

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE ERA OF COVID 19

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COVID 19 and its sequels have incited panic all over the globe for the past one and a half years. We heard of its economic impact and we saw it challenging our health care facilities. The world faced the loss of manpower and alongside the educational development got steady. Soon, it was followed by the realization and need for distance learning. The world saw a major change in the modes of communication with the symposia getting replaced by webinars, congress taking the virtual form, the group discussions getting diverted to zoom sessions whilst the old-school classrooms were restructured into google classrooms. The classic paper got replaced by the keyboard, the whiteboards became the laptop screens and teachers were suddenly digital. None the less, the learning did not stop and development continued in all walks of life in a reformed manner and at a new pace.

Brian Tracy pointed it out correctly by calling continuous personal and professional development "THE KEY" to the future. Continuous Professional Development in the easiest can be referred to as a process of building, maintaining, and later enhancing the skills, a continuous approach, set of ideas, and a group of techniques that are focused on self-learning and professional growth. <sup>1</sup> Development in every meaning is supposed to be a lifelong process, and when it comes to professional development during the COVID era, the paradigm shift from remote to digital learning gave it a new morphology. There had been a different school of thoughts about the new adaptations, some considered it the easiest approach to binge on the e-lectures of the international speakers while sitting on the comfortable couch of the lounge with no hustle of traveling across the countries and avoiding the physical exhaustion. Others labeled it as a constraint to the norm of interaction and discussion. <sup>2</sup> While the movement from traditional learning to online coaching and course delivery gained momentum, the field experience never lost its due importance. Virtual reality simulations came into play and were

thought to serve as mechanisms to support the developmental process but the worth of real-time experience could not dropdown. Multi-perspective 360 video is relatively an inexpensive approach according to some, but the equity of access to the technology has been a concern. Digital tools foster active learning and allow for collaboration between synchronous and asynchronous sessions but the need for a healthy learning environment stays unaddressed. Digital escape rooms came into play but the homework gaps are yet to be filled. <sup>3</sup> The impact of remote learning was graded short-term by one school of thought while the long term and time-tested impact of the national development and learning areas were second to none.

If the virtual learning experience is considered per se, it improved for the last one year in terms of connectivity, servers, digital gadgets, assessments, certifications for positive reinforcement. The world experienced online examinations that were once rare, the digital teachers who were once challenged for e-teaching have now provided quality content. To begin with, the target audience which once was small later transformed into masses and engage people across the continents. The online teaching over time became qualitative and more interactive to ensure better delivery. The providers became more capable and robust while the users became technology-friendly.

The other side of the picture is equally bright with no existing replacement in terms of professional relationships, hands-on skills, real-time experiences, communication skills, constructive criticism, thought sharing, and all the interactivity that is a part of the conventional setup.

While many believe in the traditional processes, the global transition and digital backup have supported it enough to keep them running smoothly when the professional development was on the verge of compromise. Things, on one hand, are getting back to their original shape but we have been exposed to the reality of the virtual world

with its utmost importance. It might not be a replacement for the conventional trends but for sure is a very strong mode of continued development that can fill the gaps more with passing days to make it another phenomenal experience for the world in the days to come. As Henry Ford said, "Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young". So to keep our minds young, learning (professional development) has to continue whether online or via traditional means.

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