CECC

2nd Central European Case Competition

Advisors' Café

Summary Of Findings

2020

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Zero contact edition of

Central European Case Competition @Corvinus

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INTRODUCTION

The zero contact online edition of the Central European Case Competition @Corvinus (CECC 2020) has come to completion.

Under the reigning difficult environmental conditions, when governments make mandatory restrictions of our personal mobility and opportunities, the situation arose that the realization of the traditional CECC format was made impossible. This happened due to events beyond the control of both the organizers and the participating universities. With dogged determination and the support of our key partners, we have managed to convert the competition into an online format in less than 3 weeks' time. In this unique format of the competition no two persons met, neither during case solving, nor during presentations and Q&A sessions.

In this context, we called the advisors of the participating universities to a virtual Advisors' Café on a bright Sunday afternoon. Afternoon by Budapest time, as some of the advisors had to get up early in the morning, while others stayed up late to be able to join. That was the beauty of this live informal event: we could bring advisors from all over the world together and feel our shared passion for supporting our students and the culture of international business strategy competitions.

Our intention with organizing the Advisors' Café was to bring a more personal event to life with little agenda and much room for free discussion in a friendly environment. Naturally, the topic of the discussion was the consideration of the different aspects of online case competitions, with particular attention to the on-going zero contact edition of CECC and its potential implications to the organization of future case competitions across the globe. It was a moment for sharing early feedback between each other, as much as collecting thoughts for a developing good practice for the pandemic and post-pandemic period of competitions.

We are happy to share our outcome with our partners in organizing case competitions in the pages that follow.

WHAT IS CECC?

Central European Case Competition @Corvinus (CECC) is an invitational case competition bringing together high-performing students of top business schools from all over the world, including Central and Eastern Europe. Teams of four students solve two complex business strategy cases and present their solutions in front of a professional jury. The case studies cover business strategy problems of companies active in the Central European region.

The idea of the Central European Case Competition has the following three cornerstones:

1. **Focused learning environment:** students can expect live cases of companies that provide actual strategic problems and participate in judging, as well as in feedback sessions.

2. **Central European spirit:** the region provides interesting cultural and business opportunities to learn with an emphasis on innovation and creativity.

3. **Coopetition:** teams are provided profound learning opportunities where they can show their excellence as well as support each other by providing progressive solutions and a fair competition environment.

CECC welcomes every participant with a professional programme accompanied by unique local experiences, where they can broaden their experience and meet with fellow case solvers.

CECC ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Miklós Kozma, PhD

ACADEMIC DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,

HEAD OF ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Zsolt Ábrahám

PROFESSIONAL DIRECTOR, MEMBER OF THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE,

CEO OF CASE SOLVERS

Erzsébet Czakó, PhD

PROFESSOR, MEMBER OF THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Zsolt Matyusz, PhD

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, MEMBER OF THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Miklós Stocker, PhD

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, MEMBER OF THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Bence Pistrui

PHD CANDIDATE, MEMBER OF THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

CECC ORGANIZERS

Corvinus University of Budapest is a leading, EQUIS-accredited university in Hungary, offering programmes in business administration, economics, and social sciences, to over 11,000 students. We have a proud tradition of participating in international case competitions for over 15 years.

You may find more information about Corvinus University of Budapest here:

https://www.uni-corvinus.hu/

Case Solvers is an organization with 7 years of experience in case solving trainings and competitions in 29 countries. The company has been using the case method to develop problem solving skills of students at the most prestigious business schools. Case Solvers was founded by alumni members of Corvinus University of Budapest's case programme. Case Solvers is providing case workshops, case writing services for universities, student associations and companies and organizing case competitions on a national and international level for high school and university students.

You may find more information about Case Solvers here: https://case-solvers.com/

PARTICIPANTS OF THE ADVISORS' CAFÉ

MODERATORS

Miklós Kozma, PhD

ACADEMIC DIRECTOR, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, HEAD OF ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

Zsolt Ábrahám

PROFESSIONAL DIRECTOR, MEMBER OF THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE

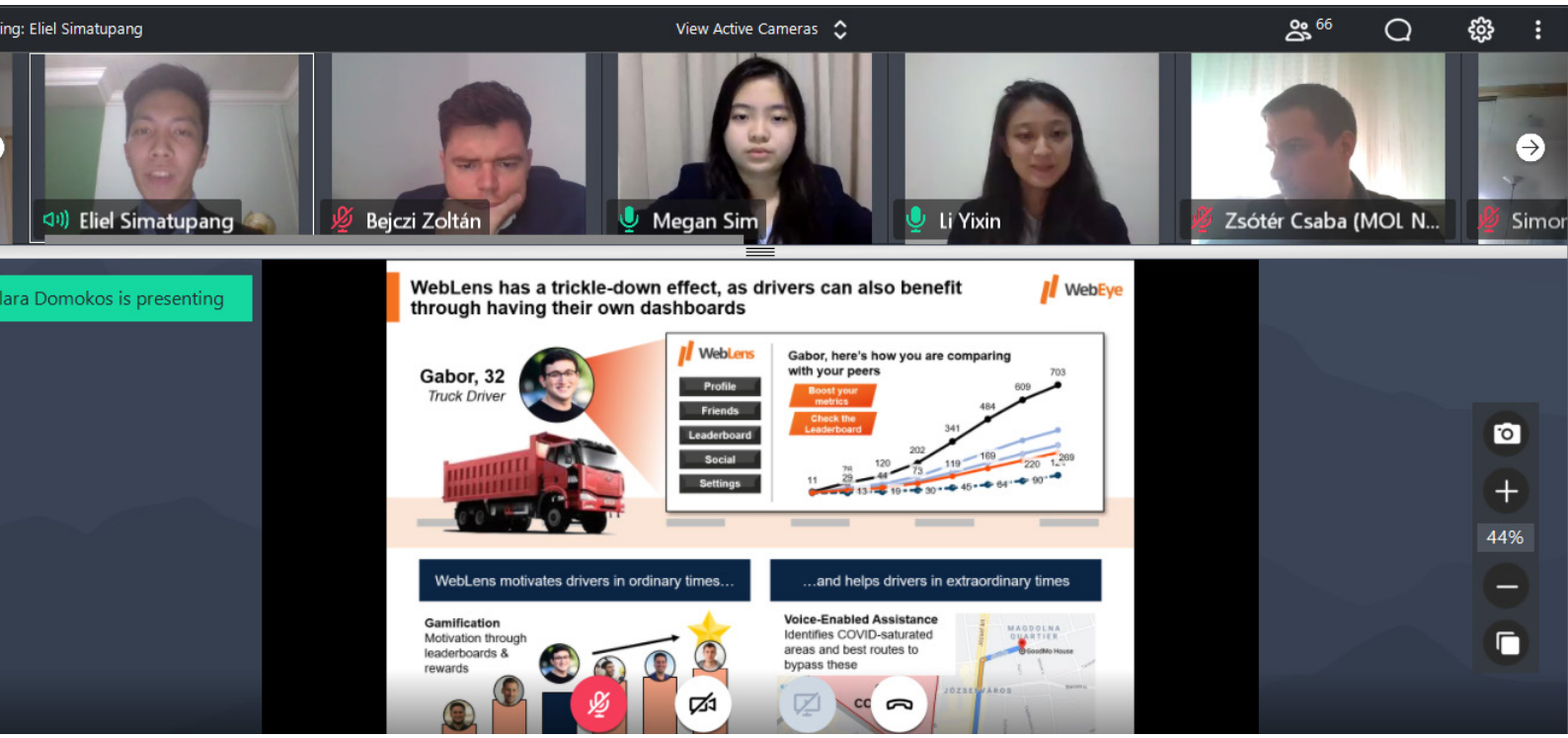
CECC 2020 ONLINE - PARTICIPATING UNIVERSITIES

Rotterdam Business School
University of Alberta
Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota
U.Porto FEP Faculdade de Economia Universidade do Porto
SFU Simon Fraser University
UTS University of Technology Sydney
NUS National University of Singapore
Iowa State University
The University of Melbourne
清華大學 Tsinghua University
Nanyang Technological University Singapore
RSM Erasmus

ADVISORS' PERSPECTIVE

HOW UNIVERSITIES APPROACH THE ONLINE TRANSFORMATION, ESPECIALLY CASE COMPETITIONS?

Universities launch online courses across the globe. Some of them use Zoom as a software, others use MS Teams or other applications. Advisors agreed that online education could be advantageous for some students, mainly the introverts as they are not as exposed to impulses and stimuli at home as they would be in the classroom. Although some professors were originally cautious or afraid of the online transformation, now it appears that group working goes quite well. On the other hand, online education is more time consuming for professors than normal, in-person education.



In online case competitions professors miss the human contact, the face-to-face, personal interactions and the opportunity to experience the host country's beauty, like sightseeing and dining options.

As for participating students, online competitions need firm commitment and ambition focused on learning, as the travel, excitement and cultural experience is more limited. The latter would normally be 50% of their motivation in getting involved in the first place.

Some case competition trainings were also changed to online to let the students become comfortable with the online case competition format and get ready for managing technological challenges.

In the future it is expected that there will be online and regular competitions as well. It may happen that the conversion of the normal event into online format is forced by changing environmental conditions again, so organizers should prepare.

HOW IS THE EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT FOR STUDENTS IN ZERO CONTACT ONLINE CASE COMPETITIONS?

Preparation should be different for this kind of event. One issue can be the overall time for preparation. E.g. CECC was transformed into a zero contact online competition due to the unexpected pandemic, so typically there was not much time to train the teams. Sometimes only 1-2 test cases were solved by teams in preparing for the event. Risk mitigation is also very important in case of slide mishaps, which is challenging, but students understand it provides learning opportunity for them. Time plans for case solving need to be more rigorous, as team members cannot turn to each other to ask a question directly, being physically separated. During the test case the ambient conditions (lighting, noises etc.) can be tested as well, and teams can improve on these.

During the competition in general: a major extra challenge teams face is the time difference. If there are teams from very different parts of the world (like British Columbia and Sydney), there can be 18 hours of difference. This means that some teams make their finals presentation into the night, like at 12 am or 1 am, as per their local time. Also, certain social events could be held online during the night for certain teams (3-4 am), so not everyone was able to participate with full zest.

During the presentation: it proved quite hard to do everything in video because you cannot fully see all reactions. Students can find it sometimes difficult to control the slides, who will take over etc. especially if the internet connection is less than ideal occasionally. It can also be a challenge to make the transitions. Slight disturbances or delays should be counted with.

Students can be more able and willing to tell how they felt and how things went during the debrief. This gives the possibility for advisors to know much more about their students than ever before.

Social events: this still remains a vital aspect. The main purpose is to get to know each other in the virtual space. Buddies have a great role in this by facilitating communication. Time differences naturally make organizing live events challenging. There can be tasks related to social events that can be done partly by the teams in their own time offline, so time difference is less of an issue in these cases.

KEY ASPECTS OF GOOD ONLINE CASE COMPETITIONS

The aspect that springs to mind immediately is the smooth functioning of the IT solutions supporting the operations of online case competitions. This is more critical than in traditional events, though IT support has always been crucial.

A contextual factor is the major difference in time zones that need to be harmonised, as much as possible. Participating teams should prepare to work accordingly. On one hand, this is a challenge as live events, even the presentation finals are outside normal working hours in some time zones. On the other hand, teams may as well intentionally choose night hours for solving the short case, as it is easier to isolate themselves from daily events potentially disturbing their work in their “home office”, and ensure flawless internet connection with less traffic.

In addition to the above special factors, the success of the online case competition depends on the same factors that determine the quality of normal case competitions. The quality of the cases and the consistency and transparency of judging has always been important, as well as the opportunity for students to learn from systematic feedback sessions. Teams have to understand why they are first, second, and how they could develop their craft and come up with better solutions in the future. Written feedback with a few notes can be useful, but live feedback sessions are usually clearer and more powerful. That is not much different from an offline competition.

Finally, the social activities in an online case competition are compromised by the physical distance. Still, live social programmes should not be skipped altogether, as they still add to the feeling of belonging to the community, and building relationships, even if in a virtual format.

ORGANIZERS' PERSPECTIVE

CHALLENGES OF A ZERO CONTACT CASE COMPETITION

TIME PRESSURE OF TRANSFORMATION

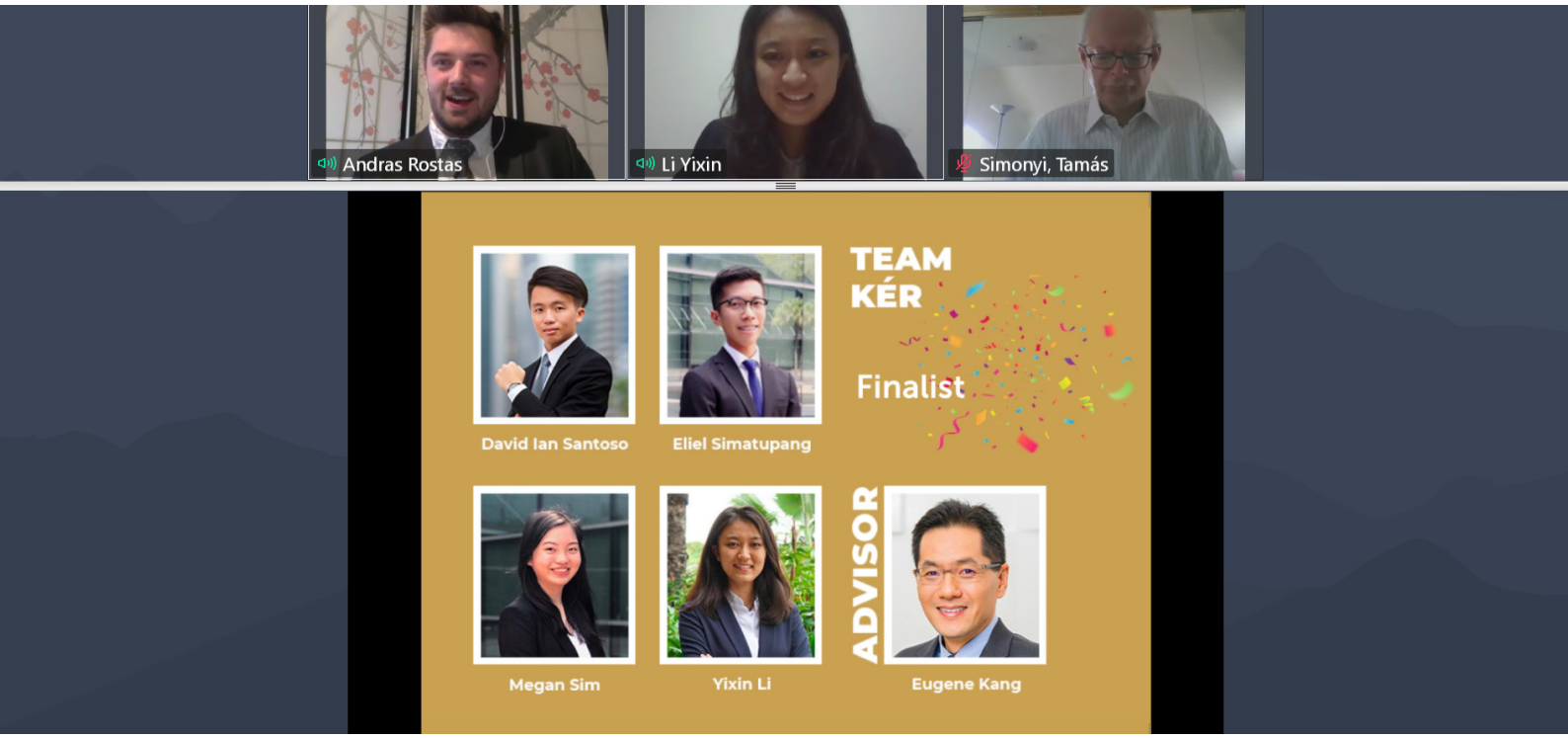
- **Manage a crisis situation.** The organizing team of CECC 2020 had 21 days to transform the whole competition into a zero contact case competition. Since January the CECC 2020 Steering Committee constantly monitored the development of the pandemic. We noted a series of cancellations of other case competitions in the international case competition community. 22 days before the competition the SteerCo decided to transform the whole organization into an online case competition format without any physical contact, both on the participant and organizer side. The concept of zero contact case competition was born.

- **Communicate the changes to the different stakeholders.** The traditional CECC 2020 case competition had a wide range of different types of stakeholders including participants, advisors, case sponsors, major sponsors, in-kind sponsors, venues, restaurants, hotels, jury members, university administration and the organizers. The SteerCo had to communicate the change with them in a highly uncertain environment. The different stakeholders reacted differently. Hotels, restaurants and catering services shut down in Hungary after the government announced the state of emergency. These companies were not flexible in terms of refunding the deposits paid by CECC organizers. The case companies - Loxon and WebEye - were open to the zero contact solution, however the they were busy with their own COVID-19 situation and related internal and external challenges. As the final concept of the traditional CECC 2020 was ready, the organizing team had to redesign every component (e.g. post plans, schedule, social events) of the Central European Case Competition.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT PLATFORM

- **Selection of the right platform.** During the 22 days of intense preparation, CECC's IT team tested several apps for the streaming, like MS Teams, Zoom, Skype, Webex or GoToMeeting. The SteerCo decided to use the service of LogMeIn as GoToMeeting is specialized for remote work and remote control (i.e. the teams can access the organizers' computer and control the slides) of computers.

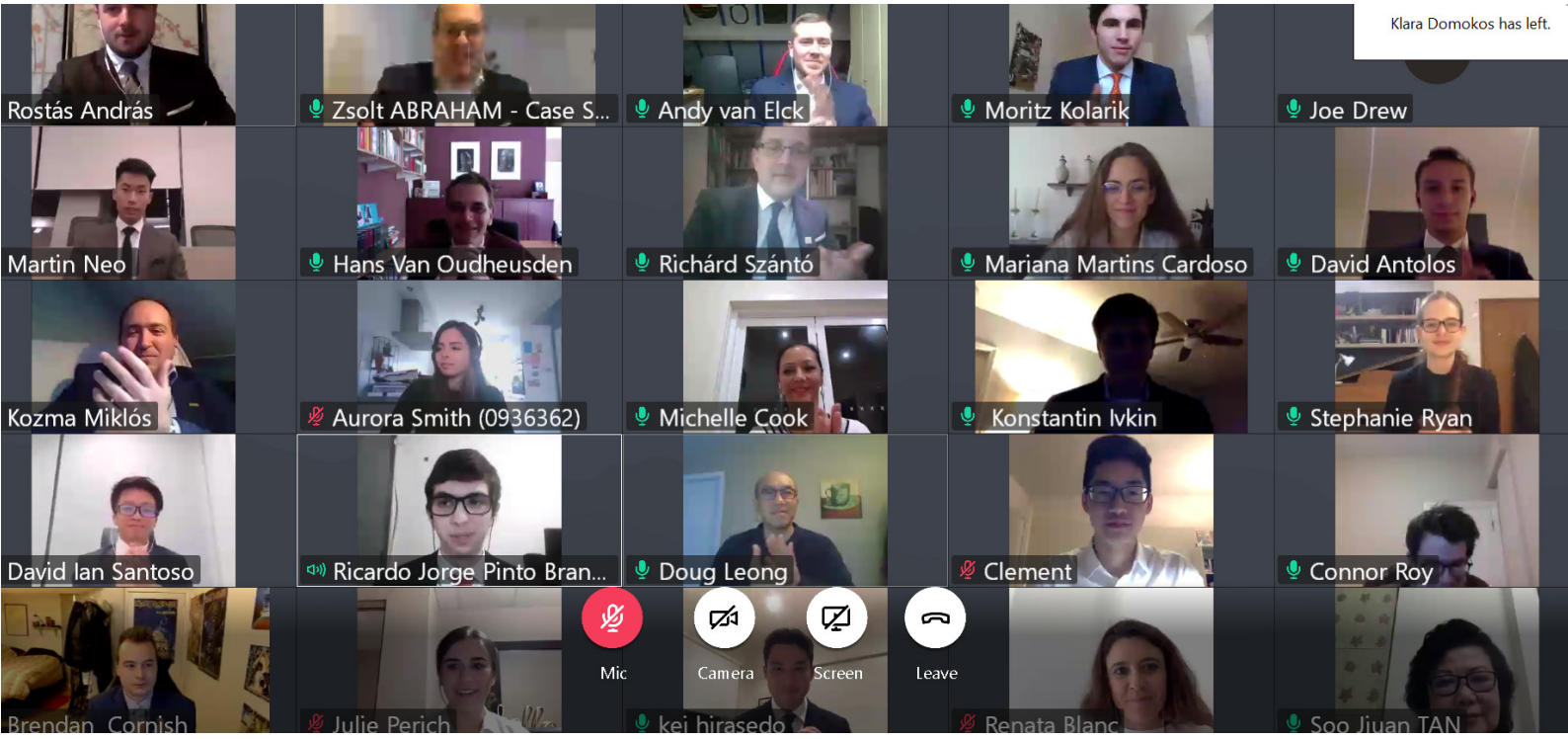
- **Technical training of teams, advisors, and jury members.** The IT team prepared a manual and the plan for providing testing opportunities to the teams, advisors and jury members. They were allowed to get a feel for the application before using it in the competition events. In the end, all participants tested the software at least once before the real time presentation.



ENSURING QUALITY CONTENT

From the perspective of CECC organizers, three factors were considered to be key in ensuring the professional quality of the case competition: clearly articulated live cases, experienced and briefed judges, and comprehensive, detailed feedback provided to the teams.

- **Clearly articulated live cases:** The organizing committee selected the right companies for CECC 2020. The scope of the WebEye and Loxon cases were discussed in iteration with the management of the case companies. Although some aspects of the original value proposition changed due to the disruption effect of the pandemic, the case companies were committed to making CECC 2020 happen regardless. Case writers kept in contact with the company representatives and agreed on the potential options for the renewed case solving and case presentation format. Due to the pandemic situation WebEye asked the case writers to extend the scope for the post pandemic recovery period.



- **Experienced and briefed judges:** In the eyes of CECC organizers, a good jury panel has three essential attributes: there should be at least one person in each panel, who has significant experience in case competitions, all jury members have extensive business background, and judges are to be briefed transparently about their remit, in line with the rules and guidelines. Although some jury members cancelled their participation due to the restrictions of their employers, the zero contact competition provided new opportunities as well. Experienced jury members (e.g. former case

competitors) who are not located in Budapest could join the event.

- **Comprehensive and detailed feedback:** CECC organizers provided clear guidelines and assessment sheets to the jury members about the feedback procedure and expectations. In the online case competition format, due to the major time zone differences, organizers decided to look for alternative, individually arranged time slots for the feedback sessions, outside the main live events of presentations.

UPHOLDING THE CECC SPIRIT

- **Online social events.** The beauty of the city, Budapest plays an important role in the Central European Case Competition. Welcome ceremony and folk dance in the main hall of Corvinus University of Budapest, dinner on a boat overlooking the night lights of the Buda Castle or case presentations in a classicist palace in downtown Budapest are memorable moments of CECC 2019 for students and advisors alike. The personal conversations and chats, social events are essential parts of any traditional case competition. The social team together with the buddies (or 'pajtás' in Hungarian) invested significant time and effort into bringing new life into the concept of social events in the new, online format. Cooking online, folk dancing online, singing folk songs to the camera in Hungarian, and rapid networking sessions jazzed up the otherwise professional focused programme of CECC 2020 zero contact case competition.

- **The Role of the Pajtás.** Due to the physical distance, the role of the pajtás (i.e. the buddy) increased in importance. The pajtás became not the main (as usually) but rather the only contact between the teams and the organizers during the competition. This raised additional challenges in terms of Pajtás communication. They were responsible for the controlled schedule of the participants and all the photos, videos received from the teams.

ZERO CONTACT ORGANIZING TEAM

The remote work changed the way the team worked together. The tradition personal fora, status meetings, brainstorming sessions of the organizing team moved to the online space, in parallel with all other aspects of our life (teaching, social contacting, work). The SteerCo famously had their meetings with the project manager dialling in from the kitchen, as WiFi was best received from there...

LESSONS LEARNED

- The zero contact online format provides a progressive response to the health related challenge teams face across the globe now.

- The motivation of students are partly based on (1) a drive for excellent learning opportunities and (2) a desire to travel to exciting locations and make international friends. The latter can be compromised, though not entirely eradicated in online events.

- Participating universities should clarify with their management how they will respond to a potential forced transformation of the event into online format. Health requirements can be met if prepared for.

- Organizers of online case competitions can accommodate a number of live events in the programme, across extreme time zones. This keeps much of the excitement inherent in the credo of international case competitions intact even in times of global calamities.

- Social programmes, despite the online format, should and indeed can jazz up the otherwise professional programme focused on learning and competition. This adds memorable addition to the experience for participating students.

- The fundamental success of online case competitions in their educational and inspirational mission is built on pillars identical to that of offline case competitions: providing profound learning opportunities for ambitious and committed students, as manifested by carefully elaborated live cases, transparent and balanced judging and sincere development feedback.

- While cancellations used to be exceptional, future case competitions need to be more transparent from day one regarding how cancellations of any kind will be managed.

- In today's environment, adaptiveness in organizing case competitions is vital, more than ever. Prepare for the unexpected!

HOW TO REACH US?

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MAIN ORGANIZERS

casesolvers

Corvinus

CASE COMPANIES

WebEye

innovation • implemented