



# Concept for international remote trainee working groups



# Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. What is Interprentice? .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3. Concept for international remote working groups.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.1 Important competences and methods for a successful     “Interprentice” experience.....</b>	<b>3</b>
3.1.1 5 key competences .....	3
3.1.2 Suggestions and Recommendations .....	5
3.1.2.1 Virtual communication skills.....	5
3.1.2.2 Time management .....	6
3.1.2.3 Communication soft skills.....	7
3.1.2.4 Cultural Competences.....	9
3.1.2.5 Self-confidence and discipline .....	10
<b>3.2 What are the best methods to cooperate in remote     international working groups?.....</b>	<b>11</b>
3.2.1. Do’s and Don’ts when organizing international remote cooperation .....	12
3.2.2 Best practice examples.....	13
3.2.3. Collaborative tools .....	14
3.2.4 Others .....	15
<b>4. Difficulties .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5. Conclusion.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>6. Sources .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6.1 Image references .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6.2 Text references.....</b>	<b>20</b>

# 1. Introduction

Mixing two different things together will always create something unexpected.

This also stands for our Erasmus+ project “Interprentice”, whose name comes from the combination of “International” and “Apprentice”.

The idea of the project is to give trainees the opportunity to broaden and improve the quality of their education by getting in touch with the



FIGURE 1: TEAMWORK

European idea and interculturality remotely during their training already.

On the following pages you’ll learn more about our project and the organisations we



FIGURE 2: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

work with. The Inclusion of different methods and skills that are helpful for better international cooperation will be at the core of this concept. We suggest you some of the best ways of remote cooperation in international working groups, which digital communication tools we

recommend and what you need to consider making an international remote collaboration successful.

If you've found our little introduction interesting so far, we encourage you to read more about our project and give us a chance to convince you of supporting our work.

## 2. *What is Interprentice?*

The Interprentice project is an Erasmus+ project that addresses the question of how interdisciplinary, cross-national distance learning internships and collaborations can look in a vocational education context. In this project we work together with other organisations from different European countries, including Germany,

Slovenia, Italy, and Spain. The total duration of the project is 15 months, starting on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March in 2023 and ending as planned in July 2024. The main target group of our



project are trainees who are expected to learn more and more digital skills and intercultural competences during their training who will benefit from this project approach.



FIGURE 3: REMOTE COMMUNICATION

The project has four main goals:

- 1. Analysis of digital competence requirements in the craft/electrical sector**
- 2. Development of a concept for international remote project work**
- 3. Implementation of this concept**
- 4. Promotion of the concept**

### 3. *Concept for international remote working groups*

With our project we provide guidance for unique international collaboration experiences for individuals to gain professional experience and cultural exposure while having the comfort of their own location. These methods and competencies can help supervisors to plan remote working groups and help individuals to gain valuable experience and develop skills relevant to the global workforce.

#### 3.1 *Important competences and methods for a successful “Interprentice” experience*

In the following we will explain five key points, that trainees should consider while working in remote international working groups. First, we give you a small explanation of the 5 main key points that should be taken in consideration together with some suggestions and recommendations on how to easily implement these competences. We also advise you on some of the best ways to cooperate remotely in international working groups with the help of some collaboration tools, different do’s and don’ts and practice examples.

##### 3.1.1 *5 key competences*

Some of the common elements that should be considered in remote international cooperation are:

Methods & Competences	Reason
1. Virtual communication Skills	Effective communication is crucial in remote cooperation, as you miss the daily physical contact in the office. Participants should be proficient in virtual communication, digital tools such as video conferencing, email, and instant messaging. Consequently, trainees will improve their capacities to articulate more and more ideas and collaborate globally with team members and supervisors remotely.

<p>2. Time Management</p>	<p>Remote collaborative work often requires people to manage their time independently. As improvement they should learn how to prioritize tasks, set deadlines, and demonstrate strong organizational skills to ensure they meet their objectives.</p>
<p>3. Communication Soft Skills</p>	<p>Since remote teamwork lacks face-to-face interaction, participants should be proficient in written and verbal communication and be proactive in it. They should regularly update supervisors and team members on their progress, seek clarification and actively participate in virtual meetings and discussions.</p>
<p>4. Cultural competences</p>	<p>International remote cooperation involves working with diverse teams from different cultures. Trainees should have an appreciation for cultural differences, be open-minded and demonstrate respect towards other cultures. Understanding cultural nuances can consequently enhance collaboration and positive working relationships.</p>
<p>5. Self-confidence &amp; discipline</p>	<p>Self-confidence and discipline are overall important in a professional life and only the thought of international remote collaborative work makes these two competences more important than ever before. Self-confidence and discipline are crucial in this framework as they facilitate effective communication, remote collaboration, adaptability, networking, adaptability, and personal growth, ultimately contributing to a successful remote working experience.</p>



## 3.1.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

In this point we suggest some effective ideas, applications, and other ways of collaborating in remote international working groups. Each of the 5 key competences has its own needs, that one should fill effectively and in the best ways possible. We advise to focus on 3-4 points, to internalize them and then gradually observe all the other points.



FIGURE 4: REMOTE TEAMWORK

### 3.1.2.1 Virtual communication skills

We suggest:

- Team meetings every week, in addition there could be Retro, Review, Planning meetings.
- Internal review after one week to check the progress of the work (to make corrections as soon as possible or to distribute the work differently if there are problems arising).
- “Pair Programming” “Pair working”<sup>1</sup>
- Weekly “Make up hour” Call<sup>2</sup> → different areas can work here together on different parts of a task.
- 30 min. talks with each employee/intern per week.
- Chat rooms for informal talks with colleagues.
- Lightning talks<sup>3</sup>.
- In addition to the remote process, there are regular or ad-hoc mandatory presence phases to

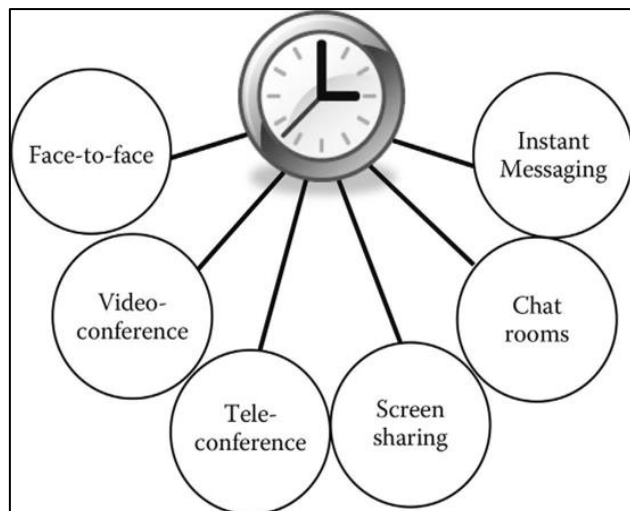


FIGURE 5: VIRTUAL SKILLS

#### **Glossary**

1. Software development technique in which two developers team up and work together.
2. for monitoring
3. Short form talks

discuss strategic decisions, facilitate exchange and for team building. Ad-hoc contacts can be done via Slack or MS Teams (or ...) to check on regularly basis for news

- To clarify in advance which tools are already known in your digital infrastructure or which alternatives are known and give the person access to the tools as quickly as possible so that they can familiarize themselves with them.
- Shared source code management.
- Consolidated communication.
- Project management tools.
- Whiteboard collaboration tools for design and for content-related more software-architectural planning and brainstorming.

### **Tools**

- Use of the SCRUM Method and adapt it to the specific company needs
- Videoconference tools such as Zoom, Google meet, Jitsi meet or BigBlueButton.
- Issue trackers like Gitlab, GitHub and Bitbucket with Jira
- Communication tools like Teams, Slack or Discord
- Kanban boards
- Whiteboards: Miro Board or Figma

### ***3.1.2.2 Time management***

We advise to:

- Set goals, clearly define your objectives for the remote collaboration and break them down into smaller manageable tasks.
- Use of the different time management methods, such as the Pareto system, ALPEN, Matrix Method or ABC Analyse of the given tasks.



FIGURE 6: TIME MANAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS



- Create a daily schedule that includes specific time blocks for work, breaks and personal activities.
- Task management apps for tracking work progress.
- Identify and prioritize the most important tasks that align with the remote working groups goals.
- Take regular breaks to rest and recharge. Short breaks or a longer lunch break can help maintain one's energy levels and prevent burnout.
- Avoid multitasking, as it can lead to decreased efficiency and quality of work. We advise to focus on one task at a time to complete each task effectively.
- Create a distraction-free work environment by minimizing interruptions, such as computer or phone notifications and unnecessary browser tabs.

### **Tools**

- To-do lists, check lists
- Task management apps such as Google Keep, Notion, Trello or OmniFocus

### ***3.1.2.3 Communication soft skills***

We recommend:

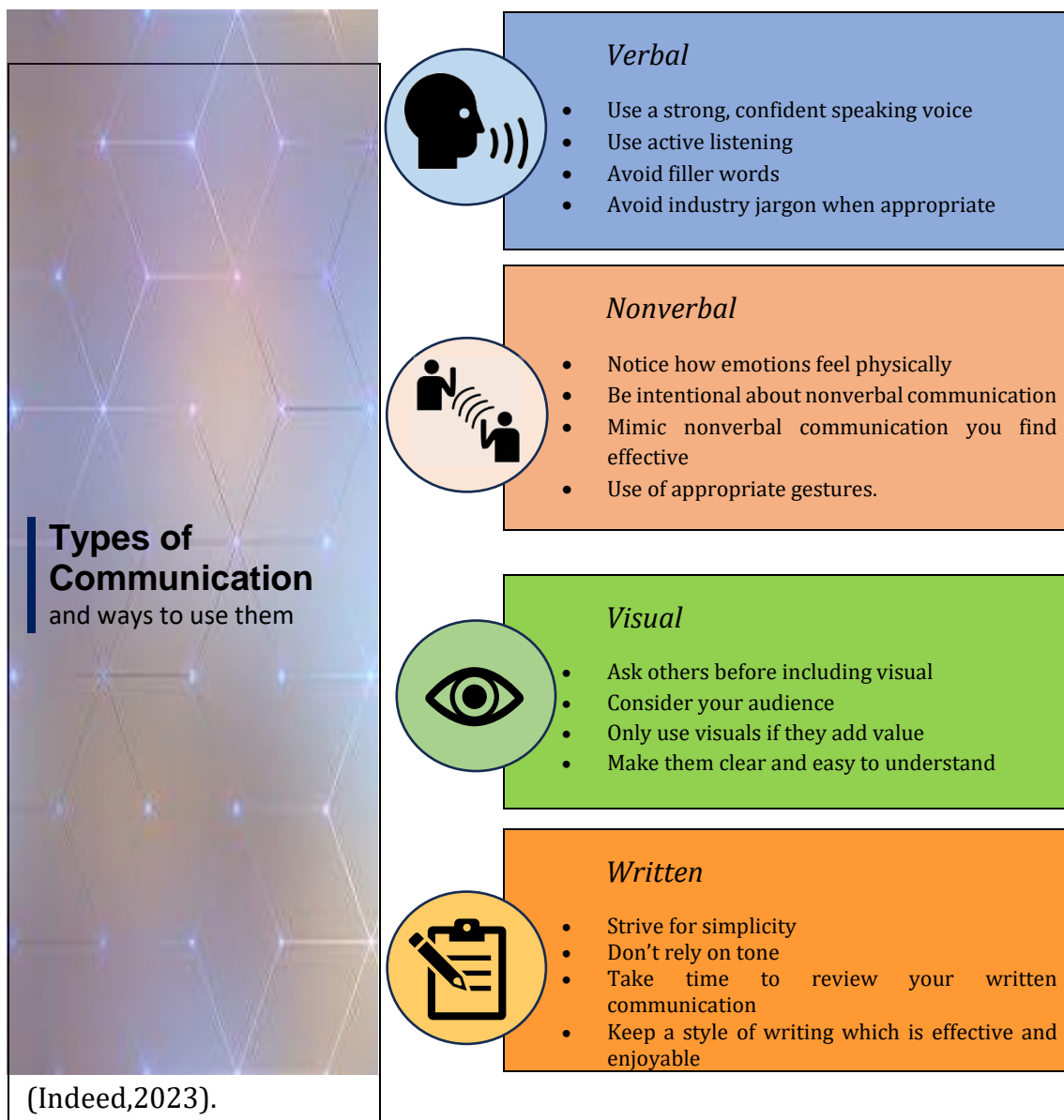
- Team meetings every week or fortnight and “daily stand-ups” several times a week are just as important in remote working groups as smaller meetings at roadblocks. Participants must also be able to talk openly about problems so that they do not get stuck on problems and thus get frustrated. An open error culture is common practice in open source.
- The more remote work the more feedback conversations. Seeking for feedback from supervisors or colleagues can help improve communication skills. Constructive feedback will enable to refine the communication approach.
- Active listening: pay close attention to what others are saying during virtual meetings and discussions.
- Be proactive and responsive, for example by initiating conversations, sharing ideas, and asking for feedback. Practice active listening by asking questions, seeking clarification, and summarizing key points to demonstrate your engagement and understanding.
- Instant messaging.

- Utilization of various digital tools and platforms for effective communication and collaboration.
- Use of clear and concise language to avoid misunderstandings.

### Tools

- Messaging tools such as Slack, WhatsApp, Outlook
- G-mail, E-mail, Microsoft Teams
- Project management Software such as Notion, Airtable, Wrike or Jira
- Video conferencing platforms such as Zoom or Google Meet
- Shared document repositories (shared storage space for documents)

There are different types of communication such as verbal, nonverbal, visual and, written. We suggest taking in consideration all of them and apply them when needed.



### 3.1.2.4 *Cultural Competences*

We encourage to:

- Understand and respect the cultural differences.
- Research and learn about the culture, history, traditions and customs of the country or countries where the colleagues are based.
- Demonstrate adaptability and understanding when unexpected challenges arise due to cultural differences.
- Adapt your communication to be clear, respectful, and sensitive to cultural nuances.
- Use appropriate language, tone and gestures while ensuring that the content is accurately understood.
- Embrace diverse perspectives and actively seek input from international colleagues.
- Try to put yourself in the shoes of your international colleagues and try to understand their perspective, challenges and experiences.
- Ask questions respectfully and demonstrate interest in understanding different cultural perspectives.
- Developing self-awareness will help navigate cultural differences more effectively.
- Cultivate empathy and a willingness to learn from each other, appreciating the diversity of backgrounds and ideas.

#### **Tools**

- Participate in virtual events or activities organized by colleagues or host organizations.

## Five Elements of Cultural Competence

1 Acknowledge cultural differences

2 Understand your own culture

3 Engage in self-assessment

4 Acquire cultural knowledge and skills

5 View behaviour within a cultural

(Trainerslibrary, 2020).

### 3.1.2.5 *Self-confidence and discipline*

We propose to:

- Create an understanding, encouraging environment in which participants of working groups feel comfortable and learn best how to organize themselves and manage tasks while working from home.
- Manage their own time to work and stick to the plan between the daily stand-ups and the weekly meetings.
- Clearly define objectives for the working group, including the skills are aimed to develop, projects that should be completed and knowledge that should be gained.



FIGURE 7: SKILLS

- Set specific times for starting and ending work, taking breaks, and engaging in other activities.
- Stay in touch with project/training supervisors and colleagues through regular communication.
- Be proactive in seeking new tasks or projects and strive for excellence in everything you do.
- View challenges as learning opportunities rather than obstacles.
- Cultivate a positive mindset towards your work and the collaboration experience.
- Think positive.
- Engage in online communities, forums, or social media groups related to your industry to expand your professional network.
- Prioritize self-care for the maintenance of your well-being.
- Establish a healthy work life balance by setting boundaries and taking breaks when needed.
- Engage in physical activity, practice mindfulness, and ensure you get enough restful sleep.

### **Tools**

- Social Media (or instant messaging) for constant communication and cultural learning

## *3.2 What are the best methods to cooperate in remote international working groups?*

Mobilities focus on transversal skills and put less emphasis on tangible professional skills. Today's mobile learners acquire soft skills rather than skills in operating new equipment or knowledge regarding new products. The digital-networked working life requires new and changed competences such as personal competences, social competences, ManMachineInterface competences, process competences, solution competences and strategic competences.

In the following point we explain some of the do's and don'ts that organizers should take into consideration when organizing remote international working groups, some best practice examples, collaborative tools and other skills and competences.

### 3.2.1. Dos and Don'ts when organizing international remote cooperation

#### *Do's:*

- Establish clear goals and objectives: Clearly define the purpose of the working group and what you hope to achieve.
- Provide mentorship and supervision: Assign mentors or supervisors to trainees who can guide them throughout the international project work. Regular check-ins as well feedback sessions are also proposed.
- Maintain regular communication: Platforms like video conferencing, email and instant messaging are very useful for providing guidance, offering support, and addressing any concerns that trainees may have.
- Set realistic expectations: Clearly communicate the expectations and deliverables to trainees. Set realistic deadlines and provide them with the necessary resources to complete their tasks.
- Provide proper orientation and training: Ensure that trainees receive comprehensive orientation and training at the beginning of the internship.

#### *Don'ts:*

- Provide insufficient resources: Ensure that trainees have the necessary tools, software and resources to carry out their tasks effectively.
- Forget about legal and logistical considerations: Ensure to comply with all legal requirements, such as visas or work permits. Also consider logistical factors like providing clear instruction for remote work, data protection and cybersecurity measurements.
- Overlook trainees' engagement: create a community among the international working group, encourage participation in virtual meetings, social activities or online discussion forums to facilitate collaboration.
- Underestimate the need of regular feedback: Provide constructive feedback on trainees' performances, acknowledge their achievements and offer suggestions for improvement.
- Neglect cultural sensitivities: Be aware of cultural differences and avoid making assumptions. Respect the diverse backgrounds of internationally located trainees and ensure that your organization promotes an inclusive environment.



➤ Encourage cultural exchange:  
Arrange opportunities for interns to interact with each other. Foster an environment that encourages cultural exchange and understanding.

➤ Overlook time zone differences:  
Take the time zone differences between your organization and the trainee’s location into consideration. Be flexible with meetings that are convenient for all participants.

### 3.2.2 *Best practice examples*

Thousands of companies all over the world were quickly forced to adapt to digitalisation and remote communication through virtual tools when COVID-19 hit. Despite these challenges, companies rose to the occasion and gave their working groups a truly unforgettable experience, both personally and professionally.

Here we name some of the companies that are managing international remote internships well after hard times such as the COVID-19.

<i>Company</i>	<i>Description</i>
HP	On its very first virtual internship program HP onboarded over 200 interns. The top priorities of the program were professional development and networking. Students were helped making strong and long-lasting connections throughout the company by making open communication.

Syslab	Syslab is a small software developing IT-company with its headquarters in Munich, Germany. In this small office, used only for administrative purposes, are working up to 10 employees that work remotely all across Europe. They regularly meet together online and work together.
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The two named companies are very different from each other but what we want to show is that no matter how big or small a company is, international remote collaboration is possible and pays off.

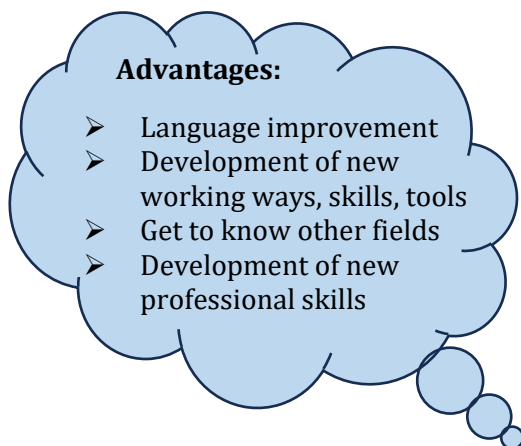
Other companies that have developed international remote collaboration and are offering international internships can be found on the following link:

- <https://ripplematch.com/career-advice/companies-that-put-on-awesome-remote-internships-62c7f37f/>
- Youtube video (field report): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-64NpcBZr\\_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-64NpcBZr_g)

### 3.2.3. Collaborative tools

In a survey about digital collaborative tools and programmes for communication conducted in Italy, Spain, Germany, and Slovenia we learned that most of the interviewed students use programmes and tools such as:

- Discord, Zoom, Skype, WhatsApp, Instagram, E-mail, G-mail, Microsoft-Teams, Messenger, Facebook, Snapchat, YouTube, Meet, Adobe, Viber and Reddit as source of information and communication.



Collaborative work platforms and project management tools such as:

- Google Drive, Dropbox, One Drive, Trello, Asana, Factro, Basecamp, Whiteboards (Miro, Concept board)

Some of the important competences suggested by trainees for remote international cooperation are for example:

- Knowledge of English (and other) languages, teamwork skills, motivation, knowledge of specific communication,

sharing programmes, digital and technical skills, discipline and keenness to learn new things.

## 3.2.4 Others

### Main actors in international remote cooperation:

- VET student (trainee) – Student above 16 years old, who is completing state approved vocational specialty
- VET teacher/tutor – Responsible teacher at VET school or VET centre, who is conducting the vocational practice, which is compulsory as part of the training process.
- Mentor – specialist, who is providing direct guidance and support to VET students at work-based settlement.
- Supervisor – a person, who is responsible at the company for the negotiation, implementation, and documentation of the process. In SMEs this person could be mentor as well.



FIGURE 8: MAIN ACTORS

### Other suggestions and advice

- Use of different strategies such as:
  - linking the traineeship (while cooperating internationally) to company goals
  - comparison of the target groups with the corresponding requirements
- Analysis of the target groups:
  - Use of questions such as Who is the learning offer aimed at? (Number of people, gender, age, regional distribution, mobility, access to media, previous experience, previous knowledge)
  - Prior knowledge of e-learning and digital media
  - Main interests, motivation
  - Subjects/modules and practical relevance

- Infrastructure analysis:
  - Who is the learning offer aimed at? (Number of people, gender, age, regional distribution, mobility, access to media, previous experience, previous knowledge)
  - Premises
  - Availability of tools and learning platforms
  - Technical and (media) didactic support for online offerings
  
- Analysis of the initial situation:
  - Qualification, content-related competence orientation and focus
  - Possibility of integrating further support structures (e.g., e-tutor programme)
  - Time capacity and the expected workload
  
- Analysis of the project objectives:
  - What is hoped for with the use of media?
    - Increasing effectiveness/efficiency
    - Increasing flexibility
    - Didactic innovation
    - New forms of learning
    - Interlocking of knowledge transfer and knowledge management



FIGURE 9: ANALYSIS

- Analysis of learning organisation, content, and objectives:
  - Which contents are to be conveyed with which goal?
    - Declarative knowledge
    - Procedural knowledge
    - Contextual knowledge
  - Structure/method: How should the offer be didactically prepared?
  - Learning organization: How should the course be organized?

## 4. Difficulties

Nowadays digital communication is very common and in constant development. With its advantages it also brings some disadvantages.

In the following we list some of the problems that can occur during remote international cooperation:

- Inability to meet your colleagues
- Misunderstanding during co-worker conversations (Poor internet connection)
- Mostly sedentary work, not much physical activity
- Lack of eye contact and body expression
- More screen time
- Lack of physical contact
- Technical and environmental issues
- Not experiencing office environment
- Less job training and guidance
- Time management if not managed from the beginning
- Lack of organizational skills
- Lack of self-confidence and discipline

Other problems like loneliness, distractions, inductions, or lack of motivation can also become an issue during remote international cooperation.

... **BUT that's what this concept is good for!** 🤔

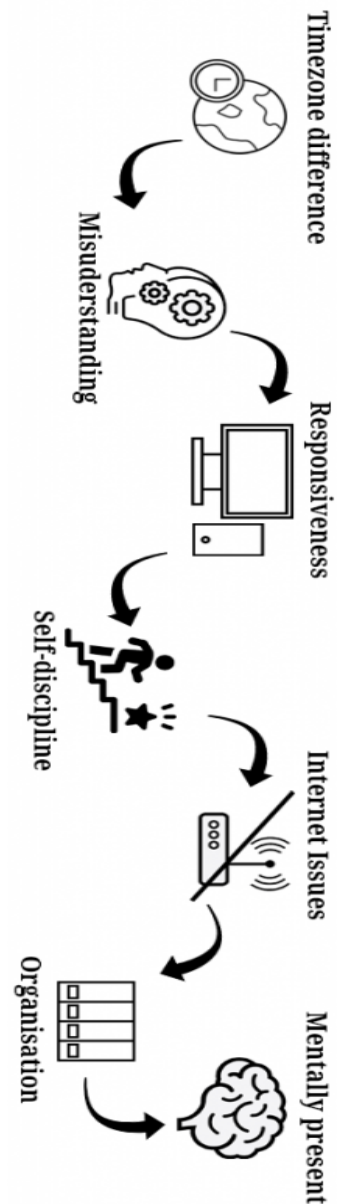


FIGURE 10:  
CHALLENGES OF  
WORKING REMOTELY

## 5. Conclusion

Remote International cooperation can be a good opportunity not only for the development of professional skills and competences, but it also offers a chance to network with international employers, contacts and friends someone would not typically meet in their home country. Remember that remote international working groups as well as international internships can be life changing opportunities.

After all international working groups should ...

... be a learning experience in a professional environment.

... be put in place within a formal documentation of agreement which sets up all the details of the activity as well as insurances, rights and obligations of the parties involved.

...allow the trainees to reach recognized and certified skills on the labour market as well as provide an accurate evaluation which is part of the fundamental learning process of the student.

**And what about you?**

**Have we aroused your interest in remote international working groups?**



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