

## Sustainable personal growth in the Northern business milieu

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Key words: Competence development, internationalization, networking, leadership, personal growth

Internationalization is important for our Northern business environment and also a central part of business education in Lapland since the polytechnics started in 1992. The idea to design an international degree programme came originally from the mayor of Haparanda in a joint meeting with representatives of Haparanda town and Kemi-Tornio Polytechnic in 1995. The wish was to open a programme combining IT and business skills, and to have at least part of the courses in Swedish language.

In 1996 we started a Bachelor programme called Euro-System Architect ESA and one year later Euro-Economics Education EEE. In BIT about half of the courses were taught in Swedish and 10 students came from Tornio valley and Kiruna. We also had a one semester specialization programme for exchange and Finnish students called Gateway Education. The names of ESA and EEE were later changed to Business Information Technology and Business Management, which nowadays is called International Business. During the more than 20 years not only names of the Bachelor programmes have changed but also the curricula have been developed further due to the requirements of the rapid change of the business environment.

In 2007 the School of Business and Culture at the Lapland University of Applied Sciences started a Master programme in International Business Management. Before the start the teacher team invested much time and effort to design the curriculum together with business life and international partners. The key question was “What kind of expertise is needed in the international business today and in the future”. The teacher team had long discussions with the people from small and medium sized companies, big companies, municipalities in the North, and manufacturing, retail and service companies. We also worked in close collaboration with

Dutch, Russian and Norwegian universities. The outcome was a curriculum with leadership competences needed in the future working life.

## From holistic business understanding to personal wellbeing

The generic competences were defined on national level for all Master programmes. Learning competence, ethical competence, working community competence, innovation competence and internationalization are valid still today. Lifelong learning for instance will be a key success factor also in the future. In the new management model and strategy of Lapland UAS, internationalization and innovation will play a key role. The students should be able to manage research, development and innovation projects and master the methods of research and development work, be able to manage project work, be able to create new information and improve existing working methods by combining expertise from different fields, and to be able to develop customer-oriented, sustainable and profitable solutions, in international environments.

Holistic business understanding, critical thinking, communication, problem solving, scenario writing and ability to work in international context were defined as subject specific competences for international business management students. After having worked 12 years with Master students, we can say that most competences were achieved during the 90 ECTS online studies. For instance ability to recognize the external factors which influence the planning of a business organization was stressed in all courses throughout the programme.

The business environment in the High North and in other parts of the world is changing due to digitalization, financial and political developments, green economy and globalization, among others. The research suggests that the future is in the North due to the changes in the demand of natural resources, demographic changes, global warming and globalization. (Smith 2011).

The research literature lists leadership competences needed in the near future. Increased levels of knowledge, problem-solving skills, systems skills, and social skills were found at higher grade levels. Certain skills and experiences, however, were found to be particularly important at certain phases of leaders' careers.

Leadership 2020 (2018) article discusses characteristics a team leader should have, such as collaborative orientation, developer of people, learning agility, digitally proficient, global

mindset including cultural agility, conscious capitalist/conscious leader, future focus, and adaptability/change orientation.

In the World Economic Forum 2018, Adam Jezard (2018) discusses the future competence needs of workers in 2030 from several perspectives. An interesting set of skills are the social and emotional, or so-called “soft skills”: these include advanced communication and negotiation, empathy, the ability to learn continuously, to manage others and to be adaptable. Business development, programming, emergency response and counselling require these skills, Jezard (2018) argues.

### Key role of leadership in the age of digitalization

Not only the business environment but also the businesses are changing; the organizational structures, the ownership of businesses, business models and role of work and labor. Networks which used to be based on one central player as a hub are changing to emerging service ecosystems, where all actors have to be actively looking for new innovations and trusted partners. Because of these developments, the character and role of entrepreneurship is seeking new forms. Entrepreneurial skills are important not only for business students but all students graduating from higher educational institutions. Lean startup is one model which helps people planning to start a new firm to develop their entrepreneurial thinking (Ries 2017).

All curricula of Lapland UAS were updated in 2015 – 2016 and implemented in 2017. During the process teachers teams gathered information from working life and actual literature about the future competence needs. They were the discussed in multidisciplinary and multicultural teams, also with existing and graduated students. For the Master programme, the outcome was a completely new curriculum based on close cooperation with the students’ case organizations, teacher teams, personal development and international cooperation.

Leadership plays a central role in a transformation process. This means that the success of a digital transformation is dependent on the skills and competencies of the leadership within an organization. The behavior of managers is an important determinant for the culture within an organization. In the IBM programme, future managers will be trained in showing appropriate behavior and raising awareness and engagement.

The Master's Degree Programme in International Business Management is designed to meet the demands of working life. It will conform to the requirements knowledge, skills and capabilities for the level 7 of European Qualification Framework, EQF(7). Furthermore, the programme aims at designing and building concrete development plans for enterprises to support their internationalization processes. Not only the Master thesis, but all courses are linked to students' own organizations, and the theory applied in real-life work.

## **Sustainable business development and personal growth**

The mission is to educate and to train professionals with competences needed to create and develop sustainable business in the digital transformation age. The focus of the programme is on business model innovation, establishing and managing service ecosystems, leading to new strategic orientation in the international business context.

The objective of the Master Programme in International Business Management is to provide a holistic curriculum for students aiming at contributing to the enterprise value creation and value innovation process. The contemporary business transformation requires understanding of the dynamic business landscape, evolving enterprise competitiveness and sustainability, and respective changes in enterprise ecosystems.

The curriculum implementation is based on firm connections with the working life, team teaching and collaborative learning with fellow students. A key element of the learning process is the personal growth and wellbeing. Many graduated students have reported that during the heavy study period of 1,5 to 2 years, it is important to remember to take care of the his/her own wellbeing, and not only the studies, work and private life.

Internationalization is obvious in the programme where all tuition is in English, the teachers and students come from different countries and cultures and all courses are related to international issues. There are also close relationships with international partners, both businesses and universities.

Based on the analysis of the company and student interviews, discussions with colleagues at partner universities abroad and actual literature, the teacher team designed a new curriculum. The vision of the International Business Management programme is based on three competence areas:

1. Digital transformation of enterprises aiming to that the student is able to appraise, develop and lead digital transformation in an enterprise, is decisive when evaluating the influence of digital transformation on the enterprise and the operating environment, and is able to self-evaluate and develop his/her expertise in a versatile and focused way.
2. Business model innovation meaning that the student is able to evaluate and develop the business model as part of the organizational strategy, is capable to developing the organization's innovation process in an international context, and is able to manage RD&I projects and masters the methods of research and development work, and is able to develop, sustainable and profitable and solutions for better customer experience.
3. Service ecosystems and platforms where the objective is that the student is able to analyze service ecosystems and platforms and to act in service environment, is able to operate in an international network and to organize and build new relationships, is capable of leading creativity and has an entrepreneurial mindset, and is able to retrieve, analyze and produce information and evaluate it critically.

## Transnational competence development

The course called Lean Startup and Innovations is a great example of collaboration between Lapland UAS, Kempten UAS and Ulster University. The methods of lean startup (Ries 2017) will be used in the process. During this 5 ECTS course, 60 students learn in multidisciplinary and transnational teams to innovate, develop and present new business ideas and models. The 2018 – 2019 course will start with a workshop in Finland in December 2018 followed by an online innovation process in mixed teams. The pitch will take place in Belfast in May 2019. An international jury will assess and reward the business ideas. In addition to many capabilities mentioned above, the course improves the communication, team-work, strategic thinking and networking skills of the participating students, and deepens the partnership between the three universities.

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