

Coronavirus Shows Us New Ways of Thinking and Doing

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The coronavirus has caused a lot of damage to the world. The virus has no respect for our borders and systems; it doesn't show its visa when passing through the gate. I call it the 3rd World War because we see the global reach of the Covid-19 pandemic and the global campaign against it. China's president [calls the efforts to end the crisis a "people's war"](#). United States' president [labels himself 'a wartime president' combating coronavirus](#). And, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) says governments must enact [wartime economic policies](#). Many people are sadly losing their jobs and lives from East to West. We are in a World War, together.

But history shows us a war can unleash new capacities in the human condition. A war can make us brave enough to shatter assumptions and challenge the status quo, power dynamics, definitions, values, beliefs, processes, systems, the way we live, the way we work, and the way we see the world. It calls us to revisit, to review, to see things again yet from a new perspective. It makes us talk to our inner selves critically, saying 'Hey, your version of truth may not be correct as you haven't seen another valid perspective, your interpretation of things may not be correct as you don't know about the other side of the coin, and your judgment is biased as the basis of decisions you make'; saying 'Hey, this can be done differently and don't worry as it works'; and, saying 'Hey, what you consider as an achievement is not meaningful or sustainable and you should think deeply about the *why* or *so-what* question for long-term prosperity'.

So far COVID-19 has opened our eyes to some new ways of doing things, for example in education, in health science, and in flexible work arrangements for a work-life balance. It has also unlocked big-picture questions like whether globalisation and global supply chains need major optimisation and redesign, or, whether the economic system could work better if governments and policymakers follow a more balanced approach and have both capitalism AND socialism. Why not to see beauty in both Karl Marx and Adam Smith's arguments. Why not to acknowledge and learn from both labour and liberal, democrat and republican, north and south, east and west. Will our judgment be less biased if we become more balanced by following the 'AND', not 'OR', approach? Can this way of thinking improve our fairness and integrity to make more inclusive policies, decisions and outcomes for people?

My plan is to write about some of these new ways of thinking and doing in a series of episodes. I want to start with the sector I work in passionately.

Episode 1: Higher Education

Because of the virus, many universities and academics have realised online teaching and learning can work, and it has worked well at least for some. Here is a snapshot of what happened:

In the United States, universities like Stanford were among the first to make the bold decision and [move classes online due to coronavirus](#). Many other universities across the world have done the same to manage physical distancing and stop the virus transmission.

Some academics have found the online experience more enjoyable and effective at least in disciplines like Business and Management. They have started sharing their Zoom online class in social media (e.g. LinkedIn). Some have written [reflections from Zoom online class](#), saying 'There is more participation online than offline', 'it was very different. And awesome.' and 'Seeing people in their natural habitat was soothing and created what felt to me like a really safe space. I also enjoyed the diversity of (real and virtual) backgrounds and co-workers (e.g., dogs). It sparked joy.'

However, some universities (or other higher education providers) and academics have faced [challenges in the transition to online](#). This group may have realised (or will soon realise) that the core of online education is not technology, Zoom, fancy recorded video (where sometimes academics are like talking statues), or a recorded long (often boring) lecture or webinar where one person talks most.

The core of online education, in my view, lies in a **focus point shift from *teaching to learning*, from the *educator's mind* to the *learner's mind*** although the same argument could apply to the on-campus education^[1] (but many of us forgot this or didn't pay attention to it enough). A better set of questions in higher education is not how *teaching* happens, rather it is: how *learning* happens, how the learner's mind thinks, and how we can keep the learner's mind engaged (and with what). Exploring these questions can help universities and other education providers invest in a right set of culture, approaches and behaviours for online education.

Overall, the virus has shown us new ways of doing in education. Perhaps education policy makers, chancellors and deans will set a new strategy and direction given this experience. They may invest in online education differently, not just by establishing a new entity within the university enterprise and calling it OnlineXYZ (and seen as an unwanted or less-proud-of child by some), but by helping the whole university or school community – particularly all academics – genuinely embrace changes, and upskill, [unlearn](#) and relearn *how learning happens* for each student segment in the era called [the 4th Industrial Revolution](#). We all need to practice genuine humility because ivory tower thinking will have no place in the new direction. Time to challenge ourselves; time for new beginnings.



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Mohsen passionately facilitates strategic supply chain and operations management MBA subjects at AIB where he and students enjoy learning together.

Footnote:

[1] I use the term on-campus education, not face-to-face education, as the opposite of online education because Zoom online class seems face-to-face.