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Research
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Series

How Higher Education Institutions Can Rise to Resilience in the New Normal

COVID-19 has upended business as usual for higher educational institutions (HEIs) with campuses switching to remote learning almost overnight and universities grappling with grave financial pressure. Vibhas Sukhwani and Rajib Shaw of Keio University, together with Takako Izumi of Tohoku University and Akhilesh Surjan of Charles Darwin University, reveal how HEIs can stay nimble in the face of continuous change by drawing lessons from the pandemic.

Related research:
Managing and responding to pandemics in higher educational institutions: initial learning from COVID-19 by Takako Izumi, Vibhas Sukhwani, Rajib Shaw, Akhilesh Surjan. Emerald Insight.

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THE 3 Ps IN A CoBS POD

PERCEIVE
with a set of key takeaways

PROJECT
with food for thought: on yourself, your organisation and the wider context

PERFORM
by putting it all into practice using action tips

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Contact: tom.gamble@essec.edu

PERCEIVE
with a set of key takeaways

- The COVID-19 pandemic presents a wide array of threats to the instructional, research and public service missions of higher educational institutions.

- Although a major setback, it is one within which lies the opportunity to rethink education.

- Sudden shifts away from classroom to online-based learning created tremendous changes for both lecturers and students.

- While the positive side of online education – the flexibility of study time – has been noted, there is much emphasis on the negative impact of COVID-19 on students' mental health.

- Students experienced extreme stress and anxiety due to the uncertainty they were constantly facing and the numerous consequences on their courses and assignments. Also, lack of self-discipline arose when students were self-isolated at home.

- Even though digital tools add value to learning and are an integral part of university education, going completely online is not the best long-term plan.

- The pandemic caused institutions to grapple with unexpected costs and potential reductions in revenue – campus shutdowns, tuition refund requests, and significant infrastructure costs necessary to make remote learning possible.

- Going forward, in order to survive such difficulty, the leadership will need to prepare for numerous possible scenarios, seek creative solutions and stay flexible during the times of continuous change.

- There is an urgent need for well-documented emergency management and business continuity plans to prepare institutions to effectively respond to multiple emergencies.

- Other measures for disaster resilience include adopting blended teaching approaches, conducting dedicated research on innovative methods to learning and teaching, networking with various government and private entities to facilitate sharing of information, and running regular simulation exercises to increase responsiveness.

Read the full feature:
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PROJECT
with food for thought

- To what extent do you consider the COVID-19 measures taken by your school/university to ensure the continuity of the educational process effective? What was done right and what could be improved?

- How do you appreciate the online teaching/learning/ assessment experience during the pandemic?

- What do you think of the blended learning model – combining face-to-face education with virtual education – considering the needs of your students? What would you say are the benefits and challenges of adopting such a learning process? What are your students' views on the advantages and disadvantages of the model?

- To what extent were the students distressed psychologically during the outbreak? What was the level of support provided to them by the university?

- How would you describe the level of safety measures and protocols in your institute to keep students healthy? How easy or difficult has it been to implement them? How clear has communication from leadership been on the safety measures?

- Does your university have an existing disaster recovery/business continuity plan? Is it a one-plan-fits-all approach or an individualized plan based on the specific threats and vulnerabilities that the university faces? To what extent does it cover the institute's needs? Is it still relevant from when it was written? How often is it reviewed, and who is responsible for it? Has it been tested? Is there a clear communication strategy in place?

- What kind of response activities were undertaken by the university against Covid-19? To what extent was the response guidance and instruction communicated quickly to faculty and staff? Was the information sharing open and smooth enough? Was the decision-making process regarding change in academic activities timely?

- What challenges did you find in your university's preparedness and response?

- Based on your experience, what kind of preparedness measures would you recommend for the university in the future?

- What were your personal response activities against the pandemic?

- What were the key challenges you faced when you switched over to online learning? What do you consider the main advantages and disadvantages of online learning in the future?

- If you can bring three key lessons from the pandemic for your future professional preparation, what would those be?

PERFORM
by putting it all into practice

CHECKLIST

☐ **1. Develop solid backup plans for meeting various crucial academic requirements** such as conducting graduations, commencement ceremonies, and examinations during emergency situations. Provide the necessary support to students for internet-based teaching, discussions, and examination methods.

☐ **2. Build both a university-level and a department-level business continuity plan (BCP).** Establish guidelines for switching to an online education delivery system, including the process, preparation, communication, and support to do so, in the BCP. Make it an adaptable document that can provide strategies to tackle a wide variety of disasters.

☐ **3. Create a dedicated emergency management unit (EMU) and communicate its responsibilities to all staff, faculty, and students.** Put the EMU in charge of conducting simulation exercises at regular intervals on different disaster scenarios and ensuring timely training and capacity building of task forces dedicated to such events.

☐ **4. Conduct regular awareness programs on risks, preparedness and responses for staff, faculty, and students.** To realize this, perform a thorough risk assessment, following an all-hazard approach. Expand current risk communication strategies (built around natural disasters and laboratory-based safety risks) to include biological hazards, risks of sudden attack, riots, stampede, etc.

☐ **5. Upskill in the use of online platforms/modes alongside classroom/ fieldwork teaching.** To regularize the blended approach of virtual and face-to-face, conduct a fair share of lectures every year/semester online.

☐ **6. Establish strong partnerships** with local governments, other universities, private bodies, civil society organizations and communities to enable knowledge and information sharing during emergencies.

☐ **7. Set aside reasonable designated funds to boost research** and innovation against all forms of hazards.

PERSONAL PREPAREDNESS

- Take adequate precautions and safety measures such as wearing masks, observing personal hygiene, and maintaining physical distance to prevent infections.
- Rely on authentic sources of information about disasters and emergencies, rather than social media posts which are often half baked or exaggerated.
- Prepare every academic faculty and administrative staff with adequate training and up-to-date awareness on safeguards against biological hazards.
- Give suitable exposure and training to faculty, staff, and students, and also provide them with resources to learn effectively through web-based teaching methods.
- Equip homes of faculty and students alike with stable and high-speed internet connection for smooth application of various methods.
- Invent radical alternatives to the conventional teaching methods to remain relatively unperturbed in the face of future pandemics.

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