**Lack of face-to-face contact at work, due to COVID, could harm careers of young professionals, new global research finds**

Decreased face-to-face interactions at work, due to COVID, could harm the long-term career prospects of young professionals, according to new global research among recent master’s graduates from 40 different countries.

The international survey conducted by CEMS, the Global Alliance in Management Education, found that 72% - most in their early to mid-twenties - believe that not being able to physically network with colleagues will negatively affect their long-term careers.

Of the 310 survey respondents, many of whom will go on to become business leaders and entrepreneurs, two-thirds also think that a lack of opportunities for face-to-face training (68%) and tighter training budgets (66%) will significantly impact their progression.

On the other hand, despite increased competition for jobs globally, respondents considered the size of the job market (50%) a less significant threat. Overall acceleration of digitisation (31%) and increased opportunities for flexible working (40%) also emerged lower down their list of concerns.

**A fundamental human need**

“While graduates recognise that the COVID-19 crisis has accelerated a pre-existing trend toward automation, digitization and flexible working, they are concerned about the impact decreasing face-to-face interactions and opportunities for ‘in-person’ development will have on their careers,” said Roland Siegers, Executive Director of CEMS.

“These young professionals recognise that social interaction and collaboration is not only a fundamental human need, but also a valuable source of innovation, productivity and growth during times of crisis.”

CEMS is an alliance of 33 of the world’s leading business schools, 66 corporate partners and 7 NGOs, which deliver the CEMS Master’s in International Management (MIM).

**Seize the moment to innovate**

Professor Greg Whitwell, Chair of the CEMS Global Alliance and Dean of the University of Sydney Business School said: “It is essential that rather than reducing development opportunities, global companies and educators seize this opportunity to innovate, finding new ways to help the next generation of business leaders collaborate and build meaningful networks.

“Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we’ve proved that it is possible to create significant learning opportunities via online platforms, which give graduates a willingness and an ability to shift mindsets, think critically and creatively, and embrace greater risk and flexibility. In a post-COVID world, graduates who can engage employees and stakeholders around experimentation, and who can continuously learn and adapt, will be in high demand.”

“From a business education perspective, one of the lessons from the pandemic is that the promise of technology affords opportunities for collaboration between schools (and hence between students) in ways that previously had not been explored.

“Digitally-enabled learning will have a greater focus on interaction, application and experiential learning in the future. While the benefits of the on-campus experience are clear, we must look for ways to facilitate the extra-curricular activities that our students – who are mostly digital natives – expect. We are also likely to see a shift toward what might be called space-agnostic learning where the aim is to provide a truly engaging educational experience whether the class be real or virtual and no matter where someone is located.”

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