

Bridging the digital divide:

Ongoing research into virtual and online relationships is shaping our future interactions and the way we work and play.

Background

Many of us are virtual workers to some degree, through being confronted with varying forms of electronic communication at work. Even people working in the same building exchange most information via email or other online platforms, and use digital technologies such as shared databases, intranet and wikis. Those working completely remotely, either from home or as members of outsourced service teams, have to rely almost entirely on digital media, while 'switchers' switch between on- and off-site work, and use both virtual and face-to-face collaboration.

Even organisations that don't currently rely much on digital media are likely to bring in increased virtual work

"Despite all this virtual flexibility, people are still physical beings, always located in a specific place and time, with a history and rooted in an organisational context with its specific culture and norms that govern their life."



in different forms, driven by technological developments, automation and financial pressures, creating more demand for outsourced services.

The research

LSBU's Professor Karin Moser is a psychologist and computer scientist, with research expertise in the areas of cooperation, virtual work, knowledge-sharing dilemmas, and decisions under uncertainty.

She says: "Digital media facilitates different types of cooperation regardless of location, time zones, organisational affiliation and social and cultural background. Everyone is – seemingly – only a click away and huge amounts of data and documents can be exchanged effortlessly. However, despite all this virtual flexibility, people are still physical beings, always located in a specific place and time, with a history and rooted in an organisational context with its specific culture and norms that govern their life. Because of these developments,

how to manage virtual work successfully



managers today need to understand the psychology of virtual collaboration, how people cope with the new digital challenges in the workplace, the loss of direct contact in many of their work relationships, and how virtual collaboration can be effectively and purposefully managed."

Professor Moser's latest research in this area focuses on how minimal cues – for example, about someone's professional status or cultural background – influence people's behaviour and perceptions in an online context. "Latest data shows that the influence is massive and subliminal, meaning that people are not aware of the effects of minimal cues. This matters greatly for online platforms in health care or other public service provisions, for instance, and we need to understand those processes so that access is equally open to everyone in society and in the best possible way.

"Moving forward I am particularly interested in psychological factors instilling a sense of trust in an unknown online partner, whether an individual on social media, a private retailer or a government service, which makes people engage, provide information or buy goods. This is important to both protect people from abuse and to educate people about when to trust in an online environment."

Researcher: Professor Karin Moser
Research Centre: London Centre for Business and Entrepreneurship Research
School: School of Business

Impacts

- Currently has an expert mandate with the European Asylum Support Office to support all EU+ member states to improve the use of digital platforms and their collaboration regarding asylum and migration procedures across Europe.
- Has been engaged in applied research and consulting on managing virtual work with four private and public sector companies since 2014.
- Her article *Only a Click Away? – What Makes Virtual Meetings, Emails and Outsourcing Successful* won the 2013 Management Articles of the Year Award: ISBN 0-85946-458-x (peer reviewed and selected by practicing senior managers).
- Has organised an international symposium on *The Role of Context in Virtual Work* at the Academy of Management Meeting 2015 in Vancouver (CA) with peer-reviewed published conference proceedings: <http://doi:10.5465/AMBPP.2015.13582>
- The EU mandate with EASO and the collaborations with private and public organisations have already impacted in the way they organise their work practices, for example by adjusting meeting structures to better support actual decision making and by making better use of digital repositories to exchange information before meetings.
- The research has resulted in a number of academic papers and book chapters on managing virtual work that can be found on Research Open: <http://researchopen.lsbu.ac.uk>.