

VIBES

Virtual Business Skills Empowerment

VIBES IO3: Educational Content Development

Tool and topics



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Introduction

VIBES IO3 – Educational content development offers a modular systematic approach to creating curricula for multicultural virtual teamworking skills. The VIBES project draws insights from three levels of education: high school, university, and graduate/professional education. Curriculum development is approached as a modular co-creation process that can be navigated with the help of the VIBES tool.

The VIBES framework builds on existing practices for the development and acquisition of *virtual team working skills* and identified related trends in European education. Acknowledging the differences of starting points across the European educational spectrum and the wide variation of adoption of online education and virtual team work, the VIBES framework provides a flexible approach that can be applied in different contexts to develop educational content for virtual teamwork.

The VIBES tool provides flexibility to create a systematic and thematic modular curriculum for the various levels of learners and educators as there is no single way to approach education. The framework does not aim to prescribe defined methods of teaching or learning. Instead, it highlights the key skills and competences for working in virtual environments and leaves space for co-designing the learning experience in different contexts and different skills levels. This allows for starting the learning journey from distinct stages and facilitating progress towards new objectives.

Developing the curricula for different contexts and learners can be complex. The VIBES tool offers a step-by-step process to describe what are the competencies to effectively work in virtual teams, lead virtual teams, and support team members required bringing focus to the topics dynamically. As such, it is a systematic modular tool that captures the overlapping nature of the different dimensions of virtual team working skills and allows for multiple perspectives to be taken into consideration. The tool provides both a logical structure for breaking down the dynamic nature of these interrelated topics, while simultaneously providing the educator the flexibility to choose which topic or sub-topics would be included in the problem space of their curricula, in each context of the learners.

Like the European Entrepreneurship Competencies of Entrecomp, and the Digital Competencies of Digicomp, the VIBES framework aims to create a structured approach to provide learners and educators with a logical framework of the competencies necessary to work successfully in multi-cultural virtual teams.

This document presents the key elements of the VIBES tool and topics addressed by the framework. More details about the development of the tool are included in the full VIBES IO3 report. Furthermore, examples of curricula created with the help of the tool are introduced in separate documents to illustrate how the VIBES approach can inspire and facilitate the development and design of diverse learning paths.

Curricula creation through the VIBES model

VIBES tool

The VIBES tool is a tool that helps with breaking complex problem spaces into concrete action plans. To bring a holistic view to the problem at hand, it is looked at from various perspectives, from a list of selected topics relevant to the context.

The VIBES tool is scalable, allowing to expand the view or narrow the focus by either number of selected perspectives, or with the number of topics and sub-topics. There are four steps that are designed to help with keeping the focus throughout the process. The steps guide through the problem space by allow deep focus on details while maintaining a comprehensive overview of the overall context. These steps are *Problem Space Mapping*, *Topic Descriptions*, *Activities Tables* and *Action Plans* (Figure 1.).

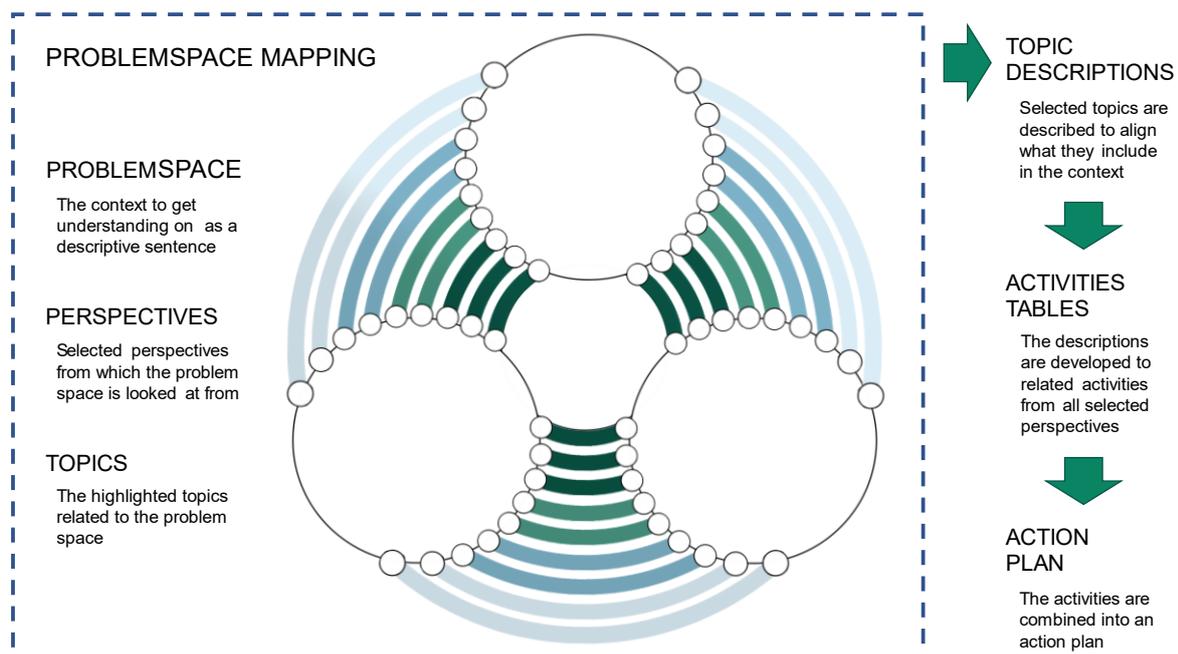


Figure 1. Structure of the Tool

The first step of the tool, problem space mapping, outlines the problem at hand. In the beginning of the problem space mapping, the problem space that is looked at needs to be

defined. This is done in a descriptive sentence that is as simple and informative as possible to help in aligning the focus throughout the process.

Once the problem space is defined the perspectives are chosen. The perspectives are the viewpoints from which the problem space is looked at from. These should be selected so that they offer holistic look on the issue and that there is some friction between them. The perspectives do not need to be a person perspective, but they could be issue perspectives too.

The problem space is also sectioned into the most relevant topics and further to sub-topics. When the problem space is particularly complex or there are very many topics, it might also be helpful to use categories for the topics. Listing the topics and sub-topics helps in understanding the whole problem space and seeing what all the things affecting it are. By breaking it down to smaller pieces, it can be viewed on a detailed level without losing the big picture. The selected topics should be relevant to the problem and combined, include the most relevant pieces of the problem.

The second step of the tool is called topic descriptions. Each sub-topic is explained with few bullet points that describe what the selected sub-topic means in this context. It is important to be specific enough, so that throughout using the tool it is always clear what we mean by this sub-topic. But it is also important to keep the bullet points on a description level and that at this point one is not trying to fix the issue yet. Typically, around five bullet points per sub-topic is sufficient.

After all sub-topics are described, they are further developed into concrete activities. Activities tables looks at the description from all the selected perspectives. The idea of the activities tables is to further explain the description and offer various perspectives, ideally, with each perspective bringing something new to the activities. Even though the step adds activities to the descriptions it should not offer the full solution at this point as that comes in the final step.

The final step of the tool defines concrete action plans. The action plan table includes all sub-topics categorized under higher level topics and further to categories. All perspectives are combined to actions that take the entirety into consideration. The table creates action plan by splitting information into *Goals, Gains, Actions, Data, tools, and resources, KPI's* and the final *Action Plan*. In the action plan table, the previously written out activities' statements are combined back to single statement that includes now all the information in them. These statements are filled in under topic *Gains* and summarized together to *Goals*. After that, the rest of the table is filled in based on the goals and gains.

Problem space mapping

The problem space was mapped based on the aims of the VIBES project and the findings gathered in IO1 and IO2. The problem space was defined to be *Strengthening competences for working in multicultural virtual environments to support the evolving business world*, and the main perspectives were *company, Individual* and *multi-cultural teamworking*.

The previous findings in IO1 and IO2 were recategorized and few related topics were added to cover the whole wide problem space. As it was important to view the entirety from the working life perspective, the findings were categorized under organizational issues, management issues, team issues and individual issues. The complete mapping can be found in the table below (Figure 2).

PROBLEM SPACE

Strengthening Competences for Working in Multicultural Virtual Environments to Support the Evolving Business World

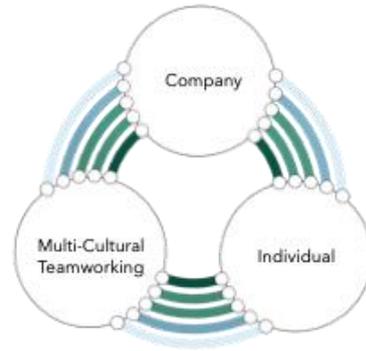
PERSPECTIVES

Company
Individual
Multi-cultural teamworking

TOPICS

Key topics divided under four categories

- Organizational issues
- Management issues
- Team issues
- Individual issues



Categories	Topics	Sub-topics		
Organizational issues	Operations	Structure	Culture & Ways of Working	Tools
Management issues	People	Leadership	Management	Teamworking
Team issues	Development	Capacity	Capabilities	Learnings
Individual issues	Interactions	Coaching	Communication	Dynamics
	Self-management	Goals & Growth	Work-Life Balance	Motivation & Attraction

Figure 2. Problem space mapping for VIBES

Topic descriptions

Each of the sub-topics were then described to align what is meant by each term in this context. The topic descriptions can be found below in the Figures 3-7. As the whole problem space is extremely broad, it was decided to concentrate on the most important subtopics out of which the example curricula would be created through the following steps of the tool.

These sub-topics were selected to be *culture and ways of working*, *management*, *communication*, *dynamics*, and *work-life balance*. For the other sub-topics, the topic descriptions were created that would then allow data to be used later taking them through the following steps of the tool. This allows for the findings to be used as a pick-and-choose solution for educators that are teaching about working in multicultural virtual teams.

Operations		
Structure	Culture & Ways of Working	Tools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Flatter hierarchy in virtual organizations - Virtual enables globally dispersed team (time difference) - Clear roles and job descriptions support virtual engagement - Priorities need to be clearer as there isn't as good visibility to what employees are doing - More emphasis on having clear and trackable KPI's because more need for transparency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transparent discussions on norms, values and ethics - Net etiquette with guidelines and trainings - More multi-cultural and diverse working environments - Cross-functional and varied levels of experience collaborating - Respecting agreed commitments and schedules is more important in virtual because everything needs to be scheduled - Supporting spontaneous socializing in virtual environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tech ecosystem - Guides on tools - Security (data protection, access rights) - Hardware (using tools and hardware, WIFI speed and availability) - Software (finding the right tool for the task, ICT literacy) - Different medias (email, teams, texts, calls..)

Figure 3. Topic descriptions: Operations

People		
Leadership	Management	Teamworking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced power dynamics and easier access to the leadership team - Harder to maintain strategic direction because of more siloed environment - Need to deal with a more complex combination of stakeholders - Requires more considered support and coaching for management - Maintaining employee motivation starting from the onboarding through the whole employee lifecycle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More persuasion used at the cost of efficiency to reach the goal better, harder to coalesce in virtual - There can be a tendency to increase micro-managing in virtual environments so more emphasis on leadership rather than management - Supporting the team members both emotionally and with their role - Leading virtual meetings in a way that is engaging, and everyone is being heard - Onboarding needs to be more engaging and comprehensive (both planning and process) in a virtual space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open attitude supporting productive teamworking even more important in the virtual because of the rapid escalation based on mis-perception - Supporting and coaching peers in collaborative co-creation is more difficult in the virtual - Keeping everyone aligned toward common goal requires more discussion - More important to have overview of other people's workload to coordinate and build team cohesion

Figure 4. Topic descriptions: People

Development		
Capacity	Capability	Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exhibiting capacities is harder in the virtual, as well as with different cultures - It is more important to have personal adaptability - Virtual environment is usually more siloed and therefore it is harder to create perceptions - Organizational adaptability requires more work from all sides - Global teams offer a wider range of diverse capacities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need of different capabilities in the virtual compared to the face to face - It is harder to demonstrate skills in the virtual environment - The pool to find specific expertise is wider when working in global teams - In the global talent market, wider experience is valued and the ability to promote one's personal brand is essential - Virtual environment allows and requires out-of-the-box thinking and doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is increased need for mentoring, and it is easier to work with several mentors and they can be spread around the globe - Spontaneous learning is harder in the virtual, and observing is harder - Formal and informal learning requires to invest more time in the virtual - Participating in trainings and education is easier in the virtual, but emphasis is with the individual driving it - There is a lot of information, both in in-depth and breadth, which is easier to access in the virtual

Figure 5. Topic descriptions: Development

Interactions		
Coaching	Communication	Dynamics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching and supporting requires more proactive awareness in the virtual - Giving and getting quick feedback helps focus and reduces friction in the team - By sparring and inspiring people, you get emotional buy-in and more clarity, but it requires more time, energy and planning in virtual - Spontaneous coaching requires more flexibility in the virtual - Reflection is more continuous in virtual as it happens in a discussion and between discussions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading the situations and non-verbal messages is harder in virtual environment - The range of considerations in virtual teams requires a broader range of emotional intelligence - Being available and accessible is important to create low threshold to contact you in the virtual - You need to be more aware of your communication and interaction styles (vocabulary) - There is more written communication in virtual environment which is easier to mis-interpret 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Noticing the active and the passive participants, as well as the introverts and extroverts, so that everybody is engaged and included - It is easier to multitask and not concentrate fully in virtual environment - The tempo of the interactions is stiffer in the virtual environment and breaks are forgotten easily - It takes more time and effort to explain things in virtual environment - Information is scattered and there is potential information overload

Figure 6. Topic descriptions: Interactions

Self-Management		
Goals & Growth	Work-Life Balance	Motivation & Attraction
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is a bigger need for coaching and mentoring in the virtual which requires to set clear targets to yourself and construct a long-term personal plan - You need to be more conscience about your role development and career path - You have to be managing up and be more self-confident in the virtual as it is harder to be recognized for personal contribution - Virtual environment requires better self-management in order to expand your skills and expertise - Importance of networks increases in the virtual (internal and external) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self management requires setting realistic targets and scheduling - Virtual environment allows more flexibility in working hours - Maintaining mental wellbeing is harder in virtual environment (isolation, depression, burnout) - It is easy to neglect physical health (too much screen time, sitting all day, staying idle) - You need to actively maintain motivation, discipline and focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is more need for recognition in the virtual environment due to lack of transparency - You need to get meaningfulness from your work as the work community is not so strong in virtual environment - You need to put more emphasis on forming relationships with colleagues in the virtual - Personal brand is increasingly important as it is easier for employees to change jobs in the virtual - In virtual environment the personal values need to align with the company values

Figure 7. Topic descriptions: Self-Management

Activities tables

Once the topics have been described, the next step defines activities from each of the identified perspectives, in this case those of the company, individual, and multi-cultural teamworking. The activities are outlined in Figures 8-12 below.

Operations – Culture & Ways of Working			
Topic Descriptions	Company	Individual	Multi-Cultural Teamworking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Transparent discussions on norms, values and ethics - Net etiquette with guidelines and trainings - More multi-cultural and diverse working environments - Cross-functional and varied levels of experience collaborating - Respecting agreed commitments and schedules is more important in virtual because everything needs to be scheduled - Supporting spontaneous socializing in virtual environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Needs to facilitate transparent discussions on norms, values and ethics in everyday working life - Needs to create clear net etiquette with guidelines and trainings to align behavior - Should support and embrace the multi-cultural and diverse working environments that allow hiring globally - Need to facilitate cross-functional and varied levels of experience collaborating with each other fluidly - Needs to articulate that it is important to respect agreed commitments and schedules as it is more important in virtual, and to live by it - Need to make conscious effort to support spontaneous socializing in virtual environment by creating flexible dynamic and reducing unnecessary scheduling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Needs to familiarize themselves in norms, values and ethics through code of conduct, policies, procedures etc. - Needs to understand and follow the net etiquette with guidelines and trainings - Be open to working in multi-cultural and diverse working environments that exposes them to alternative ways of doing things - Should be comfortable in interacting within team that are cross-functional and include varied levels of experience without deference - Needs to respect agreed commitments and schedules as it is more important in virtual to reduce uncertainty and ensures workflow - Spontaneous socializing in virtual environment requires flexible attitude and making oneself available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to take into consideration when creating the norms, values and ethics that they reflect the multi-cultural team environment that has various ways of interactions - Develop a net etiquette with guidelines and trainings that is a mix of different cultural behaviors rather than single dominant one - The multi-cultural and diverse working environments should support the feeling of safety and allow to express differences - It is expected to be egalitarian when interacting in teams that are cross-functional and include varied levels of experience even if it isn't that comfortable for people in some cultures - Need to be very specific in communicating commitments and schedules as it is more important in virtual and different cultures have different perceptions of time - Finding balance between scheduled meetings and spontaneous socializing in virtual environment to have flow of work

Figure 8. Activities table: Operations – Culture & Ways of Working

People – Management			
Topic Descriptions	Company	Individual	Multi-Cultural Teamworking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More persuasion used at the cost of efficiency to better reach the goal, harder to coalesce in virtual - There can be a tendency to increase micro-managing in virtual environments so more emphasis on leadership rather than management - Supporting the team members both emotionally and with their role - Leading virtual meetings in a way that is engaging and everyone is being heard - Onboarding needs to be more engaging and comprehensive (both planning and process) in a virtual space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to appreciate that it takes more time and effort to use persuasion to coalesce in a virtual environment in order to better reach goals - Need to be aware of the heightened tendency to increase micro-managing in virtual environments and increased emphasis on leadership rather than management - Because of isolation there is heightened need for supporting the team members both emotionally and with their role - Need to encourage all team members to participate in virtual meetings and facilitate their engagement in an environment where everyone is being heard - Need to create systematic on-going onboarding process that is engaging and comprehensive (both planning and process) in a virtual space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Because it is harder to coalesce in a virtual environment, one needs to be more receptive to listening to persuasive dialog at the cost of efficiency to better reach the goal - It requires more self-management to reduce the tendency to micro-manage in a virtual environments so there is more of an emphasis on leadership - Need of self-awareness to be able to call attention to a need for personal support, both emotional and professional - Need to actively engage themselves in virtual meetings and make their ideas and observations heard - More need to accountability during the onboarding process in a virtual space as informal guidance is less available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different language capabilities directly affect their persuasion capabilities and further increase the cost of efficiency to better reach the goal and consensus - Team members supporting each other reduces the perception of the need to micro-manage in virtual environments allowing the manager to focus on leadership rather than management - Be empathetic to support team members both emotionally and within their role respecting cultural differences - Reacting supportively to team members in virtual meetings to create engaging environment where everyone is being heard - The starting points in global hiring is more varied so onboarding needs to be more comprehensive in a virtual space. It is also important to build team cohesion

Figure 9. Activities table: People – Management

Interactions – Communications			
Topic descriptions	Company	Individual	Multi-Cultural Teamworking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reading the situations and non-verbal messages is harder in virtual environment - The range of considerations in virtual teams requires a broader range of emotional intelligence - Being available and accessible is important to create low threshold to contact others in the virtual - You need to be more aware of your communication and interaction styles (vocabulary) - There is more written communication in virtual environment which is easier to mis-interpret 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to set the norm to attempt to be more aware of non-verbal messages by keeping cameras on for example - Acknowledge that the range of considerations in virtual teams requires a broader range of emotional intelligence and managers need to mediate more - Need to create a culture of being accessible regardless of hierarchy as being available and accessible is important to create low threshold to contact others in the virtual environment - Management sets the tone and the norms of what kinds of communication and interaction styles (vocabulary) are appropriate - The company should support having spoken communication whenever possible as there is more written communication in virtual environment which is easier to mis-interpret, however, to support clarity of shared understanding the written form might be more effective especially in the virtual 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to verbalize more than you would in face to face as it's harder to read situations and non-verbal messages in virtual environment - Need to give wider latitude in interpreting communications as the virtual teams requires a broader range of emotional intelligence - Need to be active and responsible to appropriately reach out and respond to others when there is a low threshold to contact others in the virtual - Need to understand that you are accountable for your communication and interaction styles (vocabulary) and it should reflect the company tone and style - There is more written communication in the virtual, so you need to pay extra attention when communicating in writing as it is easier to mis-interpret the written communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active listening and responding helps others in reading the situations and non-verbal messages, that harder in virtual environment, so it is important, even if it's not the natural way in the individual's culture - Cultural differences create more opportunities for potential conflicts, so more consideration involving emotional intelligence is required in virtual teams underlining the importance of avoiding stereotyping - Need to develop a shared understanding of how to communicate with one another to support being available and accessible, and create a low threshold to contact others - You need to be more aware of your communication and interaction styles (vocabulary) especially when communicating with non-native speakers - There is more written communication in virtual environment which is easier to mis-interpret, even more when there are non-native speakers so it should be easy to ask for clarification

Figure 10. Activities table: Interactions – Communications

Interactions - Dynamics			
Topic descriptions	Company	Individual	Multi-Cultural Teamworking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are active and the passive participants, as well as the introverts and extroverts, and it is important that everybody is engaged and included - It is easier to multitask and not concentrate fully in virtual environment - The tempo of the interactions is stiffer in the virtual environment and breaks are forgotten easily - It takes more time and effort to explain things in virtual environment - Information is scattered and there is potential information overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to pay attention to the active and the passive participants, as well as the introverts and extroverts, and facilitate dynamics that everybody is engaged and included - Work culture should promote concentrating fully in virtual environment and to limit multitasking as a mode of behavior - Needs to be prescribe how breaks are scheduled in between meetings, and lengths of the meetings as the tempo of the interactions is stiffer in the virtual environment and breaks are forgotten easily - It takes more time and effort to explain things in virtual environment, so by preparing and distributing material in advanced the efficiency of the meeting is increased - Need to create coherent approach to maintaining information and communicating it as information is scattered and there is potential information overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Be active in participating and give room to others as well, depending on passiveness/activeness or introversion/extroversion so that everybody is engaged and included - You shouldn't multitask to concentrate fully in virtual environment - Need to be respectful of breaks and other people's schedules as the tempo of the interactions is stiffer in the virtual environment and breaks are forgotten easily - It takes more time and effort to explain things in virtual environment, it is important to be prepared when going to a meeting and it is important to appropriately utilize tools helping in explaining or visualizing things - Need to be mindful what is shared and who needs the information as there is a risk of potential information overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are active and the passive participants, as well as the introverts and extroverts, and cultures define the expected behavior and there is increased importance for making sure everybody is engaged and included in order to overcome prescribed patterns - Team dynamics shouldn't accept multitask but should expect full concentration in virtual environment by not scheduling too long or too many meetings - When facilitating meetings, the agenda and time needs to be managed as the tempo of the interactions is stiffer in the virtual environment and breaks are forgotten easily - Because of different cultural backgrounds it takes even more time and effort to explain things in virtual environment and it is even harder to keep track of sub-conversations, so perspectives should be aligned in advance - Information needs to be well structured and centrally accessible for the team as information is scattered and there is potential information overload

Figure 11. Activities table : Interactions – Dynamics

Self-Management - Work-Life Balance			
Topic descriptions	Company	Individual	Multi-Cultural Teamworking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-management requires setting realistic targets and scheduling - Remote working allows more flexibility in working hours - Maintaining mental wellbeing is harder when working remotely (isolation, depression, burnout) - It is easy to neglect physical health (too much screen time, sitting all day, staying idle) - It can be hard to actively maintain motivation, discipline and focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Company should set realistic targets, and management should support self-management and listening to your employees when creating schedules - Remote working allows more flexibility in working hours, so company needs to allow flexibility in working hours and respect and trust employees to manage their work - Needs to create safe environment and provide extra support to maintain mental wellbeing as it is harder when working remotely (isolation, depression, burnout) - Needs to support ergonomic environments and provide access to recreational activities and encourage employees to use them as it is easy to neglect physical health (too much screen time, sitting all day, staying idle) - It can be hard to actively maintain motivation, discipline and focus, so employers need to have good understanding of how to keep individuals motivated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Employee needs to be able to reflect company targets and set their own realistic targets based on them, they also need to be able to reflect on the schedule and to be verbalize it - Remote working allows more flexibility in working hours, individual needs to balance private and work life - Be actively self-aware and take advantage of the help and guidance provided as maintaining mental wellbeing is harder when working remotely (isolation, depression, burnout) and openly communicate your workload and capacity - It is easy to neglect physical health (too much screen time, sitting all day, staying idle), but remote work also allows flexibility in where you are working, and employee needs to take care of their physical health - It can be hard to actively maintain motivation, discipline and focus, employee needs to be trustworthy and accountable, and be able to understand their working patterns and their work requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-management requires setting realistic targets and scheduling, when working in a team all team members need to discuss together their targets and schedules - Different cultures have very different understanding of work-life balance, in the team it needs to be established what the guidelines are for remote working, that allows more flexibility in working hours - Maintaining mental wellbeing is harder when working remotely (isolation, depression, burnout) so the team should support the other members (interactions, workload, coaching), this is harder in certain cultures than others - It is easy to neglect physical health (too much screen time, sitting all day, staying idle), but teams can do shared activities even remotely, for example in a meeting that doesn't require seeing the screen it can be a walking meeting - It can be hard to actively maintain motivation, discipline and focus, teams should support its members by aligning expectations and providing help when needed

Figure 12. Activities table: Self-Management – Work-Life Balance

Action plans

The activity definitions provide a vast overview of actions and capacities needed from different perspectives. Based on these, the final step brought the different perspectives together in one coherent action plan. The action plan outlines the goals and gains for each of the identified dimensions and serves a basis of the curricula. Figures 13-17 summarize the main elements of the action plan.

The action plan blocks serve as set of learning objectives and outcomes that can be used to develop study modules or a full curriculum. The goals and gains define a uniform set of objectives, whilst allowing for flexibility in applying different teaching and learning methods and supportive tools and specific assessment criteria depending on the context and level. As an illustration of how the action plans can be applied in curriculum development, three concise course outcomes as examples of the VIBES tool can be found in Appendix 1. The extended curriculum example examples can be found in Appendix 2.

Operations – Culture & Ways of Working	
Goals	Gains
<p>Student learns about cultures and ways of working in virtual multicultural organizations. Diverse working cultures impact net etiquette and company norms. It is harder to have a balance between scheduled meetings and spontaneous dynamics.</p>	<p>Student understands that companies need to facilitate transparent discussions on norms, values and ethics in everyday working life in a way that allows employees to be able to familiarize themselves with them and act accordingly. As virtual environments often have multicultural teams, it is important to remember there are many different ways of interactions.</p> <p>Student learns that when developing net etiquette company should construct it as a mix of different cultural behaviours, rather than single dominant one. The guidelines and training needs to be accessible and understandable by the employee.</p> <p>Student learns that there are more multicultural and diverse working environments in the virtual, as companies are able to hire globally. The working environment should support and embrace the diversity by allowing individuals to feel safe to express their differences and alternative ways of doing things.</p> <p>Student learns that in virtual teams there are often cross-functional teams with varied levels of experience amongst members. Members needs to be egalitarian when interacting with one another, but this is harder in some cultures because of the hierarchical differences.</p> <p>Student learns that there is a need to be very specific in communicating commitments and schedules as it is more important in virtual. Different cultures also have different perceptions of time. Teams need to respect agreed commitments and schedules in order to reduce uncertainty and ensure workflow.</p> <p>Student learns that conscious socializing is hard in the virtual environment and companies should put effort in supporting it by creating flexible dynamics where employees make themselves available for inpromptu interactions. There should be a balance between scheduled meetings and spontaneous socializing to create flow of work.</p>

Figure 13. Action plan goals and gains: Operations – Culture & Ways of Working

People - Management	
Goals	Gains
<p>Student learns about people management in virtual environment. In a virtual environment there is a risk for micro-managing, and emphasis should be on the leadership instead of management. Managing in virtual space often requires more time and support to employees, both emotionally and with their roles, to reach common targets. It is important to make sure all team members are engaged through a clear onboarding.</p>	<p>Student learns that language capabilities, listening and use of persuasive dialogue impacts teams' capability to reach set goals and consensus. To reach the agreement, it takes more time and effort in the virtual environment.</p> <p>Student learns that there is tendency for increased micro-management in virtual environment and emphasis should be in leadership instead of management. Self-management and peer support by the team members reduces tendency of micro-manage.</p> <p>Student learns the importance of self-awareness and calling attention for support when needed from manager or team member. It is important to be empathetic, to provide support to other team members, by respecting cultural differences. Because of isolation there is heightened need for supporting team members, both emotionally and with their role.</p> <p>Student learns that virtual meeting should be led in a way that is engaging and everyone is being heard. It is individual's responsibility to actively engage themselves in meetings. All team members should react supportively and create an engaging environment.</p> <p>Student learns the importance of creating a systematic continuous onboarding process that is engaging and comprehensive, as the starting point in global hiring is more varied in the virtual space. Building team cohesion is a key success factor to efficient team working. It requires more accountability from the individual as informal guidance is less available in the virtual onboarding process.</p>

Figure 14. Action plan goals and gains: People – Management

Interaction - Communications	
Goals	Gains
<p>Student learns about communication in virtual teams. In a virtual environment, limited non-verbal communication and heavy reliance on written communication can lead to misinterpretations. Virtual communication requires emotional intelligence and awareness of communication and interaction styles, as well as a low threshold to contact others.</p>	<p>Student understands the limitations of non-verbal messaging in a virtual environment and the need to verbalise more than in face-to-face communication. Non-verbal communication can be facilitated for instance by setting norms to keep cameras on. Team members can also ease communication through active listening or responding, even though it might not be a prevailing practice in individual cultures.</p> <p>Student understands the relevance of emotional intelligence in interpreting communications and learns how managers can mediate the range of considerations in virtual teams. Cultural differences can create stereotyping and conflicts in teams, so collaboration requires consideration, patience and emotional intelligence.</p> <p>Student learns to be active and take responsibility to reach out and respond to others to maintain contact in a virtual environment. Companies should foster a culture of availability and accessibility regardless of hierarchy and allow team members to develop understanding of how to communicate with each other.</p> <p>Student learns to be aware and assume accountability for own communication and interaction style. Employers set the tone and norms of appropriate communication and individuals and teams should reflect the defined style. Particular attention should be paid to communicating with non-native speakers.</p> <p>Student learns to pay attention to written communication in a virtual environment and understands the risks of misinterpretation, especially when interacting with non-native speakers. Team members should make it easy to ask for clarifications and companies should support spoken communication and clarity of shared understanding in writing whenever possible.</p>

Figure 15. Action plan goals and gains: Interactions – Communications

Interaction - Dynamics	
Goals	Gains
<p>Student learns about dynamics in companies. Facilitating group dynamics in a way that engages everyone and all members feel included is important. As information is scattered and it takes more time and effort to explain things, the tempo of the interactions can become stiffer and breaks can easily be forgotten, which can then lead to multitasking and individuals not concentrating fully.</p>	<p>The student learns when being active in participating meetings the individuals need to pay attention to and give room to others, the active and the passive participants, as well as the introverts and extroverts. Companies should facilitate dynamics that everyone is engaged and included. Because culture defines the expected behavior, there is increased need of inclusivity to overcome prescribed patterns.</p> <p>The student learns that virtual work culture should promote and expect the members to concentrate fully in virtual environment and limit multitasking. By making sure there are not too many and too long meetings it is easier to support focus.</p> <p>The student learns that the tempo is stiffer in the virtual environments. When facilitating meetings, the agenda and time needs to be managed and breaks should be scheduled in between meetings. The length of the meetings should not get unnecessarily long and other people's scheduled should be respected.</p> <p>The student learns that because of differences in cultural backgrounds it takes even more time and effort to explain things in the virtual environment and also to keep track of sub-conversations in harder. It is important to be prepared and distribute material beforehand when going to a meeting as it helps with aligning perspectives and increases efficiency. By appropriately utilizing tools it is easier to visualizing things.</p> <p>The student learns that as information is scattered and there is a potential information overload, there is a need to create coherent approach to maintaining information and communicating it. Information needs to be well structured and centrally accessible for the team and everyone needs to be mindful what is shared and who needs the information.</p>

Figure 16. Action plan goals and gains: Interactions – Dynamics

Self-Management - Work-Life Balance	
Goals	Gains
<p>Student learns about work-life balance and how to support it in a virtual environment. The importance of maintaining mental and physical wellbeing is highlighted in remote working and there is a big need for self-management in meeting targets and maintaining motivation.</p>	<p>Student learns that for employee to manage their work, it is important that there are clear and realistic targets, both at a company level as well as an individual level. Especially, when working in remote teams, it is important that aims and schedules are communicated clearly and openly through discussions.</p> <p>Student understands that virtual environments and global teams allow more flexibility in working hours. This requires more trust in employer-employee relationships and increases the employee's responsibility of balancing their private and professional lives. When teams are multi-cultural, the understanding of work-life balance varies, which requires teams to align their practices through guidelines.</p> <p>Student understands that remote working strains mental wellbeing, which can result in feelings of isolation and depression as well as increased risk of burn-out. Maintaining mental wellbeing requires employees to be actively self-aware and utilize support, help and guidance provided by the company and the team. It is also crucial that there is a safe environment that allows employees to openly communicate their workloads and capacity to their supervisors and within their teams. Varied cultural backgrounds can affect how difficult it is to have these discussions.</p> <p>Student understands how remote working can negatively affect physical health. There is not that much spontaneous movement during the day and the ergonomics might not be as well taken into consideration in home offices. Employers should support ergonomic working conditions and recreational activities, but ultimately it is the employees' responsibility to take care of their physical health. Teams can support adding movement to workdays by having remote walking meetings or other shared activities for example.</p> <p>Student learns that it is harder to actively maintain motivation, discipline and focus when working remotely, and that it requires more effort from both employer and employee. Employees will need to be trustworthy and accountable, and they need to have good understanding of their individual working patterns and work requirements. Team members can help each other by aligning expectations and providing help when needed, but it is also important for supervisors to understand each individuals' motivations.</p>

Figure 17. Action plan goals and gains: Self-Management – Work-Life Balance

Curricula

Based on the VIBES framework, a set of curricula was developed, demonstrating how the framework can be applied to design courses or curricula for different contexts. These curricula, outlined in more detail in the appendix, illustrate how to design courses and learning paths focused on:

- a single sub-topic in (example: master's level course)
- combined sub-topics (example: master's level course)
- combined levels (example: combined high school, bachelor's, and master's level course)

These curricula are developed to have the same learning path for the high school, undergraduate, and the master's level. They could even be applied for purposes of professional development trainings. The aim was to facilitate multi-level integration possibilities in the learner's experience and to facilitate developing distinct roles in the problem spaces.

Conclusion

There is not, and cannot be, a single curriculum that covers all the issues of multi-cultural teamworking comprehensively. Each learner will cover the materials and the issues as they proceed and learn to appreciate the complexity of working in virtual teams.

The VIBES tool provides an approach to focus and create the dialogue and moments of reflection in developing a learning journey towards enhanced virtual skills and competences. The path through the journey depends on the learner's starting points and objectives and can be tailored to diverse needs and contexts. The journey requires interactions and experiences, to appreciate what works and what does not work in the combination of people at that moment in time. The aim was to provide examples to speed up the process of being exposed to the issues and support the actual learning as life experience.

APPENDIX

Curriculum example of single sub-topic

Course title	Culture and Ways of Working in Virtual Organizations
Educational level	Master's Degree
Credits	5 ECTS
Schedule	8-week course with 3 full day contact days
Objective	Student learns about cultures and ways of working in virtual multicultural organizations. Diverse working cultures impact net etiquette and company norms. It is harder to have a balance between scheduled meetings and spontaneous dynamics.
Transferrable	<p>Student understands that companies need to facilitate transparent discussions on norms, values, and ethics in everyday working life in a way that allows employees to be able to familiarize themselves with them and act accordingly. As virtual environments often have multicultural teams, it is important to remember there are many ways of interactions.</p> <p>Student learns that when developing net etiquette company should construct it as a mix of diverse cultural behaviours, rather than single dominant one. The guidelines and training need to be accessible and understandable by the employee.</p> <p>Student learns that there are more multicultural and diverse working environments in the virtual, as companies can hire globally. The working environment should support and embrace the diversity by allowing individuals to feel safe to express their differences and alternative ways of doing things.</p> <p>Student learns that in virtual teams there are often cross-functional teams with varied levels of experience amongst members. Members needs to be egalitarian when interacting with one another, but this is harder in some cultures because of the hierarchical differences.</p> <p>Student learns that there is a need to be extremely specific in communicating commitments and schedules as it is more important in virtual. Diverse cultures also have different perceptions of time. Teams need to respect agreed commitments and schedules to reduce uncertainty and ensure workflow.</p> <p>Student learns that conscious socializing is hard in the virtual environment and companies should put effort in supporting it by creating flexible dynamics where employees make themselves available for impromptu interactions. There should be a balance between scheduled meetings and spontaneous socializing to create flow of work.</p>
Practice	Contact days include lectures and discussions on the topics of culture and ways of working.

	<p>Students will create guidelines and ways of working to two imaginary companies merging which have quite different working cultures. As a result, groups present defined common middle ground to facilitate collective understanding of communications and operations. This is done as a launch event of the new company culture which is supported by visual presentation and short video. Group work also includes 10 page per person report. Students will apply relevant theory and utilize relevant tools when presenting their solutions.</p>
Theory and tools	<p>Academic and professional text related to mergers and acquisitions addressing operational challenges.</p>
Assessment	<p>Bloom's taxonomy is used as a base of assessment.</p> <p>Grading 1-5</p> <p>1-2: The student understands what culture and ways of working means in a company context.</p> <p>3-4: The student can understand the company culture and ways of working and can apply their learnings from various sources.</p> <p>5: The student understands company culture and ways of working. They can apply their learnings and create new innovative approaches.</p>

Curriculum example of combined sub-topics

Course title	Supporting Employees' Work-Life Balance in Different Virtual Business Environments
Educational level	Master's Degree
Credits	5 ECTS
Schedule	8-week course with 3 full day contact days
Objective	<p>Student learns about people management in virtual environment. In a virtual environment there is a risk for micro-managing, and emphasis should be on the leadership instead of management. Managing in virtual space often requires more time and support to employees, both emotionally and with their roles, to reach common targets.</p> <p>Student also learns about work-life balance and how to support it in a virtual environment. The importance of maintaining mental and physical wellbeing is highlighted in remote working and there is a big need for self-management in meeting targets and maintaining motivation.</p>
Transferrable	<p>Student learns that there is tendency for increased micro-management in virtual environment and emphasis should be in leadership instead of management. Self-management and peer support by the team members reduces tendency of micro-manage.</p> <p>Student learns the importance of self-awareness and calling attention for support when needed from manager or team member. It is important to be empathetic, to provide support to other team members, by respecting cultural differences. Because of isolation there is heightened need for supporting team members, both emotionally and with their role.</p> <p>Student understands the limitations of non-verbal messaging in a virtual environment and the need to verbalise more than in face-to-face communication. Non-verbal communication can be facilitated for instance by setting norms to keep cameras on. Team members can also ease communication through active listening or responding, even though it might not be a prevailing practice in individual cultures.</p> <p>Student learns that for employee to manage their work, it is important that there are clear and realistic targets, both at a company level as well as an individual level. Especially, when working in remote teams, it is important that aims and schedules are communicated clearly and openly through discussions.</p> <p>Student understands that virtual environments and global teams allow more flexibility in working hours. This requires more trust in employer-employee relationships and increases the employee's responsibility of balancing their</p>

	private and professional lives. When teams are multi-cultural, the understanding of work-life balance varies, which requires teams to align their practices through guidelines.
Practice	<p>Contact days include lectures and discussions on the topics of culture and ways of working.</p> <p>Students will create supervising guidelines to employee discussions, both on a team and individual level. As a result, groups present the plans. Each group has its own specific business environment (for example, financial, technology and social services). Presentations are done supported by visual presentation and short video. Group work also includes 10 page per person report. Students will apply relevant theory and utilize relevant tools when presenting their solutions.</p>
Theory and tools	Academic and professional text related to operational management, human resources, and strategic leadership with respect to work-life balance.
Assessment	<p>Bloom's taxonomy is used as a base of assessment.</p> <p>Grading 1-5 1-2: Understand 3-4: Apply 5: Create</p>

Curriculum example of combined three levels

Course title	Death on the Web
Educational level	High School, Bachelor's Degree & Master's Degree
Credits	2 ECTS
Schedule	Weekend workshop
Objective	<p>Student learns about cultures and ways of working in virtual multicultural organizations.</p> <p>Student learns about communication in virtual teams. In a virtual environment, limited non-verbal communication and heavy reliance on written communication can lead to misinterpretations. Virtual communication requires emotional intelligence and awareness of communication and interaction styles, as well as a low threshold to contact others.</p> <p>Student learns about dynamics in companies. Facilitating group dynamics in a way that engages everyone and all members feel included is important. As information is scattered and it takes more time and effort to explain things, the tempo of the interactions can become stiffer and breaks can easily be forgotten, which can then lead to multitasking and individuals not concentrating fully.</p>
Transferrable	<p>Student learns that virtual meeting should be led in a way that is engaging and everyone is being heard. It is individuals' responsibility to actively engage themselves in meetings. All team members should react supportively and create an engaging environment.</p> <p>Student learns that in virtual teams there are often cross-functional teams with varied levels of experience amongst members. Members needs to be egalitarian when interacting with one another, but this is harder in some cultures because of the hierarchical differences.</p> <p>The student learns that because of differences in cultural backgrounds it takes even more time and effort to explain things in the virtual environment and to keep track of sub-conversations in harder. It is important to be prepared and distribute material beforehand when going to a meeting as it helps with aligning perspectives and increases efficiency. By appropriately utilizing tools it is easier to visualizing things.</p> <p>The student learns that as information is scattered and there is a potential information overload, there is a need to create coherent approach to maintaining information and communicating it. Information needs to be well structured and centrally accessible for the team and everyone needs to be mindful what is shared and who needs the information.</p>

Practice	<p>Students from diverse backgrounds and educational levels collaborate in a murder mystery type of a role play where each member is given a character and pieces of information. Groups need to work together to solve a given problem based on the scattered knowledge.</p> <p>Workshop coaches team building and problem-solving skills in a playful setting. Participants need to use their assessment skills and interact with people from various backgrounds in a motivating manner.</p>
Theory and tools	<p>Role folders with character information, folders of clues and information.</p> <p>Virtual whiteboards, Zoom breakout rooms and other appropriate tools.</p>
Assessment	Fail/Pass

V/BES

Virtual Business Skills Empowerment

Strengthening Competences for Working in
Multicultural Virtual Environments
to Support the Evolving Business World



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