



L-r PhD researcher Stephanie Haddad, Professor Monika Foster and Mark Philpott, CEO of NPH Group

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International research reveals insight into post-pandemic digital era

Over 40 experts gathered at a unique research seminar to discuss how industry and academia can collaborate and share knowledge to help businesses and other organisations adapt and succeed in the digital age.

The international research, “Strengthening professional cooperation in the digital era”, generated insightful debate at the seminar at Northumbria University’s Newcastle Business School earlier this month (June 6, 2023).

The seminar included a series of presentations from academic experts involved in the new research project conducted in the North East and Amsterdam.

Led by Professor Monika Foster, Head of the Business School's Marketing, Operations and Systems (MOS) department, and Professor Daniel van Middelkoop from partner institute the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (AUAS), the research was also driven/supported by Northumbria Associate Lecturer and PhD researcher, Stephanie Haddad.

The research unveiled some surprising findings about how industry and academics work collaboratively in the post-Covid-19 age, at a time when hybrid and flexible working practices are becoming increasingly common.

Guest speaker was Mark Philpott, CEO of Newcastle-based healthcare firm NPH Group, who outlined how his business had adapted amid Covid-19 and fast-tracked expansion.

He said: "It was a case of pivot or die. The pandemic came as a surprise to all of us but we essentially moved the business forward through digital transformation. We were lucky in that we had already taken some strategic decisions which meant that when the pandemic hit we could act quickly. The systems we had in place enabled us to move in that direction in a very fast and agile way. I think, essentially, that was the basis for our success over the last two years."

Speaking about key research findings on working digitally versus the more traditional in-person approach, Stephanie Haddad said: "There are so many lovely key findings about this dual nationality research. In both the UK and Amsterdam, it is surprising to find that digitisation actually boosts creativity and innovation, as well as boosting collaboration, especially when working with teams across the globe. However, it was also clear that in both countries, the interviewees preferred to work face to face and build on their personal and professional relationships."

Professor Monika Foster, a certified business and management educator with the Chartered Association of Business Schools, has worked in business schools in the UK, Europe and Far East over three decades. She said: "This seminar is unique because it shows the complementary nature of research and academia but also how digital transformation is affecting the workplace,

in businesses here in the North East and in the Netherlands. In just one seminar we combined the knowledge, expertise and shared the latest practice in how best to cope with digital transformation in the pace of change.”

Professor Middelkoop, from AUAS, said: “There is a clear need for professional collaboration and digital transformation as a basis for good work but it also presents many personal and professional challenges for employees, businesses and organisations. To keep pace, there is a constant need for innovation but during times of change there must be time for reflection – so there is a definite tension there. This research mirrors our own on the impact of Covid-19, showing that emotional empathy may become more important in future years due to digital transformation. There is a solid case for further research in this area.”

As well as giving professionals and academics the opportunity to network, the event has further strengthened Northumbria’s relationship the regional business community.

Mark added: “NPH has a long relationship with Northumbria University which has been exceptionally helpful to me personally and also to our business in helping us explore how we can move forward and grow post-pandemic and through digital transformation in the future.”

Newcastle Business School has a global reputation for academic excellence. It was ranked ninth in the UK for research power in business and management, according to the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF).

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