Covid-19’s impact on the world of work: Challenges for employees’ person-environment fit, work-family interaction and retirement plans.

De Cooman Rein¹, De Gieter Sara² & Dury Sarah³

I. INTRODUCTION

As a result of the Covid-19 virus outbreak, drastic measures were and are still being taken worldwide to reduce the spread of the virus and manage the health crisis, ranging from complete lockdowns of countries, cities or regions to highly regulated (professional) contacts and travel opportunities. A lockdown was also declared in Belgium in mid-March 2020 with a reprise of similar measures in autumn, and with alternating toned down or intensified confinement policies in between. These policies had a significant to tremendous impact on the work routine of most employees and employers, depending upon the type of sector or job. From one day to another, a significant part of the employees could no longer perform their job, because sectors and employers were forced to close down and employees were condemned to (temporary) unemployment. Other employees, working in so called ‘essential’ jobs and sectors (e.g., health care, public transport, retail), were confronted with a substantial increase in workload and new perilous work conditions. Knowledge workers were forced to (almost) fulltime work from home for quite a number of weeks or even months. When employees were still allowed to go to work, they were confronted with strict rules with regard to respecting physical distance and hygiene measures and with a limited number of contacts and ways to interact, clearly impacting their normal work routines. In sum, the Covid-19 virus and associated policies affected people’s professional functioning and well-being at all levels of the labor force and across sectors and regions as well as they affected employers’ and industries’ functioning.

¹ Prof. dr. Rein De Cooman is Professor in the research group Work and Organization Studies, KU Leuven. For correspondence: rein.decooman@kuleuven.be.
² Prof. dr. Sara De Gieter is Associate Professor in the research group Work and Organizational Psychology, Vrije Universiteit Brussel. For correspondence: sara.de.gieter@vub.be.
³ Prof. dr. Sarah Dury is Assistant Professor in the research group Belgian Aging Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel. For correspondence: sarah.dury@vub.be.
For academics, Covid-19 confinement policies enacted by most countries have implied a sudden switch to (fulltime) working from home (for a considerable period and considerable number of employees in the company of (young) children requiring home teaching), a transition to online teaching, mentoring and examining, and an adjustment of research activities. The Covid-19 virus brought a sudden and impactful change in academics’ daily work practice and experience. Also, it raised many questions and accelerated innovations in view of the working day of tomorrow, 2021, 2030 and beyond. Many demands present(ed) themselves, some of them undoubtedly hindering academics’ functioning and well-being, others rather challenging and potentially entailing a (needed) reorientation of academia.

Within this chapter, we take a micro perspective and reflect on how Covid-19 policies and the new reality of work after the start of this crisis affects/affected employees in their functioning and well-being and what challenges still lie ahead of us. In doing so, we take a thematic approach and focus on the challenged fit between employees’ 1) personal attributes and the(ir) new work reality, 2) work and family roles, and 3) post-retirement plans and current possibilities.

II. PERSON-ENVIRONMENT FIT

The Person-Environment (PE) fit model is one of the most pervasive guiding frameworks for management scholars and practitioners alike, and key to academics understanding of employees’ emotions, attitudes, and behavior in the workplace (Kristof-Brown & Billsberry, 2013). The study of PE fit focuses on the antecedents and consequences of the compatibility between people and the environments (i.e. organization, job, team and/or supervisor) they inhabit (Kristof, 1996). PE fit is commonly conceptualized as either a supplementary or complementary form of alignment between a person and his/her work environment (Kristof, 1996). Supplementary fit exists when an employee resembles its work environment in that they share similar fundamental attributes, such as values, goals, or personality dimensions, for instance when an employee’s value attached to social matters aligns with a company’s mission and value statement emphasizing social corporate responsibility. Complementary fit exists when the employee complements the work environment or vice versa (Muchinsky & Monahan, 1987), which is, for instance, the case when employees match the particular skill and competency requirements of their jobs, or when the job fulfills employees’ intrinsic (e.g., growth and personal development) and extrinsic (e.g., social status) needs. Both
types of fit can of course co-exist with employee showing similarity with and adding to the organization, job or team. Several studies have found that PE fit correlates positively with organizational commitment, job satisfaction, performance, career involvement, and career success and negatively with turnover intentions and feelings of burn-out (Chatman, 1991; Kristof, 1996; Lauver & Kristof-Brown, 2001). Studies on the importance of PE fit cover a wide array of research on topics such as work motivation, job stress, vocational choices, recruitment and selection, and organizational culture (Edwards, 2008).

Using a complementary fit perspective, some scholars in the pre-Covid-19 era proposed individual qualities required to optimally fit into virtual work environments (i.e. organizations, teams, and jobs) (Shin, 2004) and temporary work settings (Goetz, Wald & Freisinger, 2020) as compared to traditional ones such as, a fixed office or fixed desk place (Shin, 2004). The concept of the virtual organization as used in the literature since 1995 (e.g. Coyle & Schnarr, 1995; DeSanctis, Staudenmayer & Wong, 1999) greatly resembles many employees’ work situation in Covid-19 times (and probably also in the post-Covid-19 era). Employees operate asynchronously for instance due to rotation systems in work schedules to minimize physical contact and arrangements of temporary unemployment to cope with reduced workload. They also operate in spatial dispersion from their own isolated home offices or different locations due to required reductions of work-home commutes and local outbreaks of the virus. Also, with temporary work settings some parallels can be drawn. In Covid-19 times a great deal of work involves temporary new, unique, non-routine, often complex tasks that also involve a high degree of uncertainty and risk (e.g. academics compelled to online teaching or military helping out in residential care) often involving informal and interpersonal coordination processes.

The employee attributes that were purported to be vital in such virtual and/or temporary work environments (Goetz, Wald & Freisinger, 2020; Shin, 2004) therefore currently prove to be crucial in order to ensure a good PE fit. A number of competencies may matter in terms of professional (e.g. engagement, commitment, motivation) as well as general well-being and functioning. Regarding work attitudes, the new environment requires employees to value autonomy and flexibility and to show both willingness to trust and trustworthiness. Regarding skills, the new environment requires lateral skills, virtual communication skills and computer literacy, time management skills and teamwork skills. Finally, in terms of abilities it requires someone to work autonomously, to withstand high degree of work-related stress, and to work under a certain degree of uncertainty or risk and under constraints of high interdependence.
Although autonomy is a key element in many work settings nowadays, in settings of new and complex assignments and solitude work, a worker ought to both value self-motivation and self-directedness (i.e. valuing autonomy) and to be able to motivate oneself to decide on a personal work schedule, methods, and pace (i.e. ability to work autonomously). Even more than in the virtual organization as defined in the mid 90’s, the current economic situation due to Covid-19 brings along switches in work assignments and methods and creates uncertainty in the work context. Valuing flexibility and being able to handle changes by deploying lateral skills (i.e. being able to collaborate with and learn from individuals who possess different backgrounds, perspectives, and agendas) and time management skills is therefore pivotal and highly beneficial for one’s performance, positive work attitudes, and well-being. The complexity of tasks referring to the interaction of many different actions and parameters which makes it difficult to assess the effects of actions and makes subtasks highly interdependent, undoubtedly increased in jobs impacted by Covid-19 measures or involved in designing Covid-19 measures. Hence, the ability to cope with high interdependence is needed. This requires a high degree of self-reliance and the ability to improvise, adapt to change and develop new approaches. As for trust, the absence of common control mechanisms (i.e., direct supervision) makes it necessary for employees and supervisors to rely on interpersonal trust with a greater need for willingness to cooperate, conflict resolution and creation of shared values. This is of course relevant in virtual work settings but even so in -as they are currently (and suddenly) called in Belgium- essential sectors like health care and logistics. Finally, as will also be discussed in the next theme in the specific situation of working from home, employees may be easily distracted by their family members or other disturbances. Being able to focus and manage time and workload efficiently seems to be crucial autonomy-related competencies. Since a number of tasks in times of Covid-19 were/are new, unique and non-routine, they require a lot of coordination and teamwork. Success therefore relies on effective and efficient collaboration which requires communication qualities, balance of member contributions, and mutual support among coworkers. Exchange of information and knowledge and spontaneous interactions are harder but crucial. To conclude, apart from the general Covid-19 related stress and health risks, new, unknown tasks and time pressure often lead to feelings of stress and lack of security. Consequently, the abilities to withstand a high degree of work-related stress and to work under a degree of uncertainty by using coping strategies focused on applying proactive uncertainty management to reduce problems, social support, or method-based problem-solving tend to be vital.
Using a supplementary fit perspective, there is an urge to share some specific values and goals both among employees within teams and within dyads of employee-supervisor. Organizations are/were faced with great challenges and great ambiguity, making some values suddenly top of the agenda. The pandemic has no parallel in living memory and is—besides being a massive medical challenge—a unique social challenge for individuals and organizations alike. The Covid-19 situation shows (perhaps for the first time) that other values seem to be by far more important than merely economic values. Sharing values like resilience, compassion, care, respect, camaraderie, social responsibility, safety, humanity and integrity are key, making them a (new) and important aspect of supplementary fit. Although some of the above involves rather inherent personal capabilities (e.g. values, lateral skills), others are learnable ones (e.g. time management skills).

Also here the academic (and more in general the educational) sector has great potential to contribute by how they themselves cope with the crisis and the skills they thereby deploy in their current student population and researchers-to-be through online lectures, e-mentoring and required resilience and flexibility, and the values they emphasize through the ongoing pandemic crisis.

III. WORK-FAMILY INTERACTION

Boundary theory (Ashfort, Kreiner & Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996) provides one of the dominant theoretical frameworks when it comes to understanding the (daily) interaction between employees’ work and family roles. According to this theory, employees try to create and maintain physical, cognitive and behavioral boundaries between their work and family domains, in order to structure and simplify their environment and efficiently manage the expectations coming along with both roles. The created boundaries vary in flexibility and permeability, and range from very thick boundaries strictly separating the work and family domain (‘segmentation’) versus very thin boundaries resulting in the full ‘integration’ of both domains. The type of boundary between one’s work and family roles depends on the employee’s personal boundary management preference (ranging from segmentation to integration) as well as the boundary supplies available in and offered by the employee’s work environment (Kreiner, 2006). Neither segmentation nor integration of both life domains is to be recommended for all employees, since it is the fit between one’s personal boundary
preference and work environment supplies that actually results in more positive outcomes in both the work (e.g., performance, job satisfaction) and family (e.g., family performance, work-family conflict) domain (e.g., Bogaert, De Cooman & De Gieter, 2018). Employees who are experiencing a good fit between their own preference for combining their work and family lives and the possibilities they have to do so in their current work and family context seem to perform better and are more satisfied in both life domains.

Whereas before the Covid-19 crisis some employees occasionally or more structurally—often limited to 1 or 2 days in a week—worked from home and mainly did so at their own request, the Covid-19 confinement policies reshuffled the working from home practices in many organizations (Kniffin et al., 2020). During the lockdowns in spring and autumn 2020 and the months in between and after, a significant part of the work force (including the majority of knowledge workers) was forced to work from home for the majority of the workdays if not fulltime, in many cases without having prior working from home experience and organizational policies accompanying this large-scale working from home practice. From one day to another, for weeks (even months) working from home was installed as the new standard for all jobs feasible from home, regardless of the employees’ own boundary management preference or private situation. Based on the existing literature one may claim that such a situation challenges many employees’ work-family boundaries and thereby impacts their functioning and well-being in both the work and family domain (Cho, 2020; Kniffin et al., 2020). Also in academia, studying and working from home became the norm for thousands of students, professors and other university employees. Whereas before the Covid-19 crisis professors could decide for themselves whether they wanted to occasionally work from home—combining on campus teaching activities and attending meetings with doing research in the tranquility of their own home office or living room—they were suddenly forced into fulltime working from home, inhibiting the often so valued social contacts with students and colleagues.

When trying to understand and predict the impact of the Covid-19 forced working from home situation on employees’ performance and work-family interaction, we can draw on findings from prior research on telework and working from home. Yet, these can only partly be generalized as they are mainly based on studying employees’ voluntary and part-time working from home experiences. Overall, working from home seems to have a positive impact on an employee’s individual performance. This can mainly be explained by the fact that employees put in more working hours (e.g., replacing the regular commute time by working), are able to
focus better, and have the autonomy to (better) organize their work in light of the work demands and own possibilities and needs (see Beauregard, Basile & Canónico, 2019 for an overview). However, an employee’s performance can also suffer from working from home, especially when this is done more intensely and a spatial as well as a psychological distance is experienced. Along with working from home more than 2,5 days a week (‘high intense working from home’), comes the feeling of being isolated and losing touch with the colleagues and supervisor (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Especially in the situation of high intense working from home—that is, the work situation of many knowledge workers during the Covid-19 crisis—it is important that employees feel socially supported. Supporting employees and acknowledging their struggles and efforts as well as maintaining good (informal) online communication among colleagues and supervisor appears key in fighting feelings of isolation, low self-efficacy and decreased commitment (Turetken et al., 2011).

Looking at previous (meta-analytic) research on working from home and work-family interaction, working from home can result in less work-to-family conflict for some employees as it allows them to better align their work and family roles and demands (Allen, Johnson, Kiburz & Shokley, 2013; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Golden et al., 2006). However, working from home can also result in more work-to-family conflict as it challenges the boundaries between one’s work and family domain (Golden, Veiga & Simsek, 2006; Lapierre, van Steenbergen, Peeters & Kluwer, 2016). Not only the boundaries with regard to work or non-work time and space (e.g. taking care of non-work responsibilities during working hours or working from the kitchen table) are blurred, many employees also find it harder to stop working or thinking about work when work cues are continuously present in their home environment (Delanoeije, Verbruggen & Gemeyes, 2019; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Moreover, also the presence of communication technologies used to exchange information and stay in touch with colleagues during the work day can strengthen the feeling of being available for work issues all the time and make it harder to detach from work outside regular work hours (Sewell & Taskin, 2015). Nevertheless, these previous research findings cannot simply be transferred to the current Covid-19 context of high intense to fulltime working from home in which many employees were restricted in their autonomy to decide if and when they would work from home and were simply obliged to do so, possibly influencing their intrinsic motivation and working from home experiences. Within this context of (almost) fulltime working from home, employees almost unavoidably integrate their work and family roles (e.g. assisting children with school assignments in between work meetings, attending
online meetings instead of having lunch with the family members) regardless of their own boundary management preference, work- and private situation. Research indeed already showed that employees working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic experience more conflict between their work and family roles (Vaziri, Casper, Wayne & Matthews, 2020). For those employees who like to separate both domains and for those facing high work and/or family demands, the lack of clear spatial and temporal boundaries recently resulted in more work-to-family conflict as well as family-to-work conflict.

In sum, prior findings show that working from home can have beneficial effects on employee performance and work-family interaction. Yet, high intense or fulltime working from home is not desirable and can even be detrimental for employee performance and well-being. While the Covid-19 crisis is still ongoing and both employers and employees are still trying to find a way to make the current working from home practices work, it already seems very unlikely that we will return to the pre-Covid-19 approach to work. Many employees have clearly discovered the benefits of working from home and will not be (that) eager to face the daily traffic jam for work that can also be done (and sometimes even better) from home. Employers and employees will carefully need to consider how they can organize part-time working from home in as many jobs as possible in the near future in such a way that it benefits both parties. Employers will need to develop a (new) formal working from home policy, accompanied by efficient work systems (e.g., IT, communication system) and result-based performance management practices to support and acknowledge the employees while working from home a few days a week (Beauregard, Basile & Canónico, 2019). In order to decide whether working from the office or from home is more appropriate on a particular day, one can use the type and complexity of the tasks that need to be performed that day as one of the guiding principles. A task that requires a high level of concentration would preferably be done at home, while tasks requiring input from and interaction between different colleagues would preferably be done at the office. With more employees working from home, organizations will also need to redesign workplaces in such a way that they serve work and fit the activities that are (will be) performed onsite. Besides the more practical organization of work, organizations and supervisors will also need to rethink the way they monitor, support and motivate employees, and how they can stimulate an organizational culture based on trust (Beauregard, Basile & Canónico; 2019, Kniffin et al., 2020). As for the employees themselves, they can reduce possible work-to-family as well as family-to-work conflict by engaging in boundary management behaviors that are aligned with their own preference and needs (e.g., introducing
a daily transition ritual at the end of the workday) and by clearly communicating to their colleagues, supervisor and family members when they are (not) available for work/family related matters (Beauregard, Basile & Canónico, 2019).

IV. END OF CAREER TRANSITION

Building further on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, on competences of employees and their new work reality and the current challenges related to combining work and family roles, the Covid-19 pandemic also has a major impact on employees’ (post-)retirement plans. Retirement is a significant life transition in late adult life that often brings about great changes in individuals’ patterns of everyday activity, social networks as well as one’s economic resources, requiring adjustment for both the retiree and other members of the household (i.e., van Solinge, 2013; Wang, Adams, Beehr, & Schults, 2009). The idiosyncratic adaptation of employees to this transition appears to be heterogeneous (Kim & Moen, 2002; Perreira & Sloan, 2001; Van Solinge & Henkens, 2008; Wang, 2007). Since both financial and nonfinancial retirement planning facilitates the adaptation to retirement for older employees, it is important to gain further insight into their retirement plans and whether these plans are effectively executed. However, in Covid-19 times, retirement planning might be interrupted, viewed and planned differently or even be postponed. Given that the Covid-19 confinement policies had a major impact on (older) people’s social contact and freedom of movement in every type of activity related to leisure and civic engagement, one may wonder whether Covid-19 will impact the plans of retirement from now on.

Perceptions on retirement have been applied to current policy debates around the globe as well as to societal debates introducing new policy actions such as “productive”, “successful”, “active”, “positive” and “healthy” aging (i.e., Beard et al., 2016; Boudiny, 2013). Currently, the global public health framework of the World Health Organization on healthy aging (WHO, 2015) is reshaping aging and retirement policies and thereby stresses the need to detect “the attributes that determine whether people can be and do what they have reason to value” (Beard et al., 2016, p. 2149). Accordingly, “healthy and active aging” in retirement has become a policy target in the European Union (European Commission, 2020) focusing on delaying retirement and working longer. Moulaert and Biggs (2013) refer to this as a shift from active (i.e. social and leisure activities) to productive aging (i.e. working longer and bridge employment). Note that - despite reforms - Belgium is still one of the countries with the lowest retirement age in
Europe. With an average retirement age of 61 (OECD, 2019), Belgium has an early exit-oriented retirement culture. Henceforth, the societal view on retirees as an untapped resource has introduced a new expectation for retirees. Retirees are now called to civic engagement and societies rely on their citizens for various forms of productive behaviors. However, often a narrow view on the concepts of leisure and civic activities is applied (Dury et al., 2016; Morrow-Howell, 2010; Roberts, 2010). Productive behaviors are often operationalized as volunteering (Morrow-Howell, 2010), with repetitively not including other activities, such as caregiving, associational life and/or social activities. Yet, as recent scholars claim, an engaged lifestyle comprises many other activities (Johnson & Mutchler, 2014; Martinson & Minkler, 2006).

A Belgian qualitative study of Dury and van Solinge (2020) gives a picture of the changes in peoples’ time use and structure during the retirement transition. The general picture is that young retired people (approximately retired for 1 year) create continuity by expanding activities and strengthening their social ties. The majority draws on pre-retirement roles and activities but also many young retired people give more and at a more frequent basis instrumental support to family. The results of the pre-Covid-19 study also suggest that there is a tension between (social) involvement and time sovereignty. Almost all retired people look for ways to be active and meaningful, but preferably while maintaining sovereignty. Retirement causes key changes in people’s activities. The general picture is that retirees create some continuity for themselves by expanding activities that are beneficial for themselves and for society at large by strengthening ties and increasing social capital. However, the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in, foremost in Europe, exclusion of older adults by separating the older generation even more from younger generations and from their contribution to society. Older people have been excluded as caregivers, volunteers and community leaders, which might result in excluding older people from their rights and dignity as well (United Nations, 2020).

What came forth from the study (Dury & van Solinge, 2020) is the very prominent role of being a grandparent. In the Belgian culture the role of grandparenting appears to be very important. This resulted also in the time use and time sovereignty of the young retired people. For the Flemish grandparents, the time that was freed up by not being active on the work floor was for a large part spent on the care of the grandchildren. Resulting in a high degree of continuity once retired: one intensifies the time to take care of the grandchildren, which was (often) already an activity one undertook when one was still working. What emerges from the
interviews is that the grandparent role is a social role that is strongly anchored within the Belgian society. Parents and their adult children often live less than 15 to 30 minutes apart and there are clear social expectations on the role of grandparents in childcare (Gezinsbond, 2016). Although most regions in Flanders have an extensive range of formal childcare facilities, it was obvious to the grandparents that once retired they intensified their role as grandparents in the amount of time they spent caring for the grandchildren. The study also established that grandparents continued their other activities or started a new activity, such as volunteering, attending a course or sports activity. However, the inclusion of new activities remained limited, just as with childcare, one intensifies the activities that one already did. However, this picture may be even more challenging seen the Covid-19 pandemic. Are young retirees perceiving this transition to a new episode in their lives as an episode to start new activities or intensify previous activities? What is the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic? Might that transition and starting new activities be even more hampered due to social contact and activities restrictions? This because the Covid-19 pandemic has urged generations to remain apart to avoid the risk of contamination and to protect the older generation. Seen that they are considered a high-risk group. This longer period of isolation, such as not seeing their grandchildren or only through limited contact such as telephone contact as it is less likely for older people to be digitally included among younger generations, may have a serious effect on their mental health (United Nations 2020).

As for the non-grandparents, Dury & van Solinge (2020) see a more diverse picture. They cannot fall back on the 'standard activity' of childcare and seem to struggle more with organizing their time after retirement. Non-grandparents see their retirement more often as a new start. In this group, new activities are more likely to be undertaken and it is more probable that a new start will be made and resuming or taking a new job (cfr. Bridge employment) is more common.

Building on above insights, the Covid-19 pandemic the world is being confronted with demonstrates that being productive during retirement cannot be restricted to volunteering alone but requires a broad open perspective and recognition of the wide variety of possible roles. In general, this critique points to the need for more nuanced theorizing about the complex roles of retired individuals in society. Moreover, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that older adults, even though asked to remain rather isolated from others, are crucial in civil and the society at large.
The main question of this section remains however: Will the pandemic also result in behavioral changes such as different retirement planning of older adults transitioning into retirement? Likewise, will this result in behavioral changes such as working longer or bridge employment instead of planning social and leisure activities? The pandemic might result in an economic crisis in which people may need to work longer or combine retirement with bridge employment out of a necessity. Moreover, retirement has been a momentum to take back their own time and sovereignty on that time and to strengthen their family time through informal care and care for the grandchildren. Will the Covid-19 pandemic and its consequences change that dynamic? The existential threat of the Covid-19 pandemic may include fear of being infected but also financial worries and uncertainty. Some studies established that the pandemic created fear and a snowballing anxiety beyond its logical boundaries (Banerjee & Rai, 2020).

Finally, the pandemic also has an impact on the way in which people leave the workplace and retire. For example, many people have not been on the work floor and had to say goodbye almost invisibly. Farewell via digital means is barely comparable with a physical farewell ritual. The transition from working life to retirement is a major one with a central role of rituals, but due to the current pandemic it can hardly or not take place.

V. CONCLUSION

Within this chapter, we took a micro perspective and reflected on how Covid-19 confinement policies and the new reality of work after the start of this crisis affect/affected people in their functioning and well-being and what challenges still lie ahead. In doing so, we took a thematic approach and focused on the challenged fit between employees’ 1) personal attributes and the(ir) new work reality, 2) work and family roles, and 3) post-retirement plans and current possibilities. Overall, we conclude that the impact of Covid-19 on individuals’ personal situation depends on the interplay between contextual (e.g. type of job and work environment) and individual factors (e.g. family situation, career phase, …). Thorough reflection upon potential and possible person-environment fit(s) may benefit individuals as well as organizations and societal welfare. Covid-19 entailed severe changes in how people work and how particular working conditions and behaviors align with and impact upon employees’ families and their own identity. Also, employees’ and retirees’ tradeoffs and needed skills and competencies were already challenged for a considerable time, with even more uncertainty about the months to come and whether some of the current challenges may finally convert into
lasting habits, behaviors, routines and procedures. As a vital actor in society, academia—whereof Marc was and always will be an honored and important member—took, takes and will take the role of center of expertise, generating knowledge and moving society forward both through stimulating evidence-based policies and management and by educating, challenging and preparing new, active and critical members for the future labor market. Finally, we like to end this writing with a personal note to the person who inspired us to write this and who this writing is contributed to.

A NOTE TO MARK

Marc, jarenlang onze collega van op het tweede. Een beetje de link tussen ons drieën (de auteurs van dit stuk) ook. We startten het schrijfproces van dit hoofdstuk en ontdekten gaandeweg meer linken, zowel linken tussen ons en onze onderzoeksinteresses als tussen ons en Marc. Marc was een beheerst supporter en minzaam criticaster aan de start van onze carrière. Vanuit de controletoren hield hij de startbaan goed in het oog en waar nodig stuurde hij bij. Altijd bliksemsnel, rigoureus, efficiënt en doelgericht. Het zorgde ervoor dat we rijdend snelheid maakten om vlot te kunnen opstijgen.

Net als Marc zelf, is ook dit stuk enigszins voorspelbaar edoch eigenzinnig. Wat doe je bij de Italiaan en Indiër? Je bestelt steeds dezelfde lunch omdat die gewoon steengoed is. Wat goed is, is goed, niet aan sleutelen. Die bestendigheid en duurzaamheid is een basiskenmerk van Marc. Zo is hij voorspelbaar door na GOA1? Ja…inderdaad, GOA nummer 2 op te starten. En wat doe je als onderzoeker ten tijden van crisis? Schrijven over die crisis en als wetenschapper nadenken over wat kan/zal volgen na de crisis. Het recept van de ossobuco hebben we helaas niet weten te bemachtigen van de drukbezochte Italiaan. Een projectvoorstel schrijven voor een volgende GOA viel niet te combineren met onze huidige vliegsnelheid en ideale kruishoogte. Een reflectie op de crisis dan maar… Vanuit de onderzoeksinteresse waar Marc elk van ons vanuit startpositie heen geloodst heeft, kijken we naar de huidige situatie. De situatie ook waarin Marc het controlecentrum binnenkort verlaat om ongetwijfeld de academie nog verder te piloten vanop de tarmac. Het moet raar zijn om net nu je leven anders te gaan invullen. Maar een vluchtige blik op de boordtabellen leert ons dat er toch nog heel wat Marc geprogrammeerd staat.
In dit hoofdstuk reflecteerden we op drie brede thema’s, namelijk het samenvloeien van werk- en privéleven, het samenvloeien van een individu en een werksetting en het samenvloeien van professionele rollen en pensionering. We introduceerden deze thema’s (onze expertisedomeinen) en duidden kort de stand van zaken binnen de literatuur om het dan toe te passen op de huidige, bevreemdende Covid-19 context, zowel algemeen als specifiek binnen de academische context.

Marc, bedankt om ons een degelijke set vleugels te geven en in colonne te leren vliegen, elk op onze eigen manier! We hebben je steun en kritische blik weten appreciëren en gaan ook nu graag verder in discussie met je over dit stuk. We gaan er dus vanuit dat een paar uur na publicatie een digitale postduif bij ons aangevlogen komt met track changes en (ongetwijfeld) terechte opmerkingen over het gemis aan economisch denken in ons betoog. In het verleden kwam de postduif vaak persoonlijk aan ons bureau aangevlogen en sloot die het gesprek telkens af met een positieve en grappige noot. Je humor en kritische blik op de zaken maakten het voor ons mogelijk om tijdens moeilijke momenten perspectief voor ogen te houden.

REFERENCES


