LEAD4SKILLS: Skilled Business Leaders for Skilled Europe

Guidelines for Higher Education Institutions

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Introduction

Based on the results of the Intellectual Output 1 (Cross-country report on management development needs) and the discussions held during the training and learning events and partner meetings, the project partners have prepared a number of recommendations for higher education institutions. They concern curriculum development, teaching and learning materials, as well as teaching and learning methodologies and tools. We hope that these Guidelines will find application in universities and business schools that strive to be more relevant to the needs of their students, business sector and society at large. As an addendum, a set of reports from all four Learning, Teaching and Training events (LLTs) held during the preparation of the intellectual outputs are attached as well. The main purpose of LTT events was to test the developed outputs, educate academic staff about management and leadership skills mismatch and shortage in EU, help them improve curricula, teaching materials, tools and techniques, as well as to exchange experience in order to improve developed outputs and teaching and learning practices at their own institutions. The readers my use the reports as reference to improve their everyday educational activities, or to organize similar events in their own environment.

In the world of fractured certainties and battered trust, some things matter more than others (Hamel, 2012). In business, there are many new things that matter now, including virtual reality, big data analytics, social media, virtual collaboration, distant work, work-life balance, risk management, emerging markets, and sustainability issues. As a society, we are shifting from a business environment focused on stability, problem solving, control and planning, to a new business environment where progress happens swiftly through real-time decision making based on big data analysis and agility. This new business world requires ever higher levels of management flexibility and confidence (Omazić et al., 2018). This is the world of VUCA.

VUCA is an acronym that stands for the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous context where managers and leaders have to make decisions (Johansen, 2012). This terminology is resonating with an increasing number of demographic, cultural, political, economic, social, environmental and technological factors that are shaping our present and future. Globalization, international business opportunities and cross-border mobility of human resources assume that business students will have developed the necessary skills for managing in a VUCA world, taking into consideration cultural differences and different business environments of individual learners.

Management and leadership education must be in position to help develop competencies to equip one with the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully handle various business-related issues in a VUCA world. Among other trends, rapid ICT technology development has had a profound impact on skills and knowledge that employers want from business (Mitchell, Skinner, & White, 2010; Truong & Laura, 2015). Teaching methods, tools, and techniques should better correspond to management and leadership development needs when facing the challenges of our changing world.

Lead4Skills research, among other things, pointed out the need to adjust teaching methods, tools and techniques to changing learning habits of different generations and the need to establish integrative and balanced teaching model of both hard and soft skills. Hard skills combined with knowledge define competencies one needs to perform a job, and one can gain them through formal education and training programs. These are typically measurable skills that can be easily defined and evaluated. On the other hand, soft skills define the way one relates to and interacts with other people. These are hard to measure but also to define (Windels, Mallia & Broyles, 2013). Managers interviewed in the course of Lead4Skills research identify them as essential, especially ones connected to communication, team building, sales, negotiations and conflict management. The concept of soft skills is intended to emphasize an individual's personal qualities, attributes, and communication skills, which enable that person to inform and shape productively the rudimentary ideas of others into transparent and pragmatic business scenarios (Perreault, 2004). Employers and recruiters consider soft skill traits to be every bit as important as hard skills, if not more important for career success in business (Sutton, 2002; Wardrope 2002; Pittenger, Miller, & Mott 2004; Nealy 2005). Due to that, much research has been done on the importance of soft skills in the workplace (Maes, Weldy, & Icenogel, 1997; Nealy, 2005; Smith, 2007; Klaus, 2010; Mitchell, Skinner, & White, 2010). Research shows that the most problematic type of training transfer relates to soft skills training (Botke et al., 2017).

At the same time, rapid technological and social changes ask students to understand critical assessment of existing business and management practices, be ready to anticipate future changes, and be capable of contributing new ideas for organizations. This is an especially tall order for students with limited or no professional experience. Sector-specific MBA programs enable context-related practical learning, but those programs are few and far between. Students realize they need more to be prepared. A cross-sectoral and international composition of student groups supports more open knowledge sharing and "out of the box" thinking.

There is a diversity of human resource and management development practices. These variations result from domestic versus foreign ownership, industry-specific technological trends, and changing business models. Additional variations are also seen in whether employees are being trained for routine production processes or developed for knowledge-based talents in innovation and internationalization.

Employers would like to have a voice and an active role in identifying what skills and knowledge are needed by their workforces. In addition, they believe it is in a university's best interest to seek out and develop partnerships with companies. This is good for both the companies and the educational institutions as it demonstrates, enhances, and reinforces cooperation, synergy for innovation and the relevance of the formal MBA education. As a tool for knowledge and idea sharing based on diversified business and human resources development, the MBA program can prepare students for agile organizational structures, new management ideas, entrepreneurial endeavors and society related initiatives.

Instead of traditional discipline-oriented structures (marketing, finance, logistics, HR etc.), universities should also put more emphasis on topics that are connecting different perspectives (e.g. sustainability, ethical issues, and social consequences of technological changes). Students should work in mixed groups on complex real-life issues, or at least on case studies that develop their strategic and systemic thinking, and their ability to handle complex and uncertain situations.

As future organizational leaders, management students need to learn how to handle emotionally charged organizational issues, such as resistance toward change. High levels of uncertainty and dynamic changes in the environment require a higher level of self-awareness and leadership from future managers. We also need to teach them how creative and inclusive problem-solving can help introduce innovative business solutions. Our research confirms that the role of professional skills is relatively decreasing and personal competencies, attitudes and skills are gaining more importance. Self-awareness, understanding their own and their peer's motivations and behavior, being more sensitive to ethical dilemmas of the business seem to be the critical challenges for future leaders. Accordingly, competencies of management development should include:

- cognitive flexibility
- willingness to change
- innovative and creative thinking
- complex problem solving

- decision making in a VUCA business environment
- negotiation and conflict handling
- team-building
- leading people in an agile work environment
- coaching, motivating and developing others.

Guidelines for Curriculum Development

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Based on our research work, it is clear that management education institutions should define themselves as facilitators and mentors of co-creating knowledge and skills with their students and corporate and social enterprise partners. Current structures and policies implicitly reinforce the status quo assumption that their role is to create knowledge and pass it on, instead of developing competencies and forming attitudes.

The Flipped Classroom

We would like to stress the importance of changes in terms of time arrangements and teaching methods, because traditional studies are cutting into pieces both teachers' and students' time. Higher education institutions should more actively consider the use of new technologies that can save time and energy for both academic staff (for research and teaching) and students (for collaborative learning and gaining practical experience). Concepts of micro learning, virtual learning environments (the use of artificial intelligence and gamification) and flipped classrooms seem to be useful concepts.

Let us use the example of the flipped classroom for explaining our vision: the basic idea of the "flipped" classroom is that students review and digest core content (knowledge) outside of the classroom. Class time (workshop or webinar time) can then be used for deeper discussion, role plays and other forms of collaborative learning. It can also contribute to fostering learning skills if educators pay attention to eliciting motivation for learning through playful conditions, using interesting settings and gamified context, which almost automatically provide flow experiences. In the flipped classroom, it is also important to "flip" authority relations: students should prepare with presentations and debates about actual problems and dilemmas, make their own research and initiate discussions in their peer groups. It is of course very important for professors to channel and moderate these discussions and give their opinion or theoretical background when necessary.

Cooperation with Practitioners and Companies

As business schools need to adapt to the ever-changing market needs, similarly the curriculum, courses, materials and examples should be adjusted to the ongoing changes. In order to remain interesting and valuable for the students, curriculum should be based on the actual market needs. Therefore, our main recommendation for how to develop courses is to first of all increase the cooperation with the companies.

As business schools need to adapt their programs and courses to the changing market needs, the major source of information on how to structure and prepare the programs should be the potential employers. For both, undergraduate and graduate students, the courses, teaching methods and materials should be relevant from the market perspective, thus resulting in development of appropriate skills that are sought for on the market. Therefore, courses and programs should be built in a flexible way that would enable adaptation to the changing needs.

Cooperation with the business can be conducted on various levels, depending on the degree preferred by institutions and companies. Cooperation forms can range from simple guest lectures of practitioners up to sponsorships and true partnerships in joint course development. For example, one of the leading universities in Poland, SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, has developed a graduate course "user experience design" in partnership with Axure, a software company for designers. As a result, students gain practical skills on tools provided by Axure, while the company increased its chances, that whenever students become professionals they will more likely use their tools in the future. Similarly, brand24, a company that offers tools for monitoring of the Internet, offered Kozminski University students an extended to three-month trial version of their tool. As a result, students have learned how to use the tool (which is valued by the employers), and in the future the company will have a competitive advantage over other tools.

As not every course can be interesting for companies for sponsorship or partnership, still HEIs could more actively consult with employers what are the skills that they need and value in their future employees. Especially in practical courses such as marketing, the companies may suggest what are skills and tools are currently most appreciated. Thus, the curricula should be a reflection of the current market needs.

On the other hand, companies may often have problems and challenges, while students may be the source of unconventional and creative ideas. From our experience, companies are willing to engage in such cooperation, while students are happy to work on actual challenges and problems, not just hypothetical cases.

As an example, one of the courses run at Kozminski University is based on the actual problem of the company. The marketing research course, which is a highly practical class, is constructed in a way that after each lecture students are one step closer to completing a comprehensive market research. At the beginning of the course, a company with an actual business challenge is presented, while student projects are to provide the company with valuable information to support their decision making process. Thus, the research that students perform is to serve an actual company to cope with an actual problem. As a result, students are more engaged as they feel responsible for delivering a valuable report that will be applied in practice.

In order to prepare a curriculum that serves market needs, it has to be updated each semester, thus its construction should be flexible. For undergraduate students, the main source of information on how to build a course should be potential employers and market needs. While in case of more experienced, graduate students, who are often professionals in their fields, it is worthwhile to consult the curriculum and adapt it with accordance to their specific development needs. Thus, we would suggest to engage with companies on various levels, depending on the course specifics and students' needs.

It is also worthwhile to observe leading business schools in the world that often publish their curricula online. Those can serve as an inspiration for how to develop new courses or reorganize the old ones.

The Case Study Method

Case study as a teaching method has developed as a major trend among scholars, whereas, it should be noted a case should be adjusted to the target audience not only in terms of their experience and knowledge, but also relevance. Due to easily accessible cases from all over the world, lecturers are less likely to develop their own cases. Although such approach has its advantages (presenting different perspectives and more general problems), it should be emphasized that, especially for graduate students, a more specific perspective (concerning the specific market, region) is often more valued. Moreover, often the same cases are repeated in various programs across one school.

Thus, we would encourage not to base the entire program on the cases readily available, but also to develop one's own case studies, preferably with the support of companies. As a result, self-developed cases will be recent and will concern relevant issues on the specific markets, which will be more valuable for the students.

Companies surveyed during our research suggested that personalized courses are highly valued by the companies. Whereas at HEIs it is almost impossible to serve individual needs of each student during the class, we would recommend to support courses with open, freely available educational programs. Often, companies that offer specific tools or software grant free certificates (for example Hootsuite, Google AdWords, Academy of Marketing Automation). Thus, instead of developing personalized programs, lecturers may recommend online certificates adjusted to the specific development needs of each participant. As a result, students gain additional skills, which are specific to their interests and careers. In addition, employers value practical skills that can be proven by the obtained certification.

We would also recommend to base the content of the classes, especially in highly practical courses, not only on the books but also to support oneself with the relevant articles and online sources. Although the theories may not change that fast, the market examples and the problems are changing quite dynamically. Students are more likely to engage with the example they are familiar with (even from the news), than the one that happened years ago. Nonetheless, relevant, academic literature should still serve as a base for students, but additional materials in the form of recent articles and case studies based on the companies they know would be more interesting for students.

Guidelines for Developing Teaching and Learning Materials

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Developing teaching and learning materials as part of responding to current challenges of management development should be tailor-made to the goals and intended learning outcomes of the curriculum, taking into account the specifics of content knowledge and the level of the education program (bachelor, master or executive level).

Taking into account our research results which show that approximately 70 percent of companies have or plan to establish their own learning centers in order to ensure relevant learning for their company's needs. "There is a need for a new set of institutions and programs that are jointly owned and managed by corporations or industry" (McKinsey, 2017).

Glocalization

In the current age of globalization there are strong arguments for using standardized, English language materials of leading business schools or internationally acknowledged repositories of knowledge. Harvard Business School or the European Case Clearing House (ECCH) offer a wide selection of research based, high quality materials for teaching and learning (textbooks, case studies, role-plays, videos, presentations, research based articles etc.) also available online. However, there are also good reasons to use these sources – also taking into account the financial resources of both the individual learners and the institutions, as these materials are usually copyrighted – in combination with locally developed materials – reflecting the local context. There might be cultural differences, language difficulties, regulatory specialties or differences in technological development, business systems and practices, as well as market maturity, that require local adaptations or development of completely new materials for these local contexts.

Teachers can develop materials that incorporate elements of the learners' first language and culture. In addition, teacher-prepared materials provide the opportunity to select materials and activities at the right level for particular learners, to ensure appropriate challenge levels to maximize success. In designing their own materials teachers can also make decisions about the most appropriate organizing principle or focus for the materials and activities, that can be changed over the course of the program if necessary.

Student-Centered Design

Let us consider some key factors that teachers need to take into account when embarking on the design of teaching materials for their learners.

The first and most important factor to be considered is the learner. If the point of teacher-created materials is relevance, interest, motivation and meeting specific needs, then clearly teachers must ensure that they know their learners well. Any consideration of materials design must begin with a needs analysis: what are the specific learning outcomes that the learners have to incorporate into their behavior, and what knowledge, skills and attitudes are critical elements of their development? These variables will significantly impact decisions about teaching materials. Many teachers are bound by a mandated curriculum defining the content, skills and values to be taught. Whether imposed at school or state level, a curriculum outlines the goals and objectives for the learners and the course of study. However, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that the goals and objectives of the overarching curriculum are kept close at hand when designing materials. We recommend for the teacher to ask students to fill in "Student's information sheet" (see appendix 1.) for the identification and analysis of students' needs during or before first encounters with students. For the self-reflection of learning students can be asked to use "journal of learning" (see appendix 2.).

Teaching materials should link to each other to develop a progression of skills, understandings and application. One potential pitfall for teacher-designed materials is that the result can be poorly connected activities. Clearly stated objectives at the outset of the design process will help ensure that the resulting materials have coherence, and that they clearly progress specific learning goals while also giving opportunities for repetition and reinforcement of earlier learning. Learning materials should first define basic concepts, then introduce theories and models, form attitudes and support the gradual development of increasingly complex skills.

Introduction of new concepts should focus on understanding and application, then use the models for analysis, followed by critical evaluation of theories and innovation (i.e. building students' own models).

Preferably, students should be involved in the development of their own learning materials. For example, any business student should understand the complexity of the business environment where she lives and where her company operates. The task of *scanning of global business environment* develops the skills to collect information about main events in the world, which are important for business and it can be adapted to different target groups of learners:

- For all target groups of learners:
  - A group of the students is observing main global events for two weeks, then make a presentation and analysis for the class. A review is done by analyzing the main global news portal such as CNN, BBC and etc. (the same task for all target groups of learners).
  - Students provide a written review report with the documents, which prove reliability of the report.
  - A review has to be constructive, correct and interestingly presented. It should stimulate discussion in the class.
- Master degree students and executives:
  - Such review is prepared during the whole semester.
  - At the end of the semester students provide the report about trends in business environment changes.
- Executive learners:
  - Business environment scanning is done according to the profile of their company and products/services.
- A correct choice of events, quality of review and its presentation is evaluated.

Materials should stimulate interaction and provide situations that demand the same; situations where learners need to interact with each other regularly in a manner that reflects the type of interactions they will engage in outside of the classroom. Optimal learning is based on cooperative learning principles (mutual dependence, individual responsibility, equal participation and parallel interactions) in order to enhance learning from each other, interactions, reflection on own experiences…

Materials should help encourage Self-reflection and reflection on group dynamics (also understanding some basic principles of systems-psychodynamics: what are the "parallel processes" in the group of learners that reflect the business environment and context, with which the learners are in contact individually and as part of the group (for example during a project assignment).

- Facilitation and coaching, mediation, managing conflicts, stress management and negotiation are the skills which learners should develop during education exercises.
- Teaching materials should encourage learners to develop learning skills and strategies. It is impossible for teachers to teach their learners all they need to know in the short time that they are in the classroom. In addition to teaching valuable new skills, it is essential that our teaching materials also teach their target learners how to learn, and that they help them to take advantage of opportunities outside the classroom. Also, students might be asked to prepare "self – development plan", where they identify their competences which should be developed for their success in the job market, as well as time frame and method (e.g. reading specific books, attending specific courses, entering specific education programs or developing through hobbies etc.).

Emergence of Gig Economy

The growth of gig economy provides huge opportunities for making learning processes flexible and adaptable for students. MOOCs, blended learning and online learning modules are excellent for middle-level employees who need to improve their skills.

- Digital tools provide opportunities for a group of lecturers from different countries and different institutions to work remotely on developing the X-culture instrument. X-Culture international group projects introduce students to different cultural norms.
- The main idea of the project is to provide students in International Business / International Management courses at universities around the world with an opportunity to experience first-hand challenges and learn the best practices of cross-cultural international collaboration. Working in international teams of 6-7 students for about eight weeks, students develop a business proposal for an international company and write a report that details economic feasibility of the idea and provides guidelines for its implementation. The report sections closely follow topics covered in a typical International Business textbook.
- The research shows that X-Culture improves cultural intelligence, international and virtual collaboration competencies, problem solving skills, and interest in cross-cultural interactions. All students receive X-Culture Global Collaboration Experience Certificates and the members of the best teams receive Best Team awards ($1,000 per

team, contingent upon funding availability). The data collected by X-Culture are used to study global virtual teams, international collaboration, experiential learning, and related issues. Instructors have the opportunity to get involved as research collaborators and co-authors of the resulting scholarly publications.

Taking Limitations into Account

Materials have to be customized to the realities of the teaching contexts. The resources and facilities available to the teacher-designer are also mentioned above as an element of context. Clearly teachers must be realistic about what they can achieve in terms of materials design and production within the limitations of available resources and facilities. Access to resources such as computers (with or without Internet access, with-, or without access to various pay-sites, online databases etc.), a digital camera and video player, photocopier, interactive whiteboard, etc.) will impact on decisions in teaching materials design.

Personal confidence and competence are factors that will determine an individual teacher's willingness to embark on the development of materials. This will be influenced by the teacher's level of teaching experience and his or her perceived creativity or artistic skills and overall understanding of the principles of materials design and production. In reality, most teachers undertake materials design to modify, adapt or supplement a course book, rather than starting from scratch, and this is probably the most realistic option for most teachers.

Some Practical Guidelines

A less exciting, but nevertheless, important factor to consider in designing materials is copyright compliance. Teachers need to be aware of the restrictions that copyright laws place on the copying of authentic materials, published materials and materials downloaded from the Internet for use in the classroom. This is particularly important when creating course materials that will be used by a large number of classes over time.

For teachers who wish to prepare their own materials time is also an important factor. It is thus, important to consider ways to make this aspect manageable. Teachers can lighten the load by sharing materials with other teachers, working in a team to take turns to design and produce materials, and organizing central storage so materials are available to everyone. Learning management systems (like Canvass) usually offer such opportunities for their users.

At last, but not least, it is a very critical principle to always ask for feedback and strive for continuous innovation and development. As needs of learners constantly change, so must the materials. The materials that once seemed to be perfect in the eyes of its developers, can be completely outdated and inappropriate over time through the perspectives of new generations of learners.

Guidelines for Teaching Methods, Tools and Techniques

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When selecting teaching methods, tools, and techniques diagnostic methods can be used to align theory and practice, while also taking into consideration the practical problems of organizations and individual learners' characteristics. Diagnostic tools should improve understanding for learners in the critical areas of business environment, social and technological subsystems, business processes, strategy and human resource development in organizations

At the Estonian Business School (EBS) diagnostic checklists are used for instructing entrepreneurship students that conduct an internship in enterprises and produce diagnostic reports. Lead4Skills survey shows growing evidence about using diagnostic tools also in other countries to develop the workforce's soft skills and to use internship programs for career development.

Higher education institutions should work with business organizations to bring real-life business problems into the classrooms by inviting practitioners as guest lecturers and promoting live case study approaches. Presentations of practitioners lead to deeper learning if students have done pre-work by studying available public information sources about guest lecturers' organization and his/her business experience.

For example, some larger Hungarian companies have corporate universities. Before conducting training/education programs, they evaluate the specific needs of each management level for the training programs needed. The HR departments offer general performance appraisals for middle managers, combined with a competency system that can be assessed by 360-degree feedback on a regular basis, By following the companies' corporate programs, universities could develop industry-specific competencies that focus learning on practical projects.

Many universities have established a practice to interview their degree program applicants because they believe it is the best opportunity to demonstrate candidates' potential contribution to the program and to manage students' expectations.

By reviewing the work practice of the potential student, universities learn about the real management problems students consider important to address in their studies. E-learning solutions would enable the development of diagnostic questionnaires to document key results of these interviews. Universities would then learn what management problems are relevant and instructors could work with students on these key management issues, building in specific projects to the curriculum.

Such an online knowledge base of topical practical problems and learning priorities will help counselors to guide students in selecting elective subjects. Lecturers responsible for specific subjects or learning modules can use this information to customize his/her teaching content and methods to priorities of different student groups. Knowledge sharing among university degree program managers, internship coordinators and university subsidiaries that offer in-house training or consulting services to corporate partners can also serve as a source for updating curriculum.

Learning by Doing

Teaching methods used in university education have to take into consideration learning-by-doing practices that are employed in enterprises. These include development services offered by management trainers in executive programs, and in-house training events individually tailored.

Cognitive learning methods need to be complemented with constructivist learning and behaviorist logic for fine-tuning some skills. Agile principles, when applied in the learning process, divide a learning into individual, manageable phases, which are then incorporated into project-based team learning (Noguera, Guerrero-Roldán & Masó., 2018). Agile learning proceeds in incremental steps and through iterations between phases of learning and doing. Agile methods involve creating new behavioral practices that value current business practices while searching for improvements. Universities can apply these principles in academic settings and be able to measure the progress of achieving learning outcomes specified in academic degree programs.

Classical action learning method developed by Revans (1980) represents a problem-based approach to learning, where co-learners co-operate as members of small groups whose goal is to complete a task and achieve learning through the process of problem-solving and reflection. Digitalization and globalization assume introducing new modifications of action learning methods by using digital tools and international student teams. Action learning methods can integrate all main curriculum subjects to the process that supports the team-based MBA project for developing and validating innovative business models.

Such an approach has been used in the Business Innovation MBA at the Estonian Business School. The MBA thesis in this learning framework includes project results, but also reflections of the teamwork and the learning-by-doing a process that lasted two years.

The new Digital Society MBA program, introduced at EBS in 2017, includes a project-based capstone course. In the MBA export management module, incoming Erasmus exchange students join with Estonian students to act as international business information "gatekeepers" in the project-based course entitled, "Cross-border business project with Baltic entrepreneurs." An earlier version of the course was called, "International business opportunities in the Baltic region".

Each team consists of 4-6 students representing different nationalities. Among the business sectors represented in these team projects, the most active are ICT, design, and tourism enterprises (Elenurm, 2008). In recent years, the application of such student teams has been useful for start-up founders who are interested in comparing potential foreign markets and have the growth mindset to accept business development suggestions from students.

E-learning and Networking Tools

Cooperation between tutors who specialize in different subject fields is key to applying learning methods that prepare learners for solving complex management problems. With E-learning platforms, instructors can build on what was learned in previous classes, including problems that were solved during preceding learning modules. This allows educators from universities of several countries to be involved in the same learning modules. For instance, instructors in a different location could study cross-border business opportunities and compare potential export markets. This can be a messy process - just like real life. By involving representatives of several academic disciplines to comment on online submissions of projects, students learn how different perspectives see issues differently. Students will get to see consensus and contradictions in how instructors respond to the decisions the students have made. Team teaching can be also applied in a face-to-face tutoring process but that assumes time management efforts to align class timetables of the academic staff.

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) offer opportunities to search and assess new knowledge sources that enable customized learning paths to meet specific development needs of future managers and entrepreneurs. MOOCs can be also operational for broadening the global contact network of students as the result of participation in discussion forums offered by these learning environments. Our experience of using MOOCs has revealed that many MOOCs present inspiring introduction to a subject field but deeper critical analysis of different concepts is limited and knowledge sharing between learners from different countries has limited online mentoring support.

Face-to-face learning in the classroom can be interactive and can be combined with team building experiences to improve soft skills for communication. A convergence of e-learning and face-to-face learning are essential tools for increasing cross-border networking and knowledge sharing opportunities with students from different cultures.

Blended learning has been defined as systems combining face-to-face and computer-mediated instruction (Graham, 2013). Understanding communication, knowledge sharing and project work style differences in face-to-face and online communities is an important blended learning outcome for enhancing networking readiness. Interactive methods for developing soft skills are role plays, for instance, staging international business negotiations. Such role plays can use case studies, but it is also effective to use real international sales offers of enterprises. Business consultants that have earlier business experience of the potential target market can play the role of a foreign importer or a possible agent at the foreign market. Theatre teams, such as the Playback Theatre in Hungary, offer useful experiences for imitating management roles and communication challenges in organizations. Using video recordings for analyzing role plays and teamwork has become technically quite easy during recent years and even mobile phones of students can be used to record meaningful team discussions and observations by students during their fieldwork.

Networking and open innovation (Chesbrough, West & Vanhaverbeke, 2006) serve as sources of new ideas for adding value to business development (Turner & Pennington, 2015). Liu (2015 has demonstrated that network-learning deals with experience, dialogue, articulation of needs of learners, and pollination, meaning a combination of diversified knowledge sources. Online social networking skills and ability to link these skills to entrepreneurial networking opportunities are among prerequisites for successful project work in international teams. The ability to understand the added value and knowledge sources of team members from other cultures and business environments, is stressed. EBS has conducted the course, *Business Opportunities in virtual networks,* both in its main Tallinn campus and in its branch in Helsinki. During this course, students discuss the strategic role of social and business networking for their future business and career prospects. They train how to find useful networks and how to promote their skills and networking priorities online. Estonian and Finnish students and Erasmus exchange students from different countries create new online networking tools for cross-border student cooperation. Students have to choose and involve team members from another country for their new network development exam project. Using online information in Facebook, LinkedIn, and Tricider, students develop their teams without meeting in any physical location.

The global X-Culture consortium http://x-culture.org/ is a good digital society tool for training online teamwork and raising cross-cultural awareness. This consortium connects approximately 2,500-3,000 students from 80 universities in 40 countries each semester. X-Culture creates multicultural teams to enable action learning for overcoming the cultural difference in online networking. Team members cannot choose the other team members. X-Culture organizers allocate students to virtual teams following the principle of geographical and cultural diversity of each team. Students have to build their team consensus on the international business opportunity challenge they try to solve through online teamwork over a period of two months. During the project work, students are involved in regular peer-review assessments in order to understand their pluses and minuses in online cooperation from the point of view of other online team members.

Online gaming has gained popularity among generation Y and Z. Business games have long traditions at business schools but new trends in online gaming and e-marketing gamification should be studied by universities to reflect some of them in academic learning. Using World of Warcraft to teach research methods in online doctoral education (Snelson et al., 2017) is an intriguing example, but broader gamification research is needed to understand, how management games at different degree program levels add value to a student's overall degree program.

Critical Thinking and Mentoring

Ability to monitor diverse information sources and to apply critical thinking for making difference between validated new knowledge and fake news has become more important than ever before. Online networking offers opportunities for cognitive diversity that enables innovative learning, but it can also lead to communities where like-minded persons repeat and reinforce the narrow-minded views of each other. This danger is relevant for closed communities that do not have people in the role of "gatekeepers" looking for ideas from other communities. More than a decade ago, Wenger et al. (2002) explained the importance of communities of practice and stressed the role of peripheral participation in such communities as a tool to enable the exchange of ideas between different communities. Management educators should not ignore information that learners acquire from informal internet-based sources such as Wikipedia, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other specialized social media. They can develop critical thinking by directing students to find out original sources of information and to cross-check and compare different information sources. Dispute of teams that present opposite statements is a method that teaches students to defend their point of view, to apply critical thinking, and to present arguments and counter-arguments in line with agreed rules. Disputes can be arranged in real time face-to-face settings, but synchronous online chat or asynchronous online discussion forums are also useful tools for this teaching method.

Among others, mentoring and coaching are tools that add value to action learning by supporting self-reflection and facilitating application of acquired knowledge for self-development. Broader academic and professional societies have realized the best way of learning and integrating valuable life and professional experience is by learning from the experience of others through mentoring processes (Omazić, Blažeković & Baracskai, 2008). Research shows that individuals who have been mentored have a better chance for professional advancement, make higher salaries, and report higher career satisfaction (Allen et al., 2004; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). The list of career benefits accrued from mentoring includes job performance, early career socialization, career advancement, retention of high potential talent, and leader development to name a few (Scandura & Williams, 2004; Ghosh & Reio, 2013). EBS Executive Education Centre conducts coaching for executives and also offers a course for Estonian Business School students interested in business coaching.

As a proactive effort to foster their global competitiveness, top students from the University of Zagreb started the virtual mentorship program more than ten years ago. They organize cooperation among senior undergraduate students, members of academic societies and business leaders with Croatian heritage. The goal is to give high-performing students, extracurricular activities with the purpose of creating a competitive workforce committed to value creation. In addition, the University of Zagreb is trying to involve its alumni as mentors for students involved in degree programs. Such mentors have chances to find talented students for further employment in their organizations. Self-reflection of students can be also supported by self-assessment tools that help learners to find their further professional development path. Potential entrepreneurs can use a self-assessment tool for understanding their orientation to imitative, individually innovative or co-creative entrepreneurship (Elenurm, 2012).

Teaching methods are important, but charisma and experience of trainers, educators, and coaches and their active communication with students, are essential to the success of balanced e-learning approaches. It is important to try to understand which skills will be necessary in the future. By combining the best parts of several autonomous solutions, we prepare for a dynamic and uncertain business environment that few will recognize in the years to come.

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Appendix: Reports from Learning, Teaching and Training Events

LTT 1: Program and Education Process Management Seminar

The training event targeted administrative staff of higher education institutions and addressed the issues of design, promotion and delivery of educational programs that are based on real labor market needs and issues. As a result of the training event, participants from project partner institutions provided specific recommendations for the development of the second intellectual output (guidelines for higher education institutions).

While the academic parts of study programs are extremely important, it is also strategically important for academic leaders to know how to design the educational experience, reach the right target audiences, attract the best students, enable impactful learning, and support alumni in their continuous development. All of this happens behind the scenes while at the same time, educational leaders must reach out to employers and companies regarding their needs relevant to the labor market and society.

This program was designed to address all of these critical educational and employment issues. Additionally, the content of the program has benefited from the exchange among participants, each of whom had valuable insights to share from their own experience and environments.

The program consisted of a combination of lectures by recognized international experts, classroom discussions, individual and team work around specific issues, as well as some cultural and ice-breaking activities that facilitated better exchange and networking among the participants.

Over the first two days, preliminary results of the first Lead4Skills Intellectual Output (cross-country report on management development needs) were presented to the participants to encourage their feedback and further insights on the findings of the international research on management development needs. The overall landscape of management education and its increasingly fast-changing trends were then discussed to set the scene. The role of the program manager/administrative staff in educational process was particularly addressed, including an interactive session where participants had a chance to present their countries and organizations as well as specific challenges they face in their work.

Further into the program, the focus dove deeper into issues concerning the delivery of a successful and high-quality educational experience. Participants identified several attributes that contribute to a high-quality educational experience. These include:

- Designing programs for various audiences (program/courses types and formats)
- Delivering excellent customer service (not only educational but also in terms of logistics and operations depending on the type, duration, and context of programs and institutions)
- Teaching effective communication and leadership skills, as well as managing relations with peers, participants, faculty and management
- Understanding and utilizing various types of networks within the organization and outside of it.

Through discussion and analysis of real-life situations and cases, the seminar also touched upon more sensitive issues, such as ethical dilemmas and challenges that program managers face.

Ideas and best practices for incorporating ethics and sustainability into educational process, especially with the help of experiential learning and real-life projects, were also discussed.

The program looked at the issues related to marketing and promotion of educational programs and brand management of higher education institutions. There is room for stronger diversification of both the educational programs and the way universities and business schools position themselves locally, regionally and internationally. Often the truly unique features are rooted in the context and markets in which the schools operate, and come from close links to the respective businesses and societies. This is particularly true in the relatively smaller markets of the dynamically changing societies, where the project members come from.

The importance of establishing and maintaining strong alumni relations was stressed. Strong alumni relations play a crucial role in helping the educational institutions be more responsive to the labor market needs and wishes. Alumni practitioners make excellent guest lecturers and help connect students to company visits, study projects, and internships. Alumni also contribute by supporting the educational institutions and advising in the development of study programs.

Discussions also touched upon the role of international accreditations and rankings. There are two schools of thought about this. On one hand, accreditation and rankings facilitate quality assurance processes and differentiate higher education institutions. On the other hand, accreditation and rankings are inflexible and do not acknowledge the unique contexts, formats and features each institution has to offer. Many critics say that accreditation often slows down innovation and adaptability because the requirements reward standardization and uniformity of programs, rather than experimentation and growth.

Throughout the program, the faculty made sure that participants had the chance to bring up and discuss their individual experiences, exchange ideas, and jointly find solutions to some of the challenges they and their institutions are facing. The “big picture” view was balanced with plenty of practical advice and tips that could be readily applied in everyday work. Such combination of formats and interaction proved very valuable and appreciated by all.

LTT 2: Trends in Management Education – Developing Teaching Competences and Skills

The main objectives of the training event in management education were to educate academic staff about the latest trends in curriculum development, course design, teaching materials and particularly teaching skills and methods development.

This format enabled participating educators to adapt their course curricula and methods to include more relevant, problem-based education for students. It was also designed to improve the competencies and skills in specific managerial disciplines, such as leading change, business in society, strategic management, and marketing management, as well as incorporating interdisciplinary teaching into those specific disciplines. Finally, this LTT event also provided inputs essential in other areas of a faculty member’s professional life, such as research, consulting, administration, and lastly, social responsibility and ethical considerations of a teacher’s profession.

While the program was designed to benefit faculty from the project partner institutions, the organizers felt that educators from other institutions in Central and Eastern Europe and beyond would also benefit from the experience. The program worked with professors to take them to the next level in their teaching, to take them out of their comfort zones and to embrace change.

The target audience for this LTT event was academic staff of higher education institutions either just at the beginning of their teaching careers or those looking to take their careers to the next level. The LTT event in management education was taught by experienced business and management professors, who willingly shared their experience and what they had learned from decades of successful teaching and curriculum development for various audiences and different types of institutions internationally. The event consisted of two weeks of lectures and practical exercises, discussions, group work, networking, presentations and cultural excursions. An important element of the program was a positive and impactful learning environment that enabled peer learning and exchange.

While there was a certain emphasis on case teaching as a very impactful and complex management education tool, the LTT event also had sessions during the first week addressing a variety of other topics relevant to management education and teaching. The opening session was a team building exercise where the participants met with their groups for the first time to get to know each other and prepare for the presentation at the end of the week. Each group consisted of professors from a variety of academic backgrounds, experiences and countries. In a session on teaching philosophies, approaches and techniques, the participants received practical insights into developing or refining one's teaching philosophy and why it is important to have a clear teaching philosophy.

Other sessions addressed issues related to participant-centered learning and its assessment. This included sessions on interactive teaching methodologies and using technology in the classroom to enhance teaching and learning. Related to that was also a discussion on course design for different audiences and how to tailor existing courses to different audiences, contexts and learning objectives. This group of related sessions wrapped up with a practical assignment on developing an effective teaching plan and useful tips on developing the plan, building interaction into it, and continuously adjusting the teaching to better fit the needs of students and the ways they learn best.

In another session, several participants were given five minutes to teach a topic, which was filmed and then analyzed by participants themselves, as well as by peers and faculty. This provided an opportunity to see different teaching styles and to experience the difference between personal and outside perception of one's own teaching. It also showed the effectiveness of filming one's teaching from time to time to perfect the teaching performance.

There was also a session on work-life balance. It centered on the challenges of balancing one's teaching career with a number of other responsibilities, including academic research, pressure to publish, consulting activities, and administrative or program management duties (on top of teaching/research activities). Discussion centered around managing a complicated balancing act between getting work done, avoiding burnout, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and devoting enough time for family.

The rest of the first week was dedicated to the key elements of case teaching, research and writing (which would later be covered in more detail in LTT 4). All of this was designed to not only show the effectiveness of the case method in management education but also provide some guidelines for future research and intellectual contributions in case writing. These sessions were run by faculty in the form of case discussions from several key perspectives: as teacher to participant (demonstrating how this particular case could be taught), as participant to participant (small group and class discussion of particular case issues and concepts), as well as teacher to teacher (debriefing the case discussion to illustrate the use of various techniques and their implications). The first week of the LTT event ended with each group giving a presentation on a selected topic dealing with a specific issue of teaching and learning (e.g., motivating students, assessing learning outcomes, introducing a new concept or teaching tool, etc). Each group was tasked with coming up with a creative way of presenting the topic, addressing it, and getting the whole group involved for discussion and feedback.

During the second week of the LTT event on management education, participants subdivided into their chosen specific disciplines, run by an individual LTT faculty member. This format focused on the individual development needs of participants, encouraging them to go deeper into specific issues concerning teaching different disciplines. Individual preparation for lectures and discussions, small group discussions and teamwork, case discussions, simulations, role-play, and other work methods positioned participants even more at the center of the learning process. Each participant also had a chance to teach a case study, either individually or in pairs, which required deep knowledge of the case taught, preparation of the teaching plan, managing the class discussion and questions by an experienced group of peers, and receiving highly useful feedback.

Finally, the second week of the LTT event incorporated some interdisciplinary sessions demonstrating how the same case could be taught and analyzed from various perspectives, and issues to consider for successful integration of interdisciplinary teaching into one's portfolio and curriculum. It is often noted that higher education institutions should move more towards interdisciplinary approach in their programs, however, in practice it requires even more preparation and coordination on the faculty side while there are still too few incentives on the institutional level to do so. The interdisciplinary sessions at this LTT event attempted to provide practical tools and advice to help address this gap.

LTT3: Digital Technologies in Education

Although digitalization of education is hardly a new concept, many higher education institutions are still struggling with practical implementation of technology elements into curriculum. It requires not only changes of infrastructure, significant investment of financial and people resources, but also changes to mindsets and perceptions of HEI administrators and faculty.

Embracing technology involves deeper understanding of the needs and ways the new generation of students learn. It also requires understanding and anticipating the labor market needs based on the fast-paced technological changes and trends. Life-long learning and "mass-customization" of education are coming stronger into focus. Effective application of various technologies available in education today can result in a significant competitive advantage, and can even become decisive of the institution's existence.

Digital technologies are at the heart of modern education systems, workplaces and learning environments, changing the way we teach and learn. To help management schools understand that digitalization in education does not mean switching from pencils to screens, we have developed a dedicated seminar intended for decision-makers, administrative and especially academic staff to learn more about strategies, practices and tools for embedding digital technologies in teaching and learning.

The goal of the seminar was to help participants advance their knowledge, understanding, and fluency with digital learning trends, methods and tools. In particular, after completing the seminar, depending on their role as academics or administrators, the goal was for participants to be able to:

- Engage in informed debate about the contribution, value and limitations of digital technologies in teaching and learning, now and in the future.
- Contribute to strategic decision-making related to the transformational opportunities of digital technologies in teaching and learning at their institutions
- Have a solid grasp of learning models and their implementation in a digital or blended context.
- Be articulate in the language of Learning Management Systems and related tools.
- Participate in the design and delivery of online and/or blended courses with confidence.
- Deliver impactful learning experience in a more accessible and personalized way.

Class sessions included presentations by international experts with significant experience from both education and business, panel discussions, technology demos and briefings, as well as group work and discussions where participants were able to share their own experience and discuss new insights and ideas.

The theoretical part of the seminar was enhanced by daily workshops and group activities where participants had to approach various challenges step by step to deliver a final presentation combining knowledge and skills gained throughout the seminar. Peer consulting methodology was used for group assignments. To move from theory to practice, participants were organized into diverse teams working on increasingly detailed challenges in a peer-consulting format. Building on strategies, learning models, gamification and online learning communities, groups had to present specific issues they were working on and the solutions they have developed. This was important as it enabled participants to work on challenges from their respective institutions, while at the same time collaborate with different people. In addition, a couple of cultural events were organized to facilitate communication and build lasting relationships among the participants.

In order to fine-tune the seminar to better address participants' needs, a pre-seminar online survey was issued. Participants ranked their knowledge of digital teaching and learning at their institutions and their personal experience and level of comfort with technology.

The seminar was very well received and a follow-up survey showed that participants started to implement specific changes to their classrooms based on new knowledge and technologies learned about at the seminar. It is worth noting that following the success of this LTT event, which was originally tailored to the Lead4Skills consortium needs, it was decided to repeat it next year (with some program modifications and improvements) inviting participation from wider CEEMAN network.

LTT 4: Case Writing and Teaching

It has been a long-term objective of CEEMAN and its partner institutions to encourage and promote the development of high-quality case teaching materials, especially cases that are relevant within the context of dynamic and emerging economies. At the same time, the objective was also to promote the development of case-writing capabilities of faculty within these countries.

To support this, CEEMAN has conducted various promotional and development activities, such as case writing competitions and dedicated educational modules at its faculty development programs. However, experience and an internal survey of schools within Central and Eastern Europe clearly showed the need for further development of this field and at all levels. There is a need to increase the use and quality of case studies as a teaching methodology, to increase the output of high quality cases with local context and relevance, as well as to boost case writing and case teaching capabilities within higher education institutions.

To support development of new case studies within the Lead4Skills project, CEEMAN organized a dedicated five-day Case Writing and Teaching Workshop and will further develop the format to educate its member institutions as well as other faculty.

The workshop covered topics of origin and theory of the case teaching method, overview of the case preparation process, strengths and weaknesses of the case method, what makes a good case, how to develop gathered primary and secondary research material into a teaching case, how to prepare effective teaching notes based on specific learning objectives, how to manage an effective class discussion and how to evaluate learning outcomes. All project participants were asked to prepare short case study drafts, on which they worked daily to further develop them into formats suitable for teaching. Expert reviews, as well as peer to peer feedback, were used to further support participants' work. To wrap the workshop up, participants had to present their final cases and do a test-run with other participants acting as students. The peer feedback was very valuable as cases were later actually applied at various courses and are now regularly used in classrooms. An important point was made that a case can and should regularly be modified and updated.

After historical overview, the session moved to the mechanics of producing a case study. Case writers follow a simple, but important structure.

1. First meet with the company to establish trust and scan the territory.
2. Identify key issues, players, road blocks, etc.
3. Conceptualize the case - visualize how the case is going to be taught and use deduction method to reverse engineer it.
4. Write a working outline which shows the building blocks.
5. Find a sponsor who can publish the case.
6. Get written authorization to prepare and publish the case.

It is important to know that a case is not just to illustrate the "5 key steps" to good management, or to tell an interesting story, but it is a means to help students develop independent judgment.

We have outlined several guide points which could help case writers write good cases:

1. Take care to write a case and not just a story;
2. The case should tackle relevant and important issues;
3. The case is a journey of discovery and can always have surprises;

4. Controversy helps;
5. Comparison and contrasts are important ingredients;
6. The case or parts of it have to be generalizable;
7. The case needs a right amount of data;
8. The case should have a nice flow for the reader;
9. Keep it short;
10. Add a personal touch.

To help case writers develop and tell a good story, we have developed a simple case worksheet and it can be freely used. For a good story line, a case writer should outline the (1) Setting; (2) When; (3) Where; (3) Context; (4) Characters; (5) The Story; (6) Urgency; (7) Importance; (8) Consequences.

A good case is not just a well-written document, a teaching tool, or even an engaging story about a compelling management issue. A good case should be considered as an opportunity to embark on a personal journey of discovery for the case writer, the case teacher, and the student. It should open horizons instead of closing them, raise new questions instead of merely answering them, and provide a forum for personal development and growth.

When approaching teaching with case method, educators should keep in mind that case studies are about (1) developing a subject through planned assignment, study and discussion of cases; that (2) placement of cases is a function of learning criteria: and that (3) generalizations should come in later stages of the educational process.

The case method may fail when we use old, long, irrelevant, and too descriptive cases. Or, on the other hand, the method may also fail if the teacher is poorly prepared, does not listen to students, or is afraid to lose control and is overly dogmatic.

We would recommend a simple set of questions which may help educators with their first steps or when trying to improve their practice of case study methodology.

- **Open** – what do you think of this company?
- **Diagnostic** – what are these numbers telling you or why is this company losing money?
- **Challenging** – what is the basis for your decision?
- **Action oriented** – how do we do this or who do you talk to?
- **Predictive** – how will competition react if we follow your advice?
- **Priority** – which is the most important problem/issue here?
- **Hypothetical** – what would have happened if we had lowered the price?

To help students make progress with questions, make sure to:

- Avoid questions about case facts;
- Return questions asked by the students;
- Use short summaries;
- Reformulate what has just been said;
- Play the devil's advocate only after a solid relationship has been established;
- Lead students to uncharted territories.

Case teaching method has a potential to be very rewarding and may be very enjoyable to the students as well as the educator. However, it takes time to learn how to use the methodology appropriately with best recipe for success being a lot of practice. Educators can always start by using simple and short cases and progress to more complex ones as they get more comfortable, and the same goes for writing cases.