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"Measures Taken Against Coronavirus Have Been a Driving Force"

HHL takes stock after one month of lockdown

HHL Leipzig Graduate School of Management was one of the first business schools in Germany to close its campus and move to online instruction even before the official regulations came into force.

This self-imposed early lockdown started on March 12. It represented a particular challenge as the spring term was about to begin and, in addition to the regular classes, several events were supposed to take place over the upcoming weeks.

Thanks to the great commitment of all the professors, members of staff and students, the first online course started as early as 24 hours after this drastic measure was introduced. From the very beginning, the students showed a high degree of acceptance for this approach. Thanks to the transformation into digital formats, as many as 95% of all classes can take place.

For Prof. Dr. Stephan Stubner, Dean of HHL, it was particularly important to retain the content offered to students in its extensive form and to ensure that examinations can take place as scheduled. He comments,

"Within one week, we converted all lectures into digital formats. We pushed back a few classes due to their higher complexity to allow for more preparation. As a result of our approach, our students will not lose a term to the coronavirus crisis and can plan on their fixed graduation date. Our goal was to offer maximum education to our students, especially in a time of crisis. After all, it is education and innovation that can lead us out of this slump."

HHL's Prof. Dr. Erik Maier comments on the students' flexibility,

"I was amazed by how open the students were because they are normally used to interactive lectures in small groups. We were physically separated by this type of lecture"



but at least we were able to work together again intellectually thanks to the digital format."

Even events which are based on meeting people and require a high degree of social interaction were transformed into digital versions within days. The HHL Startup Consulting Days, which are normally hosted as a two-day event on the Leipzig campus, were the trial balloon. For this occasion, HHL and McKinsey & Company always invite the most promising students from the Bachelor of business administration programs to prepare a study based on a real case together. This year's task was to produce meaningful strategies of publicizing a new sleeping app developed by a startup. Both the startup itself and the consulting company spontaneously agreed to have the event take place online.

Says Jana Vogel, Director of HHL's Marketing Department,

"To us, it was clear: We did not want to postpone or cancel the event because the feedback which we have been getting for years confirms that all parties involved benefit so much from it. Thanks to the great support from our alumni at McKinsey & Company, we were able to convert it into a virtual format at relatively short notice. All participants were enthusiastic about the solution and confirmed their attendance immediately. The new format was not a problem for the startup either. During the event, the students virtually worked on their tasks in teams of five, each one supported by an HHL alumnus, and then presented the results to the entire group."

The success of this format encouraged HHL to host their open house (Campus Day) digitally as well one week later. It was held solely in virtual form instead of offering individual student and career consultation or the résumé check. Professors presented themselves and their subjects and tried out new ways of interacting. For instance, they launched flash surveys where respondents use their phones to scan a QR code and which were then evaluated as a part of the presentation. The prospective students also had the opportunity to talk to current students from all programs about studying at HHL in a private chat room without members of staff or professors listening in or reading along. The Virtual Campus Day was a complete success. The feedback was very positive and the number of participants was much higher than what it would have been in a conventional analog setting.

Jana Vogel, Director of HHL's Marketing Department, comments,

"Our Virtual Campus broke all visitor number records, welcoming participants from around the globe. They joined from Australia, Canada, Peru, Columbia, Brazil, Russia, India, China, Thailand, amongst others; some of them even getting up at 3 a.m.! Despite all the



difficulties that crisis brings, we were thrilled about this aspect and will continue to use and develop this virtual format."

(For more quotes on the Campus Day, please see below.)

HHL has received much praise for opening up one of its valuable classes to a broader audience on a weekly basis. The original plan was to offer this online course which is about creating Excel spreadsheets exclusively to HHL students from the new M.Sc. finance track starting in September. The demand for digital education, however, has increased so significantly as a result of the measures taken in the coronavirus crisis that HHL decided to move up the class and open it to anyone interested who is not studying at HHL for free. Within just a few days, over 220 participants from almost 30 countries signed up. The class started on April 7 and takes place every Tuesday afternoon for a total of six weeks. The feedback from the course community serves as a catalyst for new forms of instruction.

Dr. Maximilian Schreiter, Research Associate at HHL, says,

"The demand for online training is enormous and will not simply go away. For me personally, diverse courses like this one are an excellent opportunity to try out new tools and formats and to get together with new groups of interested people."

The HHL Entry Test Preparation Seminar, which is normally offered on campus each year to prepare candidates for the challenging test, was offered in digital form for the first time and concluded with highly motivational results.

Kathrin Schmagar, Director of HHL Student Affairs, comments,

"We had twice the number of participants than usual. We were amazed how personal and efficient this version of the seminar can be. The participants' feedback was extremely positive throughout so that we have already decided to offer this format again in the future."

HHL Dean Prof. Stephan Stubner sees the fast and effective introduction of digital formats as confirmation of the strategic orientation of HHL Leipzig Graduate School of Management, stating,

"The measures taken against coronavirus have been a driving force for our university. The preparation for digital topics has been a part of our strategic orientation towards the future for years. In this context, HHL uses the knowledge provided by its very own Chair of Innovation and Digitalization. As a private business school training future leaders, we have already been building on new technologies for an extended period time. Even before the coronavirus crisis, we offered MBA information webinars for interested people from all



over the world, preparatory and follow-up webinars relating to M.Sc. and MBA lectures held in Cologne and Munich as well as finance webinars to teach new content to those who are interested. Last year, we welcomed a new member of staff who deals exclusively with the digitalization of instruction, including learning management systems, online class formats and other aspects. Prof. Pierfrancesco La Mura, Ph.D., has been teaching online classes for years. In the early 2010s, some professors recorded and posted videos through Lectorio, including tests to monitor learning success etc. Our Euro MBA program has had an entire online module for about six years where all the instruction takes place online.

We mastered this speedy transformation now partly because we have been pursuing the path into a digital future for quite some time and maybe this is why we were prepared a little bit better than others."

Reactions on the Campus Day

"It was awesomeeee! I loved it. So much information from the current student and now I am very motivated. I will start my motivation letter tomorrow and apply for 26 April."

"It was a pleasure for me to participate in Virtual campus day. Really insightful and participative. Q&A session, CV counseling session and session on career services were fantastic. Good initiative!"

"I would really like to thank you for hosting such a wonderful event, yesterday. Your energy was infectious and I could only imagine how the students must feel, as they interact with you. I really hope that soon I would be able to make it to your prestigious school."

"I have attended several online events hosted by other business schools but yours was the best organized one yet."

"I liked the openness of the staff to be available and enthusiastic about solving our problems. From the Dean, director of MBA program to the admissions office, everybody had put in an effort to provide us with the best learning experience."