

The old and the new normal
Observations and Expectations of a critical mind
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At the beginning of the Corona crisis - around March/April 2020 - the future took a noticeably different direction. Fixed opinions and truths were suddenly no longer holdable and an uncertain vacuum arose in which the old was no longer valid but the new did not yet exist. Expectations and basic assumptions also had to go overboard.

Back in January 2020, the future was still like an enormous elephant that consistently went its own way. Little doggies were buzzing around it and barking. Doggies like: Sustainability, work life balance, decentralised work, energy transition - little dogs that did not particularly impress the elephant on its chosen path.

But suddenly something was different. Remember the first days and weeks of your own lockdown experience. Please write one or two impressions in the chat.

What was there? Uncertainty? Relief? Tension? Relaxation? What impressed you so much back then that you can still remember today?

At the beginning of the first lockdown - from April to around June 2020 - Austria felt like it was in the 70s. Everything became slower, quieter, more relaxed. An almost pleasant state emerged. Of course, I realise that this also involved the loss of livelihoods, but for many, the sudden loss of consuming opportunities due to the closure of shops was not just a loss. Rather, it was the opportunity to now enjoy time instead of consuming goods - an opportunity that had previously only been recognised to a limited extent.

We witnessed one of the largest simultaneous global transformations of social norms in the last 100 years. Social norms that were very deeply rooted and embedded suddenly became impossible and our basic behaviour has changed dramatically.

To put it in a nutshell: if I had entered a bank two years ago with a mask on my face, the police would have been called - today, the police is called if I go into the bank without a mask.

But seriously: very central procedures like shaking hands had to be abandoned. But what instead? Holding the feet together? The elbows? The fist? The lack of standardisation often led to funny little dances, when two insecure people meet - A puts out his fist, B his foot, now things turn around and B puts out his fist and A his foot - finally somehow they agree on elbows. However: shaking hands had several meanings and secondary uses. Showing the hand open is a symbol of peace and I show that I have nothing in my hand so I am harmless, holding out the hand is a very common gesture of forgiveness and the will to make contact. In addition, when the skin is touched extensively in a handshake, a great deal of personal information is passed on: for example: the tension of the skin, which indicates physical age,

the temperature of the hand, the muscles and hardness of the hand (what is the physical capacity of this person?) and through the hardness of the handshake also information about readiness for action and a possible claim to dominance. All this is missing. Holding clenched fists together, as is becoming more and more common, is not a useful substitute from this point of view. The basic message of approaching each other with clenched fists is not helpful. Just observe: people who use the fist greeting feel this implicitly and try to compensate through the rest of their gestures and body language by giving particularly friendly signals.

But if the lower half of the face is covered, even that is not easy. One method for speed reading is to pay attention only to the upper half of the letters. Why the upper half?

Because the main information about the meaning of the character is stored in its upper half.

Try to read this:



if Omme is the past - is Omme the future ?

Now read this:

If Offline is the past – Is Online the future ?



Here is the uncovered text:

If Offline is the past – Is Online the future ?

When reading faces, we simply lack the lower half to be able to assess people. If I know the person well, it's hard enough, but with strangers it's almost impossible - at least for me - to grasp a person in their completeness. Have you ever felt the same way? You walk into a shop or a place and are greeted by a masked person. Your assessment programme runs automatically:

Is he friendly?

Is he honest?

Is he interested in the world in general and in me in particular?

And you come to a basic assumption in a flash. Now you are led to the counselling place where a glass barrier is set up and you can take off your masks for the duration of the conversation. I have often been surprised there: Oh THAT is what he looks like! The lower half of the face holds an essential source of personal information for me: The mouth!

The mouth reveals a lot: is this person chronically angry - is this person basically friendly - does he like to laugh - is he capable of enjoyment - is he sociable - what are the basic features of his character?

Now I have to admit that reading faces and fine nuances of facial expressions is part of my daily business - however, if you are in coaching and supervision, it is also part of your daily work, because you very often have to be able to read the inner reactions of a client from his implicit facial expressions. Questions trigger inner searching and sorting processes. That is the real meaning of a question. Never ask a question because you want an answer - rather: help your clients to sort, to find and to draw new conclusions from the sorted findings, from the condensed information.

The advantage of the masks, however, is that you learn to concentrate yourself even more on the eyes of a person. The Viennese say: Rarely a loss where there is not a benefit!

Another little thing that has a big impact: One's personal airspace has changed. What does that mean?

Recently, I was queuing at the cash at the supermarket. As usual, I have my shopping trolley in front of me and keep a distance of about one and a half metres from the person in front of me. But something is wrong. I feel uneasy and I become restless. But why? Well: there is another person behind me almost at arm's length. And then I notice, that I notice this! Two years ago I wouldn't have cared at all, but now I walk in front of my shopping trolley and put it behind me as a barrier against the intruder. My personal airspace has obviously changed. The personal airspace is the space a person needs to feel safe and comfortable.

Try approaching the other person millimetre by millimetre during a conversation. You will notice that the other person retreats or that the climate of the conversation becomes more tense. This is the case when you get into the other person's personal airspace and fall below the minimum distance. Finding the right distance is very important to a successful climate of discussion.

What does all this have to do with supervision and coaching? Well, quite a lot!

In counselling it is fundamentally important to create a counselling setting that is perceived as safe, appreciative and goal-oriented. Appreciative and goal-oriented is not the problem - but: how can one ensure that the client's personal safety standards are met? A good question to ask at the beginning of counselling is: "what needs to happen so that they really feel safe here? What distance from me would you like?" So the choice of place and the design of the counselling room takes on an even more important function!

Sometimes, depending on whether there is currently a lockdown or not, we have to deal with mandatory masks or even cannot make any personal contact on site.

Meanwhile, we as a society have relearned another skill: we have become much more relaxed about dealing with unpredictable situations. The planning security that let us organise a trip or an event half a year or even a year in advance no longer exists. Will the next wave come in autumn? We don't know. We will see. We organise at short notice and flexibly.

Now online comes into play. The new normal cannot do without online. Please take a look at what is possible today that was certain to be impossible just a short time ago!

Counselling work on soul level? Can't be done online!

Sensitive perception of emotions? Not possible online!

Constellation work? Doesn't go online!

Enjoyable social meetings? Doesn't go online!

Effective therapy? Doesn't go online!

Well, the reality is different! So much is possible - and I'll spare myself the eternal "But so much isn't possible!" which is largely fuelled by an unwillingness to learn or sentimentality.

Let's look and see what works! A lot is possible!

However, a lot has to be taken into account that did not exist before.

I can assess and shape very well how I am heard and seen in a personal conversation on site.

Online, I simply have to make sure that my camera is at least good But my microphone has to be very good! It is necessary, as in a consulting room, to invest great attention in the design of my online appearance. A small laptop and a squawking loudspeaker? Imagine if you had to communicate with your clients on site via a plastic tube. How would the sound quality be? Wouldn't you do something to improve the situation?

Imagine sitting in your consulting room right in front of a strong lamp that shines in the face of your counterpart. Or in front of a window through which the bright, slanting sun shines.

Your conversation partner will have to make a great effort to recognise your face and its expression. You can avoid this by moving around or at least drawing a curtain in front of the window.

So online you have to make sure that you broadcast in the best affordable way. – because you don't know what equipment your counterpart has.

In presence I can also judge quite well what possibilities for action and interaction my counterpart has when we are in a room together. However, I can't trust that my online conversation partner knows what functionality our video conferencing software offers, and I certainly don't know if he knows how to access it. It requires patience and understanding and careful guidance by the counsellor.

But what are the advantages of online?

Let's start with a very central advantage: I used to get up at 4 a.m. to catch the 7 a.m. business flight to Zurich so that I could be in the coaching room in Winterthur at 10 a.m., where I coached until 8 p.m. and then catch the 10 p.m. flight to Vienna so that I could be home at 1 a.m. completely nacked.

Today I have a relaxed breakfast on my terrace with my children, walk down 15 steps to my office and I am in New York. The improvement in my quality of life is indescribable.

Or: meetings like this one right now, which take place internationally and yet the participants don't have to step outside the door. Recently I was at an online congress where one participant was on a train, one was on a plane and one was walking through Zurich with his mobile phone in his hand.

Here ist another advantage:

Please go ahead and put some useful things in the chat, that you can do now, that you never could do in presence. Such as wearing a business shirt and swimming pants for a high class business meeting.

The possibilities of interacting with people have multiplied!

Now you might object that personal encounters allow for much more closeness because you can sense your counterpart much better. That is certainly true, but I would like to share an experience with you: When I get the video of my conversation partner as a full screen on my, hopefully very large, screen, then I am closer to this person than I could ever be in presence. I could not possibly get as near as half a meter to someone but with his big picture in front of me, I notice every little facial movement. And if I have made sure that I have good headphones, I can usually hear even the smallest vibration in his voice.

Another example: unlike in presence, you can quickly pull digital content out of a hat and perhaps show a picture or even a small video as a stimulus during a conversation.

Of course, all of this is true, but if we look at it from the point of view of society as a whole, the situation has improved decisively. People are very familiar with these phenomena and have learned to deal with them well. Driven by the concrete need, technology has developed rapidly and there are now a lot of excellent collaboration tools available.

I don't think we will maintain this rigorous separation between online and offline in the future. I think we will see a mixture of methods and approaches, using one, the other or even both at the same time, depending on the needs. Counselling processes and training will also alternate between online and offline events.

But one thing will remain in the new normal: the human soul's desire for belonging, respect and connection. This desire, however, can be fulfilled in the new normal via the online channel, even worldwide, and this offers unimagined possibilities for the rapprochement of even very different cultures on this planet.

One thing I have learned about online is, that the KISS principle applies even more: Keep it short and simple. Every lecture that is longer than 45 minutes without a possibility to interact is a physical torture for the listeners. So I stick to that principle and end my thoughts here:

Thank you for your time and attention! In accordance with the new normal, I will now take advantage of a very special opportunity and quickly bring myself a coffee...