

Association for Information Systems

## AIS Electronic Library (AISeL)

---

Proceedings of the 2021 AIS SIGED  
International Conference on Information  
Systems Education and Research

SIGED: IAIM Conference

---

12-13-2021

### ENGAGING INDUSTRY SPEAKERS IN THE NEWLY TRANSITIONED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM DURING COVID-19

G Harindranath

Royal Holloway, University of London, g.harindranath@rhul.ac.uk

Niki Panteli

Royal Holloway, University of London & Norwegian University of Science and Technology,  
niki.panteli@rhul.ac.uk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/siged2021>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Harindranath, G and Panteli, Niki, "ENGAGING INDUSTRY SPEAKERS IN THE NEWLY TRANSITIONED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM DURING COVID-19" (2021). *Proceedings of the 2021 AIS SIGED International Conference on Information Systems Education and Research*. 1.

<https://aisel.aisnet.org/siged2021/1>

This material is brought to you by the SIGED: IAIM Conference at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in Proceedings of the 2021 AIS SIGED International Conference on Information Systems Education and Research by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact [elibrary@aisnet.org](mailto:elibrary@aisnet.org).

# ENGAGING INDUSTRY SPEAKERS IN THE NEWLY TRANSITIONED VIRTUAL CLASSROOM DURING COVID-19

G. Harindranath  
Royal Holloway, University of London  
[G.Harindranath@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:G.Harindranath@rhul.ac.uk)

Niki Panteli  
Royal Holloway, University of London & Norwegian University of Science and Technology  
[niki.panteli@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:niki.panteli@rhul.ac.uk)

## Abstract:

This paper discusses our innovative approach to engaging practitioners in the newly transitioned virtual classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic. With restrictions on face to face guest speaker sessions and industry visits we recorded interviews with practitioners on themes aligned to our course syllabus which were then uploaded to our online learning platforms. We present the benefits of such an approach as well as the challenges faced and lessons learned. Our experience suggests that this approach has several advantages and can be easily replicated if certain student-centred guidelines are followed.

**Keywords:** practitioners, virtual classroom, computer-supported collaborative learning

## I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID19 pandemic has brought a lot of challenges in higher education especially in traditional universities and notably those with limited reliance and investment on digital technologies. With lockdowns and travel restrictions as a result of the pandemic, traditional classroom-based university lecturers across different parts of the world had to transition their classroom teaching to online course delivery. The transition happened quickly with limited support from their universities as they themselves suffered from lack of readiness. Several challenges were experienced as a result which included among others a need for lecturers, including ourselves, to become familiar with several technologies, such as MS Teams, Zoom and Webex as well as a requirement for a complete redesign of course delivery especially for the academic year 2020-21. It is within this context of unprecedented changes and new challenges, that we, as newly transitioned online lecturers, had to rethink and adapt the way we incorporate industry viewpoints and practitioner input into our teaching.

The relevance of information systems (IS) research has been a topic of considerable debate within the IS community [see for instance, Rosemann and Vessey, 2008; Saunders, 1998]. We believe that practitioner perspectives are a key route to learning within the IS curriculum as they help bring theory to life. Pre-pandemic, we would occasionally invite practitioners across a range of organisations within the local proximity to attend a lecture and give a talk on specific subjects. In some cases, we would also arrange for students to visit the company where they would interact with the IT experts and see first-hand the company's investment in digital technologies, use their video-conferencing suite etc.

During the pandemic, we had to rethink how we incorporated industry experts into our course delivery with the mode of delivery being solely online. With the limited functionality of MS Teams at the start of the academic year 2020-21, and also with Moodle as the main VLE platform, we made the decision to introduce industry experts through a pre-recorded video-based interview. Given the rapid transition to online learning, we decided to collaborate across courses on this endeavour. With a view to doubling the practitioner content on our respective courses, we identified specific industry practitioners for interview and then shared the interviews we conducted with each other whenever they matched the course syllabus. As a result, each course benefited by having more practitioner input during the year than in any previous year.

We invited industry speakers to contribute to the following topics: cloud computing, digital transformation, digital strategy, online collaborations and managing misunderstandings in virtual teams. The first four talks were shared among two courses on different Masters programmes (i.e. Information Systems and Operations, and e-Business). The final, specialised topic was included within a course in a specialist Masters programme (i.e. Leading Online Collaborations).

We had two types of industry speakers' talks. One that was structured to last up to 10 minutes and which was driven by a series of 3-5 specific questions on a pre-set topic (e.g. online collaborations; conflict and misunderstandings in virtual teams). The purpose of this adopted structure was to keep the discussion focused and to encourage the students to watch the entire recording. The second type of talk was longer lasting between 10 to 25 minutes and was orientated around a topic (e.g. digital transformation; digital strategy) where the practitioner was invited to share their organisational experience and to provide examples of particular challenges and solutions. The purpose of this type of interviews was to bring practical relevance to theoretical concepts and models.

## II. IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL METHODOLOGY, ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) can be implemented in different ways [Hämäläinen, 2012] including the macro-script and micro-script approach. Our initiative can be characterized as a macro-script approach, as we do not describe in detail what our students should do (micro-script) but we provide them with some guidelines and leave a lot of space for students to work independently. With this in mind, our pedagogical purpose was twofold: first, we aimed to expose students to real-life industry experiences in their virtual classroom, and second to develop critical thinking in the use and implementation of specific IS applications across different organisations and industries.

Unlike other industry talks that are available online, the uniqueness of our talks was that these were planned and guided by ourselves (the course instructors) through the interview/conversational approach. In an interview style conversation, the instructor was able to lead the conversation by guiding the practitioner to talk about topics that were relevant to the course. Therefore, the students could see a familiar face (their lecturer) leading the interview and not just another impersonal YouTube presentation. The instructor would be asking questions that were relevant to students' own programme of study and specifically driven by themes derived from course syllabus. Interviews with case study organisations also allowed us to bring particular cases to life through the credibility of practitioner voices. Our approach enhanced the learning experience by widening the breadth of coverage of issues that matter to practice while ensuring theoretical relevance and alignment with course topics. Qualitative feedback from students was generally positive. For instance:

*"I have personally found the interviews to be very insightful and helpful".*

*"I love the way you interviewed those executives ..."*

Though there are several advantages of having practitioners giving face-to-face guest lectures within the class-room, including the opportunity for students to engage directly with the practitioners and ask questions, there are also challenges such as the practitioner's availability. In-class guest lectures by practitioners were often opportunistic and entirely dependent on their availability during scheduled class times. Pre-recorded interviews allowed us to be more strategic and interview appropriate practitioners better aligned with course objectives.

Our approach ensured that students who had other commitments and those who remained overseas were still able to benefit from access to practitioner perspectives that enhanced their educational experience despite the restrictions on face to face teaching and guest lectures. At the same time, from the point of view of the students, the lack of direct interaction with the practitioner was seen as a limitation, as evidenced by the following quote from a student.

*“Probably [you] can give us a forum to come up [with] questions that we can ask them. So we can feel more related and feeling like we join[ed] the interview. But overall it’s awesome I love it”.*

Further to the qualitative feedback received, we undertook a post-implementation assessment of this initiative following the end of the academic year 20-21. We used Panopto statistics to examine the overall views and downloads as well as completion rates for each of the industry interview recordings during the specific academic term when these were used. Figures 1 and 2 show a representation of these statistics for two of the recordings.

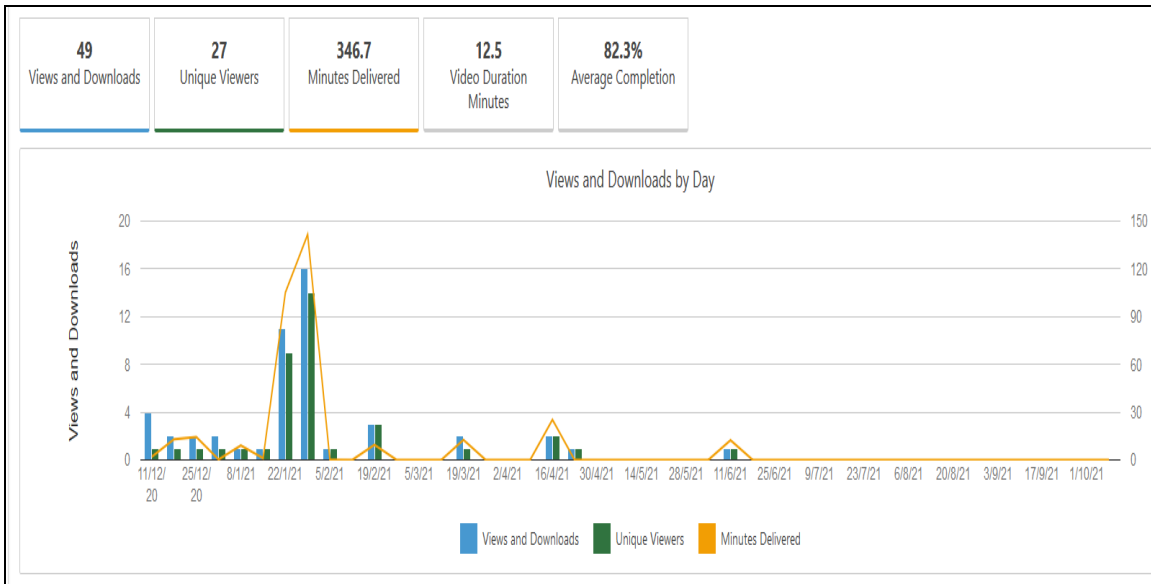
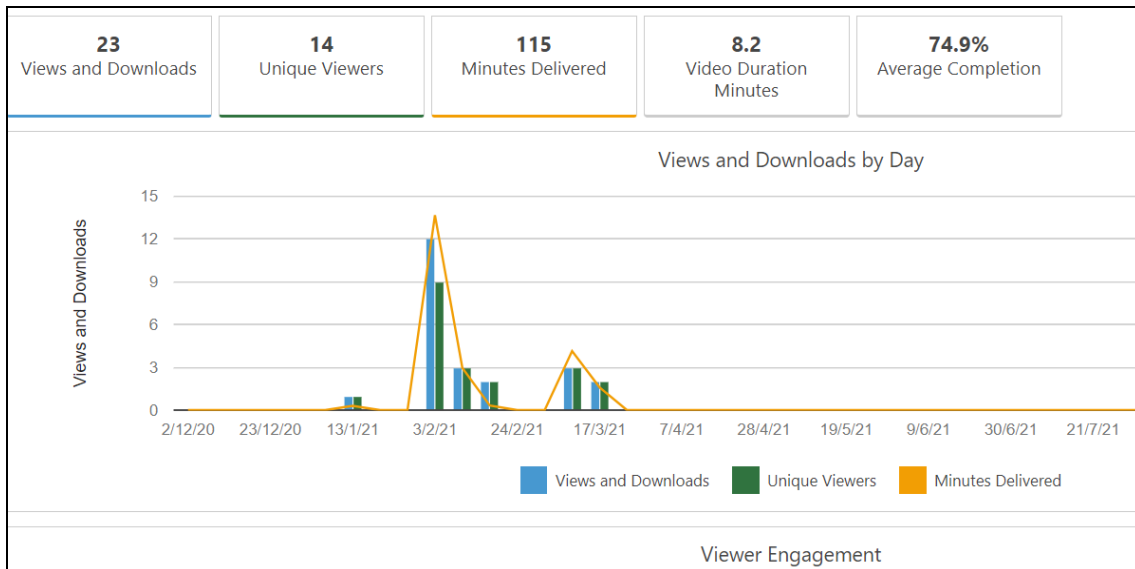


Figure 1. Video Analytics Snapshot from Panopto Software



syllabus we interpret the results to mean that shorter videos (between 8 and 12.5 minutes long) were more likely to attract views and had an increased percentage of completion rate. In addition, the popularity of companies seemed to have an effect on views with well-known companies like Cisco and Nestle receiving higher viewership numbers.

### **III. DISCUSSION OF OUR EXPERIENCES**

The pre-recorded interviews with industry experts had several advantages. The practice allowed us to bring industry experts to the 'virtual classroom' to support student learning and understanding of specific themes. It offered the opportunity to students with language difficulties to re-watch the interviews as appropriate. This was also the case for students who were located across different time-zones. The approach also permitted students to pace their learning and to watch the videos alongside related materials at a time convenient to them during the week of the session and later on as suitable. For example, as shown in Figure 2, even though the majority of the students who viewed the video did so in mid-February (as guided by the course syllabus), there were instances where students watched the video several weeks later, at the time of the assignment submission as they could see alignment between the videos and their assessment

We found our new approach to be more effective than organising occasional in-class guest lectures due to the complexities of timetabling and difficulties in matching timetabled slots and session topics to practitioner availability.

Video recordings made using the Panopto software has the added functionality of usage analytics (for instance, views, downloads, unique user views and time associated with the viewing of the video). While this may provide some information on usage and video completion rates it does not provide rich insights into levels of engagement which might vary considerably between types of learners [Yoon et al., 2021].

Despite the benefits from this approach, we also noted some challenges in using pre-recorded material for asynchronous use by students. These included the impact of online fatigue (Peper et al., 2021) and related affective factors such as mood [Rodrigues et al., 2011] on the students' use of recorded material. Given the extended screen times necessitated by COVID-19-related transition to online learning, additional pre-recorded material such as ours could become an impediment to further engagement at least in the case of passive learners [Yoon et al., 2021]. Such learners may require additional in-class guidance and specific video-related tasks in order to improve engagement. More directed use of pre-recorded interviews clearly linked to related assessments might also help improve usage and engagement.

The lack of direct interaction with the practitioner is also a limiting factor to pre-recorded interviews. Some students preferred the traditional 'guest speaker' approach to practitioner input as it affords the possibility for synchronous exchange and learning alongside the networking benefits that may arise. However, given the pandemic induced restrictions we believe our approach has made a useful contribution to learning through other modes of practitioner input.

### **IV. LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE**

Regardless of return to normality, having pre-recorded interviews is useful for both lecturers and students. A lesson we learned is that these need to be well-integrated in the curriculum and be an embedded part of the weekly learning and practical activities. For example, even though we encouraged students during the online workshops to bring views shared in the videos, this level of engagement was limited and restricted to the most active student learners. Even though we recognize that the popularity of companies played a positive role in video usage and downloads, in future we may need a more pragmatic approach that better aligns such interviews with course assessments so as to improve engagement. We may also need to pay more attention to the

length of videos and possibly reduce the duration of some existing videos to encourage higher levels of viewing and engagement.

Combining theory with practice (and vice-versa) is critical in information systems and management disciplines. When the pandemic disrupted plans for face to face guest lectures we developed a creative solution that has, with hindsight, been more effective in presenting industry voices to a digitally savvy generation of students who often prefer to watch videos and access study materials at times that suit them. Not only is this approach easily replicable across courses it can also create a repository of practice perspectives for our courses.

As we move forward, an option we would like to consider is to give the opportunity to students to identify their own questions which can then be raised with the industry expert during the interview. This we believe will increase student ownership of the recorded interviews. This suggestion was reinforced by students' feedback as evident above.

We also plan to invite some of our practitioner contacts to meet students online or on campus to further expand on material covered in the interviews so that the in-class time is spent on interaction as opposed to PowerPoint presentations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the practitioners who generously gave us their time during what was a very challenging period for everyone. We also thank our students who continue to challenge us to think in new ways.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Hämäläinen, R. (2012) "Methodological Reflections: Designing and Understanding Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning", *Teaching in Higher Education*, 17(5), pp. 603–614
- Peper, E., Wilson, V., Martin, M., Rosegard, E. and Harvey, R. (2021) "Avoid Zoom Fatigue, Be Present and Learn", *NeuroRegulation*, 8(1), pp. 47–56
- Rodrigues, M., Fdez-Riverola, F. and Novais, P., (2011) "Moodle and Affective Computing-Knowing Who's on the Other Side", *ECEL-2011-10th European Conference on E-learning*, Brighton, UK, pp. 678-685
- Rosemann, M. and Vessey, I. (2008) "Toward Improving the Relevance of Information Systems Research to Practice: The Role of Applicability Checks", *MIS Quarterly*, (32)1, pp. 1-22
- Saunders, C. (1998) "The Role of Business in IT Research," *Information Resources Management Journal*, (11)1, pp. 4-6
- Yoon, M., Lee, J. Jo, I-H. (2021) "Video Learning Analytics: Investigating Behavioural Patterns and Learner Clusters in Video-based Online Learning", *The Internet and Higher Education*, (50), 100806, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2021.100806>

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**G. 'Hari' Harindranath** is Professor of Information Systems in the School of Business and Management at Royal Holloway, University of London. His work focuses on the social and organisational implications of digital technologies including ICT4D. Hari is an editorial board member of the Journal of Information Technology, Senior Editor of Information Technology and People, and Associate Editor of Information and Management.

**Niki Panteli** is Professor of Digital Business in the School of Business and Management at Royal Holloway, University of London and an Adjunct Professor at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. Her main research interests lie in the area of digital transformation, virtual teams, online collaborations and digital health and has published widely on these topics.