Thinking Space No.31

"Chatiquette" – or how to comport in online meetings

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Covid-19 – the world-wide challenge in 2020. Digital solutions were to be found for private and business meetings, networking events, conferences, webinars and more in order to stay healthy and stop the pandemic from spreading. Business etiquette is known for personal contacts but what about etiquettes for meetings in the online world? When preparing NEETs for the job market many assets need to be kept in mind. Today, job interviews often take place digitally and therefore this TSP focuses on tips to increase the chance of winning the opportunity through making a good first impression online. An overview about „chatiquette"(chat+etiquette) as well as does and don'ts of online meetings will support the preparation process.

"Device on and let's start?" – not having had a second thought about the online meeting can lead to worst case scenarios. An unorganized, private background, bad lightening behind the speaker, no working sound or disruption through ringing phones as well as other people walking through the room can be very disturbing and lead to an unprofessional atmosphere. Home-office, remote job interviews and webinars have to be organized and thought-through the same way as personal encounters. The following checklist will help the preparation process and avoid uncomfortable situations:

✓ Background: clear, tidy and professional

> The background should be chosen carefully – best is a clean, clear background like a wall without private items. A private background is rather suboptimal and would need to be very organized to have a neutral impact on the professional impression.

✓ Vista: light, display, camera

> Lighting can have an immense impact on the visibility of the digital meeting participant and should therefore be positioned with frontal illumination - lighting from the side or behind can throw adverse shadows. If feasible, natural light would be the perfect choice. In addition to that, the camera should be positioned in a frontal "head and shoulder close-up", sitting down and allowing the perceptibility of gesture and mimic that supports the spoken while granting the counterpart an eye-level conversation.

✓ Sound: microphone, headset

> Microphones have to be chosen carefully as sounds like white computer or background noise can be disturbing for all call participating parties. Even small noises create a subconsciously more difficult concentration situation for everyone that can have a negative impact especially on longer calls or webinars. The usage of headsets is advisable as noises are suppressed and the voice can be heard clearer.

✓ Technology: software, links, telephone number

> There are different kinds of software that are used for online meetings nowadays. Whatever tool is being applied should be tested beforehand. Installation of software, comparability of hard and software as well as the internet connection during different peak times need to be taken into consideration. All links that are being used as well as telephone numbers to call in case of spontaneously occurring problems should be within reach during the call.

✓ Disturbance: surrounding, distraction, other no-goes

> Another person walking through the room, a telephone ringing or somebody else speaking to the call participant are all disturbances that need to be avoided. Not only in consideration of the professionality and etiquette but also concerning data privacy protection all necessary avoiding prearrangements have to be made. Food and drinking should not be part of the conversation – although, depending on the type of call, drinking a coffee is arguable.

✓ Chat: features, benefit, risk

> A chat is often part of webinars or larger online calls/events/meetings. When preparing an online meeting, it is best to communicate clear rules like a "further question time" at the end to avoid unnecessary interruptions. Also, if links shall be shared, it is useful to the links prepared in advance and have someone post them into the chat while the host is presenting. A risk of a chat is that the participants concentrate on communicating only there and with one another. To keep the attention to the presentation itself, it can be useful to ask questions to the participants or interact with them in other ways like polls etc.

Having taken the checklist into consideration, a general "chatiquette" should be applied in every Webinar or call. Certainly, punctuality and preparation are indispensable regardless of the context. The way of addressing other participants can vary from being formal to informal which always depends on the composition of the group. Leading an online call is easily done by involving participants through asking questions. While the chat communication can be very practical as participants' questions being written down and answered whenever fitting during the presentation, it is important not to use the tool for sharing documents during the call but rather afterwards via email. Also, keeping track of all the participants (not leaving anyone with questions behind) and ignoring provocative commentaries that might occur are important tips for a professional online comportment.

The following seven principles for an effective webinar[1] can be transferred into online coaching, working with NEETs:

1. Planning (introduction, implementation, closure, follow-up):
   Webinars need so be well-prepared regarding content, methodology and technology.
2. Feature diversity (choice of medium):
   Different tools and features can be chosen based on the target of the webinar. Teaching and working with NEETS can lead to the use of even more interactive tools for creating an interesting atmosphere that keeps the attention and curiosity to the call/webinar itself. Tools like Skype, Zoom, Microsoft Teams are examples for call tools that can be spiced up with features like Mentimeter (for polls and documentation of a call)[2], Kahoot (asking questions in a quiz show character and can be used to e.g. repeat learning content)[3] or Flinga (a whiteboard tool that can be used for content visualization, commentary/feedback collection; hosted in Finland and is therefore in line with the European data security guidelines)[4]. More interactive is the avatar meet-up tool Tricat (each participant needs to download it beforehand and the host has to pay for its usage. Participants chose an avatar and walk through digital meeting rooms)[5]
3. Relevance (target-group customized content):
   The webinar audience determines the content of the webinar, the level of difficulty and the material to be used.

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[1] https://www.elearning-journal.com/2019/12/12/live-online-trainings/, retrieved on 16.11.20
[2] www.mentimeter.com, retrieved on 16.11.20
[3] https://kahoot.com/, retrieved on 13.11.20
[4] (https://flinga.fi), retrieved on 13.11.20
[5] https://www.tricat.net/, retrieved 10.11.20

4. Interactivity (creative, positive, integration of participants with activities like pools, questioning etc.):
    Interactive tools (introduced in principle 2), asking concrete questions, including participants in the conversation and having different speakers presenting their input can support the integration of the participants, further the achievement of the knowledge transferring objectives and keeps the participants' interest.
5. Social presence (community, communication, trainer/coach as connecting element):
    Digital calls, webinars and seminars can – especially during Covid-19 times– influence social interaction between people. NEETS are not isolated, interact with other participants or their coaches and – if regularly met – can create a sense of group belonging, which is beneficial on many levels. Here, it is important to mention, that -if possible(!) - all participants' usage of not only microphone but cameras for more interaction, mimic and gesture involved in conversations will add up to the more personal communication of participants.
6. Visualization (clearly, structured presentation, expedient image selection)
7. Less is more. In presentations, visuals should be preferred over words, always supporting what is being said. It is even more important than in the physical world to make the presentation short, to the point and interesting and avoid speaking monotonously or reading slides. At the same time, the presenter should keep an overview of the number of participants, the time, dynamics, the tone of the contributions and the chat as the digital environment can have different group dynamics. Participants are not in the same room; cameras are not always switched on and the attention might not be the same as in physical meetings.

Having applied the above preparation checklist and the seven success principles with more concrete examples on tools, visualization and moderation, the coaching/webinar or online conversation with your NEET(s) can only be a great success!