DISTANCE OPENS UP HORIZONS –

NEW RULES OF VIRTUAL COLLABORATION

Editorial

Our intention was to celebrate cinfo's anniversary with a symposium, to jointly shed light on the topic of the day in a party-like atmosphere. We took the courage to plan for forms of collaboration we had little experience with – hoping for participants to explore with us, what it means for our daily work. The day should offer different topics, and forms, being online and face to face – and: even different ways of relaxing. We planned for the programme to be attractive to experts from different disciplines in order to facilitate a creative dialogue between them. We are happy to see that a colourful mix of people followed our invitation – it was a fertile ground for inspiring discussions.

Technology has completely changed our relationship with people we work with. Boundaries have vanished, reach has increased. But also our practical work has changed. We e-mail, we spot suitable profiles on LinkedIn, contact candidates via Facebook and recruit them over Skype. Webinars and MOOCs help us to develop the competences of our staff members. We co-create documents and share them in a cloud.

So where is the limit – how do we best explore the opportunities at hand? Jointly we explored some of these opportunities in terms of flexible working locations and times according to personal preferences, collaborative working and IT support over a distance and reaching out to talents. And we came to the conclusion that there is not best fit. Individuals and management have to create an awareness of what suits them best, openly discuss online practise within the team, negotiate and react, when signs of «too much» become visible.

Clearly organisational structure and culture are also challenged by these changes. We touched upon the co-existence of formal organigrams on paper and real-life networks that developed without command. In a world where everyone communicates and exchanges information, who then has the real power to decide, to guide and to direct? What could or should a management response be to this? Big questions opened up our horizons again.

During the day we were stimulated, explored emerging questions and opportunities and at times found rest and reassurance. The interactive workshops and the creative and trustful spirit of the participants allowed opening up our individual and collective thinking. Virtual collaboration is neither black nor white – we have to explore the shades in between. I am convinced that it is worth it to courageously experiment. Curiosity will pay off and the fun aspects of work have potential to grow. The splendid final presentation of the visual recorder fully captured the spirit of the day and directly led to cinfo's anniversary party. May this spirit be with you in your organisation thanks to this poster!

Lisa Isler
Director cinfo

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«Lets get digital»
The use of WhatsApp in a humanitarian crisis.

Beatrice Weber, Swiss Red Cross (SRC)

SRC staff deployed to Nepal after the earthquake spontaneously decided to set up a WhatsApp group to remain connected while on mission. The group communication tool was very useful for teambuilding, stress management, managing media contacts and logistics. Main findings are:

- The group can provide emotional support
- Don't force establishing a WhatsApp group upon a team
- Be part of it but know when to be silent and to switch off
- Don't let group to be too big (20 people max.)
- WhatsApp does not replace existing management or reporting tools

→ http://bit.ly/SRC_WhatsApp

Twitter: #cinfovirtual15

The participants of the symposium were invited to report live on the different sessions through the Twitter hashtag: #cinfovirtual15. Cinfo staff assisted participants, encouraged and accompanied some of them into the posting of their first tweets. The initiative proved right: participants curiously explored the channel, quite some overcome their resistance to tweet and started to take a action. The result is a beautiful poster of tweets that shows the power of instant feedback.

→ http://bit.ly/Twitter_HT

Tweet about today:
#cinfovirtual15

From Hierarchies to Networks – Implications for Leadership and organisational Culture

**Kuno Schläfli, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)**

Impressive digital stories introduced us to the world of networks. These stories nicely illustrated the power of networks for learning, for connecting ideas with action and for providing recognition to staff. Networks can be great motivators for staff to perform and develop innovative ideas. However, when networks coexist within hierarchies, shifts happen in terms of the lines of accountability and command. Initiatives from various points in a network may lead to tangible results – leadership becomes multidirectional.
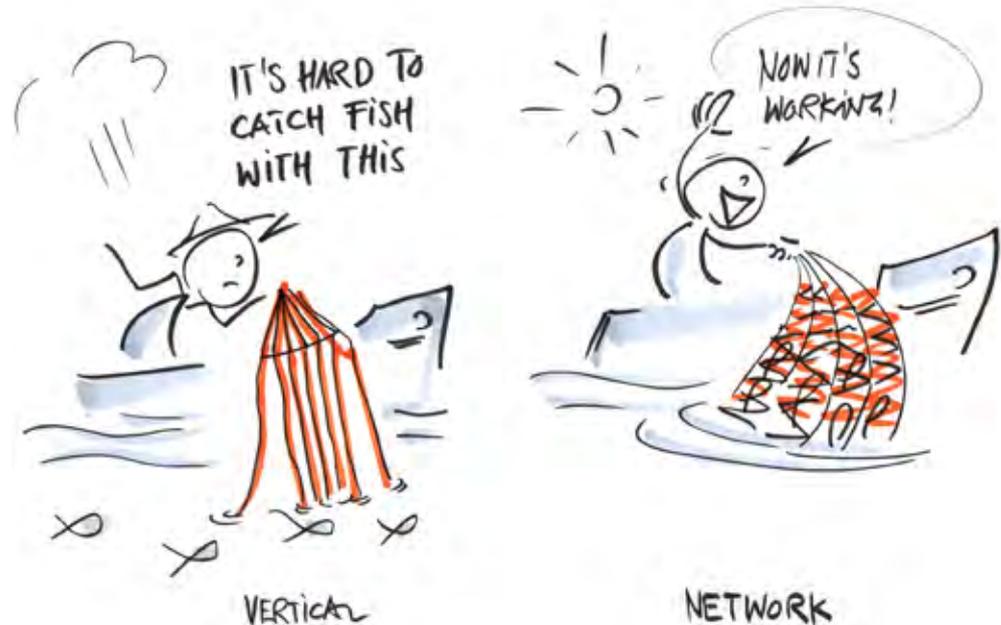
→ http://bit.ly/SDC_Networks

Stress reduction thanks to virtual communication – a contradiction?

Ute Klotz, Hochschule Luzern
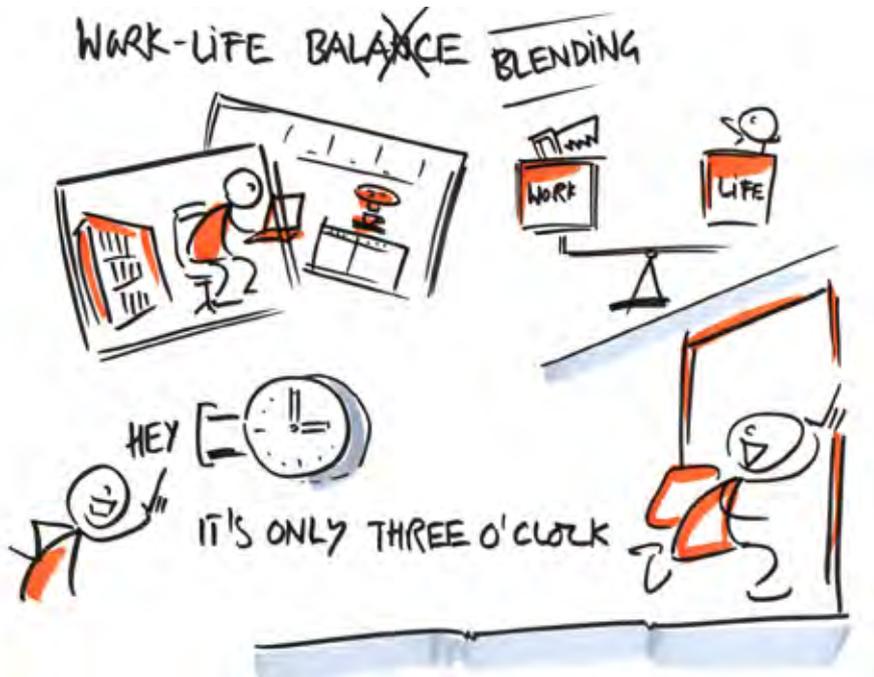
Virtual collaboration has many facets – there are clear potentials that were presented: increased flexibility of where and when people work as well as easy real-time collaboration over distance. Thereby people have more flexibility in blending their live domains. There are many ways to handle these new options – common to all is that staff and management have to carefully treat their most precious resource: their own time.

→ http://bit.ly/HSLU_virtual

Online interviewing:
with head, heart and gut feeling

Sara Lindemann, viasto

Producing and watching videos is part of our lives: according to youtube, every second 2'314 hours of video viewed globally. Using videos for recruitment is a novelty and has its strength. As in traditional interview settings, the first impression remains a very strong influencing factor. Recruiting becomes global and local at the same time. Face to face interviews even proved to be more biased than video interviews, as the questions and flow of discussion may differ between candidates.

→ http://bit.ly/VIASTO_online

Webinars: the future of interactive training and virtual team communication?

Bertha Camacho, skat consulting

A convincing live example how webinars can bring the classroom online with little cost, offices can connect, and documents can be shared, co-created and commented. As in face to face situations, a competent facilitator or trainer is required as well as: sufficient broadband, IT support and a technical test to assure connectivity. For the rest, it is just a matter of getting into it and tapping the value added of webinars compared to e.g. skype sessions.

→ http://bit.ly/SKAT_webinar

MOOCs: good practice, opportunities and limits

Constance Martin, The Geneva Centre for Education and Research in Humanitarian Action (CERAH)

A MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) can reach very far, if well designed – clear objectives and convincing teaching staff are key ingredients. Using a variety of tools, such as videos, printable handouts and online questionnaires for self-assessment makes a MOOC lively and capturing. Integrating opportunities for exchange is essential. Interactive moderated forums and group exercises are examples allowing reflective learning among participants to compensate for the lack of individual tutoring.

→ http://bit.ly/CERAH_MOOCs

Online Competency Assessment in Talent Selection and Development

Bettina Hasel and Antonino Brusa, UNICEF

Virtual tools have become a routine part of UNICEF's recruitment practice. Recently, the organisation introduced a job simulation competency assessment part to its online recruitment procedure for young professional positions (P-2 and P-3). Job simulation exercises are supported by videos reproducing emergency situations. The aim is to assess competencies in a more efficient way and to help narrow down the people who really match to the position, who have transferable skills and who culturally fit to the working environment of the organisation.