

ISOC India Mumbai Multi-Stakeholder Webinar on Work-Life Balance in a Pandemic: Role of the Internet

Date: 19th April 2020

Time: 5.00 pm-6.30 pm IST



 Internet Society
India Mumbai

Work life balance in a pandemic: Role of Internet

A multi-stakeholder webinar

19th April 2020

17:00 hours IST, Skype

RSVP: Sneha Tambe (Skype id: @snehatambe14)

Panellists

Akshai M is an Applied Researcher and Embedded Device Engineer with five years of experience in prototyping Low Power Embedded Wireless Hardware, Linux Device Firmware and Design for Small to Medium scale manufacturing. He is currently associated with the International Centre for free and open-source software (ICFOSS). His research interests include LoRaWAN Hardware Node and Gateway Design. Application development using RIOT, Mbed, Zephyr and Low-Level Firmware Development for Ultra-Low-Power wireless nodes.

Dr Deepak Maun is an Assistant Professor at the International Institute for Higher Education Research and Capacity Building (IIHed) at O. P. Jindal Global University (Sonapat, Haryana). He received his Ph.D. in Innovation and Management in Education (IME) from IIM Ahmedabad in March 2019. His thesis focused on the collaborative learning of the government primary school teachers in online spaces. Before joining IIM Ahmedabad for his Ph.D., he was working with a social sector organisation focused on teaching XI-XII grade students from low-income families. His areas of interest include teachers' workplace learning, teacher professional development, critical thinking, children's play, and unschooling/homeschooling.

Divya Srivastava is a counsellor, psychotherapist and life-coach. She is trained in Clinical Hypnotherapy, Bach Flower Remedies, Neuro-Linguistic Programming and Breakthrough Coaching. She is an internationally certified EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) Advanced and Matrix Reimprinting Practitioner. After receiving her Masters' degree in Counselling from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, Divya continued to delve deeper into the magical world of healing. Each path she took, helped her tap into techniques and tools that have the power to open each one of us to our fullest potential. She is also an Access Consciousness Bars Facilitator, and very recently, she was awarded Accredited Journey Practitioner by Brandon Bays.

Varsha Goyal is a postgraduate in Economics from Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics, Pune. From being an intern in Reserve Bank of India, Mumbai to a research associate in Ministry of Finance, North Block, from a Genpact employee to Azim Premji Foundation personnel, her work experience enriched her learning and introduced her to different work cultures and some very talented colleagues. Due to bigger and better changes in life, she now leads a life of a digitally savvy home-maker, living in the Netherlands for the last six years with her husband, her pre-schooler son who is perpetually picking her brain, and her toddler twins who teach her valuable life lessons. Her day of hyperactivity is usually followed by reading, listening to music, picking up new skills like doodling, blogging by taking short courses and browsing Instagram.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has profoundly transformed the way we worked, lived, thought and socialised. The preemptive lockdown enforced by the governments has made people adopt and adapt to alternative and innovative ways of work, entertainment, living, caring and socialisation. At the heart of this change is the Internet that has made it possible to live and imagine the unimaginable. To celebrate the transformational potential of the Internet, the Internet Society India Mumbai chapter organised a multi-stakeholder discussion on the "Work-life balance in a Pandemic: role of the Internet" on 19th April 2020. The discussion saw four panellists from 4 different geographies, and four different sectors share their views on how pandemic has changed their lives and what role the Internet has played in it.

The discussion began with panellists discussing what all changes the pandemic and lockdown have brought the changes in their work-life balance?

Akshai M, a hardware engineer shared how despite the difficulty of working without a physical lab, his organisation has been able to stay connected through the Internet and has even registered an increase in productivity through nuanced working and ownership of work. Akshai highlighted how the sudden lockdown disrupted the physical aspects of research as the researchers had to leave for their native places and the access to a physical lab became a challenge. To continue their research, the associates set up small labs and the work

environment at their houses only. Some of the studies were carried out virtually. The new arrangement resulted in a shift from a top-down approach to bottom-up approach allowing for more ownership at every level of the organisation. This transformation not only resulted in more independence and autonomy but also led to a two-fold increase in productivity. However, this increased encroachment of work at home environment has some adverse issues too, especially mental health and well-being.

The aspect of mental wellness was further explored by Divya. Divya Srivastava, a counsellor by profession, shared how the sudden lockdown caused panic and uncertainty amongst the people. While a certain section of society was happy as the lockdown allowed them to have more time with their families and gave time for companionship, a significant section experienced a negative impact on their mental and physical well-being. This negativity primarily resulted from an increase in anxiety, harassment, abuse, toxicity and depression. In these times, the Internet has allowed her to help such people sail through the periods of increased tensions and depression brought about by the lockdown by staying connected with them and being available for them. She also highlighted that access to learning and entertainment material online through YouTube, webinars, e-books, Netflix has kept people engaged and away from a negative mind-set.

Talking more on the transition of learning and education Dr. Deepak Maun, an Assistant Professor at a top private university shared his experience of how education has completely moved online at his and many top universities in India and the World, and how through the Internet the universities and professors are able to continue providing education to all. He recounted how the initial apprehensions of teachers and educators towards using technology and online mode as a form of teaching changed the lockdown. Of course, there still are challenges related to issues of access, Internet connectivity, bandwidth and supporting infrastructure, but the Internet has allowed for a smooth transition from offline to online education. On a personal note, while he feels that transitioning to teaching required some adjustments; however, the lockdown gave him the continuous availability of time to carry out his research which is mostly carried online. For the researcher in him, the lockdown gave him the much needed time and space for his research.

The pandemic and lockdown have affected families in other parts of the world also. Varsha Goyal, a home-maker from the Netherlands and representing care economy, mused about how the pandemic has affected her life. She informed about the "intelligent lockdown" that was imposed in the Netherlands (where people are expected to exercise self-isolation), and how in these challenging times, the Internet has become like a family member to her. For a full-time mother who is also a teacher and entertainer for her three kids, the lockdown further made her life busier. In these hectic times, she credits the Internet for acting as a digital babysitter and teaching assistant for her three kids.

On the significant role played by the Internet in the times of pandemic, the four panellists shared interesting ways in which the Internet has come to their aid.

Akshai shared how the Internet has provided him with the time to dedicate to learning, skilling and self-development through attending online courses, training programmes and webinars. Divya too echoed Akshai's sentiments and shared that there has been a realisation that lockdown is not a holiday. Further, the fear of job and salary cuts has propelled people to improve their knowledge and efficiency and have turned them towards learning online. Deepak posited that while the Internet played an important role before too but given the lack of emphasis on "self-directed learning" in our education system, the potential of the Internet was never fully explored. Agreeing with Deepak, Varsha reflected that the Internet is both a bane and a boon. The Internet has changed the way one viewed learning. It has changed the way kids connected with stories, books and narration, as well as their surroundings and environment (going on virtual field trips, visiting landmarks like pyramids, etc.). The Internet has aided kids to learn through "do it yourself" mode.

The discussion presented by the four panellists invited great interest, questions and comments from the audience.

Responding to a question by Sumeet Rajadnye on 'productivity' and how it has been associated with 'going to a physical workspace', Akshai M said that given his research organisation is a government body, it is vital to convince officials that the work is being carried out efficiently even during the lockdown. Therefore, there is a greater need for ownership and efficiency.

On a question by an ISOC India Mumbai Volunteer to Deepak on how did he see the movement of professional and lab courses like pharmacy online, Deepak shared that online simulations have been part of many pharma courses and can aid in online teaching too.

On the question of how this lockdown is affecting school-going children, Divya responded that it had a physical, psychological and economic impact on kids and parents. In a lot of cases, one laptop is being used by father, mother and the kid causing lags in their work. Additionally, the constant staring at a screen puts a lot of strain on eyes, causes headaches and affects the general well-being of the kid.

Answering the question on how amidst lockdown a hands-on mother with three kids is balancing her own learning, Varsha agreed that the lockdown has definitely reduced the time that she got to pursue her own interests and passion. Still, in this time of the pandemic, the Internet has allowed her to re-invent herself and explore new ways of learning, for her kids and herself.

The discussion ended on a profound note by Dr. Govind, who pragmatically summarised that while pandemic has turned the world upside down, it has also provided the world with an

unprecedented opportunity. An opportunity to reimagine the way government functions, the way industries will run, office work will be carried out, and how the new work-life balance will be. In the heart of this new imagination is a crucial role that the Internet is currently playing and will continue to play in bringing a semblance of normalcy to the world and in our lives.

The ISOC India Mumbai webinar on ‘Work-Life balance in a Pandemic: Role of the Internet’ was recognised under “I Heart the Internet” initiative by Internet Society (ISOC) that shared some of the heartwarming stories and initiatives from ISOC Community, celebrating the role of the Internet in these times of a pandemic.