

Dancing with a Virus: Finding new Rhythms of Organizing and Caring in Dutch Hospitals

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Covid-19 crisis in the Netherlands

- Started off in March 2020, first two weeks only in de South, but then spread across the country
- First mainly hygiene measures, followed by “an intelligent lockdown” (e.g. closing schools, sports fields, nursing homes, working from home, social/physical distancing) – but citizens were free to move around
- Half of March: severe shortage of personal protection equipment, ventilators – strong focus on hospitals and fear of ‘Code Black’)
- Lack of test capacity
- End of April; numbers of hospitalized papers declined, measures gradually softened
- Now: rising number of infected citizens, particularly among young people (students), number of hospitalized patients remain relatively low, New measures are being taken.

Erasmus

Ethnographic research/interviews in hospitals

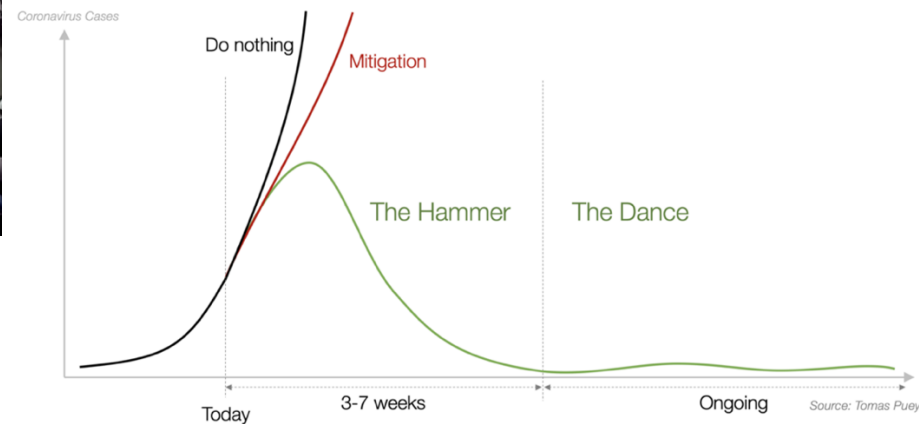
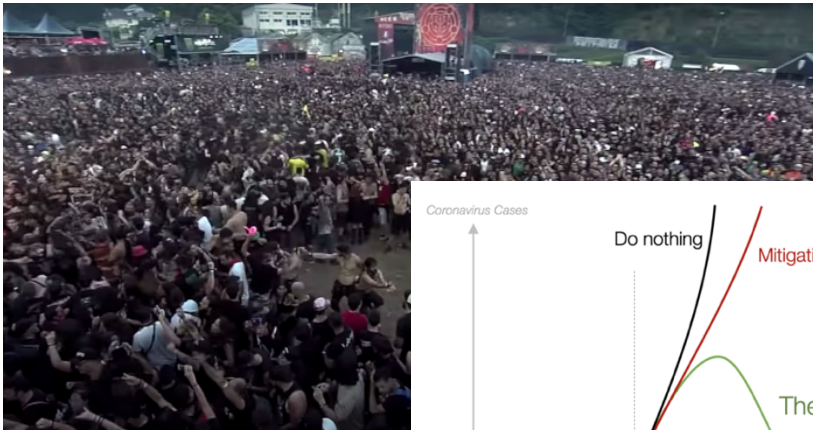
- Ethnographic research in one university hospital (March 5th onwards), just after the hospital had identified their first Covid patient and right before the first Dutch Covid fatality was reported
 - Focus on decision making, dealing with uncertainty
 - Hospital boards, hospital staff, regional actors
 - Over 210 hours of observation, 29 formal interviews, 2 focus groups
- Interview study with nurses and nurse managers in 4 different hospitals, 16 interviews
- Study will continue for at least 2 more years...

Erasmus

Dancing with a virus

3 phases:

- Learning to dance
- Dance marathon
- Dancing to a cacaphony



Pueyo, T. . 2020. "The Hammer and the Dance. What the next 18 months can look like, if leaders buy us time." Medium (blog). 19 March 2020.

Ezafun

1 Learning how to dance

“I was phoned by an ambulance nurse, saying that they had been circling on the Amsterdam motorway for quite some time, and that they would bring in the patient within 10 minutes.” (Hospital manager)

- Dance had started abruptly, not knowing the music nor the rhythm
- Actors had to learn about the virus and related diseases, protecting themselves (and their families) as well
- Actors constantly had to rethink their own role in the emerging choreography and had to come to terms with those of others
- Enduring uncertainties engendered intense emotional responses at all organizational levels

A stylized, handwritten-style logo for Erasmus, featuring a large, flowing 'E' followed by the word 'Erasmus' in a cursive script.



2 Dance marathon – hanging in there

- Physicians and nurses worked long hours in difficult circumstances, with severely ill patients who deteriorated suddenly and had to be brought to the ICU
- An army-led national center was established to (re)distribute patients and technical equipment
- Problems in nursing homes increased: many patients died
- Hospitals worried about their clinical/nursing staff as well as competitive position



Already at the very first meeting we have been thinking about the post-Covid crisis; we can't turn into a Covid-hospital. We must keep working on our patient portfolio. If we now shift care to [name hospitals] we lose it. (...) We have some hospitals in this region that like to offer more specialized care. We have negotiated about this; who does diabetic care, or transplants. Others [non-university hospitals] won't do the heart transplants, but there still is a grey area in which they might step in. If they take it now, we won't get it back after the crisis.

(Staff member university hospital)

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3 Dancing to a cacophony

You can see it in the time line, how the curve was flattening. The week after, you could feel the urgency fading away. Maybe as quick as it had appeared, peacefulness returned. On Monday we thought 'let's see what will happen', and on Wednesday we said 'it's really flattening'. Immediately the tone was changing. (staff member)

- Number of ICU patients declined, patient inflow decreased
- 'old' voices (and interests) reappeared, along side new requirements (e.g. 1.5 m rules), vanishing feeling of solidarity
- Covid and non-Covid care side-by-side, fearing a Second Wave
- Cacophony of experts, reflecting uncertainty as well as conflicting values
- Mixture of rhythms and styles

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Discussion

- The metaphor of the dance enables to point out the flexibly *moving with* the virus and related emerging organizational issues
- It enables to connect different and sometimes conflicting acts at various organizational levels (including regional and national actions)
- Dancing is evoked by continuing uncertainties – related to the virus and its effects; to organizational responses; to crisis management vs normal care
- Dance points at the reflexive, and emergent character of organizational and system responses
- Uncertainties have further multiplied in the past few weeks; increasing number of infected patients, conflicting interests and values

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