

WEBINAR: CREATING THE NEW ACADEMIC NORMAL FOR INFORMATICS RESEARCHERS.

WEBINAR CHAT & PARTICIPANT WORKSHEET FEEDBACK

25 June 2020

The content of the Zoom chat stream has been reproduced here, with the participants' names removed. Because the chat occurred in conjunction with conversation (e.g., whilst the seed talk was taking place), some context may be lost here in this reproduction. In addition to the Zoom chat stream, this document includes anonymized comments submitted via the participant worksheets as well as links to extracts of the video recording of the webinar with talks and menti poll results.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

Informatics Europe Office: Participant Worksheet can be downloaded at:
www.informatics-europe.org/images/documents/IE-Webinar-Worksheet.docx

Informatics Europe Office: Video recording of the menti poll can be seen at:
www.informatics-europe.org/images/documents/IE-Webinar-Geraldine-Fitzpatrick.mp4

Informatics Europe Office: Menti poll results can be found at:
www.informatics-europe.org/images/documents/IE-Webinar-Menti-Poll-Results.pdf

2. **SEED TALK OF PROF. MATTHIJS BAL (UNIVERSITY OF LINCOLN, UK) - ACADEMIA BEYOND COVID-19: A PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Informatics Europe Office: Video recording of the seed talk of Prof. Matthijs Bal can be seen at:
www.informatics-europe.org/images/documents/IE-Webinar-Matthijs-Bal.mp4

Informatics Europe Office: Matthijs Bal, webpage:
www.matthijsbal.com and staff.lincoln.ac.uk/44aaf6fc-1da0-4324-a268-f672f8bd5ca1

Informatics Europe Office: Manifesto for the future of work and organizational psychology:
www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1359432X.2019.1602041

Attendee: It's vintage!

Attendee: "normalisation of absurdity" is an amazing term reaching far beyond academia and workplaces...

Attendee: not only "Populist governments" have difficulties Managing crisis.

Attendee: Environment: Nothing of real relevance has been achieved by COVID. It has merely shifted everything by a month or two.

Attendee: agree on environment. Neither did we see a lasting effect nor any reasonable considerations. The opposite: many organisations do their best to get back to where we didn't want to be before.

Attendee: I'm not sure - I expect that all of us will travel less in the future.

Attendee: Re environment: of course that is true, but the crisis has shown what could be changed if only we made up our minds. So, it's more of a psychological effect that expanded our perceived scope of action.

Attendee: In that it might be significant.

Geraldine Fitzpatrick: A comment from someone who couldn't attend the webinar - from their worksheet:

REMARK ON MANIFESTO:

3) We have responsibilities towards reducing inequality: We must strive to reduce inequalities in academia and to protect all academics who are in unstable, precarious positions.

This recommendation for a sustainable future must be clarified. Equality as a general goal in academia may be in a contradiction with academic freedom. "Protect all academics who are in unstable, precarious positions" may be understandable as an attempt to freeze current situation and avoid improvement.

The issue of using scientific publications as a key quality indicator for university teachers is a separate very important discussion.

- How can we ensure our own well-being in a post Covid-19 workplace?

Unfortunately, universities fulfill their main function through the reflection of the existing society, which they reproduce through the education of young people. The well-being of the academic staff of the university is a function of the attitude to and needs of education in society. Improving the well-being of teachers in society is impossible without significant changes in the value of education in this society.

3. BREAK OUT ROOMS FEEDBACK

Attendee:



Attendee: BREAKDOWN of boundaries between work <> non-work life, setting up boundaries needs time - and every situation is different.

Attendee: Be careful to set up work - home separation. If possible set up a physically separate space for work, could be a part of a table where work is done.

Attendee: Education: (1) We are mostly optimistic that we will have learned something relevant from COVID for the way we teach. (2) We are positive that physical interaction is needed and pure online teaching does not work, be it for hard reasons (haptic aspects in HCI) or softer ones (informal communication). (3) One member was skeptical whether university education will continue to be perceived as relevant unless we manage to greatly improve the quality of our courses.

Attendee: SITUATION: Surge of submissions of articles and proposals.

PROBLEMS:

- If conferences/journals keep restricting the number of accepted articles, a lot of papers will be rejected. This slows down knowledge exchange overall.

- Funding agencies could be flooded with proposals for the years to come.

Attendee: We could also ask it on a more fundamental level: is the flood of articles increasing knowledge: my guess is: rather the opposite.

Attendee: (because the level of noise is increasing steadily not the knowledge)

Attendee: Re: "the level of noise is increasing steadily not the knowledge" → I agree with regard of pre-prints. However, an increase in peer-reviewed publications that are not bounded by number of papers would have the same signal-to-noise ratio.

Attendee: Note from a breakout group discussion:

- Economy and project funding
 - More money to COVID-related, but not others
 - More proposals are written during the lockdown
 - More proposals submitted → a lower acceptance rate
 - Less money overall
 - The problem will be going on for years to come because people rewrite their rejected proposals.
 - What can be done:
 - Raising awareness of this problem to public and politicians
- Journal and conferences are swamped with papers
 - Lowering the acceptance rate?
 - High rejection rate → mental concerns for researchers
 - Can surge of papers (peer-reviewed and pre-prints) during COVID be scaled up and adapted to other fields
 - High-quality publication venues with high rejection rate lengthen the time for exchanging scientific knowledge
 - How can we change how reputations are counted in our research?
 - Going towards Open Science
 - Alternative metrics, PlumX, AltMetrics
 - Recommendation letters for reviewing individual researchers are not work
 - Open Source community recognizes small contributions
 - Faster science → more noise
 - But deliberation can be collective instead of lonely

Attendee: Were the people who were more productive - did they have families/kids as well? Just curious.

Attendee: Re: people who are more productive. People who need to take care of family and kids could be at disadvantage.

Attendee: For those with families, gain in productivity by eliminating commuting etc. was overshadowed by the increase in balancing work and life at home...

Attendee: it would be interesting to see if this effect can be seen in the articles published, i.e. more male authors.

Attendee: Anecdote regarding proposals: We submitted one on our distributed pair programming tool Saros in January(!) that is still not under review because the agency is having a hard time finding reviewers.

Attendee: I am sorry that I came late. I have a practical question. I experience that running research projects are accumulating money because all the travels and organization costs went to 0. How to invest this money? better online platforms? and how do we make budget for new projects? did you discuss this issue?

Attendee: we're extending some employment as a solution on one of our projects ... shifting travel money

Attendee: Re research projects accumulating money - check what your funding agency allows, some will not allow budget transfers, some do.

Attendee: from a PhD students perspective, I just want to add, that there exist "coping strategies" in a PhD journey that students normally do not openly talk about. I am mentioning that, because working on change has to respect, we do not have a complete picture.

4. COLLATED COMMENTS SUBMITTED VIA PARTICIPANT WORKSHEETS

What do you miss about your pre-COVID academic life?

Communication and long run prospective for Higher education in general.
Going to conferences, meeting people by chance there, scientific gossip and inspiration, serendipity.
The opportunity to discuss things at the side of meetings.
Talking to students in persons instead of on a screen.
Having a regular daily/weekly structure.

What do you not miss about your pre-COVID academic life?

Traveling too much and seeing the kids to little.
Long Administrative meetings.
Original researches of individuals on future development of Higher Education.

What do you actually like about this COVID time (if anything)?

Having more time with my family.
COVID time works as magnifier for weaknesses and strengths of education and administration process.

What surprised you most?

How well meetings work when everyone is on a videoconferencing system and using electronic whiteboards. I love electronic whiteboards when you set a task and the whole group is busy populating the whiteboard.
How much more focused I became in teaching.
I was surprised by potential of my colleagues to switch quickly from face-to-face to remote version of education.

What new insights do you have?

Virtual meetings before COVID were cumbersome, because it often meant mixing on-site and virtual participants. It is much easier when everyone is online!
Virtual meetings can also easily be called with people very far away, which pre-COVID would have meant finding the time to meet, arrange travel etc. Now academic exchange is at your fingertips, it feels.
How much time can be saved through avoiding travelling: Project meetings that would have taken two days previously can now be done in 2*2 hours.

As my new insights I can mention necessity to have two concurrent education processes for one and the same program - one blended and one completely remote (distant).

What did you do well in handling the COVID situation?

Switching the whole teaching to online in a very short time.

We implemented our old researches and trials in distance learning as a wide and complete educational process using already existing ICT infrastructure. And we had already trained leaders to build new teaching management process on the base of LMS Moodle and Open Source BigBlueButton technology.

Thinking about your department, faculty or institution, what did they do well?

It's funny, but apart from a constant stream of new COVID regulations I cannot think of anything...

Well, yes, the IT department gave us Zoom (at least for a year)!

All communications were transferred into remote form with intensive use of shared information materials in Moodle LMS. All forms of management including chair meetings, consultations, advertising and application (intake) process were implemented remotely.

Work at home was positively evaluated by the majority of the teaching staff, taking into account the growing workload and higher professional requirements necessary to meet quality.

Thinking about your academic peer community, what did they do well?

On the whole, conferences were handled well – in a variety of ways!

There were no problems!

The most important in this situation were three things:

- 1) Clear vision of the future. In our case it was total blended learning.
- 2) Trained staff both academic, administrative and technical. In our case we have 15 years with distance learning experience and 2 years ERASMUS+ project in remote competences evaluation.
- 3) Motivated students with good ICT background. In our case the student leadership performed students from engineering programs (electronics, computer science, aviation and logistics).

Thinking across all of these: What do these experiences/responses tell you about what is important, what values matter - to you, your faculty, your peer community?

Nice questions!

Family matters, informal academic exchange matters, to my faculty rules and regulations matter.

What are some of the things you thought were set in stone that now don't seem so set in stone?

Every meeting needs to be conducted in person, that people need to be in their offices for being proper academics.

What strengths/capabilities do these experiences and responses point to - for you, your faculty, your peer community?

Self-organisation strengths.

Reflecting on what values and strengths your experience(s) point to for:

- **You as individuals**
- **Your institution (faculty/dept/group)**
- **Your peer community**

Look at your work-life balance: homeschooling and nursing kids with two full time parents in the home office simply is a challenge! COVID brought this topic to the fore.

Community: have informal local gatherings online. Invite people for giving remote talks.

Be available to students on as many channels as possible (Zoom, Chat, Email, Moodle, ...)

Society: give money to scientists not only on a temporary basis and following immediate societal needs, but let them do their stuff. And don't bother them with too much administration. Academia can NOT be governed like a company.

Where/how can we start to create this new academic normal? What thing(s) would have the biggest impact?

- 1) New formulation of the society request (demand) to Higher Education.
- 2) New funding principles based on new society request (demand).
- 3) New educational technologies to meet society request (demand).
- 4) EU level program for 5 years to transform existing Bologna system to new society demands.

What's one commitment you can make to help create your new academic normal?

To take part in creation a new vision of Bologna system and share my knowledge and experience in this area.

5. **FINISHING-OFF**

Austen Rainer: Thank you very much to all of you for your attendance and engagement in this webinar. And thank you to Matthijs for your talk, and to Informatics Europe for hosting this discussion.

Gregor Engels: in case you would like to continue a discussion on this, please write to us at: administration@informatics-europe.org (Informatics Europe Office) or engels@upb.de (Gregor Engels). We can start a "working Group" on this Topic at Informatics Europe. Let's shape our future after/with Corona.

Informatics Europe Office: You could learn more about the Academic Leadership Development Online Course at: www.informatics-europe.org/services/academic-leadership.html