

The Digital Office, Seminar and Coffee Room: European Doctoral Researchers Keeping Contact in the Exceptional Period of Pandemic Isolation

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Abstract

In Europe, the COVID-19 pandemic “began” in the early spring of 2020, leading to closures, curfews and quarantines in European societies. For European universities the novel situation meant restrictions and reorganisation of their operations, which caused unprecedented challenges to work of all academics. The general focus of this research is on both the immediate and more prolonged pandemic-related experiences concerning work of PhD students, that is doctoral researchers, in business and organisation studies from several European universities. More precisely, in this qualitative study I describe and analyse views of thirty-eight European doctoral researchers on four varieties, and changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, of their work communication: i) formal corporeal face-to-face communication, ii) informal corporeal face-to-face communication, iii) formal virtual face-to-face communication, and iv) informal virtual face-to-face communication. The 38 doctoral researchers came from many European universities, and they participated in two online seminars on qualitative research methods for PhD students in business research and organisation studies in May 2020 and May 2021 organised by the author. Digital platforms and tools mainly enabled the doctoral researchers to continue their studies in virtual remote mode, but many problems and shortcomings in both formal and informal virtual face-to-face work communication were reported. In more detail, the analysis elaborates some forms of suffering but also adapting and thriving of the doctoral researchers in the first fourteen months of the COVID-19 pandemic era.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, doctoral education, qualitative analysis, remote work, virtual communication