyard VARYAG from Petrozavodsk (Russia) and the Port of Kirkenes (Norway). Various innovative ideas were presented to the case companies during the final presentations.
  4. The fourth workshop took place in Tornio, Finland. The newly established Lapland University of Applied Sciences took charge of the arrangements. Cases were offered by the Municipality of Kvalsund (Norway) and the Port of Tornio (Finland). The clients were satisfied and gained several new, valuable and applicable ideas through the students' proposals.
  5. The fifth workshop was again organized in Alta, Norway, by The Arctic University of Norway. The students had a chance to work on two assignments, both offered by the KVALSUND MUNICIPALITY. At this workshop too, the case company representative hoped to continue development work with some of the students involved in the project.
  6. The sixth workshop saw participants gathering in Murmansk, Russia. This workshop was also the concluding event of the whole project and the organizers were International Institute of Business Education and Murmansk State Technical University. The cases were offered by the Murmansk Shipping Company (MSCO) from Russia and Datadrivers Oy from Tornio, Finland.
- More than 60 participants were involved in each workshop, including international students from the partner universities, coaches, coordinators, lecturers and case company representatives. The workshop weeks contained not only team work, but also visits to local businesses and sightseeing excursions, as well as networking and socialising events.



**Practice Future offers an effective way and a chance to improve communication and analysis of business reality.**

- Anastasia Chugunova, student, PetrSU

The background of the entire page is a light blue, textured surface. Overlaid on this are several large, expressive brushstrokes in shades of orange and brown. These strokes are somewhat irregular and layered, creating a sense of movement and depth. A solid orange horizontal band runs across the middle of the page, containing the main text.

# The first Business Innovation Workshop in Alta, Norway



**Alta is the largest town in the sparsely settled Finnmark County in the High North of Norway.**

**Back in the 1950s, Alta was a small agricultural community. Today, with around twenty thousand inhabitants, it is the most populated community in Finnmark, a trading centre with small industry, and a traffic node between the north and south of Norway. It is a service centre for a large area between the cities of Hammerfest and Tromsø. The town is famous for its slate industry. The Finnmark Faculty in Alta with more than one thousand students is a part of UiT – The Arctic University of Norway with its main campus in Tromsø. In addition, there is a research institution (Norut NIBR Finnmark) located in Alta.**

# Workshop activities in Alta

Peter Fischer

## OCTOBER 2012 IN ALTA

The first international Business Innovation Workshop in the Practice Future project was held in Alta, Norway. The lead partner university hosted around fifty guests, students and staff, together with Rock 'n' Roll Entrepreneurship students from Alta, who are enrolled in a recently launched and English-taught international Bachelor programme. These entrepreneurship students are encouraged to work as coaches and jury members in local high school Gründer camps, thus connecting higher education with a variety of activities arranged by the Norwegian government-supported organisation, Young Entrepreneurship. International exchange students in Alta participated in the workshop too, so that around 75 students from fifteen nationalities took part, together with academic and administrative staff from Murmansk, Petrozavodsk, and Kemi-

Tornio. Teachers from Alta contributed by giving teams feedback on their proposals as members of the jury, which evaluated the final team presentations together with representatives from the tourism company "Sorrisniva" from Alta, the local organiser of the festival Aronnesrocken, and, via an online connection, the representatives of "Art From Barents" from Murmansk.

## PROGRAMME OF THE WEEK

The primary objective of the week-long workshop was to provide the main case companies from Alta and Murmansk and the company "Aronnesrocken" with valuable solutions to their perceived problems. In order to achieve this goal, core activities were planned which provided students with further expertise and local knowledge relevant for their case studies. The intention was to bring them together with experienced local entrepreneurs as external lecturers, but unluckily they were prevented from

showing up for business reasons. An experienced student from the Alta Entrepreneurship class, a business woman from Hammerfest, could fortunately take on their part.



**Every international experience provides the opportunity to think globally.**

- Daria Matveenkova, student, MSTU

In order to unite students from all those different nationalities, teachers from Murmansk and Tornio gave lectures and organised group work in cross-cultural communication. Another teacher from the Finnish partner made students, particularly those with non-business backgrounds, familiar with case study facilitating tools, such as Business Model Generation.

An excursion called “Entrepreneurship in the Wilderness” rounded off the week’s programme. It was a seminar excursion to a local husky kennel, Northern Lights Husky, owned by a woman from Alta, who had participated several times as a musher in the world’s northernmost sled dog competition, the Finnmark Race, and in the Iditarod in Alaska.

Now she had made a profitable tourism business out of her passion. A second business seminar, meeting local entrepreneurs, took place at Sorrisniva where teams could gather more information and feedback from the case company.

Two presentations to case company representatives and the jury were arranged during the week. A so-called preliminary presentation of ideas, right after the opening of the workshop week on Monday morning, served as a test run. Teams faced the first critical feedback, after which they were able to refine their work until the final presentation on Friday. An award ceremony on Friday evening granted the best three solutions awards from the jury and case companies.



# Assignments to tackle

Peter Fischer

For the first project stage in autumn 2012 the main case companies were one company from Alta and another one from Murmansk. They were chosen on account of personal and professional contacts between company members and academic staff. Using personal networks to obtain necessary commitments from case companies proved very effective. A third case, to be worked out by the entrepreneurship students from Alta, but integrated into the whole Business Innovation Workshop week, was the local festival company “Aronnesrocken”.

## SORRISNIVA, ALTA

Sorrisniva is a small family firm with a long tradition mainly in winter tourism. The company is located on the riverbank in Alta, Norway, offering tourists and locals products such as riverboat safaris, snowmobile safaris, igloo hotel rooms, dog sledding,

Lavvo sleepover and local food. Sorrisniva’s biggest and most known product is the Igloo hotel. The company has a busy winter-season from January to April while the igloo hotel is open, and there are challenges in every aspect of running a good winter business. However, Sorrisniva’s biggest challenge is the rest of the year. There is almost nothing to do from May to December. With an eye to the large numbers of tourists passing through Finnmark every summer, and to a big potential market in the East, especially Russia, Sorrisniva’s assignment autumn 2012 was to figure out what summer related products they should put their money and effort in, and to give advice on how to go about developing this product.

Students developed a number of proposals appreciated by the company. They also suggested potential business partnerships abroad. The main ideas the company appreciated were building a cave hotel and short-time events like a summer marathon,

**CASE**

## **SORRISNIVA, Alta, Norway**

**→ Develop business ideas for our family firm for the summer season.**

balloon trips and food-festivals. Some innovative ideas were assessed as very well suited to the Sorrisniva profile, with focus on high quality and good products, and with the potential to transfer from summer to winter season, as for instance guided eco- and photo tours.

However, according to the case company, the proposals made by students had been mainly refused, because of too high expenses and the consequent lack of profitability, but also because of legal or regulatory restrictions in a sensitive natural environment, or because the ideas did not fit into the company's business profile. On the other hand, the case company assured they would take some suggested activities into consideration like, for example, team building and hotel-related offers.

## ART FROM BARENTS, MURMANSK

The second main case students worked on during the first project period in autumn 2012 was Art from Barents, Murmansk. The company maintains an Internet-gallery for the sale of paintings from contemporary artists from the Barents Region. The

firm had started its business in October 2011 and was developing a high-quality on-line distribution channel. Art From Barents intends to work towards the luxury market of private customers and of organizations. Their offer is to facilitate purchase of paintings via the Internet and their delivery to the stated address in any part of the world.

The case assignment was, laconically formulated: "The task is to find customers from Europe and the USA as fast as possible". As background information, the company provided students with their already planned efforts in order to avoid waste of time and energy.

The case company representative lauded three teams: One, because they were successful in establishing potential business contacts in the US and Finland, another for video and other promotion ideas like accomplishments in social media and airport marketing and a third one for suggestions about working with Russian Heritage organizations and for great examples of on-line gallery web design.

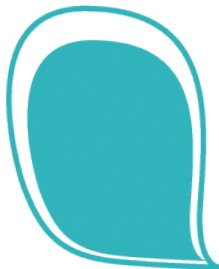
According to the case company, one student did an especially impressive job and carried out a good experiment on social media, creating a twitter account and collecting data on web page visits. The

# CASE

## ART FROM BARENTS, Murmansk, Russia

→ Innovate and improve the on-line sales of paintings via our website.

company also considered hiring one of the students for another business, because he independently took the challenge and tried out things. They also intended to contact a second Russian student for using the students' network and for different project ideas, and they will perhaps use international contacts provided by the teams. The case company confirmed that they became aware of the importance of these potential contacts through the students' work, and that this actually met their expectations well. The company also mentioned useful feedback about the web page, its core platform, and that they slightly extended their business model as a result of the cooperation with the project.





# Main results with regard to learning platform development

Peter Fischer

After finishing the first stage of the project, the partners listed plenty of relevant issues for further development of the learning platform.

Several teachers wished an earlier recruitment of teams in order to start earlier with required lectures and seminars related to supporting topics. Coaches decided to make lists of general activities, simple but essential for fulfilling the task, a unified toolbox for all the teams to use, at least when it comes to non-business students. Mini-lectures on peculiarities of international business strategies, marketing etc. would make them better informed and compensate for disparities between business and non-business teams.

Partners also learned that particular tasks about cross-cultural interaction should become part of the project work, and that ice-breaking activities must

be arranged in the very beginning of a workshop week.

In order to enhance the effects of learning and the quality of teamwork, teachers also agreed to include “experienced” team members from the first stage into new teams in the next stage of the project. The competition side of the workshop was evaluated as being a stimulating and encouraging factor that added more excitement to the entire case study period, but some of the students took it too seriously to the detriment of potential cooperation for even better products. Already in October 2012, one of the suggested solutions was to mix student teams during the workshops. The partners also found that it was necessary to define clear assessment criteria for final presentations.



**When you have a psychological and sociological background, it is like theory. Practice Future project presents opportunity to practice.**

- Vladislav Ilenkov, student, Alta

# First Work Sessions – a Coach’s Perspective

Teresa Chen

International projects constitute a productive platform for nurturing cooperation between diverse partners and a school project such as Practice Future creates an environment that facilitates collaboration between regional higher education institutions and enterprises. It creates an opportunity for students to engage in dealing with issues related to real enterprises, as well as for the enterprises to widen dimensions for possible future expansion of their business. This is the right platform for students to be innovative and creative with their business ideas.

As a teacher-coach in charge, I was involved in recruiting appropriate students from the Business and Culture department of the then Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences (presently Lapland UAS). In selecting students emphasis was laid on competences, such as communication, team-working and inter-cultural skills along with personal dedication to working in the project.

## FROM CHALLENGES TO RESULTS

The very first round of Practice Future was kicked off in Alta, Norway in the autumn of 2012. I had the opportunity to coach six students, most of whom belonged to the Business Management study programme and who represented various nationalities: Finnish, Chinese, Bolivian, Nepalese and Russian.

It is challenging for a teacher to inspire groups of diverse students, especially students with varying motivation and competences. Students ask to be treated as adults and yet the reality is that some students are not able or willing to take charge and be responsible for the tasks at hand. As a teacher-coach my task was to guide students to utilize their own competences and skills in finding solutions to problems.

The student group did face personality challenges and a change in leadership. In spite of all these hurdles the group eventually managed to find synergy in diversity and put their strengths together and passionately worked on the two tasks provided by two case companies, the Norwegian tourism enterprise Sorrisniva and the Russian enterprise Art from Barents.

Regular meetings and intensive discussions along with guidance related to organizational activities ensured a sense of stability and established a harmonious group working environment.

## FINDING THE INDIVIDUAL STRENGTHS INSIDE THE GROUP

In order for harmony to prevail in the working group, it was essential to establish a certain work ethic. A set of team rules was drawn up and approved by all members.



**I worked alone before, now I can work with people of different backgrounds. That makes me a team player.**

- Svetlana Ismailova, student, Alta

The division of labour in the group was based on students' personal SWOT. The students then carried out their own individual research and studies to fulfil their end of the bargain.

Students were required to conduct interviews with regional enterprises and this proved frustrating since the students' intentions were not taken seriously and they sometimes met with condescending rejections. I had to intervene at different stages to boost students' moral and self-confidence.

As a teacher-coach, I had to ensure that all students had an equal opportunity to voice their contribution, to foster individual growth and professional identity. Each student brought ideas forward which were collectively discussed in the group before further actions were taken. This brought about a sense of unity in the group where all were able to express freely various ideas in order to achieve a common goal: solutions to the tasks provided by the case companies.

Each student was made to feel a worthy contributor to the group tasks provided, which I personally believe brought about the passion in students to put in their best effort in order to find the optimal solution for the case companies.

## FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCES OF REAL-LIFE BUSINESSES

It was very gratifying to watch students take ownership of their responsibilities. They established a productive environment in which they could innovate to their best ability. In spite of their varying cultural backgrounds, the students in the group successfully managed to communicate their thoughts and ideas efficiently with each other.

The students got to experience the functioning of real enterprises first hand. They had several opportunities to discuss on-line with the representatives of the two commissioning enterprises and during the workshop week in Alta the students

had the unique opportunity to visit Sorrisniva. Both these contacts provided better insights to tackle the tasks provided. I felt proud that my student group's ideas were ranked first and third for Art from Barents and Sorrisniva respectively.

The workshop week further provided an opportunity for the students to meet and befriend participating students from the other four higher education institution partners from Russia and Norway. There were about seventy-five (75) students originating from fifteen (15) countries among the workshop participants. Some of the students created their own network of friends who keep in touch using social networking tools. This was a fertile inter-cultural interaction arena where participants were involved in the creation of friendships and networks.

The students got more out of the week than just functioning as entrepreneurs. It was an intensive week of brain storming, frustration, collaboration and results. As a teacher-coach I had plenty of opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas on issues ranging from coaching students and future plans with my colleagues from the partner institutions.



# Participating in a Business Innovation Workshop – A student's point of view

Lauri Eskola

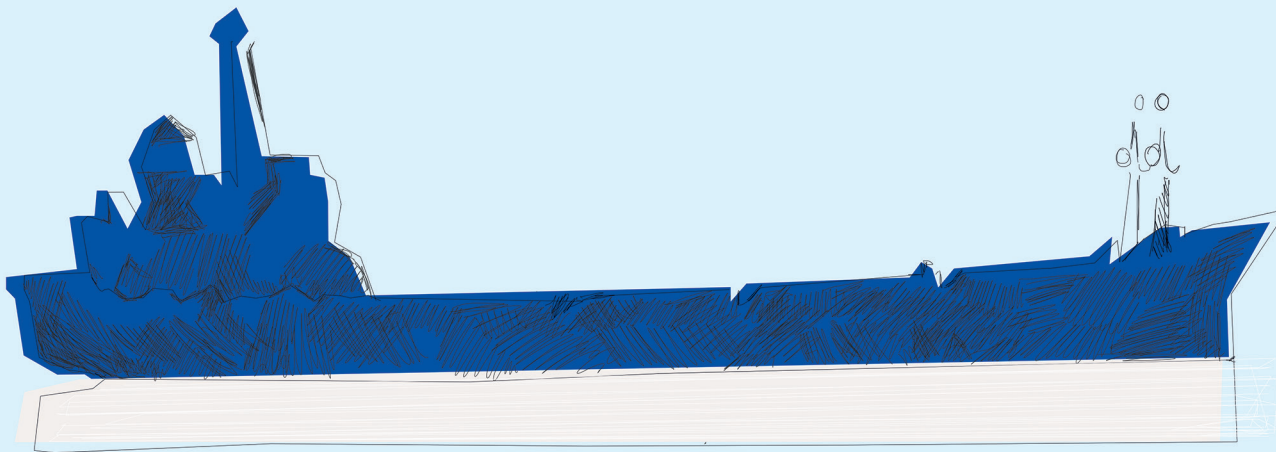
In 2012 the Practice Future project's Business Innovation Workshop took place in Alta, Norway. During that run of the project the assignments involved the Sorrisniva hotel in Norway, famous for its Igloo Hotel during winter time. The second case company was Art from Barents, an art retailer based in Murmansk, Russia, that mainly operates via on-line sales. The case company Sorrisniva wanted to explore opportunities to expand their customer base for the summer season in Norway. For Art from Barents the case was to find possible networks in the USA and Europe which could potentially increase their sales and visibility as an art dealer.


For the Sorrisniva hotel a variety of solutions was offered, including various experience-based services and few ideas for the expansion of the product. The winning idea for this case was an eco-friendly hotel expansion from two teams that collaborated and joined forces. It proposed the building of environmentally friendly platforms in nature to provide shelter from the elements, so that the hotel guests could experience nature a bit closer. Our Kemi-Tornio group took third prize with solutions that presented various extreme activities and mainly focused on event management. It involved arranging a marathon, or a similar event, which would be held in the stunning scenery of the Alta region.

The case of Art from Barents was a rather difficult one for all of the teams. However, long months of work paid off for Kemi-Tornio's team who won the first prize by offering real contacts in the USA and Europe. The second and third prize went to groups that had taken a small sidestep into marketing and developing the company's websites and were not focusing on the initial idea of expanding the company's network. The decision about the winning teams fell to the representatives of the companies, as they knew their companies best and what solutions would be most beneficial and practical to be implemented.

Good practices that were implemented were the fact that during the intensive week in Alta, we could familiarise ourselves with the surroundings and the region, this way expanding our understanding of the possibilities based on our experiences. The mixing and sharing of team ideas was not necessarily the most practical idea in a competition, although it can be argued, of course, that sharing and teaming up with the opponent can result in a competitive advantage. However, the truth is that the threshold to take such a step during a competition is high.

# The second Business Innovation Workshop in Murmansk, Russia





**Murmansk (known as Romanov-on-Murman before 1917), founded in 1916, is the centre of the Murmansk Region and the largest Russian sea port on the Arctic Ocean. The Murmansk Region is one of the biggest and most urbanised and economically-developed regions in the North-West of Russia. Its population is 771 058 people (2014), and the territory covers 144 936 square kilometres.**

**In the West the Murmansk Region borders on Norway and Finland, in the south on the Republic of Karelia. It is washed by the Barents Sea in the North and the East and by the White Sea in the South. The terrain is hilly and mountainous, the highest point (1 208 meters above sea level) is in the Khibin Mountains. The biggest part of the Murmansk Region lies north of the Polar Circle. The climate is arctic but moderate.**

# Various activities during the Murmansk workshop

Svetlana Kuskova

The second international Business Innovation Workshop took place in Murmansk, Russia, from the 22nd to the 26th of April, 2013.

The responsibility for organizing the International Business Innovation Workshop was equally shared by two participating universities situated locally: the International Institute of Business Education (MIBO) and Murmansk State Technical University (MSTU). The events of the workshop week were also held on the premises of these higher education institutions.

It was the first time that the Practice Future international Business Innovation Workshop was organised in Russia. That is why, along with the main objectives of the meeting, the organizers also focused on breaking “the ice” and the negative stereotypes that might exist about Russia in general and its cold areas in particular.

For that purpose a range of social events were included in the programme, like students and staff socializing in anti-café “Teplo”, a unique sort of place where people gather and pay not for the food and drinks but for the time spent in the company of friends while playing games, watching films and having tea with biscuits.

Other activities, aimed at creating a spirit of cultural and professional cooperation, were the

workshop “Opportunities and challenges of creative business” and the Norwegian-Russian concert at the “Jazz-n-Blues Café” (the performing groups were “ShowTime!” (Murmansk) and “All About the Sound” (Hammerfest). The city tour that enabled the participants to enjoy the city highlights included a visit to the Russian Orthodox Church, a photo stop at the Monument to the Defenders of the Russian Far North and a visit to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Centre. Finally, an excursion on board the icebreaker Lenin provided an interesting insight into the Soviet nuclear-powered icebreakers still working in Arctic waters. “The Lenin”, the world’s first nuclear powered surface ship, is now a fascinating museum.

The team from Finnmark University College also paid a visit to the Norwegian-Russian School, located in Gymnasia # 1 of Murmansk, and participated in an Entrepreneurship class there. The focus was on gaining experience of how entrepreneurship is taught locally within the framework of international cooperation.



## FROM GROUP WORK TO PRESENTATIONS AND EVALUATIONS

The project workshop week gathered together almost 50 international student members of the teams from participating universities, 9 coaches and coordinators and 3 representatives of the youth house "Mr. Pink", the case company that is located in Murmansk. Representatives of the second case, the Tornio-Haparanda Development Project, followed presentations on-line.

The major events of the first day included initial presentations of business ideas and experts' questions to the teams, as well as group work and a meeting of the coaches. The second day was focused on knowledge building by means of a lecture and a workshop. There was also an opportunity provided to meet local entrepreneurs and to get to know their "success stories".

Later on during the week a lot of time was dedicated to group work and social events, while the staff participated in the steering group meeting. The granting programme Kolarctic ENPI CBC was represented there by Julia Korshunova, the local programme officer. On 26th of April the teams made final presentations of their business ideas that were assessed by the jury and the case companies. In the afternoon the participants provided their evaluation of the week and in the evening the award ceremony took place during the farewell dinner at the Meridian hotel.

It is important to mention that for the Business Innovation Workshop week the staff of the project collaboratively worked out common approaches to

the evaluation criteria of business ideas, so as to employ objective and well-reasoned approaches to the quality of idea contents and presentation. The criteria included evaluation of the innovative quality of the idea, feasibility of the idea, marketability of the proposed venture, financial and/or social return of the proposed idea, contingency planning and risk assessment and sustainability of the idea. The presentations were primarily judged for their clarity, completeness, and persuasiveness, as well as the quality of the team members' responses to questions from the jury members and experts.

# Case companies offered real-life business assignments

Svetlana Kuskova & Nina Ershova

According to the data presented on the official site of the Murmansk Regional Government (2014), the Murmansk Region is one of the strategic areas of the country in the North-Western Federal District.

Murmansk is a base for cargo transport to areas of the Far North, the Arctic and beyond. The unique capabilities of nuclear icebreakers have ensured year-round Arctic navigation. The region occupies an important geopolitical position in relation to regions with a developed industry connected to it by land, sea and air routes.

The structure of the gross regional product is officially presented in the following figures: mining operations, manufacturing activity, producing of electric energy, gas and water – 36,4%, fishing and fish farming – 7,1%, transport and telecommunication – 8,9 %; wholesale and retail trade, repair of vehicles, household appliances and articles of personal use – 8,9 %; budget sector – 23,4%, other activity – 15,3 %.

Moreover, the geographical position close to the border, significant exporting capabilities and available transport links create good conditions for efficient cooperation with other countries. The Murmansk Region is an active participant in the Barents Euro-Arctic Region relationship and activities, resulting in a number of international projects. This is in line with one of the goals of the Practice Future project, which is to assist further cross-border cooperation in the Arctic area.

## SIGNIFICANT ASSIGNMENTS CREATE REAL INTEREST

The case companies for the international Business Innovation Workshop week in Murmansk were suggested by Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences (KTUAS) and Murmansk State Technical

**CASE**

### **TORNIO MUNICIPALITY, Tornio, Finland**

**→ Develop a public-private funding model for an island park on the Swedish-Finnish border.**

University (MSTU) and agreed upon by all other participating higher education institutions.

The case from the Finnish side, the Tornio-Haparanda Development Project, was commissioned by Tornio municipality. It focused on assisting the "På Gränsen – Rajalla" project that, in its turn, is aimed at the area between the old town centres of Tornio (Finland) and Haparanda (Sweden), a former border zone, and its development into a new joint centre for the twin town. The final public part of the above-mentioned project, the EU park, still needs to be built, although the overall plan was conducted back in 2007.

The Tornio-Haparanda case assignment had a history that started in 1997 when the two towns began a joint project "På Gränsen – Rajalla", i.e. "On the border". The project implementation stage started in 2003. Most of the public infrastructure was opened by 2011 (2006 - Ikea and Ikano Retail Park, 2008 - Rajalla På Gränsen shopping centre as well as 120 apartments), but the final part of the project, the EU park, still needed to be built as the funding for the park development (about 2 million Euro) was lacking.

Some local business representatives introduced the idea that private businesses could participate in

the park's development, and this became the starting point for the Practice Future students' assignment. The cross-border operating environment and the location of the park, literally on the border, set an interesting and challenging background for the students. Their task was to develop a business model for the public-private partnership for the park development. The model was to be implemented in the cross-border environment of the Tornio-Haparanda twin city in the way that local communities collaborated with nationally and internationally active local business and municipality partnerships.

The Russian case assignment was presented by the non-governmental organisation "Mr Pink", the centre that helps young people in Murmansk to implement their ideas/projects with resources (equipment, volunteers, etc.) and advice. It is a unique organisation fully managed by young people and also associated with the most creative youths in the city. The organisation gave a very precise task to the student teams formulated as a list of needs that had to be met:

- finding a better location and place to carry out activities;

## CASE

### MR. PINK, Murmansk, Russia

→ Create a funding model for our social enterprise and ideas for the location of our venture in the city centre of Murmansk.

- engaging at least 15 per cent of the young population of Murmansk in the Youth House projects as managers, participants and audience;
- strengthening the reputation of the Youth House as a place where dreams can come true, thus increasing the number and quality of the projects;
- developing fundraising and finding ways to generate self-income.

The Russian case can be referred to as a social project, since the commissioning company, the youth house “Mr. Pink” from Murmansk, is a place where young people can gather to work on their projects, or to participate in the implementation of other people’s ideas. It is a unique organisation that is associated with the most creative youth of Murmansk and is fully managed by the youth.

The major challenge of the youth house is considerable lack of financing. This situation causes constant problems with payment of utility bills for the premises the organisation occupies and uncertainty about the future. In connection with

this, the task to be solved by student teams was to make the youth house “Mr. Pink” a self-sustained project (and prospectively, a profitable one), preserving the idea of social entrepreneurship. The assignment caused genuine interest among students.

In our opinion, the cases and the business ideas developed by the students had great significance for the economic and social development of the focus areas.

## CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION EMPHASISED IN THE RESULTS

KTUAS and MSTU handled initial communication with the commissioners of the case companies, who prepared written descriptions of the current situations in place and their case assignments. Further on, the dialogue was organized via the internet through the intensive use of the Adobe Connect platform.

The kick-off on-line meeting took place on February 11, 2013, but prior to that the teams sent their collected questions to the case representatives.



**Practice Future is about business communication, language, people and problem solving. It brings these realities to our lives.**

- Ksenia Grebyolkina, student, MIBO

The first-ever meeting between the teams and the companies was efficient and helped to get primary clarifications of the assignments.

Later on the student teams worked on a more individual basis and contacted the companies via e-mail or during other on-line meetings. Despite the really busy schedule of the company representatives, they usually responded to the students' questions promptly and provided the required information.

When the international Business Innovation Workshop week was held in Murmansk, the teams from four of the five partner universities involved in the project had an opportunity to visit the case company, youth house "Mr. Pink", and ask further questions to its representatives before working on the final development of their business idea. The leader of the youth house, Evgeniy Goman, was also a member of the jury sitting in Murmansk and served as an expert providing his evaluation both of initial and final presentations.

To sum up, as one of the project goals is to enhance the sustainability of the cross-border cooperation in the Arctic area, the students' ideas seemed quite relevant, because they were connected, deep and wide, with the possibilities of establishing new forms of cooperation, or strengthening the existing patterns of going international.

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# Workshop's results and tools for the future

Nina Ershova

For the second project stage two cases were chosen, one located in the border-spanning territory of Tornio-Haparanda (on the border of Finland and Sweden) and the other one in Murmansk, Russia. The peculiar thing about the Murmansk workshop was that non-commercial organisations offered both cases.

Solutions presented by the student teams can be divided into several groups and a description of these solutions follows, starting with the Tornio-Haparanda case assignment.

## NEW IDEAS FOR EVENTS AND CROWD FUNDING FOR TORNIO-HAPARANDA CASE

A lot of teams suggested organising some public events and activities to attract more attention from mass-media and potential investors: the “Zarnica” game in the summer or a snow battle in the winter (team Alta D), mini-golf, fitness Rubik Cube, human chess, ice sculptures (KTUAS team), open-air festival with a floating stage (PetrSU), launching of lanterns (MSTU team 1), Angry Birds activity park (MIBO team). Crowdfunding was another popular solution suggested by at least 3 teams (Alta 3ZET, MSTU 1, MIBO), and this solution was often integrated with the idea of establishing a park web-

site or holding a fund-raising campaign on the Internet.

For example, Finnmark University college team Alta 3ZET suggested the “One pixel idea” which meant that the future park should be divided into small separate parts or pixels belonging to a certain company. The company would invest into a pixel development and thus advertise itself and contribute to the development of the whole park territory. The fund-raising campaign could also be arranged on the Internet where each person could donate for the development of a certain pixel. The MIBO team originally had a very similar idea called the “My Park Website”. It proposed the EU park territory should be divided into sectors presented on the website so that local people could choose a sector (e.g. a bicycle path) and vote for it with money. Local businesses could also participate in the action and contribute either with money or equipment or construction work in the park.

A very special idea for the Tornio-Haparanda case was presented by the Alta B team. The students thought of a new key feature which should be added to the EU park, namely creating the concept of a green, sustainable territory. The key activities mentioned by the team were designing a Recycling Park and constructing a self-sustaining building.

The general atmosphere of the Murmansk workshop can be described as friendly and excited, as it always is when some competition takes place.



### CO-OPERATION SUGGESTIONS FOR MR. PINK CASE

Mr. Pink received a bunch of ideas connected with increasing publicity and informing people of the Youth House activities: publishing a magazine for the youngsters (Alta D team), starting a radio programme broadcast by a local radio station (Alta 3ZET), making videos about Mr. Pink project leaders and establishing an advertising branch inside the Youth House (MSTU team 1). To attract new people most teams suggested cooperation with schools and universities in Murmansk and partially using their facilities (e.g. equipment, premises – Alta 3ZET) as well as cooperation with partners working in similar areas (“Youth in Action” programme – PetrSU, SIVA business incubator – team Alta B). The idea of arranging master-classes and workshops run by professionals was presented by almost every student team; the Youth House also received a long list of local sponsors and possible partners.

### THE DOUBLE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM IN CHOOSING THE WINNERS

The teams’ ideas were assessed not only by the companies, but also by a panel of experts who were to judge according to specially designed evaluation forms. The panel consisted of people having entrepreneurial or business education backgrounds (Elena Zubritskaya, Vice-Rector for Research, MIBO/ Head of Barents InnoLab within the Young Innovative Entrepreneurs project; Dennis Kreminsky, private entrepreneur, Ivan Makhortov, private entrepreneur), experience of working in the Kolarctic programme (Iulia Korshunova, Kolarctic ENPI CBC office Murmansk; Anna Trubkina, Young Innovative Entrepreneurs project manager and regional coordinator) or direct connections with companies (Natalia Kolesnik, Mr. Pink member and representative). Unfortunately, there was no opportunity to include a representative from the Tornio-Haparanda side into the panel of experts, so the EU park representatives evaluated the teams’ final presentations sent by e-mail.



## **Practice Future is more about practical issues that expose one to the real practical reality.**

- Duong Minh, student, Lapland UAS

The double assessment system was implemented, because the project coaches and the coordinator team wanted to monitor students' activity of developing business ideas from a pedagogical point of view. A company would always choose the idea they like best regardless of the creative and working process in the team. It is not important for the company what marketing tools or strategies a group of students used to develop a certain idea, but it makes a difference to the project team. For this reason the panel of experts was given the following evaluation criteria:

- innovativeness of the idea
- feasibility and quality of the idea
- marketability of the proposed venture
- financial and/or social return of the proposed venture
- contingency planning and risk assessment
- sustainability of the idea
- clarity, completeness and persuasiveness of the presentation

- quality of the team members' responses to questions from experts.

The final decision on the winning teams was a combination of the companies' opinion and the experts' evaluation with the companies' opinion given a priority. One more special feature about the final presentations was the Audience Award among the student teams. As a result the final presentations were evaluated from three different perspectives: of companies, experts and participants. In this article we will only briefly name the winner teams: they were the MIBO team, Alta 3ZET, MSTU team 1 ("Polar Heads") and the KTUAS team. It is worth mentioning that the idea presented by the Alta 3ZET team for the Youth House Mr. Pink somehow found its implementation the next year: Mr Pink leader Evgeny Goman took part as a co-presenter in a regular radio programme "Radio Amateurs" that was broadcast by one of the local radio channels.



## FEEDBACK FROM THE PARTICIPANTS SHOWS SUCCESS

The general atmosphere of the Murmansk workshop can be described as friendly and excited, as it always is when some competition takes place. To make students feel more relaxed and comfortable in a new environment the workshop organizers planned a social programme which included sightseeing and the already traditional Get Together Evening and Awards Ceremony.

Judging by the participants' feedback forms, the workshop could be in general evaluated as having 4 points out of 5 possible, which seems to be a good result taking into account that the whole workshop programme was shortened and lasted for only four working days instead of five working days as had previously been the case.

It is interesting to note that some aspects of the workshop received both positive and negative feedback from the students. For example, some participants marked the lectures arranged during the workshop as highly relevant, informative and inspiring, whereas others noted that they would like to receive more practice-oriented lectures connected with the case assignments. The same can be stated about the facilities and the social programme, but all in all the participants' impressions can be described as positive.

As to the case companies, they were very satisfied with the workshop results and the outcomes they got. It was already mentioned that Mr. Pink Youth House implemented one of the ideas, the radio programme.

## THERE'S ALWAYS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

Describing the workshop in terms of good practices and things to avoid during the next project event, we can mention the following good practices:

- the overall workshop arrangement: all guest teams and coaches were accommodated in one hotel, which made team work and the coaching process easy; the visit to Mr. Pink at the beginning of the workshop gave students a clear idea of what the company really is;
- the presentation and evaluation: the panel of experts assessing the teams according to clear evaluation criteria; the Audience Award.

Some things to avoid in future events are as follows: shortened workshop programme, technical difficulties during final presentations (no real-time connection with Tornio-Haparanda), students' delays in delivering final presentations. Some participants, for example the MSTU team 1, mentioned that they would have preferred to get a specially organised session on exchanging ideas with the other teams, because it helps to develop case assignments in many ways. Guest lectures also got very different ratings. Part of these drawbacks were taken into account and corrected in the following workshops; others will have to be improved during the final project event in Murmansk in October 2014.

# Lessons for the Business Innovation Workshop teachers

Victor Emelianov & Nina Ershova

Practice Future has proven to be a very efficient way of teaching students many practical skills, as far as business management is concerned. In fact, this project is a good illustration of the common knowledge that 'learning by doing' is a very effective and efficient way of teaching and learning.

While engaged as a students' coach in the project from the MSTU side, we learned some lessons during the workshop in Murmansk which might be of interest to the other staff involved in Practice Future, or others working with similar kinds of workshops.

## ADEQUATE LANGUAGE SKILLS AS A PREREQUISITE FOR SUCCESS

Lesson 1 is about the English language. One of the conditions for selecting a student for Practice Future is fluency in English, and that is where we came across a real problem. We have to admit that after the second project stage we understood that, although we have a lot of creative and talented students, we have a limited choice of those who speak good English.

At MSTU we start recruiting students for a new project stage both inside the International Relations

Department, since it has the maximum number of candidates with good language skills and all over the university via the MSTU website. However, we often end up with almost exclusively International Department students recommended by our colleagues, or selected from one of the writer's, Viktor, groups due to the language factor. Project stage was no exception with only one girl with an economic education background joining the Murmansk workshop.

The workshop in Murmansk was a bit different for us as student coaches, as we were able to recruit two student teams without being limited by accommodation or transportation issues. MSTU team 1 had already taken part in the Alta workshop (October 2012) and felt really confident and motivated to continue in the project. MSTU team 2 consisted of the new members with some international background but no earlier experience of working in Practice Future or in projects of the same kind.

The cooperation and coaching process with these two teams was very different and this is where we learned two more things.

## INTERACTION BETWEEN TEAM MEMBERS

Lesson 2 is about member interaction within a team. The initial idea for the workshop in Murmansk was to combine students who have already participated in the first workshop with the newcomers, so that the more experienced participants could act as the core of the team and somehow guide the new members. Thus we planned to meet the project indicators on the one hand and ensure sustainability and transfer of experience between the participants throughout all the workshops on the other hand.

However we met some sort of resistance from the side of MSTU team 1 as they were not willing to have new members bestowed upon them (i.e. somebody the team don't know or don't approve of); they finally invited two new members, but these were chosen by the team themselves, not by the coach or the project coordinator. As to MSTU team 2, they also applied for the project and worked as a group of friends, but there was one clear distinction between the two teams: team 1 knew who is aimed at getting results and who should be invited to the new project stage in order to achieve even better results. They worked together, because they liked it and invited new people who were their friends, but they were also thinking about members' contribution all the time. MSTU team 2 came to the project and developed the assignments as a close group, but they were not so work- or goal-oriented. The fact that they were on friendly terms seemed to be the main reason for their working together, without considering competences or skills.

It is necessary to say some words about whether it is appropriate or not to let the teams work with people they want. We often heard our colleagues in the project say that students shouldn't choose who will be in their team, because they will seldom have such a chance in the future, at their place of work, and that is why mixed teams appointed by a coach are more realistic and true to life. We cannot argue with this, but in our opinion working with someone you can choose, namely with your friends, gives a very important addition to the project from a student's point of view: it gives fun, excitement and motivation to work. It also makes students feel free to express their ideas on the companies' development, no matter how crazy they can be. Looking back at the project workshop in Murmansk now, we are confident that our students would have gotten fewer winning places if they had had to work in teams deliberately mixed by the coach.

## TEAM LEADING AFFECTS THE WHOLE TEAM

Another important thing that we can call lesson 3 is team leadership. As we have mentioned earlier, the language factor affects the creative potential of MSTU teams. However, this drawback may be well balanced by a good team leader like it was in Murmansk and before that in Alta when MSTU had Anastasia Bryzgalova as a team leader. Anastasia, while doing a lot of work by herself, was still able to encourage all team members to work to full capacity, which allowed the coach to add just a few things to

There is always some feeling of shyness and unfamiliarity with what is going on in the workshop among the newly recruited students, so it is very important to make them interact with the others.



the case. Paraphrasing the saying “A good beginning is half the battle” we may say that “A good team leader is half the battle”.

MSTU team 2 was in a bit different situation, not only because of lack of experience with the project, but also because of a different team leader. Veronika, their leader, had a lot of positive and valuable traits: she was hard-working, responsible and good-tempered apart from being intelligent and broad-minded. Her only drawback was that she tended to do a lot of work by herself (perhaps like most responsible people) instead of assigning tasks to the other team members. On the other hand she wasn't assertive enough in dividing responsibilities, because she worked with her friends and apparently didn't want to offend them by being too bossy.

## WORKING IN TERMS OF UNIQUE TEAMS

The difference between the two teams affected greatly the way our communication and coaching was organized. With MSTU team 1 we had a number of short meetings where the team reported on their ideas for the case companies and what results they

had got while trying to implement those ideas. The word implement is very important here, because team 1 was trying to test their ideas throughout the project stage. For example, they found a lot of additional information that could “kill” or support an idea, made phone calls and asked people about their opinion. They also held preliminary negotiations with possible partners. The main task for the coach here was to guide the team on the general student team activities and check the result afterwards.

MSTU team 2 needed far more attention, not only assistance from the coach, but also help in acting as a team leader and as creative group members who could generate ideas for the case companies. Of course, one reason for this was the fact that the MSTU team 2 consisted of the newly recruited students who weren't so familiar with the rules of the game and didn't get the fun of it. But we also have to admit that, because of their different attitudes to membership interaction and because of a different team leader, they had less advantage than MSTU team 1.

One workshop activity that could have really helped our team 2 to improve their ideas and

understand the importance of gathering all participants in one place, could have been interaction between the teams and local students, as it was organized in Alta during the first project stage. This activity always gives a positive impulse to students in many ways: they get feedback on their ideas (sometimes it's as important to local teams as to the workshop guests), they get inspired by others and often change their way of thinking regarding the case companies, which in the end affects their final presentations. The workshop in Murmansk was organised in a way that both local and guest teams spent a lot of time together (during the lectures and study visits and also during the social programme) and thus had a lot of opportunities for interaction, but still such a mixed-team discussion could have become a very helpful activity for the development of ideas. In our opinion, there is always some feeling of shyness and unfamiliarity with what is going on in the workshop among the newly recruited students, so it is very important to make them interact with the others.

## NOTES FOR THE FUTURE

Summing up our experience of the workshop in Murmansk, we would say that it was challenging for many reasons. The case assignments were rather complicated, although each in its unique way and both MSTU teams were different and thus demanded a different approach to coaching and guiding. MSTU team 1 could “spoil” a coach for they were active, goal-oriented and had a strong team leader, while

MSTU team 2 had good potential, but needed a lot more pedagogical guidance as well as leadership.

However, the most important outcome that we got was exactly this difference between the two teams and the lessons we learnt after comparing them: language limitations, member interaction and team leadership. This knowledge appeared to be of great help during the recruitment process for the following project stages.

# The third Business Innovation Workshop in Petrozavodsk, Russia





**The Republic of Karelia is located in the north-western part of the Russian Federation. Karelia, with its attractive geopolitical location, rich recreational resources and many centuries of cultural heritage has always been interesting to both Russians and foreigners. In the ratings by Russian tourists Karelia takes the first place in active types of tourism and the third place in winter tourism.**

**The capital of Karelia is the city of Petrozavodsk. Today Petrozavodsk is an important industrial and infrastructural centre of the Russian North-West, an educational centre and city of science and culture.**

# Workshop activities in Petrozavodsk

Ekaterina Martyuikova

The third international Business Innovation Workshop week took place in Petrozavodsk, Karelia, Russia on October 21st -25th, 2013.

Petrozavodsk State University (PetrSU), the host of the third Workshop, is one of the 30 leading universities of Russia. It was founded in 1940 as the Karelian-Finnish University and it was renamed in 1956. During its 70-year-long history, the university has trained more than 60000 highly qualified specialists. Among its graduates there are academics, ministers and world-famous specialists in culture and science, heads of enterprises and workers in various branches of industry of the Northwest and Northern economical regions of Russia.

PetrSU has a high status as a large research centre in the field of programming, information

technologies, plasma research, microelectronics, mathematics, physics, medicine, biology, history, philology, political and social sciences, law, economy, forestry, building and agro-industrial complexes, etc.

PetrSU is a recognized leader among the institutes of higher education of the Northwest Federal District of the Russian Federation in the sphere of international cooperation development. The university has 35 international agreements in force with foreign institutes of higher education, research organizations and research-and-production companies in Finland, Canada, the USA, Great Britain and Italy. Annually, PetrSU implements about 30 international projects, carried out with the



**The Practice Future project experience brings us to the reality of places and solving people's problems.**

- Maria Solovyena, student, Lapland UAS



financial support of various international funds, programmes and organizations.

## ACTIVITIES BASED ON THE EARLIER EXPERIENCES IN THE PROJECT

The third international Business Innovation Workshop attracted over 60 participants: 45 international students from the partner universities, 12 coaches and coordinators, three lecturers, and two case companies.

Being the third, the workshop in Petrozavodsk was supposed to take into account all of the experience of the previous stages and focus on creating a good working environment for students. Therefore, the workshop included different types of activities to help students get the most of their business ideas, develop them highly. There were networking activities, benchmarking, teamwork, initial and final presentations. Two lecturers were invited to give lectures on topics closely connected with the cases. As one of the case companies had the task of entering the Northern European market, there was a lecture on the topic “Global Marketing Strategies: Benefits and Pitfalls” conducted by Oksana Prokhorova. The other lecture conducted by Dmitriy Liberov was devoted to the “Psychological basis of entrepreneurship”.

As the experience from the previous stages of the project had shown, it was not always easy for students from the partner institutions to interact with one another. To overcome this difficulty there were ice-breaking activities held on Monday. Psychologist

Yulia Teryushkova offered the students several interesting exercises to help them get to know one another and understand themselves better.

Students also had the opportunity to get acquainted with the local area: a Petrozavodsk City bus tour and an excursion to the Nature Reserve Kivach and the Uspenskaya Church were parts of the cultural programme of the week.

# Assignments from outside the comfort zones

Ekaterina Martyukova

There were two cases offered to the students during the third stage of the Practice Future project. They were: the Wooden Shipbuilding yard “Varyag” and the Port of Kirkenes.

## WOODEN SHIPBUILDING YARD

«VARYAG»

Petrozavodsk, Karelia, Russia

### Karelia – economical background

The economy of Karelia is based on gathering and processing the local types of natural resources (forest and mineral resources), tourism and recreation activities and on the beneficial economic and geographic (near-border) location. All these factors determine the specialisation and regional specific features of the Karelian economy.

Karelian industry makes up more than 40% of the gross regional product (GRP). The main industrial sectors of Karelia are: the forestry, wood-working, cellulose and paper sector (altogether they make up 41,2%); iron and steel industry (18%); electrical energy industry (14,8%); machinery

production and metal industry, nonferrous metal industry and food industry (5 to 9% each).

The main types of manufactured products of Karelia are: commercial timber, sawn wood products, cellulose, packing and newsprint paper, paper bags, conventional plywood, iron-ore pellets, iron ore, aluminium and construction material (road metal, bricks, walling material, reinforced concrete structures, etc.).

The number of large and medium-sized industrial enterprises in Karelia is 1364. There are over 70 000 employees working there. In fact, 1032 of them belong to key branches of heavy industry (forest industry complex, electrical energy industry, iron and steel industry, nonferrous metal industry, machinery production and metal industry), which makes the Karelian economy specialised in heavy industry.

### Wooden Shipbuilding yard «Varyag» as a company

Keeping in mind the exceptional position of the forest industry in the Karelian economy and the entrepreneurship orientation of the Practice Future project, it was decided to invite the Petrozavodsk

Wooden Shipbuilding shipyard «Varyag» to become a case company for the third stage of the project.

The closed joint-stock company «Varyag» is a unique enterprise specializing in designing and constructing vessels of various sizes and types:

- blue water sailing yachts and sail-training ships with displacements up to 100 tons;
- pleasure craft (motor/sail);
- crew and tourist boats;
- fishing boats;
- ship boats (types YAL-2, YAL-4, YAL-6);
- traditional Karelian boats (“soyma”, “kizhanka”, “finka” etc.)

One of the main areas of business is construction of ship replicas, designed as vintage sailing and steam ships. During the construction process the company uses traditional and modern technologies and materials, Russian and foreign ship equipment of leading manufacturers. The yard also offers architectural design of interior and outer décor.

The staff of the company consists of 30 experienced ship constructors, representatives of the northern school of wooden shipbuilding.

Dozens of motor and sailing-motor ships and hundreds of boats have been constructed during the twenty-year activity period of the shipyard. They include copies of historical sailing-ships of the 14th through 18th centuries; Russian sea and river boats and skimmers of the 11th through 15th centuries; copies of boats of Peter I and Ekaterina Velikaya for the museums of Zarskoe selo and Pereslavl-Zalesskii; copies of Viking boats for Vyborg; floating models of old-time sailing-ships and rowing boats for the

English movie «Hornblower» and the Russian movie «The Passenger» by Stanislav Govorukhin.

Ships built by «Varyag» can be found both in Russia and abroad: in England, Spain, Italy, Sweden, Norway, Finland, in the Caribbean Sea and in the Canary Islands. Wooden Shipbuilding shipyard «Varyag» is one of the few enterprises where native traditions of wooden shipbuilding are carefully preserved and developed.

### **Assignment offered to the students**

The company goal for taking part in the Practice Future project was entering the market of Northern Europe.

The main problem was the lack of current assets. Construction of ships for Russian customers is financed through advance payments by the clients. Foreign customers consider the financial risks of advancing money in the shipbuilding process to be very high. This is based on the following factors:

- the technology of traditional wooden shipbuilding implies a rather long production cycle (1-1,5 years for 1 vessel on average);
- the high price of the end-product;
- a low level of trust in Russian companies.

As a result, the usual scheme of financing the construction of a ship is unacceptable to new foreign customers, despite interest in the product and the appreciated ratio of quality and price.

The company has taken part in several international boat shows: Stockholm International Boat Show 2006, Helsinki International Boat Show 2007, Helsinki International Boat Show 2008,

Moscow International Boat Show 2009, and Moscow International Boat Show 2010. The company represented its boats at the shows. The boats were always sold on the first day of the show, which indicated interest in the products of “Varyag”. Yet at the same time potential customers from Northern Europe were not ready to advance money for building new boats, so the company didn’t get any new orders.

Therefore, the achievement of the company’s goal, entering the Northern European market, was difficult.

The student assignment during the third stage of the project was to develop options for entering the Northern European market taking into consideration the problems stated above.

The final business ideas offered by the students included implementation of a new payment method PayMe, a cooperation project between PetrSU and Varyag, redesign of the company website, cooperation between Varyag and the project “Traditional Maritime Skills” (which creates solutions to protect and sustain the traditional boat building heritage) and cooperation between Varyag and tourist companies.

The winning project was the business idea of dealership offered by the Petrozavodsk State University team Business Sharks. The students developed a detailed plan of entering the market of Northern Europe with minimum initial investment. Besides this, all the teams had established contacts with possible partners.

## THE PORT OF KIRKENES

### Kirkenes, Norway

#### Kirkenes’ future possibilities and challenges

The Arctic University of Norway is the leading partner in the Practice Future project. Therefore, the second case company for the Petrozavodsk stage was chosen from its region.

In the years to come increased industrialisation of the High North will take place. The resources are in the Arctic. In order for us to access the offshore oil, gas and mineral deposits, the harsh climate, long distances and lacking infrastructure require new logistics systems and solutions. Climate change

## CASE

### Wooden shipbuilding yard VARYAG, Petrozavodsk, Russia

→ Find opportunities / develop models for pre-financing foreign ship building orders.

might create opportunities for new sailing routes and demand for new efficient and sustainable logistical solutions.

In Kirkenes the oil and gas industry will be the driving force for investments in port infrastructure in the years to come. Already now, the municipality administration experiences a significant demand for infrastructure, quays and areas for industry and business development. This trend will most probably increase. There will be a growing demand for new sustainable and efficient maritime logistics systems and transport corridors.

Port development in Kirkenes must be seen in a perspective where port expansion takes into consideration not only the oil and gas sector, but also other commercial interests like the fishery and seafood industry, mining and minerals and the cruise and tourism sector, in addition to the possibilities that new transport routes create.

### **Students were offered a challenging task**

The need for an efficient and sustainable logistics infrastructure requires cross-disciplinary attention and knowledge. The assignment for students was to:

- analyse the market potential and identify the main logistical actors and their ambitions,
- analyse the cargo flows,
- analyse the demand for different logistical solutions,
- recommend a strategic process for commercial port development in Kirkenes.

Due to the challenging nature of the task, it was decided not to have a team competition on the Kirkenes Port case. The student teams presented their ideas on Friday, October 25th.

## **CASE**

### **PORT OF KIRKENES, Kirkenes, Norway**

**→ Develop ideas on how to make the port more attractive for upcoming industries in the High North.**

# The results and good practices in the Petrozavodsk workshop

Vladimir Isakov

In Petrozavodsk students dealt with two assignments. In the case of the Varyag company the task was very focused. Students' efforts were aimed at finding marketing solutions in a difficult financial situation. So the solutions suggested by the teams included, firstly, new distribution channels, new potential customers and partners in Europe, as well as new ways of advertising and, secondly, new financing schemes and ways to reduce financial risks for potential investors and customers.

The teams offered the following solutions for the company:

- Cooperation with dealerships in Northern Europe;
- Cooperation with shipyards in Northern Europe;
- Cooperation with tourist companies;
- Cooperation with educational institutions;
- Cooperation with non-governmental organisations;
- Getting a membership in YachtWorld.com – the largest search engine for yacht sellers and buyers;
- Creating a positive image and brand for company via TV channels in Northern Europe;
- Participation in boat shows;

- Improvement of the company web-site;
- Introducing new payment methods for the company's customers;
- International licensing.

It should be noted that the solutions had very detailed specifications. In many cases the teams made pre-agreements with the potential partners.

In the case of Kirkenes port the teams were assigned a more general task to develop the company's strategy. So the solutions were also very broad and in some cases sketchy. It seems that students did not have enough time and expertise to develop a detailed strategy.

Nevertheless, the ideas were interesting and included the following:

- Cooperation with other sea-ports in the field of cruise tourism;
- Membership in Cruise Norway – a marketing company;
- Cooperation with the Venus Project in order to re-design port infrastructure;
- Development of port infrastructure;
- Construction of crab eco factory;
- Construction of a helipad in the Kirkenes port;
- Use of Arctic ice to get fresh (drinking) water.



**This experience challenges one to match theory with practice.**

- Dmitriy Kalinin, student, PetrSU

## PRESENTATIONS AND EVALUATION

For the Kirkenes port case the international team of students was organized for the first time in the project. Teams were to delegate several representatives to work together on-line. A new on-line course was created on iversity.org - a platform for Massive Open On-line Courses. Coaches and students got an opportunity to upload relevant materials for the case study and discuss them on the platform. As it was the first time that students had to communicate only on-line without any face-to-face meetings, students' level of activity on the platform was not as high as it could be, but still it helped to prepare for the workshop in Petrozavodsk. Besides being in contact via iversity.org members of the international team were in touch through Facebook and had several meetings in Skype.

In Petrozavodsk teams were given the choice of presenting their ideas separately or taking part in

the international team presentation. Since it was an experiment, the coaches decided not to have a competition between the teams' ideas for Kirkenes port.

The panel of experts who evaluated teams' solutions for Varyag company included the CEO of the company and representatives of the Student Business Incubator of PetrSU, the Institute of Economy of the Karelian Branch of the Russian Academy of Science and the Chair of International Relations of PetrSU. Most of the questions and comments were from the company's CEO as he was 'the client'. And his opinion had a major influence on the final ranking.

The set of criteria for evaluation of ideas included the innovative quality, feasibility, marketability, financial and social return, risk assessment and sustainability. The jury also assessed the quality of

Despite the communication problems, the experiment with the international team was judged to be a success and it was decided to continue teaming up students from different countries..



the presentation and team responses to questions. At the awards ceremony the company's CEO said that the main criterion that he used to pick a winner was the feasibility of an idea.

When the teams presented their ideas for Kirkenes port, the room in Petrozavodsk was linked up with the representative of the port via Adobe Connect. He asked questions about the ideas. The organizers received his evaluation of teams' solutions that were based on the same set of criteria.

Although there was no competition in this case, the results of the evaluation were announced at the awards ceremony, so that the teams could understand which ideas were better.

## MIXED FEEDBACK FROM THE CASE COMPANIES

Afterwards we conducted interviews with the representatives of the companies which participated in the project. As for the CEO of Varyag, the evaluation of the project outcomes was highly

positive. He mentioned that the results had exceeded all their expectations and that the students had taken the assignment very seriously and had shown their creativity. It was a surprise that most of the teams had found several partners they could work with.

The main challenges that the company faced during the project were the language barrier and a lack of time.

The company has adopted some of the ideas such as an improvement of the web-site, participation in foreign boat shows and cooperation with tourist companies. They are going to implement the idea of cooperation with dealerships after completion of ongoing projects. The main reason for rejection of some ideas was a lack of time and resources for implementation.

The overall impression is described with the following words: 'The project has helped us to realize that there are a lot of opportunities for developing our business. Thanks to the students we now have a pattern for entering the market of Northern Europe'.



As for the possibility of further participation in such kinds of projects, the answer was also positive.

The evaluation of the outcomes carried out by the representative of Kirkenes port was not so positive. He was disappointed that the students had not taken the initiative to go deeper into what they had been focusing on. Among the ideas to be adopted he mentioned only those that have already been a part of the port's activities such as oil spill management and port and cruise companies' cooperation.

The main challenge was communication, because the representative of the port didn't meet with students face-to-face. But despite the problems, the answer to the question about possible further participation in projects like Practice Future was positive.

## CONCLUSIONS OF THE WORKSHOP

The students also evaluated their participation in the project. Their feedback was very positive, because they had a chance to get very useful experience. But they also faced some communication problems, including the language barrier and a lack of feedback from companies' representatives during the preparatory period.

Coaches and coordinators of the project drew the following conclusions from the workshop in Petrozavodsk:

It was decided that assignments should be more focused and specified. It makes expected outcomes clearer for both student teams and case companies and, as a result, makes the case companies more satisfied.

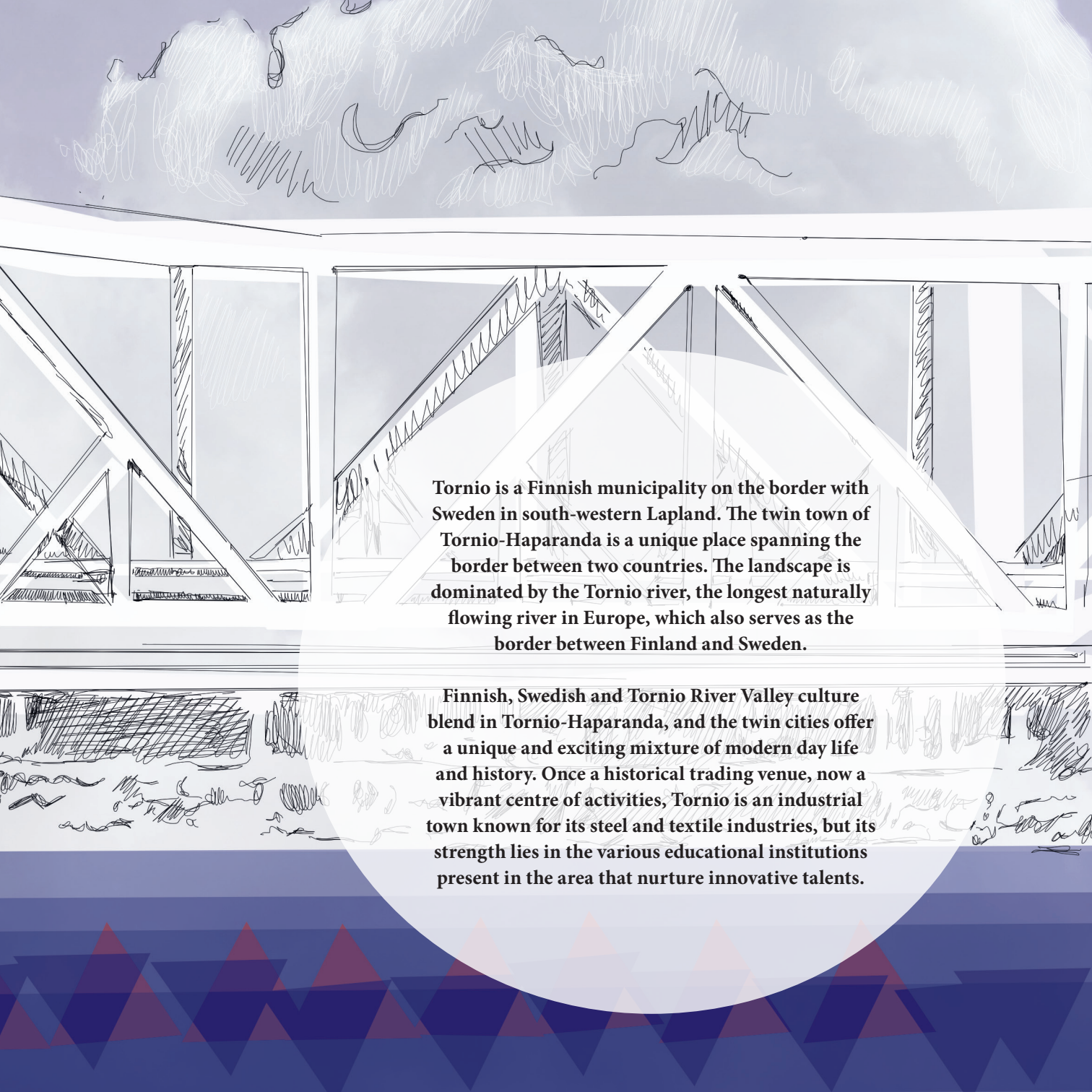
Despite the communication problems, the experiment with the international team was judged to be a success and it was decided to continue teaming up students from different countries.

Another good practice was related to the dissemination of the project results. Members of PetrSU team later presented the results of their work in the project at the Youth Economic Forum and won the first prize in their section.

The workshop has also shown that communication is one of the main challenges in running international, multidisciplinary student-to-business projects and it is a matter of permanently striving for improvement.

The image features a hand-drawn architectural sketch of a building's structural frame, including a roof and internal supports. The drawing is rendered in black lines on a light blue background. A horizontal teal line separates the top part of the sketch from the text. Below the text, another teal line separates it from a white horizontal band. This band contains a sketch of a textured surface, possibly a wall or floor, with a grey rectangular area in the center. The bottom of the image is decorated with a pattern of overlapping triangles in various shades of blue and purple.

# The fourth Business Innovation Workshop in Tornio, Finland

The image features a background architectural sketch of a building's interior, showing structural beams and windows. A large, semi-transparent white circle is centered over the sketch, containing two paragraphs of text. The bottom of the image is decorated with a pattern of overlapping triangles in shades of blue and purple.

**Tornio is a Finnish municipality on the border with Sweden in south-western Lapland. The twin town of Tornio-Haparanda is a unique place spanning the border between two countries. The landscape is dominated by the Tornio river, the longest naturally flowing river in Europe, which also serves as the border between Finland and Sweden.**

**Finnish, Swedish and Tornio River Valley culture blend in Tornio-Haparanda, and the twin cities offer a unique and exciting mixture of modern day life and history. Once a historical trading venue, now a vibrant centre of activities, Tornio is an industrial town known for its steel and textile industries, but its strength lies in the various educational institutions present in the area that nurture innovative talents.**

# Regional development for business and culture in Tornio

Jetta Huttunen

The Tornio workshop of the Practice Future project was hosted by Lapland University of Applied Sciences, a brand new educational institute in Northern Finland (the result of a merger between Kemi-Tornio University of Applied Sciences and Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences in January 2014).

The Tornio campus is home to the faculty of Business and Culture and the people responsible for the organization of the workshop week were teachers and students of Business and Culture. During the workshop week, lectures were also held in Rovaniemi and Kemi, on the other campuses of Lapland University of Applied Sciences.

For one week in March 2014, teachers and students from all over the Barents Region gathered in Tornio to think of new ideas and fresh perspectives for two distinctive cases. The aim of the workshop was to develop innovative cross-border business plans for the assigned case companies and build relationships between higher education and local businesses. The purpose was also to enhance the creative and entrepreneurial skills of the students and to help the participants build their international and trans-sector networks.



**Practice Future helps to know how to channel goods and write down business structures. This project helps me to communicate with representatives of business.**

- Aliona Tretiakova, student, MIBO

## TEAMWORK AND ACTIVITIES TOGETHER

The cases on the table were the Municipality of Kvalsund and the Port of Tornio Development project, to which the teams of students had been assigned already in January.

Since the students had been working on the assignments since February, the week started with the presentations of the initial business ideas that had already been developed. The students could then consult the experts and case companies about the ideas. After that the students were divided into seven teams, each with around seven students. The team work was carried out in study groups, where students worked independently on the assignments. During the week the students also attended lectures on marketing and communication.

The students working on the assignments were divided into work groups roughly along geographic lines, i.e. students from Northern Norway and Russia were “Team Arctica” and students from Asia were “Team Asia”. Altogether around 50 students worked on the assignments. They were guided by 15 coaches (teachers) and other experts. In addition to that, six people from businesses and local organisations assessed the assignments at the end of the week. All in all around 80 people attended the workshop week in Tornio.

The week consisted of lectures, teamwork, networking and, finally, presentations and evaluation of the completed assignments. The week ended in an award ceremony, where the best ideas

were honoured. In addition the international guests visited the Santa Claus village on the Arctic Circle, the Outokumpu factory in Tornio and the icebreaker Sampo in Kemi.

In conclusion, the work shop week was a demanding but fruitful week for all the attendants. The students built their international networks and strengthened their knowledge of business-related practices. The case companies received new innovative ideas for their development projects and built their cross-border networks. The transfer of knowledge and competence between the Russian, Finnish and Norwegian participants was greatly enhanced.

# The cases and outcomes of the workshop in Tornio

Jetta Huttunen

During the Tornio workshop week the students tackled two distinct business problems from two different case companies. The case companies were chosen for their strong regional weight; both of the case companies are important actors in their communities. Due to this, any development in the business and/or organisation of the case companies would have an immediate impact on the wellbeing and comfort of the inhabitants of the communities. Encouragement of entrepreneurship and cultural activities in the region were also strong aspects in both cases.

The case companies greeted the students' suggestions and ideas with enthusiasm. A positive vibe was created between the participants of the workshop and future co-operation between the organizations was planned and scheduled at the end of the Practice Future workshop in Tornio.

## CASE 1: MUNICIPALITY OF KVALSUND

Kvalsund is a small municipality in northern Norway. It is situated on the Barents Sea and has a minority of Sami people living in the area. The municipal administration intends to develop the area via several projects which target private and business activities.

The precise assignment was to come up with innovative ideas for the Kvalsund Competence and Knowledge Center. The Center will provide education in the region and its main purposes will be to provide locals with formal competence, e.g. in languages, and to enable people to educate themselves further in different subjects.

The students were given the mission of designing a sustainable model for the Kvalsund Competence

## CASE

### MUNICIPALITY OF KVALSUND (1), Kvalsund, Norway

→ Create ideas for a profitable knowledge and competence centre in the village.

and Knowledge Center as a social enterprise that creates value for all stakeholders involved. The students were reminded to take into consideration in their proposals the facilities in the area, the needs of the local population and the aim to address different target groups and to outline how the different actors should interact with each other.

With no easy task at hand the teams worked hard to come up with ideas and a model for the Kvalsund Competence and Knowledge Center. I will now present the outcomes and results of the assignment in a conclusive manner, combining the best and most relevant ideas, to be used by the case company in the future.

### Tourism related activities

Kvalsund means Whale Bay. This fact should be exploited in branding the area as a region for sea life activities, especially the marine wild life in the area. The Kvalsund Center could be the hub of these activities, offering tourism services for sea trips both on water and under the water. Cooperation with the Sami museum could provide

a starting point for developing an experience industry based on Sami culture.

### Business related activities

The courses and activities in the Kvalsund Center should focus on B2B interaction and the dialogue between community and industry. This can be achieved by inviting local companies to contribute to the educational and social activities in the Centre. The participation of regional livelihoods representatives (salmon farming, mining, industry, reindeer herding) would contribute to the social coherence of the community and enhance business opportunities and networks.

### A living room for the inhabitants

The Kvalsund municipality is small in population but vast in area. The Kvalsund Center could be developed as a meeting point and activity center for the inhabitants. The activities and services provided by the Center could be an Internet Café and event venue with ongoing programme throughout the year. Also the Center could host workshops for

## CASE

### PORT OF TORNIO, Tornio, Finland

→ Forecast potential demand and find the most effective ways to improve the attractiveness of the port of Tornio.

different target groups according to their needs. Children, the elderly and immigrants would be special target groups for these activities.

### Branding the area

The seaboard nature, exotic periphery and communal living could be used as concepts to brand the area further. The brand should be integrated to all the activities provided by the Kvalsund Center. The Kvalsund Center should serve as a hub for industry, culture and community with a strong brand attracting travellers, companies and inhabitants.

## CASE 2: PORT OF TORNIO

The town of Tornio has rented out the port of Tornio in Röyttä to Outokumpu Oy. The port mainly serves the needs of the nearby Outokumpu ferrochrome and stainless steel production facility. However, the port is not reserved for the traffic of the Outokumpu export industry alone. It is also open to other cargo shipping. The positive development of trade in Tornio-Haparanda, future possibilities offered by the mining industry in northern Finland and the development possibilities of the port of Tornio have generated an interest to research the potential need of logistic services that the port of Tornio could provide.

The assignment for the Practice Future teams was to forecast potential demand and to find the most effective ways to improve the attractiveness of the

port of Tornio. The students were asked to ponder how the port of Tornio could market its services. The students should consider what would be the most interesting target groups and what could be the most effective means of marketing the port. Students were further asked to come up with an idea how the future marketing of the port of Tornio could be organized since there was no marketing organisation for the port at the moment.

The main outcomes and suggestions for this project were as follows.

### Enhancing cargo and passenger traffic

In order to increase traffic within the port, it was suggested that a network of Barents area resource industry (mining, forest industry and the like), would be further looked into and strengthened. Railways to the Arctic Ocean and the North Sea are vital routes of cargo for the port; therefore these networks should be researched and utilized.

### Tourism related activities

The port should be developed as a centre for tourism and cultural services. It could focus on the Gulf of Bothnia and the River Tornio, providing access to the Natural Parks and water ways in the area. This activity could be further developed into tourism services including sea travel on old wooden boats and an experience industry based on the smuggling business between Finland and Sweden in the old times. In the boldest vision there was an



entertainment park in the port which would showcase mining and fairy tales set in mines.

### **Business related activities**

Local businesses and companies should be tied more concretely and strongly to the development of the port. With Outokumpu as an attractive business partner already established, the network of companies and organizations should be built further. Educational co-operation with Lapland University of Applied Sciences could prove fruitful in involving future professionals in the cargo business and related activities.

### **Marketing the port / Branding the area**

The northern location and access to the Arctic landmass and seas are the focal points in branding the region and creating a strong identity for the port. Marketing the port as a transportation hub for the area and a passage to Lapland's waterways should be at the centre of all communication and marketing concerning the port. A marketing plan should be developed, preferably with the co-operation of marketing professionals.

# Teacher's experience of the workshop

Helena Ranta-Saarela

In this article I share my experience in coaching two teams from Lapland University of Applied Sciences in the Practice Future project in Tornio. The paper undertakes a review of practical experience in team coaching from the point of view of a teacher. The teams of participating universities competed with each other to propose the best innovative ideas for the case companies. As Clutterbuck (2007) stated, team coaching is a learning intervention designed to increase the collective capability and performance of a group or team, through application of the coaching principles of assisted reflection, analysis and motivation for change.

My role in this project was to teach economic and entrepreneurial expertise and presentation skills to the two teams from Lapland University of Applied Sciences.

## TANGIBLE EXAMPLES OF WORKING TOGETHER WITH THE STUDENT TEAMS

The project week started with the presentations of the student teams from the participating universities. The Monday presentations were very short, and teams did not properly reveal their ideas. The main reason for this was that the teams did not want to share their ideas with an eye to the competition.

The following day the teams and the coaches visited one of the case companies, which was located

in Tornio. Good information about the case was provided during the visit, although the students could have been more eager to ask detailed questions concerning the case. My experience was that the students did not take the best advantage of this visit.

The following days the students developed their ideas and the coaches discussed them with the students. During this process I noticed that some members of the teams reached a conclusion faster than others. The role of the team leader was crucial. If she/he had good knowledge and a clear understanding of creating ideas and developing them for the case companies, the team work process was smooth. The teams also practiced their presentations with the coaches beforehand and feedback was given.

## THE NEED FOR COACHING DURING THE WORKSHOP

According to Clutterbuck (2007), team coaching fosters a higher quality of communication, both within the team and between the team and external stakeholders in its activities. Team coaching promotes the social dialogue that builds rapport, stimulates understanding of self and other team members, and develops the skills to avoid negative conflict and enhance positive conflict within the team. One of the main objectives of the coaching

was to improve both teams' performance and teach them how to meet the challenges articulating ideas for the stakeholders. The most important way to achieve this goal was to communicate with the team members and help them to understand the external and internal factors affecting their ideas and how they were related to the cases. By observing and providing feedback with another coach, I could help the teams to solve problems and develop their ideas.

## REACHING THE BEST RESULTS

The workshops succeeded well. All the teams of the participating universities presented new ideas for the case companies. One of our teams was a winning team, however, winning was not the main point in this project. The main purpose was to learn how to cooperate and compete at the same time. During the working process I noticed some relationship conflicts, but these could be overcome. Relationship conflicts can sometimes be fruitful if the team leader has the tools and skills to use the conflict to generate dialogue.

Further development might be needed in the process how to form mixed teams from all the participating universities. During the Tornio week, there was only one team with members from all participating universities, the so-called "International On-line Team", while the other teams were each made up of members from only one of the participating universities. All the teams should have been mixed with students from different universities. This arrangement could have taught more team skills, cultural awareness, understanding of local

circumstances, and would have increased trust among the students.

The presentation skills of the teams were the most important part to be improved. The teams had good ideas for the case company; however, they could not express the gist of their ideas properly.

The best experiences for me were learning how the team members worked together, how they solved their problems and how strong their commitment to work together was. Team coaching should always encourage the teams in their work. It was also good to notice how students made new friends and I had an excellent opportunity to make the acquaintance of other students and coaches from the participating universities and observe their working methods.

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# Beneficial opportunity to participate in Business Innovation Workshop

Ida-Maria Pajari

In 2014 the Practice Future's Business Innovation Workshop was organized in my hometown in Tornio, Finland.

One of the cases was offered by the city of Tornio and the local stainless steel mill Outokumpu. They requested a development plan for the port of Tornio (Röyttä) near the steel mill. The port area has been rented from the city of Tornio since 1993. The rental contract is valid until 2054. Outokumpu has invested heavily in the port during the last decade. The port mainly serves the purposes of this factory, but in fact the port is open to any other industrial or private cargo if the volume and demand are high enough. The assignment was to forecast the future potential demand and find ways to improve the attractiveness of the port.

The second case came from the municipality of Kvalsund in Norway. Our assignment was to improve the attractiveness of Kvalsund and design a sustainable model for the Kvalsund Competence and Knowledge Center (KCKC) as a social meeting place and to create value for all the stakeholders involved. In our proposal we needed to include the facilities, provisions for the local population, different user groups, local and distant suppliers, supporters, and other potential network partners, and outline how they will interact with each other.

## PROVIDED SOLUTIONS

In the case of Tornio the main focus seemed to be increasing the volume of industrial cargo and almost all the teams noticed the increasing investments and new claims in the mining industry in Lapland (Northern Finland) and Norrbotten (Northern Sweden). Also the strategic location on the border of Finland and Sweden (Gulf of Bothnia) was taken into consideration.

In the case of Kvalsund the overall theme was utilizing the local premises and e-learning applications in a cost-effective way in order to create value for all the stakeholders. Different courses and activities were proposed. One important aspect was involving the traditional Sami culture and retaining the cultural heritage of the region for future generations.

## PRESENTATIONS AND AWARDS

On the last day of the event, Friday 21st of March, we presented our work to the jury. Members of the jury included, naturally, the representatives of the case companies from Tornio, Finland, and Kvalsund, Norway, and the representatives of Lapland

University of Applied Sciences from Tornio, Finland, which was hosting this stage of the project.

After the presentations we received some feedback and general comments considering our presentations and proposals. In the evening we had dinner together followed by the award ceremony where the three best teams were awarded based on the evaluation of the jury. The top three teams for the case Tornio were Eurasia (Lapland UAS, Finland), Arctica (International team) and MIBO (Russia).

Nearly all the winning teams noticed the increasing investments and new claims in the mining industry in Lapland and Norrbotten. Also the strategic location on the border of Finland and Sweden was taken into consideration in their proposals. The utilisation of already existing, local resources and involving local students' competences was also an appreciated aspect.

The top three teams for the case Kvalsund were Arctica (International team), Petrozavodsk (Russia) and Eurasia (Lapland UAS, Finland). The proposals included suggestions for different types of activities and courses that KCKC could offer and that would be beneficial for all the stakeholders.

Involving the traditional Sami culture and retaining the cultural heritage of the area was appreciated as well. Yet again, the utilisation of local, already existing resources was an important and attractive aspect to the jury.

## CASE COMPANY RECEPTION

The overall expression was that the case companies were satisfied and gained several new, valuable and applicable ideas from the students' proposals. Students gained valuable project- and team-work experience and formed an idea what is like to work with real-life commissions in the business world to meet the needs of commissioning companies.

Also the development of professional and language competences was an important aspect to students. For the students from abroad the visits to and accommodation on the border were interesting experiences as well. They seemed to be surprised that it's possible to visit Sweden any time even on foot without any customs formalities.

## BENEFITS FOR FUTURE WORKING LIFE

All the teams appreciated that they had their own and private working places and access to the Internet during the team work sessions. However, the time for team work was quite limited and therefore more time reserved for team work would have been appreciated.

During this event the working model of the international team was implemented for the first time. Interactive and distant working methods through different applications will be used more often in modern, international working life. Therefore gaining experience of this way of working, even partially, would be beneficial to all participating students.

# Open Innovation Project: Trajectory of Practice Future workshop 2014

Emmanuel Oladepo

Preparation for the workshop in spring 2014, designated to be hosted by Lapland University of Applied Sciences, began in earnest in January 2014. It is noteworthy that the choice of this year's event venue, Lapland University of Applied Sciences (formerly known as Kemi Tornio University of Applied Sciences, which had just gone through a remarkable merger with Rovaniemi University of Applied Sciences) strengthened the overall outcome of the workshop.

The workshop, which is primarily convened to promote a unified approach to an integrated effort in addressing the social and entrepreneurship challenges in the Barents Region, provided another dimension to the creative learning process. The objective is to harness student competence through mobilisation using local scenarios in different cases. The mainstay of the region is the capacity building using innovation-minded youth to solve business challenges in the Barents Region.

## GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER AND THE TORNIO AREA

The workshop week began on March 17 and ended on March 21, 2014. It can be said to have been unprecedented in many areas from the testimonies of the students, staff and guests. The Mercuria auditorium in Tornio was the main workshop location, but the venue also included visits to the Minerva and Rovaniemi campuses, the Sampo ice-breaker, the Outokumpu steel factory and the Santa Claus village in Rovaniemi. The objectives of this tour went beyond mere familiarisation with places or just sight-seeing. They were to research local viabilities and possibilities.

The factors that shaped the host city were also made known to the enthusiastic guests and officials to give a foretaste of the exhilarating culture and history of the place. The weather during the week was ideal Lapland winter weather that enhanced both the indoor activities and the exploration of the outdoor beauty.

As part of the welcoming event, the ice-breaking session gave a vivid picture of what to expect during the week as each team stayed focused on outdoing the others in creativity games and ideas. The organising teams left the competing teams guessing

about what was ahead of them in terms how the unforeseen challenges would be met. As the saying goes, “curiosity killed the cat”. Earlier, the competing teams had been officially introduced at the inaugural presentations. The teams were made up of students from:

- Lapland University of Applied Sciences, Tornio, Finland
- Murmansk State Technical University (MSTU), Russia
- International Institute of Business Education, Russia
- Petrozavodsk State University (PetrSU), Russia
- UiT, Campus Alta, Norway

## SOLVING REAL-LIFE BUSINESS PROBLEMS

The primary objectives of the workshop were to develop and enhance practically relevant business ideas, as well as business models to create viable broad access to foreign markets for Tornio sea port. In addition to fathoming its potential, also the present challenges this objective might face were researched. Each team explored as much as possible all the collaborative tools between members to present their ideas of how this objective could be met. The workshop featured students and officials from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, which contributed to interesting views and presentations from the different teams.

Secondly, in a similar way the teams were to creatively assess the town of Kvalsund, Norway. They were to address the way it could be made a hub of eventful and profitable activities in such a way that it drives mobility. From the pedagogical point of view the objective was to present different ideas that will enhance the development of the town without detriment to the local people or the visitors.

In many notable ways these pedagogical objectives were connected to business operations in each case presented. For example, Tornio port is mainly utilized by the Outokumpu steel mill with Tornio city as the landlord. Yet, it still requires an optimisation to reach its full potential. Likewise, Kvalsund, Norway is opening its arms to foreign businesses and activities to enhance its attractiveness and productivity.

The organisers drew the curtain on the Practice Future event on Friday 21st, 2014. After competitive presentations by competing teams and stormy deliberation by the judges, the most resourceful teams and the most useful ideas were nominated for the sponsors’ awards.

One of the most enriching aspects of the workshop was voiced by the participating team members. Maria Solovyeva of the Tornio team described the open innovation project as follows: “The project experience brings us to the reality of places and solving people’s problems”. Anasthasia Chugunova from PetrSU, Petrozavodsk defined the event as “The effective way and a chance to improve communication and analysis of business reality”. I believe they are both right.

# The last Business Innovation Workshops in Alta and Murmansk







**MURMANSK**

# Cooperation with small regional communities – The case of Kvalsund

Peter Fischer

As well as small and medium-sized enterprises, public organisations and municipalities too are main target project partners in the region. Post-project interviews with municipality representatives show that small communities, often remote and sparsely settled, are more and more looking for external input. Cooperation with university students proved a valuable relationship for all parties involved.

Practice Future went into such partnership several times; twice with Tornio-Haparanda, focusing on funding and marketing tasks, once with South Varanger / Kirkenes, also with a marketing related assignment. The smallest community students worked for is Kvalsund in the High North of Norway. During the spring semester 2014, students worked for Kvalsund in two different

project sessions with proposals very closely related to people's everyday life.

Kvalsund with around one thousand inhabitants is located along the Barents Sea coast, some thirty kilometres from Hammerfest, the world's northernmost city with ten thousand people. Hammerfest is nowadays mainly focused on offshore gas field exploitation. Kvalsund itself lives first of all from primary and service industries; most people work in the public sector as teachers, nurses etc., and in the administration. Around two hundred people commute from Kvalsund to Hammerfest for job reasons. The parish has two churches, a museum of the Sea Sami people, a supermarket, and a hotel in the village of Skaidi, a few kilometres from the main centre. For leisure activities, a downhill ski slope and a network of cross-country ski and snowmobile

## CASE

### MUNICIPALITY OF KVALSUND (2), Kvalsund, Norway

→ **Based on the resources of the community, work out feasible business ideas and create business models for economically profitable recreation and tourism facilities.**

tracks are available there. Some exiting salmon rivers flow into the fjords and sounds, surrounded by steep mountains, which rise from sea level up to the Finnmark Plateau. (Kvalsund 2014.)

## ASSIGNMENT FROM KVALSUND

I was in Alta in May 2013, in a meeting with members of the West Finnmark Regional Council and faculty staff from Finnmark University College (now UiT), where it all started. One of the items on the agenda was how small communities could be connected to facilities of the urban world. The opening of an on-line education centre was announced, and, among others, a university proposal on cooperation in E-Health discussed. Jørn Stenersen, leader of municipality projects in Kvalsund, finally agreed on cooperation with Practice Future. In January 2014, the first session was started, and for a second one in April 2014, another assignment was given, built on the first-time experience, and it was finalised in May 2014.

Kvalsund administration is permanently developing the community and has several projects on the shelf. Student teams were assigned to come up with contributions for two of them. The first one was to build a sustainable model of a Competence and Knowledge Centre as a social enterprise, facilitating formal competence enhancement of local people in fields typically challenging in the area, such as arctic climate, avalanches, mining, health care, etc. (March 2014). The second case assignment asked for ideas for private business activities and public-private partnerships in

profitable recreation and tourist facilities in Kvalsund (May 2014).

## COOPERATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND CASE COMPANIES

Students developed ideas for small ventures to be run by local entrepreneurs, tourism experience projects, and international contacts for local artists. Though, not all expectations were fulfilled, e.g. to get in contact with potential foreign investors and partners in tourism, or to come closer to sustainable solutions for a centre for distance-based learning.

As in all Practice Future case studies, communication with case companies matters. Students could have better tested their ideas, Jørn Stenersen said after the first session in March. For students, the lesson learned meant working more closely with locals the following time, and for the municipality it meant anchoring the project more locally. Two months later a focus on communication with people from Kvalsund made the difference, before and during the final workshop week. Students from Alta had set up a frequently used channel not only to Jørn Stenersen, but also to an immigrant lady from Kvalsund who connected them to other local enthusiasts.

So-called problem and solution interviews with locals were prepared in class and finally conducted as field work, in order to make conversation and idea testing more effective. The Alta team partially provided also the competing teams with general information gathered. The tight binds between some of the students and residents of Kvalsund proved a

valuable resource for discussing ideas and solutions later on.

However, Jørn Stenersen expressed the main importance of the cooperation in an interview already right after the first session: “We want young people coming to Kvalsund, with young eyes, providing us with new perspectives. In our small community, we need a fresh view to get innovative ideas”. Another potential for future cooperation between HEI and small communities is meeting future employees. “There are three students we would like to continue to cooperate with... that would be interesting; we have now contact with one of them; she got an offer to apply for a project place”.

## COOPERATION POTENTIAL FOR THE FUTURE

During the regular workshop week in May 2014, more than forty students from eleven nationalities and ten faculty and staff members from five partner universities experienced an eventful day in Kvalsund. A tour along the Kvalsund Fjord through former fishery places, guided by the mayor of Kvalsund and the local project leader, a warm welcome by the priest of the Kvalsund parish, an exclusive piece of jazz music played by the organist of the church, these were just wonderful introductions.

Later, students interviewed local people in the supermarket to get first-hand expertise, important to test many of the assumptions. During a coffee meeting in the afternoon, artists and craftswomen from Kvalsund, as well as the priest were bombarded

with further questions and asked to discuss students' ideas. An evening meal for some sixty people, prepared jointly by all students with instructions from the village ladies, rounded off the day. Reindeer meat was served with other local ingredients. The impressions of this day and the many talks with people the students, in fact, worked for, inspired them to find new solutions, or to refine proposals for the final presentations in Alta some days later.

The cooperation with three community partners, in particular Kvalsund and Tornio, has demonstrated that Practice Future is not only a business-related project; it also has the potential to develop a strong and fruitful bond between Higher Education Institutions and small communities in the Barents Region. Markus Kannala, case company representative from Tornio in 2013, highlighted the importance of personal contacts with universities and students participating in such projects. As a former student of the college in Tornio he added: “It is good I can give something back”. Jørn Stenersen from Kvalsund: “The project motivates us to do more... to spread the message in the region. We've started something, we challenged ourselves and others. I became aware of many resources waiting to be used”.

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# Finalising the project with the Murmansk workshop

Svetlana Kuskova

According to the original project plan, the sixth international Business Innovation Workshop week was held in Murmansk, Russia, on October 20-24, 2014. It was not only a traditional meeting of students' teams with the case companies and presentation of their idea proposals, but also the finalising event of the project as a whole.

The previous workshop, namely in Alta in May 2014, proved that it is possible to organise the work of an international team, to which the students are enrolled by their local universities and in which they collaborate mainly on-line. Then, there was only one international team with representatives of all partner universities, but the coaches agreed on taking up a new challenge and mixing up all university teams into new, international ones. This time there were seven teams made and all coaches worked on-site with the students from their

university and on-line with international team members.

## INTERNATIONAL ATMOSPHERE AMONG THE PARTICIPANTS

The responsibility for organizing this international Business Innovation Workshop week was equally shared by two Russian universities – the International Institute of Business Education (MIBO) and Murmansk State Technical University (MSTU) that are situated locally. The events of the business week were held on the premises of MIBO and the AZIMUT hotel, a newly-opened hotel that is also a landmark of the city.

The workshop week mainly followed the traditional routine with initial presentations made on Monday, followed by teamwork and final

## CASE

### **DATADRIVERS, Tornio, Finland**

**→ Propose marketing actions to promote Datadrivers' software for driving course management to professional driving training providers in the EU.**

presentations on Friday. The remarkable feature of this project week was that on initiative of the project manager, Peter Fischer, there was an invited lecturer participating, Prof. Dr. Ulrich Bauer from Kempten University of Applied Sciences (Germany). Together with the lecturers Teresa Chen from Lapland UAS and Galina Smirnova from MIBO he held a two-day workshop «Business negotiation, cross-culture business communication». This workshop was very much practice-oriented and did not only contribute to the students' personal development, but also to their actual team work within the project. That was important, especially in the context of international teams collaborating on the cases, and it was really warmly received and highly appreciated by the students and the coaches.

As one of the cases was provided by the Murmansk Shipping Company (MSCO) and was related to the eco-design of the Moryak hotel, that is part of the company's structure, the programme of the week also included a visit to the hotel and a meeting with its director, as well as a visit to the Museum of MSCO history. Moreover, a guided city tour and a shooting competition combined with a dinner at the Shooting

Club "Krechet" were offered to the students as part of the cultural and social programme.

According to our observations and the evaluation made by the students during the so-called "feedback session", the week ran smoothly and everything was well-arranged. The participants enjoyed the atmosphere of true international cooperation that was a characteristic feature of the international Business Innovation Workshop week in Murmansk.

## CASE

### **MURMANSK SHIPPING COMPANY, Murmansk, Russia**

**→ Redesign the interior of the company's hotel for the 75-anniversary of the company in a way that is innovative and ecologically sustainable.**

# The cases and outcome of the Murmansk workshop

Galina Smirnova

*“Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.”*

– Aldous Huxley (1933)

## CASE COMPANIES: ARE STUDENTS' COMPETENCIES DIVERSIFIED ENOUGH FOR THE CHALLENGES?

After the May 2014 session in Alta with one case company for the session, the project team decided to get back to the two-case scenario.

This scenario enhances the ‘international taste’ of the project. It also exposes the teams to different industries, markets, case representatives and their customers and, not the least important, to different cultures — of business-making, of customer understanding and cultures of communication in general. In this context the students should learn to get adjusted to these multidimensional differences in solving a specific task. This is a condensed experience that is hard to underestimate.

The two cases for the final project session were from a Finnish company and a Russian company.

The Finnish case was provided thanks to the personal contact of Teresa Chen, Lapland UAS project coordinator. Throughout the project,

personal networks have been a fruitful source of cases and devoted case company representatives.

There was one inspiring innovation during the preparatory stage of the Murmansk session. The Russian case was provided at the initiative of a participant from the previous project sessions, Ivan Peschinsky. He is a veteran participant with the three sessions of Practice future and a pilot session (2011) in his ‘bag of university takeaways’. Having graduated in the summer of 2014, he still continued being personally interested in the project developments. He came up with the idea of the case company for the October 2014 session, conducted the initial talks with the company representatives and made them interested in stepping in.

As a result, the two cases were agreed upon in June 2014, so that the teams could start working at the cases as soon as the new academic year began.

## CASE 1

**DATADRIVERS**, Tornio, Finland is a software development company, specialising in devising software tools for driving course management. The company is well-established in Finland and feels ready to enter other European markets.

The task for the teams was as follows: Propose marketing actions to promote Datadrivers to professional driving training providers in EU.

Special emphasis was laid on the EU directive 2003/59/EC, called the ‘certificate of professional competence’ (CPC). The company was interested in investigating the status of periodic training (35 hours in 5 years) for professional drivers given in other EU-countries and possible software for course management used by training providers.

The case company also helped the students a lot by breaking a big task into smaller pieces and providing the specific details already at the initial stage:

- Analyse the situation of periodic training for professional drivers in EU-countries, especially countries such as Germany, UK, France, Austria, Estonia (if there are too many countries, students can concentrate on for e.g. Germany and UK).
- Analyse the market for possible course management software which is used by training centres / training providers (for periodic training and for traffic schools as well) in the countries mentioned above.
- Present proposals on future marketing actions for Datadrivers Oy, potential partners or contacts in any particular country or countries.
- Students can provide company and product presentation to potential partners and give our contact information to them (presentation material can be agreed on later).

The case company supplied useful links to the EU transport agency resources and the document by

CIECA, the international commission for driver testing (survey on the implementation of the directive 2003/59/EC laying down the initial qualification and periodic training of drivers of certain road vehicles for the carriage of goods or passengers).

## CASE 2

The **MURMANSK SHIPPING COMPANY (MSCO)**, Murmansk, Russia is one of the oldest and most renowned companies in Murmansk. The task was to innovate on redesigning the interior of the company’s hotel in a way that is ecologically sustainable.

The object for the project case was the Moryak (“Seaman”) hotel, a structural unit of the company. In 2014 MSCO is celebrating its 75th anniversary. The company representatives had thought of redesigning the interior of the hotel in connection with the celebration, seeing it also as an opportunity to raise the competitiveness of the hotel and increase its profitability.

The case representatives asked the students to focus on eco-friendly and minimalistic design solutions by using space-saving, low-waste technologies and recycled materials. They also offered the option of using the MSCO logo and other corporate style elements in the redesign.

In the task description the case company representatives focused the students on the following details:

“Students may think about all kinds of hotel interior, but should focus on the logo, and other



image-bearing objects. The idea is either to focus on those symbols that will be dedicated to the company's anniversary or to consider some more long-term renovations. If the accent is laid on the so-called "long-lasting" elements of the design, the use of recycled or easily recyclable materials should be born in mind. Otherwise, if "short-term" elements are introduced, the negative impacts on the environment should be minimized, e.g. by using non-toxic materials, etc."

The two cases were from different countries and the tasks deemed of a really different nature. It might seem that the first case is for left-brainers, implying information search and hard fact analysis, whereas the other case may at first be perceived as a treat for right-brainers, with the ability to visualize and devise aesthetic solutions.

Nonetheless, a true entrepreneur knows that creating value is a matter of 'design thinking', and in every idea the hard facts and creativity are key ingredients that only work in combination.

## WORK ON THE ASSIGNMENT IN THE INTERNATIONAL TEAMS: CHALLENGES SEEM TO PILE UP

**International teams.** During the October 2014 session there was an innovation in the Practice Future project itself: for the first time all the teams were international, bringing together students from at least three universities and at least two countries (see the team casts below, in the solution description part).

The students from the five universities started working at the assignments at different times, depending on when their academic year started. UiT and Lapland UAS students started earlier, whereas Russian team members joined in mid-September.

As far as I could judge from observing the MIBO students' work, talking to them about how the work proceeded in the mixed teams and discussing the developments with the colleagues, the students received the assignments generally with enthusiasm. Still, individual students showed preference for one or the other case.

MIBO participants claimed that the Datadrivers case was easier to perceive in terms of market and customer segment analysis, business modelling and marketing strategies. The Moryak hotel case was viewed as opening more opportunities for creativity, but the two restrictions — ecological sustainability and limited budget — created a quite rigid framework for the ideation process.

**Understanding the task.** Some challenges in understanding the task can be traced to the question-answer sessions that the teams had with the commissioners at the preparatory stage of the session. For example, it took students some time to realise, that the Moryak hotel and MSCO managers did mean "cheap" when stating that the solutions had to involve "least investment". MSCO's leading specialist in ecology, Olga Leskova, used the word "cheap" twice in answering the students' questions regarding the preliminary ideas. This straightforward attribute referred to the hotel itself and to the proposals that students were coming up with: they were supposed to be "cheap". It seemed to have disillusioned some students at first. It might be

challenging to break the ‘beautiful means expensive’ stereotype. However, the outcome showed quite a number of aesthetically attractive yet cost-effective solutions. Straightforward clients might be a cold-shower to creative developers, but understanding restrictions is important in a client-oriented perspective, and most students seem to have learned this lesson really well.

**Role distribution in teams.** In some teams the students split their responsibilities, so that one part of the team focused more on Datadrivers case and the other part on the Moryak hotel case.

There was a lot of sense in such a role distribution in the context of international teams\*. The students could benefit from the different backgrounds of their members, from the access to on-site information and network opportunities.

Murmansk participants could get a better picture of the status quo in the Moryak hotel and the hotel market in Murmansk and they could visit the place already during the preparatory stage. The students from Lapland UAS had a better understanding of the Datadrivers business; at the preparatory stage they conducted an interview with the company representatives. Some of the UiT participants were

German students studying in Norway. The Datadrivers task originally targeted the students’ attention, among other countries, to the German and Austrian markets, so the teams with German participants could benefit from their language and cultural competences, as well as their understanding of the software market and driving school situation in Germany.

In this respect the mixed teams proved a very fruitful way of arranging the teams. Most of the teams made the most of the opportunities they got. Along with the priceless communication experience they also practised collaborative problem-solving of the ‘wicked problem’\*\*, the teams worked in the real-life situation of distant collaboration within a group of people with a variety of unique competences and resources.

**Team cooperation innovation.** Another innovation of the October 2014 session in Murmansk was the workshop on “Communication. Cooperation. Negotiation”, delivered by the project coaches, Galina Smirnova and Teresa Chen, and the invited lecturer, Professor Dr. Ulrich Bauer from Kempten University of Applied Sciences, Germany. Each lecturer focused on one of the elements of the

\* There appeared one wholly Russian team at the workshop week, as some participants couldn’t travel because of formalities; Hence there is no Team 6 on the list below, its two members joined Team 8 during the workshop. The preparation stage, though, involved all the students as listed in the original team distribution.

\*\* ”Wicked problem” is a phrase originally used in social planning to describe a problem that is difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize. The term ”wicked” is used to denote resistance to resolution, rather than evil. Moreover, because of complex interdependencies, the effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems.” (Wicked problem 2014.)

triad designated in the workshop title. We arranged a progression: general issues of communication and misunderstanding, ways of cooperating, taking into account the cultural issues and then came the climax of the workshop – negotiating with the competitors. After an introduction into the challenges of the negotiation process and showing ways to deal with some of them, Prof. Bauer asked the teams to trade the strong points of their ideas to other teams, thus creating an incentive for the teams to analyse their proposal more thoroughly, do benchmarking and think of ways to improve the solutions they have devised.

## THE SOLUTIONS OFFERED: DO FACE-TO-FACE COLLABORATION AND INITIAL FEEDBACK MATTER FOR THE OUTCOME?

From the coach’s perspective, it seems worthwhile to consider not only the outcome, reflected in the decision and comments of the case company representatives and the jury, but also to try to trace the progress of the teams’ outcome from comparing the final presentations with what the teams had come up with at the initial presentation. Below the key ideas of each team are outlined, along with the notes on the changes made over the week of face-to-face collaboration in the teams. Some teams restated the ideas proposed on the first day, whereas others made considerable changes over the five days of the workshop.

This part contains quotes from the hand-outs that the teams provided at the final presentation. It is also based on the author’s notes made during the presentations on the first and the last days of the week.

### **Datadrivers case: Expanding the European market of the software for driving schools, produced by the company**

**Team 1 ”Arctic Force”:** **Hanna Kattilakoski, An Tran (Lapland UAS), Luidvik Avedisyan, Marat Tukhvatshin (MSTU), Mikhail Kazimirov, Natalia Smetanina (MIBO)**

At the final presentation the team restated its original ideas for the most part:

- providing a mobile version of the software. The students offered a contact to a Finnish company, specialised in developing mobile applications.
- social media marketing via Facebook and LinkedIn.
- sending out marketing materials.

The two latter ideas were not specific enough, though. The answers to the jury’s question on particular tactics and ways of implementation were of a general nature.

The new idea was a ”Limited access promo campaign”, meaning that a customer gets access to the software for a fixed period (six months), after which they might be charged for the extended use or choose to stop using the software. The team’s argument in favour of the idea was that it is not only

a promo opportunity, but a tool for getting feedback about the software, which is crucial for the development and for understanding new markets.

It should be noted that on the first day this team was the only one that presented the results of CIECA report analysis and outlined the status quo in the implementation of directive 2003/59/EC on periodic training for professional drivers. The ability to do thorough research of the primary information seems a strong point of the team.

However, on the final day they chose to start with the SWOT analysis and broke the time limit for the presentation, having also to cut short on describing the specific proposals.

The hand-outs contained the Business model canvas description of the company activity in line with the proposals made and the practical information: a list of competitive software in European markets and the contacts of potential Estonian and the UK customers.

**Team 2 "Riverside": Ekaterina Zamiryakina, Andreea-Miruna Chiuariu (Lapland UAS), Svenja Janine Klein, Evelyn Baier, Tanja Maria Huschle (UiT)**

The team's ideas were as follows:

- improving the company web-site (redesigning and developing versions in more languages) and adding more features (connection to social networks, developing a mobile version, adding a multi-platform system)
- improving the software itself, namely, splitting it in packages for customizing sales, as well as adding such features as on-line chat

for users, an on-line store, a CRM connection, on-line and live customer service and developing multi-language versions.

- promotion on the integrated Germany / Austria / Switzerland market, taking advantage of the cross-border opportunities deriving from the common language and similar driving directives. The team provided two potential partners in Germany with vast databases and experience (Fahrschulen and Academy Fahrschulen).

The team kept most of its original ideas presented on the first day, having delved deeper into analysing the German market. It should be noted that after the first presentation the team got a comment from one of the coaches, Anthony Okuogume, about the idea of splitting the software into packages being doubtful. They explained that it is a promotional tactics for the initial stage of extending the markets. The team defended their idea and seemed to be convincing to the case company representative on the final day.

**Team 3 "Sunshine": Roman Shamray, Tudor-Cristian Nitu (Lapland UAS), Raisa Bochoeva, Vladimir Mamaev (UiT), Natalia Hokhlova, Kseniya Shevyakova (PetrSU)**

The team's ideas were as follows:

- establishing a connection to the Motor School Association (MSA), making use of their networking possibilities
- taking up contact with the Freight Transport Association (FTA) in Ireland

- joining the Irish platform for suppliers and service providers (Irish road haulage industry) with 20 thousand unique visitors from all over Europe

The team kept all of their ideas from the first presentation. At the final presentation the team seemed to have focused on presenting the team in the hand-outs and a kind of analysis of the competitive advantage of their team compared to the others. The hand-out promoted the team, all the specific information regarding the case was placed on slides.

In answering the case representative's and jury's questions the team claimed to have contacted the MSA representatives by telephone and to have arranged a feasible and cost-effective collaboration.

**Team 4 "The Lapland Quintet": Péter Ivanics, Antti Helavirta (Lapland UAS), Vladimir Uljanikhin (UiT), Alina Kolosova, Aleksandra Toksubaeva (PetrSU)**

The team claimed to have contacted the Driving Instructors Association (DIA) in the UK and 44 driving schools in Hungary.

They targeted the Hungarian market as promising, seeing the potential in the fact that most driving schools in the country use "old and traditional (paper-based) methods to manage their students".

They reported not having gained positive responses, saying that DIA, for instance, was "sceptic about our offer". The team supposed that was mainly because they are students and offered the case company to contact the companies again.

On the first day the students had presented mostly the same accomplishments, though in a less detailed way and without the descriptive hand-out. They had got a comment from one of the coaches then about software being one of the hardest products to sell and a question about the intended selling form. They had been advised to look for resellers in the targeted countries and to be "more crazy" in searching for solutions.

The team chose to stick to the traditional direct e-mail marketing strategy though.

**Team 5 "Aquillo": Heikki Pelttari, Majedul Hoque (Lapland UAS), Asamoah Awuah, Paulina Dresler, Lena Pfaar (UiT), Anna Mandrusova, Alyona Shibaeva (MIBO)**

The team started on the first day with an idea of cooperation with the German competitors and governmental structures to get a market share for Datadrivers. They also offered a contact with DEKRA Akademie GmbH, which could assist in making the product more marketable in Germany.

By the final presentation the team had made an in-depth survey of the potential market for driving school software in the UK and Germany and found out the 300 training schools in the UK are already part of the Joint Approval's Unit for Periodic Training (JAUPT) under a 5 year contract, which "prohibits the training institutes from switching to Datadrivers". Driving schools in Germany use FADATA, "which is a similarly complete software package". The team offered the case representatives to "use professional individuals to directly contact potential buyers and partners".

The jury member, Dennis Kreminsky, commented that risk avoidance data is valuable and the fact that the team convincingly stated that there is no straightforward way to enter the UK and German markets is important. At the same time, the team did not provide any suggestion to their case company: which road should be taken under the situation?

**Team 7: Lisa-Marie Elina Pekkola, Olubukola Idowu Oyekunle, Linda Mira Amberger (UiT) Aleksandr Bezpalko, Ksenia Alliamova (MSTU), Daniil Zyuzin, Daniil Teremovskii (PetrSU)**

The team came up with a package of ideas and solutions for the case:

1. Making a promo to focus customers on the Finnish quality of driving and education. They supplied a link to the video of Usain Bolt, a Jamaican sprinter, who had been invited to Finnish Lapland in January 2014 for winter driving lessons by Finnish Formula drivers, and suggested that Datadrivers can use a similarly daring strategy in creating a promo.
2. Software solutions, namely:
  - splitting the software into packages, so that it is of relevant value for individual customers
  - creating a "mobile app for all ages to promote the software and help in the learning process", for different user systems (Windows, Android, iOS)
  - expanding the range of language options (German, English, Spanish, Estonian) for the software and add at least an English version to the site
  - introducing IT customer support services

- creating a "software CD, or a software license for drivers, educational institutions or any driver school, that can be purchased from the company via, for example, an on-line shop"
- establishing an on-line shop to ship packages and programs worldwide, in at least Finnish and English

### 3. Networks

The team presented the contact of Driver Hire, "the UK's largest specialist transport and logistics recruitment company", offering, among other services, Driver CPC training, and the contact of Estonia Niguliste Autokool, "the biggest driving school in Estonia", located in Tallinn.

There was also the list of platforms (professional forums and expos) in use in Germany, Finland, Estonia and the UK in the hand-outs.

The team's suggestion was that "Datadrivers should endorse their partnership with driving schools" through the networks, as well as "make prototypes of different service packages and test them in the target market", then "finalise products and pick the best packages and refine them, and release them to the market".

The final proposals that the team presented restated the suggestions made on the first day, with specific contacts and links added.

**Team 8 "4G and 2B": Alena Tretyakova, Ekaterina Ulyanchenko (MIBO), Katja Becht (UiT), Tatiana Kashirskaya (MSTU), Mikhail Oshutinskii, Dmitrii Kalinin (PetrSU)**

The team presented five ideas to expand the software to foreign markets:

- Proving a company e-mail address that the students could use for sending promotional materials (e.g. export@, foreigntrade@, euomarket@). Thus changing from company e-mail to personal e-mails of the case company representatives would mean a serious business contract.
- Targeting Turkish customers living in European countries with a considerable share of Turkish immigrants (Germany, France, Austria, England, Norway and Finland, "where we can find many Turkish customers").
- Attending international conferences and exhibitions (Autowinner in Saint-Petersburg and Deutscher Fahrlehrerkongress in Berlin), as well as using B2B portals as platforms for networking.
- Promote "special simulation for customers who live and have to drive in the Northern weather conditions, including people in Norway"
- Entering the Russian market as well, in view of the "big changes in Russian legislation for driving schools".

The team changed their initial proposal considerably, having 'killed' the idea of inviting German driving students to Finland for taking courses after having got sceptical remarks from the audience regarding the costs and the relevance of the proposal to the potential German customers.

## **Moryak hotel case: Redesigning the Murmansk Shipping Company's hotel for the company's 75th anniversary in an ecologically sustainable and cost-efficient way**

**Team 1 "Arctic Force": Hanna Kattilakoski, An Tran (Lapland UAS), Luidvik Avedisyan, Marat Tukhvatshin (MSTU), Mikhail Kazimirov, Natalia Smetanina (MIBO)**

The team made four proposals to solve the task. They underscored that in devising the solutions the team focused on the "historical uniqueness of the hotel".

1. Refreshing the lobby with wallpaper that can be either made of black-and-white photos from the company's museum or ready-designed wallpaper with geography-related themes. The hand-out contained the contacts of proposed companies and a price estimation for each option.

2. Refreshing the exterior:

- repainting the hotel wall and getting rid of the garish advertisement boards outside
- installing a laser-light projector "to create an innovatively attractive advertisement on the outside wall"
- placing the "MSCO 75th anniversary" logo at the hotel entrance, develop its seasonal version.

This part of the proposal contained the price estimation for the 2014-2015 period of the exterior renovation project, as well as the project timeline November 2014 — April 2015.

For developing the logo the team offered the free service of a Vietnamese designer, who is the personal contact of one team member.

3. Arranging a souvenir's corner to sell, among other things, a "limited edition postcard collection" replicating the photos from MSCO's history museum and dedicated to the MSCO anniversary. The team supplied a list of Murmansk companies capable of implementing the idea.

4. Social media marketing: In presenting this part of the proposal the team involved the audience to demonstrate the currently underdeveloped features of the Moryak hotel website. For example, to make it obvious that the hotel should have an English version, they asked one of the Lapland UAS coaches to read the results of the Google search, in which the results for the Moryak hotel came up in Cyrillic only.

Search engine optimization was also exposed as a necessary step for attracting customers via Internet.

The team also demonstrated the fact that the key information about the price of the room should be present in the search results. The hotel's customer segment is budget travellers, yet their foreign customers cannot get access to the price information.

Still another way to attract foreign customers could be registering on tripadvisor.com and www.tripadvisor.ru.

The team kept part of the package of ideas presented on the first day. They seemed to have dropped the ideas mentioned by other teams (eco-friendly lighting in the lobby, white-and-blue lobby style, souvenirs of recycled materials). The team also 'killed' the conference room idea, probably, after

having received sceptical comments from their colleagues from Team 8 at the first presentation.

They kept the most original ideas and worked to provide evidence that the ideas are feasible.

The laser-projector idea was received with enthusiasm at both presentations. On the first day it received a positive comment from Antony Okuogume, who saw it as a realistic and cost-efficient opportunity to add visibility to the place. At the final presentation the laser-projector idea made the company representative interested and aroused the question on where the projector should be placed. An Tran suggested that the projection could even be made on the opposite buildings. If such an agreement were possible, that could make the hotel still more visible.

**Team 2 "Riverside": Ekaterina Zamiryakina, Andreea-Miruna Chiuariu (Lapland UAS), Svenja Janine Klein, Evelyn Baier, Tanja Maria Huschle (UiT)**

The team presented two solutions:

- Pallet furniture to redesign the hotel lobby. To make the solution cost-effective, the team suggested that MSCO should recruit volunteer workers via workaway.info that promotes a "fair exchange between budget travellers, language learners, or culture seekers and families, individuals or organizations who are looking for help with a range of varied and interesting activities." Volunteers work for board and lodging, this work is a way for them to travel to places. Being ardent travellers and active internet-



users, the volunteers could then contribute to raising the hotel's profile through their blogs and in personal communication on returning to their countries.

- The concept of creating an eco-friendly reputation for the Moryak hotel and MSCO: producing souvenirs of plastic waste, re-using old ship equipment for decorating the lobby, placing reminders of the eco-friendly behaviour the hotel rooms.

The team kept most of its ideas from the initial presentation. They dropped the one about using a wind-mill for eco-friendly energy production after receiving a comment on the noise and low efficiency of the solution in terms of energy-production from the jury member, Anna Yashkina, a specialist of the Department of ecology and environmental protection from Murmansk State Technical University.

**Team 3 "Sunshine": Roman Shamray, Tudor-Cristian Nitu (Lapland UAS), Raisa Bochoeva, Vladimir Mamaev (UiT), Natalia Hokhlova, Kseniya Shevyakova (PetrSU)**

The team offered three main ideas:

- setting up a social programme to collaborate with the Murmansk State College of Service, giving its students an opportunity to produce wooden furniture for the hotel during their practical training
- placing paper sofas of Scandinavian design in the rooms
- arranging an exhibition of objects from the MSCO History museum in the hotel lobby.

The team dropped one of its initial ideas, namely, that of collecting rain-water and melted snow on the hotel roof for cleaning the hotel.

As with the first case, the hand-out of this team at the final presentation contained rather a description of the team and the "competitiveness of the team's ideas" that resulted from the participants' joint workshop with Prof. Dr. Ulrich Bauer.

At the final presentation the team got a comment that the hotel could also collaborate with local penitentiary institutions, known for their skilled workers, who make furniture and other wooden produce as part of their labour duties. In Murmansk oblast a number of penitentiary institutions already have contracts with local companies and administrative bodies for wooden furniture production. The team emphasized, though, that there should be a social contract on taking part in moulding young people as professionals. Even though it might be less efficient, but it may contribute to raising the company's profile.

**Team 4 "The Lapland Quintet": Péter Ivanics, Antti Helavirta (LUAS), Vladimir Uljanikhin (UiT), Alina Kolosova, Aleksandra Toksubaeva (PetrSU)**

The team came up with the idea of "using paper as cheap and eco-friendly material". They presented two "unique logo designs" and created giveaway materials with the hotel contact information: "origami polar bear cutaways and corporate polar bear symbols". The team offered two ways of producing the giveaway cards and origami: ordering

from a professional company and "going on budget", with an estimated fourfold difference in cost.

At the initial presentation the team announced the logos, by the final day they seemed to have diversified on the ways to use the logos.

The team got two important questions at the final presentation. The first one concerned the market design issue: a jury member pointed out that the bear in their logos is looking to the left / backwards, whereas in MSCO's original logo it is looking to the right / forward, the proper way for the symbol of the company. The other question came from one of the students; she asked what kind of paper was meant to be used for giveaway materials, as only recycled paper can be regarded "cheap and eco-friendly".

**Team 5 "Aquillo": Heikki Pelttari, Majedul Hoque (Lapland UAS), Asamoah Awuah, Paulina Dresler, Lena Pfaar (UiT), Anna Mandrusova, Alyona Shibaeva (MIBO)**

The team offered two important contacts to the case company representatives.

- Eco Russia (ecorussia.info), an international coordinating and consultancy company, "facilitating suitable partners in the field of eco-design". The team contacted the company and got a list of initial ideas for redesigning the lobby; the solutions concerned not only for the furniture and walls, but also the floors ("Keep the dirt outside!").
- Eco Helpline (ecohelpline.com), an international coordinating and consultancy company, specializing in "improving the eco-friendliness of medium and small-sized

hotels". The "first actions list" contained lectures and training for personnel, which is viewed as a crucial factor for billing a company as "eco-friendly".

In both cases the team provided the contacts of particular contact persons in the company, the team claimed that these specialists are already aware of the Moryak hotel case and are ready to work with the case representatives.

The team kept its original ideas from the first day. After the first presentation they got positive comments: some jury members, coaches and guests considered the team's second idea progressive, as enhancing the eco-friendly approach can be really effective in the long-term perspective if it is achieved through changing the mind-set of the people working in the industry.

The hand-out contained also the draft programme for the six day training of Moryak employees. The jury member, Julia Korshunova, remarked that the language issue should be taken into account when arranging the courses for the employees.

**Team 7: Lisa-Marie Elina Pekkola, Olubukola Idowu Oyekunle, Linda Mira Amberger (UiT) Aleksandr Bezpalko, Ksenia Alliamova (MSTU), Daniil Zyuzin, Daniil Teremovskii (PetrSU)**

At the final presentation the team frankly commented on their progress since the first day. They mentioned their initial ideas (enhancing the polar bear logo on pillows, napkins, towels, etc., creating a carpet logo and developing an English version of the website).

However, after the visit to the hotel, the team decided to focus on redesigning the entrance and

the entrance hall rather than the interior. Thus, the team offered designs of the entrance and the lobby in watercolour, provided a list of materials for the interior, with the emphasis on wood and granite. The team also offered and a list of "Russian providers of professional design" that could implement the ideas (Eco-tech group company, Kaliningradneftestroy, Ecostroyles).

**Team 8 "4G and 2B": Alena Tretyakova, Ekaterina Ulyanchenko (MIBO), Katja Becht (UiT), Tatiana Kashirskaya (MSTU), Mikhail Oshutinskii, Dmitrii Kalinin (PetrSU)**

The team focused on redesigning the lobby, using the MSCO corporate colours, white and blue (so-called 'marine style'). In the initial presentation they described the intention, in the final presentation the team showed an alternative design, developed by a designer who is a personal contact of one of the students. The team emphasized that the notion "eco-friendly" may not only be about materials, but also the style.

## **"THE JUDGE HAS SPOKEN!": CASE COMPANIES' AND JURY'S FEEDBACK AND RECEPTION OF THE IDEAS**

The jury for the session was selected by the organizers, so that its members have the specific competencies required for making reasonable judgements on whether the solutions are feasible and whether the proposals meet the customers' needs and market conditions.

### **Jury list, initial presentation**

- Olga Leskova, leading specialist in ecology, MSCO (case representative)
- Anastasia Zhirnova, director of the Moryak hotel, MSCO (case representative)
- Julia Korshunova, Kolarctic programme coordinator, Murmansk
- Dennis Kreminsky, IT Entrepreneur, co-founder of the project mycity.io
- Anna Yashkina, specialist of the Department of ecology and environmental protection, MSTU

### **Jury list, final presentation**

- Esa Kreivi, founder and owner of Datadrivers Oy, (case representative)
- Irina Yusupova, head of the press service, MSCO (case representative)
- Julia Korshunova, Kolarctic programme coordinator, Murmansk
- Dennis Kreminsky, IT Entrepreneur, co-founder of the project mycity.io
- Anna Yashkina, specialist of the Department of ecology and environmental protection, MSTU

As can be seen from the lists, the Moryak hotel case representatives were part of the jury during both the initial and final presentation of ideas. The decision on the winners for the Moryak hotel case on the final day was taken jointly by the case representatives and the other members of the jury. The jury's and case representatives' joint decision on the winners for the Moryak hotel case, ranking and reasons for the decision:

### **I. Team 1:**

- carefully thought-through proposal that is implementable
- possibility for a free development of the logo (the team member's personal contact)
- production of the anniversary-related postcards focusing on the company's history
- carefully developed budget for the laser-projector idea

### **II. Team 7:**

- beautiful design of the hotel entrance and lobby combined with the truly entrepreneurial approach of making use of the resources available (an artist's contribution to drawing the designs)
- carefully considered list of partner-companies providing materials for redesign

### **III. Team 5:**

- finding a 'ready to go' partner for MSCO (Eco-Russia)
- emphasis on personnel training to enhance the eco-friendly image of the company (focus on people) and establishing the contact with Eco Helpline company to assist in arranging the on-line courses for the personnel

There was also a special prize for Team 4 for creativity in developing the MSCO anniversary logo and cards and for involving professionals into the logo design (team members' personal contacts).

For the Datadrivers case the jury and the case representative did not collaborate. Esa Kreivi,

founder and owner of Datadrivers Oy, attended the final presentation on-line on Friday, 24 October. He also had presentations and hand-outs sent to him the day before. He was not part of the jury and it was he who made the final decision on the winners for the Datadrivers case.

The jury's role in the Datadrivers case was giving comments and discussing the content of the presentations to clarify or question the ideas offered, on both the first and final day of the project week.

Nonetheless, after the final presentations the jury discussed the solutions for the Datadrivers case and made up a list of teams that were best in their opinion. Their list turned out quite different from the case representative's award list.

It was not the first time in the project history that the jury and the case representatives had a different opinion. It usually happened when the case company representative was only present on-line and could not take part in the jury discussions due to time constraints that business people and officials naturally have. The same scenario developed, for example, during the previous Murmansk session, March 2013 (Tornio municipality), or during the Petrozavodsk session, October 2013 (Kirkenes port case).

However, this time the jury changed the routine. They took the decision to announce their winners' list and comment on what were the strong points of the presentations and ideas.

This step seems reasonable. The fact that there is an alternative opinion to what the case company representative has decided is stipulated by several reasons. The jury saw the ideas and the teams in

progress, on the first and on the final day, they could evaluate the dynamics, adaptability, ability to listen and to take into account the comments and new issues that come up at post-presentation discussions. Being present at the venue, the jury can better estimate the presentation skills that are also part of the evaluation sheet for the judges. Finally, they can have information or competences that allow them to see the potential of some ideas that might not seem really implementable to the case representative, or otherwise, they can be aware of the limitations of those solutions that seem 'ready to go'. These scenarios are rather speculative, of course, but it might be a note to make for the project team: why not give the jury part of the decisive voice for all cases, not only the cases, for which case representatives can physically be on the venue and take part in the discussion of the presentations?

Anyway, this time the jury voiced their comments on the Data Drivers case. Their favourites did not get the prizes, but they heard the opinion and it seemed important to some. For example, Lyudvik Avedisyan and Marat Tukhvatshin asked Dennis Kreminsky, the jury member, for extra comments and said they were happy their presentation was regarded third best by the jury.

The case company representative's decision on the winners for the Datadrivers case, ranking and reasons for the decision:

### **I. Team 2**

- best understanding of our project aim
- concrete examples and proposals of improvements and steps to take to expand the market area

- good links to the companies for possible partnership

### **II. Team 3**

- a lot of investigations made, important contacts made already
- two possible contact information sources

### **III. Team 8**

- innovative ideas, with rather big risk, though
- Russia is an interesting market area, but it is not on the company's main target list of countries, as it is a difficult market area for the company

The jury's alternative decision on the winners for the Datadrivers case, ranking and reasons for the decision:

### **I. Team 7**

- a package of diversified yet feasible ideas
- meticulous attitude to the original task
- extended list of platforms for networking
- proper understanding of the specific nature of the software products and the ways to market them
- excellent presentation skills, convincing responses to questions

### **II. Team 2**

- sustainable suggestions on improving the product over time
- marketing issues have not been given equal attention, though

- persuasive presentation

### III. Team 1

- thorough research of the primary information, provided by the company
- competitive software analysis (benchmarking)
- substantial and logical presentation of the business model

## LAST BUT NOT LEAST: SOME TAKEAWAYS OF THE SESSION

The teams presented quite a few innovative ideas and feasible solutions. The session showed the benefits of international teams, or rather made obvious the benefits that Teresa Chen had been 'pitching' to the project team for the previous two years. Yet some of the project team seemed sceptical about the idea, myself included. And now I should say it was a brilliant idea, it changed the perspectives for both the students and the coaches and engendered a different approach to collaboration among all the project participants.

At the end of the session the coaches and coordinators agreed that the project innovation had worked out fine and seemed to have contributed a lot to the students' experience. The students themselves stated the same during the evaluation session on the last day of the workshop.

One of the jury members, Dennis Kreminsky, made an important observation. He started with referring to Mark Zuckerberg's recent visit to Beijing,

where the renowned Internet entrepreneur conducted an entire 30-minute Q&A session in Mandarin. Dennis used the example to show the importance of personal contact in business: "Business is not about technology and innovation, it's about people".

It may be really hard to reach out to actual people, but it is the only way to create value. He pointed out that several teams employed their personal contacts for developing ideas and called it a very good sign. "Any connection you build in life", he said, "can be your future opportunity".

During this session the international teams had been devising solutions for two very different companies over distances and cultures. This experience has given the students a lot to add up to what is called 'social capital'.

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# Developing the best coaching methods – a personal insight

Teresa Chen

I started as a team coach in the Practice Future project, but due to a change in circumstances I was handed the position of project manager representing Lapland UAS. Being a project manager did not keep me from coaching the student teams of Lapland UAS though. Reflecting upon my experiences I can say that in a project like this there are a few key elements that play vital roles in guiding student activities. Advance planning is essential for the implementation of plans into action and for students to get a sense of orderliness and become more prone to follow through with the plans. For my students to exploit their competences optimally, I, as their coach, am required to create a conducive atmosphere for them to work in. If students are not able to express their thoughts frankly, the innovation process cannot be nurtured. This atmosphere is not always readily achieved; the Practice Future project has seen over fifteen different nationalities participate. Fortunately, my experience as a cross-cultural trainer has given me the advantage of knowing how to interact with students from various backgrounds.

Working with students who have varying degrees of motivation and diverse interests, I found it essential to set very clear rules right from the beginning. This enhances a sense of fairness among

the students, as they know that they must all abide by the same set of rules and will be rewarded for following those rules. It is gratifying for students to know that their efforts will be rewarded in one form or other. Apart from study credits students have often appreciated token awards too; something tangible that would remind them of their participation and success in the project. Clear and attainable objectives are another way of ensuring that the team work will progress. Once a student team has been selected, I kick-off the process by discussing the cases and setting objectives for the team. Once the objectives are set students can chalk out ways to reach those objectives. The learning outcome can be easily determined when the students ultimately reach the set objectives. To me it is gratifying to witness the students' journey in their quest for answers, starting from an empty canvas of objectives and questions, and ending up with a rich landscape of solutions and answers.

In the Practice Future workshops over the past two years I have grown and learnt to help my students better as a coach. For instance, I have encouraged the “veteran” participants to tutor the “rookies” in the student teams. The veterans feel responsible and have the urge to set appropriate examples and the rookies have someone to look up

to during moments of uncertainty. I have also learnt to step back a bit to let the students carve out their own path of learning and only step in when assistance is required and when I am needed to aid them in proper decision making. It is a marvellous experience for a teacher-coach to witness students develop and gain confidence in themselves with regards to proper decision making within the parameters of project work. In a way I share in this achievement when I respond to students with open dialogue and careful consideration of their points of view. Students highly appreciate being listened to and receiving proper feedback on and evaluation of their ideas.

Through my coaching activities, I have personally gained experience as well. I have become much calmer when project activities do not work out as originally planned and I patiently look for an alternative way out. Through instilling proper work ethics in my students, I have become a better project manager myself.







**GOOD PRACTICES  
AND  
EXPERIENCES**

# Feedback as a tool for future improvement

Galina Smirnova

*”Man’s mind, once stretched by a new idea, never regains its original dimensions.”*

- Oliver Wendell Holmes (1958)

The Practice Future project is a platform for networking between the students of five universities in the High North of Russia, Finland and Norway, involving also local SMEs and communities.

The six workshops have been arranged, so that each university has at least once been the host of the Business Innovation Workshop week. The opening session took place in October 2012, at the Arctic University of Norway, campus Alta (at that time – Høyskole i Finnmark). The intermediate sessions were hosted by Murmansk State Technical University and the International Institute of Business Education (April 2013), Petrozavodsk State University (October 2013), Lapland University of Applied Sciences, campus Tornio (March 2014), and again the Arctic University of Norway, campus Alta (May 2014). The closing session was hosted by the Murmansk universities in October 2014.

## EXTRA VALUE FROM THE FEEDBACK OF THE STUDENTS

Getting feedback from both the students and the case companies has been an integral part of the project, a means to evaluate the project’s

methodology and to detect the needs for improvement.

Feedback from the students has been received in two ways. One way is through work journals that the students send to the project coordinator twice, once before and once after the Open Innovation Workshop week. The other way is through the questionnaire that the students fill in at the evaluation session, held on the last day of the week. Work journals are meant to encourage the students to reflect on their activities in the project, and to focus on individual growth, be it professional or personal.

According to both staff and students, these journals did not seem really effective at first. The students’ responses were for the most part either descriptive or declarative, and did not contain a lot of reflection. Some students tended to give elaborate descriptions of the routine activities (group meetings, interviews with case companies), while their actual individual experience often got lost in the wording. It seemed sometimes they had been driven by the urge to fill as much space as would seem appropriate to the teachers. The other extreme was a brief routinized diary, enumerating the scheduled activities.

It took time, patience and a lot of on-line communication between the staff members to make the guidelines for work journals really explicit.

What helped to trigger the students' written reflection and make the evaluation more vivid was the suggestion to write work journals in the form of instant messages (SMS, Skype messages). The comparison to instant on-line communication and the sharply outlined points to focus on (my own experience, what struck me, what's new, unexpected, what to think twice about, work in teams, own expectations, etc.) encouraged the students to write about the essential things, new and vital ones. The students were prompted to imagine themselves sharing the project-related thoughts with someone they know well, or with themselves some years from now. This personalized touch to the guidelines helped to get the right sort of feedback, reflective and substantial.

Interviewing students provided valuable extra-feedback. This qualitative research was arranged by Peter Fischer, the project coordinator, during the Open Innovation Workshop week in Tornio. The staff conducted individual interviews with selected students. The interviewers had the instruction sheet from the project coordinator, which included the key questions, discussed by the project staff in advance, grouped in 6 sections: Team, Individual work/personal incentives, Self-Assessment/self-reflection, Case companies, Presentation skills, Competition and Cooperation. The interviewers and the interviewees could not be from the same university and it was desirable that they did not share the same native language. The interview was meant to clarify and to interpret the feedback that the staff had been getting earlier.

An important outcome of the interview, apart from the information collected, was that it made

some of the students think again about how the project contributes to developing the practical skills they need in entrepreneurship, consultancy and other professional areas. Another important by-effect of the interview was better contact between the students and staff members, coming from different universities.

## FEEDBACK COLLECTED FROM THE CASE COMPANIES

Feedback from the case companies has been collected by the project coordinator, on a regular basis, in the form of interviews.

The overall impression, which the staff got from communicating with the case companies, was that they, more often than not, consider the students' suggestions in a somewhat patronizing way and do not treat them as consultancy advice. It is to some extent natural, given the lack of practical experience in the students, which sometimes was obvious in the very manner of the presentations.

The impression seems to be confirmed by the fact that few ideas have been implemented "as is" (e.g. constructing the helipad, offered by the MIBO team as a way to develop the facilities of the Kirkenes port and increase its competitiveness under the growing offshore development). In most cases the case companies got "the pool of ideas", the collection of ways to diversify their activities and the contact information of the potential partners. According to one of the company representatives, it is not the offered ideas, but rather "fragments" of different ideas that are feasible.

## MORE STAFF FEEDBACK IS NEEDED

Written feedback from the staff was something that the project lacked, but could benefit from, in my opinion. Of course, it sounds like extra work, but work journals from coaches could encourage us to keep more regular records of the unique experience. I wish I had more accurate notes that would help me to better trace the development of the project and its participants, to make up my bottom lines and lessons to learn.

The environment for the coaches and coordinators' reflection has been the project staff's evaluation meetings, held at the end of each Open Innovation Workshop week.

At each meeting there tended to be one key issue, along with numerous minor ones:

- In the Murmansk session (2013) it was the team recruitment issues and the ways to motivate students to enrol.
- In Petrozavodsk (2013) it was the work journal issue, as well as dissemination of the project experience.
- In Tornio (2014) the cooperation-competition dilemma was brought to the table again (some two years after it had been the main point in the Practice Module's final session, the 1.0 version of Practice Future).
- In Alta (2014) we discussed the case companies' perspective and the ways to get companies motivated to participate and take the proceedings in a committed and serious way, similar to the way they would take a professional consultants' advice.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the staff has been trying to turn mistakes into advantages by reacting to problem issues. To err is human, and to correct a mistake is a skill that adds up to the outcome.

## COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION ARE KEY FACTORS

Another important result of the project staff communication is that we ourselves have learned to be explicit in communicating with each other and with the students. The cross-cultural nature of the project contributed to our becoming more concerned with making sure that what we communicate is understood the way we intend it to be understood, given the cultural differences and the differences in educational paradigms between the institutions.

We have started our joint work with the premise "nothing is obvious", underscoring the fact that staff communication is among the key tools for building up the project. As the sessions were becoming more routinized, communication started to subside. And this immediately led to misunderstandings.

Before the Alta session started in 2012, it had been agreed by all the staff that there will no longer be team competition, but that of ideas and that the case company representative will only have one criterion for the evaluation, i.e. whether the idea is feasible for his company/activity at the moment. The case company could pick any number of ideas, from zero to the total number of ideas presented. The aim

behind this decision was to bring the evaluation closer to real-life “client-consultant” interaction.

In the Alta session most students and staff were puzzled by the fact that the case company selected the ideas according to criteria, more relevant for academic activities, instead of applying the one criterion of feasibility, and also ranked them. At which point had the message changed? In a project involving ten staff members, around 45 students from three countries (often more than 10 nationalities) in each session, with both teachers and students representing not only a dozen different cultural identities, but also different educational paradigms, it was not an easy thing to trace.

This shows that there is still something to perfect. And it also shows that this project is a living organism, which is manageable and yet unpredictable.

This comparison brings us to the most conspicuous feature of the project; it’s very real. This feature can be found mentioned in one way or another in nearly every piece of student evaluation.

The project does not simulate a business environment, but rather brings the students into the situations, typical of a business environment, i.e. team work, information search, networking, figuring, analysing resources, looking for ways to be persuasive. All these points have been mentioned in students’ responses as challenges, and the list is not complete.

If one is to sum up the challenges of the project mentioned in the feedback and to project them onto the challenges of the modern business world, the correlation is obvious indeed:

- The case companies (clients). They are busy with their day-to-day activity. They are willing to expand, but not willing (some of them – extremely unwilling) to change their routines, because “well, at least it has been working in this way for years”. Your proposal should be very convincing to satisfy the real entrepreneur, fit his vision of his business and his company identity, as well as the cultural milieu.
- Ideation process. You should remember to keep your options open, not be married to one idea only. Remain committed to investigating your current idea, but avoid getting into a tunnel, retain the broad vision and keep the mind open.
- Information search and implementing tools for business analysis. To find a compromise between your innovative proposal on the one hand and the case company’s potential and expectation on the other hand, you should become an expert in the field; do SWOT-analyses, devise business-models, think of a clear and convincing way to arrange the presentation.
- Communication skills. To manage the task within the limited time given you should build an efficient team with your fellows. Conflicts between individual ambitions and the common goal seem to be an unavoidable ingredient of team work, though. Another challenge is managing international communication and overcoming cultural differences. This concerns international

teams, as well as teams representing only one nation. There is a necessity to follow the rules, meet deadlines and stay observant, thoughtful and creative.

The ability to work under such circumstances is one of the skills that are "robust and relevant" to the modern world, where professional competence is presumed, but is considered only part of the skills set essential for a successful career.

## EXPERIENCES AND BENEFITS

The project helps students breed these qualities in themselves. One of the telling points, revealing the students' attitude to the project, is the number of non-rookies on the project. Students tend to stay for more than one session, even when it means extra work with no academic credits. For 70 % of the students the Alta session in 2014 was at least their 2nd one on the project, and for some of them it was the 3rd or even 4th session.

This is how one of the participants explains his enrolling for the third time:

*"I was quite satisfied at the end of the autumn session. But already in Tornio this March I outlined for myself something that I had to improve by May. First of all, it has to be my notes. Through the March session I noticed that I have all necessary information in my notes, but the chaos in the notebook made it almost impossible to extract something useful from it. <...> ... it is not a good idea to postpone the analysis of new material. <...> in previous sessions I improved my skills in searching and analysing the*

*information. I believe that today I do it better. So, I need this session to check if I am right or not. I want to tie my professional career with research work. I know that there is still a lot to do for me in this direction. The session in Alta will be for me one more indicator of my progress and mistakes."* (Ivan Peschinsky, student, MIBO)

For some students the project was an opportunity to check how they perform in different environments, including the international team:

*"This time I will be a part of the international team. It will be a true challenge for my communication skills and the knowledge that has been formed by now ... But I plan to get acquainted, communicate, apply my skills and check them in the independent (from my team) work."* (Ksenya Grebyolkina, student, MIBO)

The students seemed to enjoy the challenges and appreciate the real-life aspect of the project:

*"So, why for the fifth time? First of all, I just like this project as it makes me feel a part of a somewhat world-changing community. Secondly, the final stressful week is a time of my life, when my mind works at its best."* (Ivan Dundin, student, MIBO)

The following two responses come from Yaroslav Sholin, a MIBO student who took part in the Practice Module session (2012) and afterwards in two Practice Future sessions.

*"To be frank I was expecting some major changes in the project. Participating in the very first one I had doubts about its organization. But not much has changed since that time. On-line meetings still do not seem to be very productive. And team work does not feel like team work. Maybe the reason is that team*

The project does not simulate a business environment, but rather brings the students into the situations, typical of a business environment, i.e. team work, information search, networking, figuring, analysing resources, looking for ways to be persuasive.



*members do not know what they are best suited for, so the work faces some difficulties. Or maybe it is just me and I am not suited for team work.*

*In general the whole process is pretty much the same as it was in 2012: getting assignments, discussing, collecting information, sharing ideas and etc. The problem is that all this seems to be a kind of game and not a serious business.” (Motivation letter, February 2014)*

*“...my motivation has changed since my last participation in the project. Before it was all about developing my personal skills, especially communication skills. But then I discovered that I can help to improve the project while taking part in it. It is really nice to know that all the feedback is taken in consideration and used for making the project better.” (Motivation letter, April 2014)*

In a way, students can be said to be our clients on this project. The project staff can write hundreds of thousands of words about how practical the project is and how beneficial it is for the students. But better leave it to the students to evaluate:

*“... it is really nice to have an opportunity to influence the project and to help in choosing the*

*direction for its development. Right now I am looking forward to seeing whether any changes have already been applied. And one more thing I expect is learning something useful in the process, something that can be used in the future. It’s hard to tell what it could be because, as the experience shows, one can never know what can happen.” (Yaroslav Sholin, student, MIBO)*

*“Actually, it is the real beauty of the Practice Future project. You do things that have almost never seriously interested you. And as time goes on and on, you feel like becoming a specialist in it. No doubt, this feeling helps you to escape the fear of doing something new and unknown.” (Ivan Peschinsky, student, MIBO)*

Isn’t this daring attitude the core of the entrepreneurial mind-set?

## TOOLS FOR LEARNING

To help students to get the most out of the project, pedagogical techniques and methodology have been

chosen carefully, but have always been open to discussion and changes.

To default to the option that requires the least mental effort is human. This is the approach that the project defied at its every stage and in its every aspect. There was a continuous process of selecting and adapting the tools and techniques.

Offering the students substantial theoretical background proved not really efficient already in the 1.0 version. The students, especially the non-business ones, often got bogged down in the complex theories and the practical side of the task got blurred when they started to drown in the business theories and economical notions. Those who skipped the theory, however, tended to presume that they underperformed in the project.

It was then decided that all the information, which the students get in the course of the project, should be task-related. The tools chosen for check-listing the feasibility of the students' ideas have been the Business Model canvas and the Lean canvas, its plain version. The terminology there is intuitive and the canvases designate the very essential points in how to develop a business idea into a product.

Non-business students were exposed to the feasibility analysis techniques in the course of

lectures, extra to their main curriculum. It required a good degree of flexibility and explicitness on the part of coaches as well.

The outcomes of the project (the quality of presentations, the feedback from the case companies, the academic part of the jury boards and the responses from the students) enable us to conclude that the students benefited from the methodology chosen as the main tool of the project. It is scalable and applicable to any kind of product or service. Being exposed to these methods in practice has provided each participant with a tool to test their own business idea on the day they have one.

## DEVELOPING THE COUCHING METHODS

In the International Institute of Business Education we have developed a practice of inviting experts who tell the students about the businesses and industries related to the project cases. For example, in the 2013 session (the Kirkenes port case) we invited experts in port management and marine tourism development: Maksim Zubritsky, the then Deputy Engineering Manager of the Murmansk Commercial Sea Port, Maksim Belov, the then, Chief Business

**Developing communication skills and emotional intelligence, this is what the project contributes to and that is how the general atmosphere improves.**





Development Officer of ATPI Russia (Human Logistics) and Vasily Shaytanov, Director General of SevGipromybzflot (ship redesign and maintenance).

The chance to talk to people, who are not only professionals in a challenging business, but who are also so fond of their work that they are ready to spend their time sharing what they know with others, turned out to be a strong motivator for young people.

The team work arrangement required another set of pedagogical methods.

Devising team rules within the team, with clearly stated consequences for breaking them, proved an efficient method in the Lapland UAS team. It was borrowed by MIBO in the early stages of the project.

Team SWOT-analysis is another method, applied in Lapland UAS, as well as in MIBO and PetrSU. This technique helps students to distribute roles in the teams. It is important that by this time each student has filled in the Prior-to-Start questionnaire, which makes individual students reflect on their personal qualities and professional skills.

Coaches have had to maintain the balance between team independence and supervision. This balance proved crucial for the success of the teams and the net value of the project experience for the individual student.

The recipe for the right sort of coaching could be: Be there, be ready to come up with solicited advice, actualize the students' problems and questions (help them understand what they lack to overcome the obstacle they face).

Metaphorically, coaching is giving the fishing rod and showing how to fish, but not feeding your own

catch to the students. In my experience, the students seem to appreciate their own failures more than their successes, if they can't identify themselves fully with this success.

## COMPETITIVE ATMOSPHERE AS A CHALLENGE

To say that the project participants have always been enjoying a friendly and peaceful atmosphere would be a hackneyed phrase and a lie.

There was at first a very strong spirit of competition between the teams, and there were times when the atmosphere during the Open Innovation Workshop weeks was tense and some participants could be even hostile.

It took at least two sessions to communicate to the students that their task is creating value for the case company, rather than to just "beat the rival". And in creating value, cooperation could be a more productive strategy (Red ocean vs. Blue ocean approach). Anyhow, the idea of competition is hard to get rid of. The changes in the evaluation procedure (the case company taking decisions on the criterion of feasibility) and repudiation of distributing places could be steps on the way from the competition of teams to the competition of ideas. Though even to this time there seem to be participants for whom "the place" is not of importance, but the thought that their idea has been rejected by the case company is really depressing.

Though the competition spirit is still there, the atmosphere has become really comfortable over the

three recent sessions. I would define it as “respectful”, in all dimensions. The students and coaches learn to tolerate, to listen to and some learn “to talk to” rather than “talk at”.

Developing communication skills and emotional intelligence, this is what the project contributes to and that is how the general atmosphere improves.

One of the students at the evaluation meeting in Alta conveyed a message that everyone supported: he said that an important and valuable outcome of the project is not only getting professional experience but also making new friends.

## FROM SIMULATION TO REALITY

If the aim of the project were defined as exposing the students to a real-life business environment, it would be right to claim that this has been achieved.

The project participants learned to network, to use personal connections in searching for expert advice or helpful contacts, they learned to appreciate the opportunities that personal communication provides.

Thanks to the project, students could find out that “social capital” is not just a buzz-word, but a valuable asset with the potential to increase the value of a proposal you have devised locked in the closet (your think tank).

In addition to all the specific knowledge they got in the course of the project sessions, the students got valuable generally applicable take-home messages:

- Hard work alone does not get you ahead, understanding the actual goal does.

- There is never a “right” and “suitable” time to do what you are supposed to do.
- There are no universal solutions to individual problems.

The students were plunged into a situation of real-life chaos, unpredictability and conflict: of time management and workloads, of scheduled obligatory activities and unscheduled activities to be squeezed into the time left, of the wish to be protected (by the coach, the team members) and the wish to be respected, between the necessity to meet the requirements and at the same time keep the mind open and flexible.

Standard academic methods and techniques can trigger these conflicts too, but in a simulation regime. Projects like ours give students real-life first-hand experience with the same lessons to learn, as actual consultants and entrepreneurs do.

Keeping this standard is challenging, the coaches and coordinators should be totally dedicated to this activity and never let themselves think of the project activities as a simulation exercise. When students feel this is not a mere simulation, the value of the project reaches its highest mark.

“No peace for teachers” is the prerequisite of the project’s success.

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# Students' evaluation of the success of workshops

Minttu Merivirta & Nico Abong

As a part of the project's assessment, the students responded to a questionnaire during a joint seminar session at the end of each Business Innovation Workshop.

Until April 2014, written feedback was collected from three different workshops:

- Murmansk 2013
- Petrozavodsk 2013
- Tornio 2014

From the first workshop in Alta, the feedback was gathered orally and for this reason we won't evaluate it further in this article. Our goal is to present the feedback that has been given via written questionnaires.

In the questionnaires the students were posed questions that enabled us to evaluate, for example, the following theme categories:

- Arrangements of the workshop week
- Work on the project case
- Team cooperation and communication
- Overall impression and further development of the project.

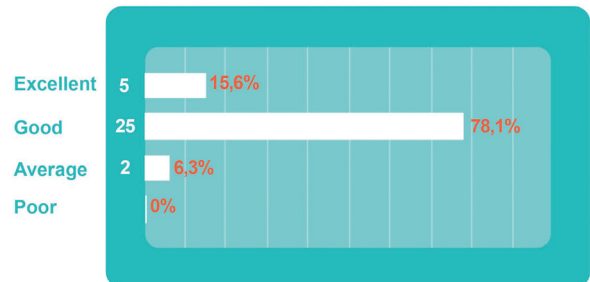
Each workshop was organized in different country, on a different campus and by a different partner, and for this reason the questionnaires used varied in every workshop. In the next chapters we'll present some of the issues that emerged from the feedback of the participants.

## FEEDBACK FROM THE MURMANSK WORKSHOP

Practice Future's Business Innovation Workshop was organized in Murmansk, Russia, in April 2013. Together 35 participants answered to the questionnaire.

Almost all of the students were satisfied with the workshop in general (see Figure 1). Twenty-five students were of the opinion that the workshop was good overall and five students pointed out that it was excellent. Only two students rated it as average and none of the students had an overall negative view of the workshop.

In general, the students gave positive reviews of the project process. A total of eighteen out of thirty-five students, or 52.9%, were of the opinion that the

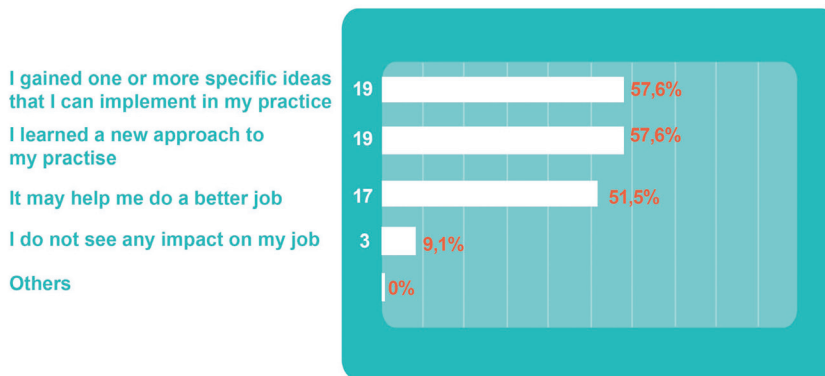


**FIGURE 1.** Overall rate of the workshop according to the participants

workshop met their specific need. Only six students, or 17.6%, indicated that the work did not meet their needs. The rest of the students (i.e. 11 students, or 32.4%) had an average view point.

As to the duration of the workshop, the students gave mostly positive and average reviews. In relation to the project tasks, a majority of the students were of the opinion that they were relevant to the case companies. A total of twenty-three students, or 69.7%, pointed out that the practical ideas and business models presented were applicable to the case company. Only four students had a contrary viewpoint and six students were on the fence.

The students also identified a number of benefits they gained through the workshop (see Figure 2). Nineteen students indicated that they gained new ideas and learned new approaches that they could implement in practice. Seventeen students also indicated that the project may help them do a better job. Only three students stated that they do not see any impact from the workshop to their jobs.



**FIGURE 2.** Benefits of the workshop for the participants

Additionally, twenty-two students believed they workshop updated their skills and twenty students believed they acquired new and/or advanced skills from the workshop. Twenty-one students pointed out that the workshop has provided them with better knowledge, on which to base future decisions. However, a total of ten students said that, while the presentations were appropriate, they are still to determine their usefulness to them.

## FEEDBACK FROM THE PETROZAVODSK WORKSHOP

The third Business Innovation Workshop took place in Petrozavodsk, Russia, in October 2013. Altogether 43 participants returned the questionnaire.

The impression of the students concerning the project process was in general very positive. Regarding the delivery of the project task well in advance, all the students had positive reviews. A total of 21 students, or 48.8%, rated this aspect as excellent. Furthermore, twenty students, or 46.5%, rated it as good and two students, or 4.7%, rated it as average. No students gave it a negative review.

The students' opinion on the time allocated for the project was also in general very positive. Fifteen students, or 34.9%, rated the time allocation as excellent and sixteen students, or 37.2%,

rated it as good. However, ten students, or 23.3%, thought the one week time period was just okay, while two students, or 4.7%, indicated that the time was not enough.

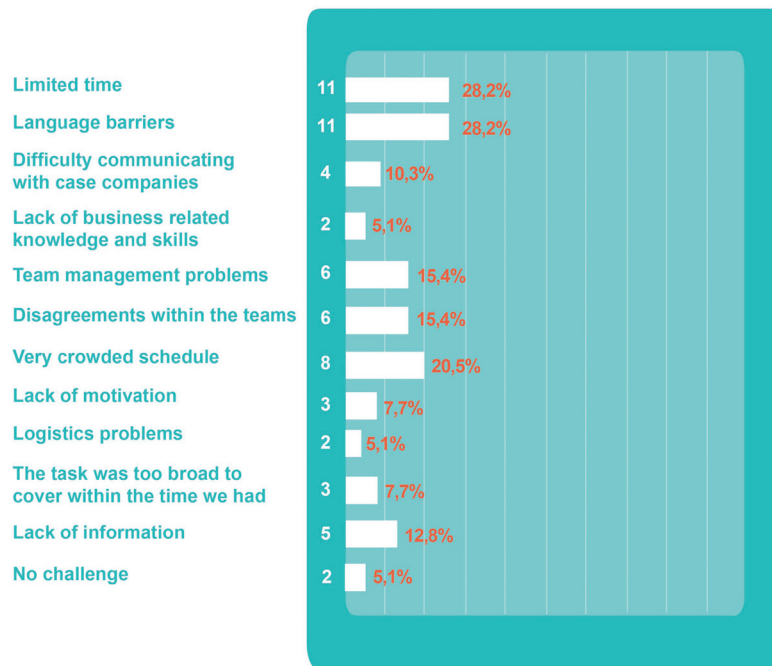
In relation to the process of communication with the case company, there were also positive reviews from the students in general. While only five students, or 11.6%, were of the opinion that communication was excellent, twenty-five, or 58.3%, stated that communication was good. Thirteen students, or 30.2%, scored the level of communication as average. None of the students was of the opinion

that communication with the case company was poor.

The review of cooperation and communication within the teams was in general mixed. A total of twelve students, 29.3%, were of the opinion that cooperation within the teams was excellent. Seven of the students, or 17.1%, indicated that the level of cooperation was good, while nine, or 22%, students said it was average. The negative review was also relatively high. Nine students, or 22%, noted that cooperation was poor and four students indicated that it was very poor.

The students in general had good reviews about the social aspects of the week-long session. A total of ten students, or 23.8%, noted that the social events were excellent. A further sixteen students, or 38.1%, pointed out that they were good, while eight students, or 19%, rated the social events as average. Despite the generally good reviews, six students were of the opinion that the social events were poor and two said they were very poor.

The students identified some challenges they faced during the course of the project (see Figure 3). The top three challenges identified were related to language barriers, the limited time frame for the project and the very crowded schedule during the workshop week. These challenges may be



**FIGURE 3.** Challenges that participants faced during the workshop in Petrozavodsk

attributed to the fact the students were from different countries and speak different languages. Effective communication in English, which was the working language for the project, was a challenge to some of the students. A lot of the students also complained that the Russian students presented in Russian and the translation into English was not good. It should also be noted that the session lasted for just a week and a lot of activities in addition to the completion of the task had to be carried out.

Other major challenges identified by the students were problems with team management and disagreements between the team members. Some students mentioned a lack of adequate information on the case companies, difficulties communicating with the case company, the very broad nature of the task and lack of motivation within the teams as some of the challenges they faced. It is worth noting here that two students were of the opinion that they faced no challenges during the project.

## FEEDBACK FROM THE TORNIO WORKSHOP

In March 2014, the Business Innovation Workshop was held in Tornio, Finland. Altogether 43 participants submitted answers to the questionnaire.

The impression of the students concerning the project process was in general very positive. With regards to getting the project task well in advance all the students had positive reviews. A total of 24 students, or 55.8%, rated this aspect as excellent, ten,

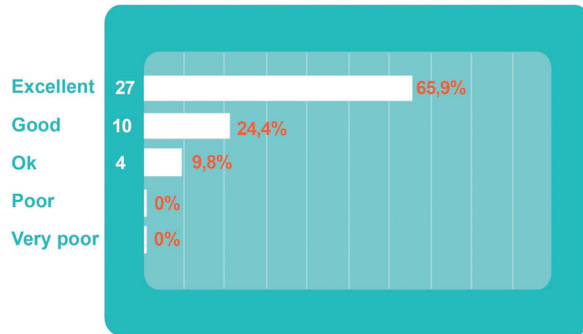
or 23.3%, rated it as good and nine, or 20.8%, rated it as average. No students gave it a negative review.

The students' opinion on the time allocated for the project was also in general very positive. Twenty-four students, or 55.6%, rated the time as excellent and eleven students, or 11.4%, rated it as good. However, five students, or 11.6%, thought the one week time period was just okay, while three students, or 7%, indicated that it was not enough.

In relation to the process of communication with the case company, there were also positive reviews from the students in general. Nineteen students, or 46.2%, were of the opinion that communication was excellent and thirteen, or 31%, stated that communication was good. Eight students, or 19%, considered the level of communication as average. Just two students, or 4.8%, thought communication with the case company was poor.

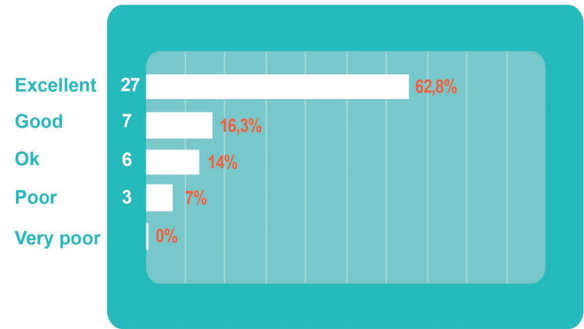
The students also had positive feedback about the lectures offered during the Tornio workshop in general. A total of fifteen, or 26.8%, of the students pointed out that the lecture on "Understanding attractiveness in the analysis of growth opportunities" was excellent and ten, or 36.6%, were of the opinion that it was good. A further nine, or 22%, stated that the lecture was average. Only six students had negative views on the lectures. Concerning Jetta Huttunen's lecture on "How to use media to promote business", fifteen students, or 36.7%, were of the impression that it was excellent, while seventeen students, or 40.5%, indicated it was good. Seven students, or 17.7%, viewed it as average, while only three students, or 7.3%, thought it was poor.

The students in general had very good reviews on the social aspects of the week long session (see Figure 4). A total of twenty-seven students, or 65.9%, noted that the social events were excellent. A further ten, or 24.4%, pointed out that they were good and four students, or 9.8%, rated the social events as average. None of the students expressed any negative opinion regarding the social side of the session.



**FIGURE 4.** Evaluation of the social events organized during the Tornio workshop

Opinions of cooperation and communication within the teams were also in general very positive (see Figure 5). A majority of the students, 62.8%, were of the opinion that cooperation within the teams was excellent. Seven of the students, or 16.3%, indicated that the level of cooperation was good, while six students said it was average. Only three students had a negative view point on this issue. In addition, 58.1 % of the students noted that there was enough time during the week long session to cooperate and only one student was of the opinion that a week was insufficient for effective team cooperation.



**FIGURE 5.** Participants' evaluation of the team cooperation arrangements

The students identified some challenges they faced during the course of the project. The top three challenges identified were related to difficulties communicating with the case company, limited time frame for the project and language barriers. These challenges may be attributed to the fact that most of the students were not from the same area, or even country, as the case company. In addition, the students were from different countries and spoke different languages. Effective communication in English, which was the language for the project, was a challenge to some of the students.

Other major challenges identified were a lack of adequate information on the case companies and the broadness of the task. Some students mentioned insufficient understanding of the task at the beginning of the project, disagreements within the teams and very tight schedule during week 12, as some of the challenges they faced. It is worth noting here that eight students were of the opinion that they faced no challenges during the project.

# Case companies' point of view

Teresa Chen & Minttu Merivirta

With an eye to the theme of the project, which is an open innovation network of local businesses and students, the case companies' task is to provide suitably challenging tasks for students to work on. The company representatives must be committed to meet students, either on-line or face-to-face, to enlighten them regarding the enterprises in question and the tasks provided.

The project manager facilitates on-line meetings two to three times per semester, during which students from partner institutions from three countries have the opportunity to interview the representatives of the case companies in order to gain insights into the respective enterprises and to clarify the tasks given. If the commissioning enterprise is located in the same city as the workshop host, the students have the opportunity to visit the enterprise to gather first-hand knowledge. The representatives have the final say when evaluating the students' solutions to the given tasks and ranking them.

The feedback from the case company representatives on the overall experience, as well as expectations and outcome, was considered vital for the development and improvement of the implementation. With feedback not only from the students but also from the case companies, it was possible to evaluate what had been the main challenges during the different stages of the project and how well we had succeeded.

## COMMITMENT BRINGS THE BEST RESULTS

Examination of the case companies' feedback reveals a dichotomy. The companies that had very low expectations in the beginning experienced the outcome as mainly successful. On the other hand, the companies that had higher expectations prior to the implementation often were a bit disappointed in the results.

Although some kind of relationship can be seen between the expectations and the outcome, another reason for this dichotomy could be the student involvement and activity. The case companies' feedback shows that some student teams put more time, effort and innovativeness into the work process than others. The motivation and the willingness to seek answers below the surface, not concentrating only on the obvious, proved to be an important thing for the case companies.

How good and feasible the ideas were that the case companies acquired, varied a lot. Some stated that "the results exceeded all their expectations and the students have taken the assignment very seriously and shown their creativity". In contrast, some companies said "the results were minimal with regard to the assignment and they were disappointed that the students took little initiative to dig deeper and go into more detail into their topic". These answers show that the students' commitment



to the project and the assignments is an important prerequisite for the success of the project.

One key factor in the improvement of future workshops will be the form of the assignments. Many case companies pointed out that they felt their assignments were not clear enough for the students to fully understand what goal was aimed at. The assignments must be very thorough and accurate, so that the students don't have to guess what it is that they are supposed to do. If the student teams don't really grasp the core of the assignment, this can lead to disappointment in the case companies when the presented ideas don't match the expectations they had of the student teams.

The international character of the project was mainly a positive factor for the case companies, but it also proved to be a challenge, mainly because of the language barriers and inadequate skills in English. Different cultures, backgrounds, educations and mind-sets of the participants offer a fruitful setting for idea exchange and utilizing every individual's personal strengths and capabilities. However, if the team's personalities collide, or different backgrounds cause misunderstandings, the results can suffer. The collaboration and the coaches' responsibility in building the team spirit are very important.

## TIME WELL SPENT?

The case companies felt that the time used for the project was suitable. Committing to be a part of this kind of project means automatically that the case companies' representatives have to shift concentration from their daily job to project

involvement and meeting the student teams' requirements. However, as one of the case companies points out, "efforts were outweighed by outcomes", as engaging in the project resulted in a deeper and better relationship to clients.

Concerning the time investment, the case companies also put forward that on-line communication wasn't always working as they wanted. On the other hand, this kind of personal contact was desired and hoped for. E-mail communication takes more time from both parties and can give rise to misunderstandings, so personal contact, face to face, or if it's not possible, for example via Skype, should be utilized more to enhance the collaboration and understanding between the student teams and the case companies.

Generally the project management got good feedback from the case companies. Problems during the on-line presentations were mentioned in nearly all feedback. In the future, these kinds of technical challenges could be better prepared for beforehand.

Being part of the project was overall a positive experience for the case companies and they would like to participate again later on, if possible. Many ideas presented by the student teams were taken into consideration; some of the ideas have even been implemented by the companies already.

The most active and innovative students have gotten opportunities to cooperate with the companies later on. It seems that the students who realized the importance of the Practice Future project in showcasing their own talents were the ones that gained most from the experience, as well as gave most to the case companies. Diligence and a mutual understanding of the goal proved to be the key to success.

# Students' perspectives and reception

Minttu Merivirta

By May 2014, more than 150 students from the cooperating universities had participated in the Practice Future workshops, many of them more than once. By the end of the project in October 2014, 189 students had participated at least once, and the total number of student participations was around 280. Workshops have been organized in Norway, Russia and Finland.

Practice Future offered students a unique opportunity to network with each other and with companies in the Barents Region. It also provided encouragement and support to think outside the box while offering insights for the companies behind the assignments.

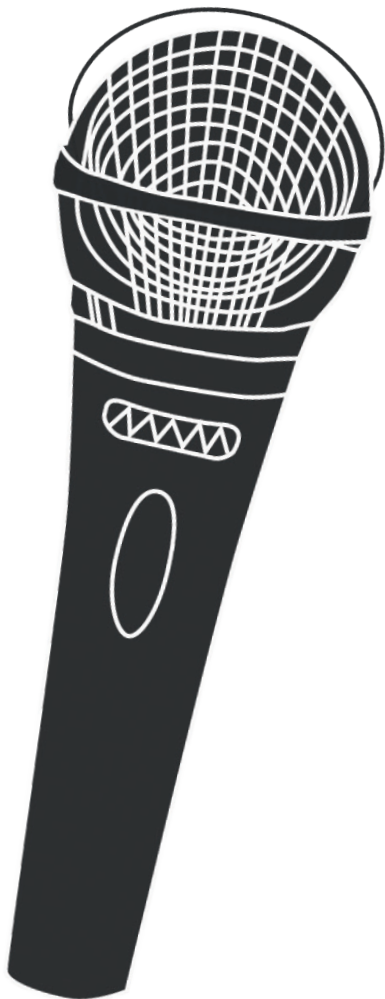
But what did the participants really think about the benefits of the project? They were asked to answer the following questions:

1. **Why did you decide to take part in the Practice Future project?**
2. **What kind of expectations did you have of the Practice Future project?**
3. **What kind of assignment/case did your team work on?**
4. **How did the assignments develop your professional skills and innovativeness?**
5. **Which were the biggest benefits you got personally and professionally from participating in Practice Future?**
6. **What is your best memory concerning the Practice Future process?**



## EKATERINA STORCH, 21, RUSSIA

**1.** First of all, participating in this project gives me a chance to solve real economic tasks using theoretical knowledge which I acquired in the University. Secondly, the project is the best way to practise English. Practice Future is my first international project.



**2.** I got new knowledge, found new friends from other countries.

**3.** My assignments were «Wooden Shipbuilding shipyard «Varyag», «Port of Tornio», «Kvalsund Competence and Knowledge Centre»

**4.** I and all members of my team have some qualities, such as responsibility, erudition, persistence, etc., which helped us to succeed.

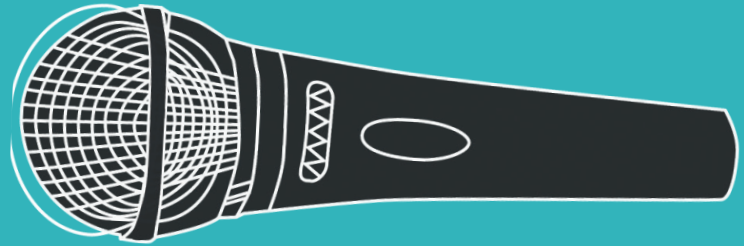
**5.** A lot of emotions, new interesting people... I believe participating in the Practice Future project will help me in my future career.

**6.** Now I can say that Practice Future is the best thing in my life! Tornio trip, excursions, lectures, presentations, team work and, of course, our wins are amazing. I will always remember every moment of this project.



## **DU JING, 22, CHINA**

- 1.** First, our school Lapland University of Applied Sciences provided this chance for me to take part in this Practice Future project. Secondly, this project enables me to share ideas with other participants from different countries; this valuable experience enriches my study life and helps me obtain problem solving skills.
- 2.** The first expectation was to compete with other teams and win the competition. But what I really expected from the project is to have more new friends. Besides, during the competition, it was also a learning process to learn how other teams were dealing with the cases and what their highlights are.
- 3.** In our team, two of us worked with the Tornio case and the other two team members worked on the Kvalsund case.
- 4.** The assignments enhanced our analytical skills in a big step, through analysing the background, current situation and possible future environment of the two cases, a strategic plan should be proposed. It enables me to combine theoretical knowledge which I learnt in previous studies with practices to strengthen personal skills.
- 5.** The biggest benefits I gained from the project are the lectures given by teachers. Through those lectures, essential knowledge was provided in order to enrich our knowledge, especially on social media aspects, it gave us an in-depth understanding of using social media. In addition, through the presentations made by all teams, I saw how each team presented their ideas and the great ways they came up with to attract the audiences.
- 6.** The best memory of this Practice Future process was the team acquaintance activity and also the presentations given by all the teams. There were many kinds of games and activities organized for us, it created opportunities for us to get more familiar with other team members. Furthermore, each team gave me different deep impressions of their interesting presentations, especially the way they were presenting, that was very attractive and well worth learning.



**DIANA VOLK, 22, RUSSIA**

- 1.** I decided to take part in the Practice Future project for several reasons. The first reason is a great chance to put my economic skills into practice. The second reason is a possibility to communicate with foreign students. The project is a good possibility to try to solve difficult tasks in the team, and this project will develop my skills in cooperating with other teams to achieve general goals.
- 2.** I wished to learn to collect and analyse the raw data; to create a theoretical and econometric model; to analyse and meaningfully interpret the results better. More than that I would like to develop economic, social skills solving difficult tasks
- 3.** My team worked on the following cases:
  - case «Varyag»
  - case «Kirkenes port»
  - case «Kvalsund»
  - case «Port of Tornio»
- 4.** We were working together, communicating with students from other countries, so we were developing social skills. When we were solving cases we were developing our professional skills.
- 5.** I learnt more about team work, especially in the field of economics and I can say that goal has always been a strong motivation for me. I found myself in the position where I was able to combine the best of both worlds, on one hand checking my opportunities and on the other hand the ability to look at specific problems from different angles.
- 6.** Our visit to Outokumpu was unforgettable. It is a great opportunity to understand the production process on such a huge plant. Of course it helped a lot to develop our idea. Team work and team entertainments were also great.



## **DUONG NU NGUYET MINH, 21, VIETNAM**

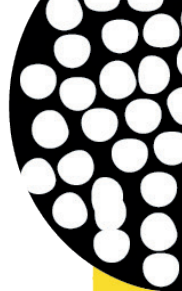
- 1.** The Practice Future project firstly is considered to be a playground for international students from the 3 Nordic countries, which are Finland, Russia and Norway, to practice business solutions in reality. This project is a part of my study programme at Lapland UAS, Finland and I found the interest of interacting, collaborating as well as competing with other potential businessmen.
- 2.** I expected that my team to achieve the first place in the competition of this Project. In addition, I expect to make friends around with other students from Russia and Norway. Learning from other fellows was my expectation from this Project.
- 3.** We have been working with the case of Tornio port, Finland and Kvalsund Knowledge and Competencies Center (KCKC), Norway. Particularly, we were required to develop a marketing plan to promote the port of Tornio and to create a business model for KCKC in order to improve the life of local inhabitants.
- 4.** During the time of implementing these assignments, I learnt to use social media as an innovative way to market the port of Tornio. Moreover, I developed skills of researching relevant information and creation in order to create the most realistic KCKC. I also learnt professional presentation skills from other teams.
- 5.** Personally, I advanced myself from this project in terms of professional skills as mentioned earlier and I also enhanced my friendship network internationally. I gained the experiences in working and competing under pressure in order to perform effectively and efficiently. Professionally, joining in this project will be a plus point which I could add to my CV as a team working experience.
- 6.** The best memory was to enjoy the Kemi and Rovaniemi trip together. Furthermore, the pressure to create the best solutions for the assignment on the last day strengthened and raised my team spirit, which I remember the most.



**IDA-MARIA PAJARI, 21, FINLAND**

- 1.** I participated earlier during spring 2013 in Murmansk, Russia. This spring Strategy Play was part of our study curriculum and organized in Tornio, Finland.
- 2.** Because of my earlier participation, I already knew the structure of the project. I was looking forward to meet new, interesting people and to work with interesting and challenging commissions. This time I worked within an international team, so we didn't meet each other before week 12 face-to-face. This way of interactive and distance working was valuable experience for me.
- 3.** Development project for Røyttä port (Outokumpu) in Tornio, Finland and other case was from Kvalsund municipality in Norway.
- 4.** Real-life based cases gave valuable experience how to work with different types of cases from different countries and having different perspectives as well.
- 5.** Interactive working methods brought more challenges to overcome, because the team members weren't able to meet face-to-face before week 12. However this way of working is the future and therefore gaining experience already at this point was very valuable.
- 6.** Completing the project successfully with a good result after working hard.









**PRACTICE  
THE FUTURE**

# Cross-border cooperation in the project – the outcome for the participants

Peter Fischer

## EDUCATION

An obvious success of Practice Future is the equal cooperation of partners in testing and further developing the features of the learning environment. All partner proposals are discussed and, if applicable, implemented. Suggestions for improvement were often rooted in cultural and national characteristics of the partners. Different approaches, especially to team work, leadership and competition, were discussed and partly assimilated during the project process. Although partner universities remain free to focus on their preferred work tools and methods, the main driver for all partners to improve the platform has been the wish to come closer to real-life demands. Below follow some examples of successively improved features and methods:

## FEASIBILITY VERSUS INNOVATION

Though apparently obvious, the necessity to emphasise the feasibility of business ideas rather than their innovativeness became clear during the first three project stages. In the beginning, suggested ideas more often failed to match case company resources for implementation.

From team competition for “best” ideas as main motivator to cooperation and value creation

Another major example is the effort to develop inter-team cooperation instead of focusing on pure competition. Since different teams possess different resources and competences (due to their location or subject of study), students were encouraged to look at competitors also as potential resources of value-added benefits for the case company, e.g. by combining ideas.

After having completed the first three project stages, it was decided to establish one particular team of students from all five universities, a so-called international, or rather international on-line team due to the fact that the students were located in different places and had to communicate on-line until they finally met for the Innovation workshop. After two trials, partners finally decided no longer to build university teams, but to mix up all students, in order to create an environment similar to what is more and more the norm in globally acting companies.

## PRACTICING MORE THAN ONE TIME

Some students volunteered to participate a second time as coach assistants for rookies, deepening their experience. In future use of the platform, one might recommend that students have to participate at least twice. Repeated participation seems a core element in becoming aware of innovative and entrepreneurial behaviour.

## BEST PRACTICE OF ON-LINE COMMUNICATION

It turned out that students are able to choose their own internet communication platform. Students largely ignored on-line tools provided by the project in favour of the simplest available solutions, both for real-time audio (Skype) and for cloud-based written communication.

Many students have documented in their work journals and evaluation papers that meeting and overcoming individual and teamwork challenges in real-life problem solving goes far beyond traditional classroom-framed project work. In particular, the students emphasise the importance of critical thinking, familiarisation with the culture of the participating countries, the emergence of new professional and personal contacts, and the opportunity to use the results of case studies in other courses of their degree programmes.

The project will help participants to build their individual cross-border network and might encourage young people especially to stay in the

region, or think of individual mobility within the region. A growing number of student self-assessments show enhanced communicative and creative skills and awareness of entrepreneurial behaviour.

## CASE COMPANIES

The outcome for small businesses is more complicated to measure. In general, the degree of implementation of innovative cross-border business plans for case companies has remained low. Even though, as mentioned above, feasibility has become the focus of the case studies, student created models only take the case company's available resources into account to a limited degree. One of the conclusions for the future is to use less complex assignments and to focus on micro companies as committed partners and on municipalities with the capacity to follow-up on the case study.

## INSTITUTIONS

Practice Future has contributed to a broader integration of entrepreneurship education into partner university degree programmes. In conformity with different national education systems, case studies have become part of the curricula as internships, elective or mandatory courses, and through cross-faculty cooperation at already some of the universities. Another result of Practice Future are conclusions relating to language issues in the project. According to partners in Murmansk, the English language is an obstacle to

recruitment of students otherwise highly qualified for the project. Now, MSTU is considering additional language courses. The partner institutions, at least the departments involved, show enhanced commitment to business-related practice. Beyond this, the project contributes to building stronger relationships between higher education and relevant local businesses, especially in Norway and Finland. Furthermore, participating universities strongly support the project's sustainability by integrating Practice Future into their curricula, as internships, elective, or mandatory courses.

## REGIONAL

The cooperation with municipalities and regional business organisations has been especially fruitful. Tornio in Finland has twice been a case company, once in cooperation with stainless steel manufacturer Outokumpu. Kvalsund municipality in Norway, a small community close to Alta, participated also twice in order to get input for tourism and identity development. Case companies emphasise how important it is to get personal contacts with universities and local students by participating in such projects. Other cooperation networks are strengthened, for instance, between the partners in Murmansk and the Russian-Norwegian Chamber of Commerce. The Karelian partner team participated successfully with its Practice Future based work in an all-Russian business model competition.



# Project results encourage to plan future cooperation

**Svetlana Kuskova**

The international Business Innovation Workshop week in Murmansk in October 2014 served also as the finalizing event of the Practice Future project, so in addition to the workshop activities it was also important to focus on the project's results and perspectives. It was expected that the students will gain new experience and the coaches and other project team members will summarize the results of their work and develop a strategy and a schedule for the project's continuation in spring 2015.

On Wednesday, October 22, 2014, a staff meeting was held at which the summary of the main stages of the project and the evaluation of the achieved results were made. It was followed by the Steering group meeting on Thursday, October 23, 2014 that also focused on the perspective development.

It was jointly agreed at these meetings that the project objectives have been fulfilled and the Grant Contract indicators have been reached. It is important that the project results have been widely disseminated through such activities as a) project presentations on all partners' websites; b) participation in international conferences with a work paper discussion (Turku conference in April 2014), a poster presentation and an ignite speech (EAIE conference in Prague in September 2014); c) media reports in the countries of participating institutions etc.

Julia Korshunova from the Murmansk office of

the Kolarctic programme joined most activities of international Business Innovation Workshop week 6 as a jury member, a workshop participant and a Kolarctic representative and she highly esteemed the practical outcomes of the project, especially the fact that students deal with real-life cases from internationally located companies and get experience in innovative thinking and business planning. She also appreciated the team spirit and the friendly atmosphere of the project.

One of the key issues discussed during the project week was an application for extension of the implementation period and additional activities that the project participants could take part in. It was decided to apply to JMA with the request for the continuation of "Practice Future..." until July 31, 2015 with a benchmarking meeting with the Norwegian-Russian Chamber of Commerce (NRCC) in February in Murmansk or March in Arkhangelsk and a joint course on Collaborative International Innovation (February-May 2015) followed by the new workshop week in Tornio in May 2015.

The above-mentioned discussions made it clear that even though it was the final International Business Innovation Workshop of the project, it also proved that the staff was really collaborative and eager to cooperate within the newly planned set of activities.

# Networks for the future – benefits of the project

Teresa Chen

The Practice Future project, with the focus on the Kolarctic region, aimed at bringing together students from higher education institutions (HEIs) and local enterprises along with the municipalities in developing beneficial business models to access cross-border markets. The students were expected to put classroom theories to practice and, the enterprises were expected to dedicate time along with their expertise in order to develop fresh innovative ideas and alternative ways of learning.

Over the thirty-month period regional enterprises and municipalities were contacted to acquire commissioners, students were recruited from the local HEIs as project participants and workshops

were held. Experiences and students' feedback show that the process of innovation input succeeded in developing the innovation competences of students.

Due to the international nature of the project, the students learned to work and cope in a multicultural environment, and solving problems in the way of learning by doing. Individual growth in students was also evidenced. For example, Aleksandra Domina, a student of Business Information Technology at Lapland UAS, first joined the project in the spring of 2013 as a quiet and reserved participant. Her growth was very gratifying to witness, since in the spring of 2014 she led her own team with good results. Not that Aleksandra



**When you deal with real cases, you solve real problems.**

- Veronica Piontkovskaya, MSTU

overcame her shyness totally, but she had the confidence and faith in herself to be a team leader.

The regional case companies, be they enterprises or municipalities, had opportunities to engage with the young and fresh talents of the local HEIs. Through the collaborative learning process the case companies' representatives obtained fresh ideas for their organisations. Feedback gathered evidence that the ideas presented by student-teams have potential for practical purposes. It could be stated further that the case companies' representatives acquired better insights in cross-border perspectives with participating students originating from over fifteen countries and the five HEI partners located in Finland, Norway and Russia.

The project made it possible to develop the innovation skills of students in a way that is real-life and practical, as, according to the project manager Peter Fischer, two new courses were introduced at the Alta campus in Norway which were unique in nature. Participating students received credits and at Lapland UAS the students were able to use those credits to compensate for entrepreneurship-related courses in their curricula.

A beneficial network was created among the interests groups, regional enterprises, municipalities, HEIs and participating students. Such networking has significant importance in the sparsely populated High North region and the project made it possible for various interest groups to be involved. The project created a mobility platform, which was especially beneficial to the youth among the population. The students involved could find

potential practical training placements and eventually possible work places.

Overall, the project created a multidisciplinary channel to develop an alternative way of acquiring study credits through an innovative business network. The potential for such networking could be developing joint virtual courses and a future project in targeting the regional young workforce.



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Practice Future is a cross-border innovation project in the Barents Region connecting higher education and business. The project targets undergraduates from universities in three different countries; Finland, Norway and Russia. It's a multi-layer experiment in distance learning and cross-cultural communication, involving public institutions like municipalities and local business associations.

The project made it possible to develop the innovation skills of students in a way that is real-life and practical. A beneficial network was created among the interest groups: regional enterprises, municipalities, higher education institutions and participating students. Such networking has significant importance in the sparsely populated High North region and the project made it possible for various interest groups to be involved.

This publication introduces to the reader an overall view of the Practice Future project implementation. Emphasis is laid on the practical execution of the project's core activity, Business Innovation Workshops, and of course on the students' feedback and experiences.

