PDP

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

A GUIDE FOR DESIGN AND BUSINESS STUDENTS

A!
Aalto University

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OBJECTIVE

The aim of this guidebook is to help design and business students identify the pain points and challenges that hinder their contributions and learning in the interdisciplinary Product Development Project (PDP) course at Aalto University. It presents insights gathered from the experiences of past design and business students who have participated in PDP. This guidebook will navigate you through the realities and challenges you may face in the course, ensuring these obstacles don't come as a surprise. By informing and preparing you, this guidebook will help you anticipate and manage these challenges effectively.

1 Identify the actual challenges faced by design and business students in PDP

Hacks in the form of questions that might guide design & business students to tackle these challenges **2**

DO YOU HAVE A MOMENT TO READ THIS?

PDP, as exciting as it sounds, offers the opportunity to work in interdisciplinary teams with budget of 10,000 euros to build a physical product.

However, after speaking with PDP teams and mainly interviewing designers and business students, I've identified several challenges these students face. Through these interviews, I've pinpointed the major challenges they encounter. This nine-month-long project isn't smooth sailing whether you're an engineer, designer, or business student. There are ups and downs, moments of laughter, celebration, dedication, hard work, passion, and enthusiasm. However, there are also challenges inherent in interdisciplinary teams: conflicts, lack of motivation, feelings of exclusion, concerns about not delivering enough, and the complexity of the project, among others.

Ask yourself if you have ever worked in an interdisciplinary team. If not, it's the right time to explore and get ideas on what it's like to work in such a team. This will help you understand how interdisciplinary teams function and how they differ from same-discipline teamwork, enabling you to become a good team member in your PDP team.

WHAT IS THE INTENTION?

The intention here is to emphasize that while nothing is perfect, everyone has the ability to contribute for improvement. This guide book presents the challenges that are faced by design and business students in PDP course in their own words.

Each PDP project is unique, and teams possess varied expertise, resulting in different sets of challenges. For instance, issues in one team may not be present in another. Because of this diversity, these challenges cannot be addressed with a universal solution. Nevertheless, this guidebook will help you identify and tackle the specific problem you might face within your team or project, offering guidance on how to resolve them in the form of hack questions.

In the next chapter, I will guide you through the potential challenges you might face during the PDP project as a design and business students. Along with brief descriptions of these challenges, I have listed potential questions that you can aks yourself, your team, or the PDP faculty to help overcome these challenges.

PROJECT SCOPE & DEFINATION CHALLENGES

Design and business students often find projects to be too vague or overly ambitious, leading to initial confusion, frustration, and a sense of being lost. Unfamiliar with engineering knowledge, they struggle to understand technical terms and engineering terminologies. This can make the project seem beyond their scope, causing them to feel unable to contribute effectively.

ISSUES

- The project was too vague to comprehend.

- Surprised by how technical PDP was.

- Encountered poor company coordination, leading to issues.

- Initially felt lost due to ambiguous project goals.

- Project goals were overly ambitious and unclear.

HACK YOURSELF !

Ask yourself these questions

- How can I seek clarification on the project's objectives and goals to ensure I understand them fully?

- Who should I communicate with to address both the technical complexities and coordination issues?

- What resources are available to help me better understand the technical aspects of the project and how can I access them?

- How can I propose a more structured and comprehensible approach to managing and defining project goals within my team?

TEAM DYNAMICS & COLLABORATION CHALLENGES

Design and business students often feel disconnected and excluded due to various factors such as ineffective online meetings, a lack of team-building activities, and an overemphasis on straight jumping on solution approaches. Decision-making can also be influenced by the higher number of same-discipline team members which might make you feel you don't belong to the group.

ISSUES

- Felt excluded when the team consistently prioritized only how to find the solution.

- Participated in only few team-building activities.

- Meetings could have been more focused and planned.

- Transitioning to online meetings felt unwelcoming and led to disconnection.

- Wished for a more assertive team leader.

- Decision-making was influenced when team members were from the same disciplines.

- The team lead struggled to maintain cohesion within the team.

HACK YOURSELF !

Ask yourself these questions

- How can I ensure that meeting are more focused and well planned? Can I contribute to make it more cohesive?

- What sorts of measures can I take or suggest to ensure inclusivity and engagement in the project?

- If my team members don't understand some of my design or business skills, what do I do? How do I communicate them?

- How can I ensure diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making processes?

- If I feel that within my team, the team dynamics is not great, how can I play important role in bringing us together?

- How can I emphasis on importance of low effort meetings to discuss basic issues?

TASK MANAGEMENT & RESPONSIBILITY CHALLENGES

Design and business students often feel lost and demotivated due to unclear task assignments. The bias that design students are responsible for graphics and visuals is real. It might be extremely difficult for design student to convience their team members that they are there to learn new things rather than doing visuals. Additionally, they encounter difficulties in assigning suitable tasks to team members with similar backgrounds, resulting in reduced motivation, participation, and overall productivity within the team.

ISSUES

- As a design student, my team expected me to do posters, visuals and graphics by default.

- I hesitated to propose ideas because most team members thought I should work on them alone or take the lead, which demotivated me from sharing ideas.

- Design workshops were undervalued.

- Limited tasks led to a loss of motivation.

- Team members expected the team lead to assign tasks.

- Finding suitable tasks for teammates with similar backgrounds was challenging.

HACK YOURSELF !

Ask yourself these questions

- Maybe a small coffee chat with a design/business student from another team might help me find ways to identity/improve my own tasks?

- If my team thinks that the design workshop I propose is undervalued, how should I clarify that its outcome could be beneficial?

- What can we do in our team for better task divisions?

- What strategies can I propose to encourage shared responsibility for leading ideas among my team members?

- What approach can I take to maintain motivation in the absence of assigned tasks?

- How can I help my team to identify suitable tasks especially for those of us with similar background?

LACK OF EXPERTISE &
SKILL CHALLENGES

Design and business students sometimes assume that their teams lack relevant expertise. However, the root of the problem may also lie in communication issues, or in not effectively communicating what they or their team members are capable of doing. Design aspects are sometimes undervalued or overlooked, leading to demotivation among design students. Theoretical knowledge gained in business school can be challenging to apply in practical, technical settings, contributing to feelings of inadequacy and frustration. Additionally, some team members may perceive little value in workshops and struggle to effectively brainstorm ideas or define clear outcomes, resulting in a lack of direction and engagement. These challenges lead to underutilization of team members' skills and a diminished sense of contribution and motivation.

ISSUES

- I struggled to effectively break down the ideation phase or define workshop outcomes, which later led to my team not seeing value in it.

- Design was initially overlooked or undervalued, particularly because of its intangible nature, which demotivated me in the first place.

- The team lacked the appropriate expertise to address certain challenges.

- Some team members felt overwhelmed by uncertainty in solution focused approaches, unsure of what and how to contribute.

- Business school theories proved challenging to apply practically within this context.

HACK YOURSELF !

Ask yourself these questions

- What steps can I take to recognize and value design contributions more effectively among my team members?

- How can I be able to communicate the value of workshops like ideation workshops with in my team?

- How can I be able to ensure that I along with other team members feel engaged with meaningful project tasks?

- If my team lacks expertise and I end up doing out-of-scope tasks that drain me, where can I seek help? How do I raise this issue with in my team?

COMMUNICATION & MISALIGNMENT CHALLENGES
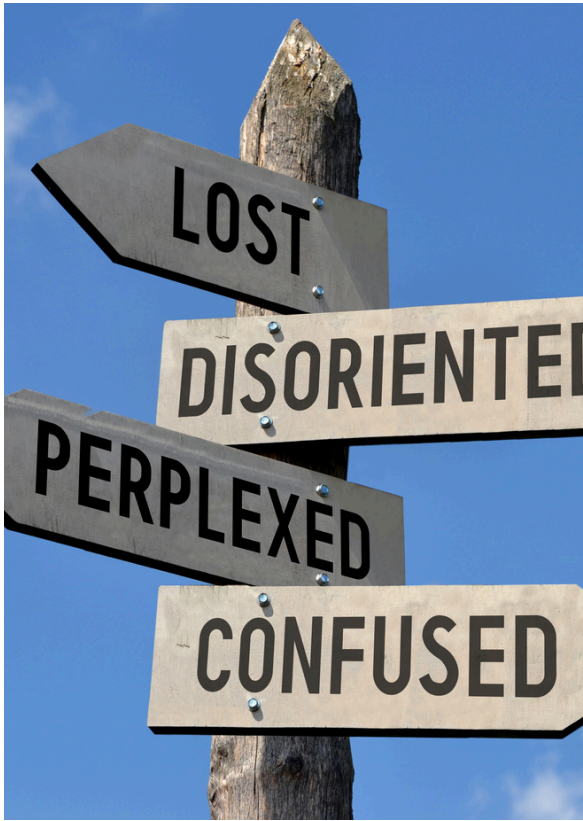
As a design student, communicating ideas can be challenging, especially during activities like design sprint workshops where you're identifying and eliminating constraints. Sometimes, it's difficult for rest of the team to grasp these ideas. Ineffective communication among team members, between teams and clients, or between teams and faculty can result in division within the team and misunderstandings regarding expectations and constraints. Communication barriers among team members can lead individuals to feel excluded or undervalued. Miscommunication with sponsoring companies further complicates project execution and alignment.

ISSUES

- It was hard to understand when engineers were talking.

- Our team became divided due to lack of communication.

- Miscommunication occurred between sponsor and my team.

- Some team members felt overlooked and uninvolved in communications.

- Despite discussing constraints and elimination, the team didn't grasp anything.

HACK YOURSELF !

Ask yourself these questions

- Should I communicate my concerns with my team so that it can be resolved?

- How can I help in improving communication to foster unity within my team?

- How can we enhance communication with the sponsor to prevent misunderstanding?

- What measures can we take as a team to ensure all team members feel included and informed in communications?

- How can I ensure my design terminologies are easily understood by rest of the team members and viceversa?

PERSONAL MOTIVATION & COMMITMENT CHALLENGES

A lack of open communication about personal feelings and other challenges face by team members might lead to a sense of isolation and disengagement. Additionally, frequent shifts in focus and tasks can prevent them from effectively applying their skills, causing frustration and reducing their overall contribution. Addressing these personal and motivational challenges is essential for ensuring that all team members remain engaged, motivated, and able to utilize their skills effectively throughout the project. Team members may prioritize other motivational factors or personal interests over the project, causing a decline in overall team morale and productivity. This lack of dedication from some members can demotivate others, creating a ripple effect that undermines the team's ability to achieve its objectives.

ISSUES

- Teams showed inconsistency in meeting commitment.

- Some members lost motivation due to other priorities priorities.

- Some team members never showed up after first few team sessions.

- I felt like some members think its easy credit course and took it for granted.

HACK YOURSELF !

Ask yourself these questions

- How can I help my team to establish clearer expectations and timelines to improve commitment consistency?

- What measures can we take to increase motivation and dedication among team members who may be lacking?

- Who should I consult if I feel I am losing my motivation?

- How can we improve accountability and ensure everyone is meeting their commitments effectively?

- Are there any strategies or tool that I can use could help me and my team to better manage and track team commitments and progress?

Remember, you have the capability to initiate change and address these issues responsibly.

Step up and make your team successful - no project is perfect, and no team is flawless.