



October 2024

DigiEduHack Webinar #5: Shaping the Winning Project Idea and Building a High- Performing Team (10/10/2024)



DigiEduHack Webinar #5: Shaping the Winning Project Idea and Building a High-Performing Team

Date: October 10, 2024

Time: 17:00-18:00 CET

Overview:

This webinar focused on generating winning project ideas and assembling high-performing teams for educational hackathons. The session offered insights into brainstorming, project conceptualisation, and team dynamics, emphasising practical strategies for building collaborative, interdisciplinary teams.

Onsite Invited Speakers:

- Slavko Rakić (Serbia), Professor at Faculty of Technical Sciences, University of Novi Sad, and DigiEduHack National Ambassador.
- Kelly Lilles (Estonia), Co-Founder and CEO at ALPA Kids, and DigiEduHack National Ambassador.

Online Invited Speakers:

- Alexandru Capatina (Romania), Professor at Dunarea de Jos University of Galati, and DigiEduHack National Ambassador.
- Filipa Lemos Cristina (Portugal), Founder of PowerUP, and DigiEduHack National Ambassador.

Webinar Host:

- Mart Soonik (Estonia): Communication Manager and Lecturer of MSMedia

Ask-Me-Anything Host:

- Kristof Fenyvesi (Estonia), Visiting researcher at Tallinn University.



Highlights of the interview

How to Generate Winning Ideas?

Slavko Rakić introduced a research-driven approach to generating ideas, focusing on the importance of performing desk research to understand trends in digital education. He stressed that participants should look at the needs of users—students, educators, or even entire institutions—and develop ideas that solve clearly defined problems. Using the **design thinking** method, participants can explore these needs, while tools like AI, AR, and VR can be leveraged to create innovative educational solutions. He also emphasised aligning ideas with specific educational contexts, noting that Serbia's focus was on integrating cutting-edge technology into its education system.

Kelly Lilles took a different angle by sharing the origin story of ALPA Kids, a solution born from her personal need as a mother seeking educational resources in her children's native language, Estonian. She advocated for looking at personal experiences or asking the end users, such as teachers and parents, for pain points that could be addressed. For Kelly, innovation doesn't always come from groundbreaking new technology; it can come from identifying gaps in everyday life. Both speakers stressed the importance of **starting small and scaling**, recommending that participants avoid tackling too many problems at once. Instead, narrowing the problem focus and aiming for simplicity are keys to creating effective, implementable solutions.

Team Building: How to Assemble a High-Performing Team?

Building the right team was one of the most recurring points of the webinar. Slavko Rakić and Kelly Lilles both explained that a successful team must include a balance of technical skills and domain expertise. Slavko noted that while IT and programming skills are crucial, team members with business acumen, educational content knowledge, and marketing abilities are equally important to the project's overall success. He encouraged participants to form **multidisciplinary teams** that can think holistically about both the technical and the strategic aspects of the solution they are developing.

Kelly added that during hackathons, teams often lack a certain skill set, such as psychology when working on solutions for children's education, or business strategy when aiming to commercialise a product. This is where strong leadership comes into play. Team leaders should actively seek to fill gaps, either by recruiting additional members or consulting mentors. Both speakers underscored that hackathons are not just about building a product—they are about building the right team to support its growth beyond the competition.

What Makes a Good Project Plan and Presentation?

The speakers agreed that clear communication is essential when presenting a project. Kelly recommended using the “**Why, What, How**” structure to build a narrative that connects with both the judges and the audience. She shared the example of her own project pitch, where showing a **video of children already using her prototype** helped create an emotional connection and demonstrated real-world value. She emphasised the importance of showing that your solution is already having an impact, even if it is still in its early stages.

Slavko stressed that **data and prototypes** are critical components of a winning presentation. Teams should aim to show that their idea is not only feasible but also validated through user research. He suggested incorporating numbers—such as feedback from potential users or market data—to strengthen the pitch. He also shared techniques for keeping the audience engaged, such as using **rhetorical questions** and **dynamic visuals**, and ensuring that the presentation flows smoothly and concisely. Both speakers reiterated the need for confidence and enthusiasm, as well as the ability to sell the idea effectively in the limited time available.

Challenges and Success Stories:

Alexandru Capatina reflected on the difficulties of managing an intercontinental team during a hackathon, particularly the logistical challenges of coordinating across multiple time zones. Despite these hurdles, he pointed out that communication was key to keeping everyone engaged and motivated. He shared how his team from Romania, Morocco, Peru, and Australia used continuous communication to overcome setbacks and deliver a successful project by the end of the competition. **Team leadership** was critical, with team leaders acting as motivators and ensuring all members stayed focused on the final goal.

Filipa Lemos Cristina highlighted the importance of **empathy and collaboration** within teams. She shared her experiences from PowerUP, where structured feedback and open communication fostered

trust among team members. Filipa also stressed the value of mentorship, suggesting that mentors help guide teams through difficult moments and provide both technical advice and emotional support. She advised hackathon organisers to ensure that mentors are available not just to help with the project but also to help manage the pressure and time constraints participants face. Both Alexandru and Filipa highlighted how challenges often lead to growth, with teams learning to adapt quickly and come up with creative solutions even under stressful conditions.

Concluding Remarks:

DigiEduHack Webinar #5 focused on both the technical and strategic aspects of participating in educational hackathons. From generating impactful ideas grounded in real-world problems to assembling diverse, multidisciplinary teams, the speakers emphasised the importance of preparation, collaboration, and creativity. Practical advice on pitching, storytelling, and leveraging data further highlighted the importance of clear communication. The session's focus on adaptability, empathy, and mentorship highlighted that hackathons are as much about the learning journey as the final solution, fostering growth and innovation in participants.

