



The Future of Conferences Post-Pandemic

Steven Fraser / Dennis Mancl

2022 Survey

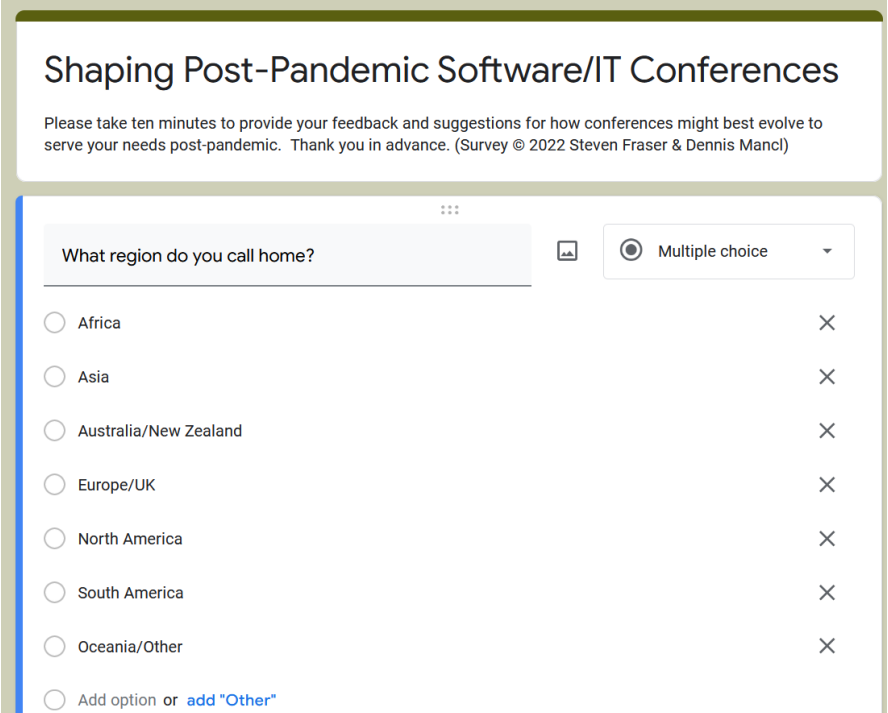
Conference Participation Preferences:

- *In-Person?*
- *Hybrid?*
(Mix of In-person & Virtual)
- *Virtual?*

How do people feel about virtual conferences?

I don't know...
let's ask them!

We initiated a lightweight online survey in February 2020 with 16 questions:



The screenshot shows a survey form with the following content:

Shaping Post-Pandemic Software/IT Conferences

Please take ten minutes to provide your feedback and suggestions for how conferences might best evolve to serve your needs post-pandemic. Thank you in advance. (Survey © 2022 Steven Fraser & Dennis Mancl)

What region do you call home? Multiple choice

- Africa
- Asia
- Australia/New Zealand
- Europe/UK
- North America
- South America
- Oceania/Other
- Add option or [add "Other"](#)

Survey Form – questions:

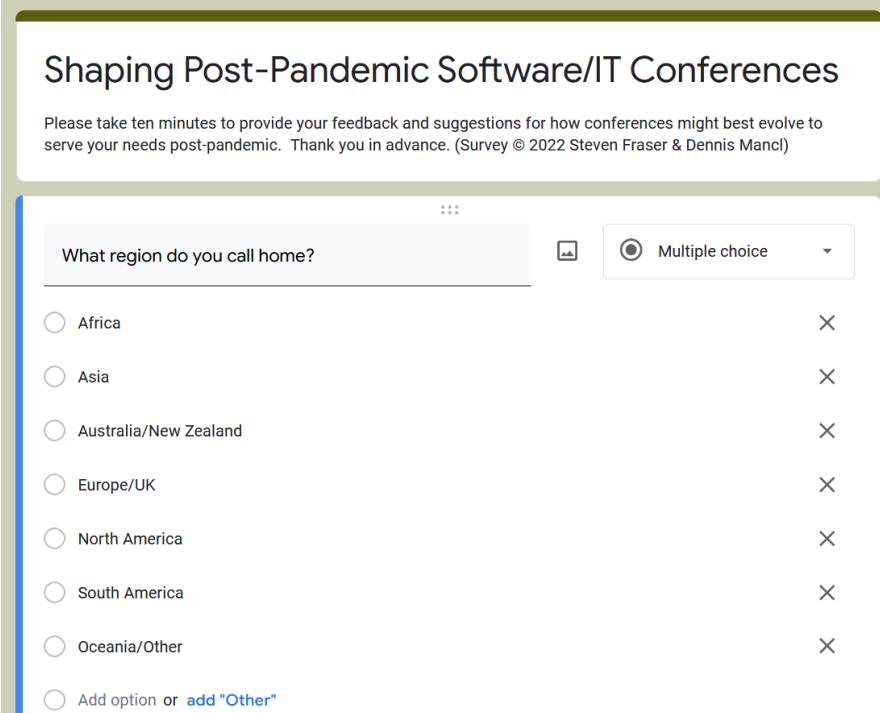
http://manclswx.com/misc/survey2022_document.pdf

How do people feel about virtual conferences?

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Survey:

- 6 “demographic” questions
- **Preferred attendance mode:** (hybrid, in-person, virtual)
- Conferences attended in 2021?
- Conferences planned for 2022?
- 5 questions on preferences, **obstacles**, and benefits
- What topic interests you most?
- **Suggestions** for improvements?



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Some interesting results →
Preferred Mode; Obstacles; Suggestions

Who was surveyed?

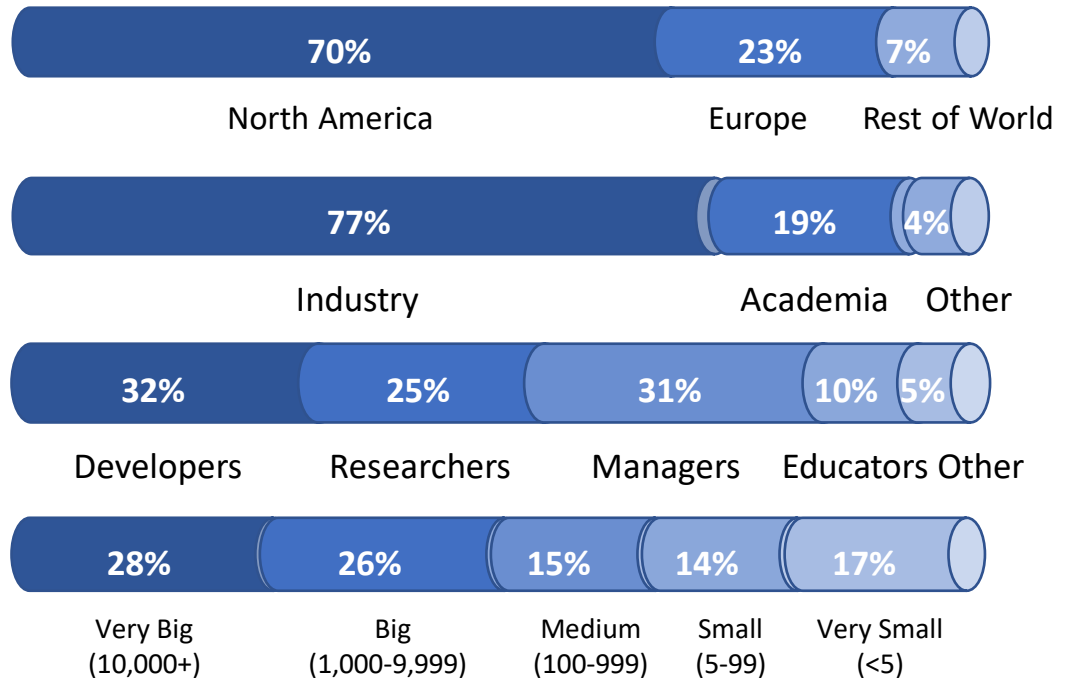
I don't know...
let's ask them!

- 331 responses
- 6 continents
- A good mix of industry, academia, government... large and small organizations
- While *not* a scientific or random sample, a broad sampling of the software community

- 6 “demographic” questions

Over 500 different conferences mentioned!

- ACM, IEEE, Agile Alliance
- Everything from AAAI to JavaOne to QCon to Zoomtopia!



Preferred Mode



Hybrid/Virtual (63%):

- Increased access & diversity
- Complex, difficult to organize
- Avoids expensive travel
- Interaction needs new tools
- Fatigue an issue

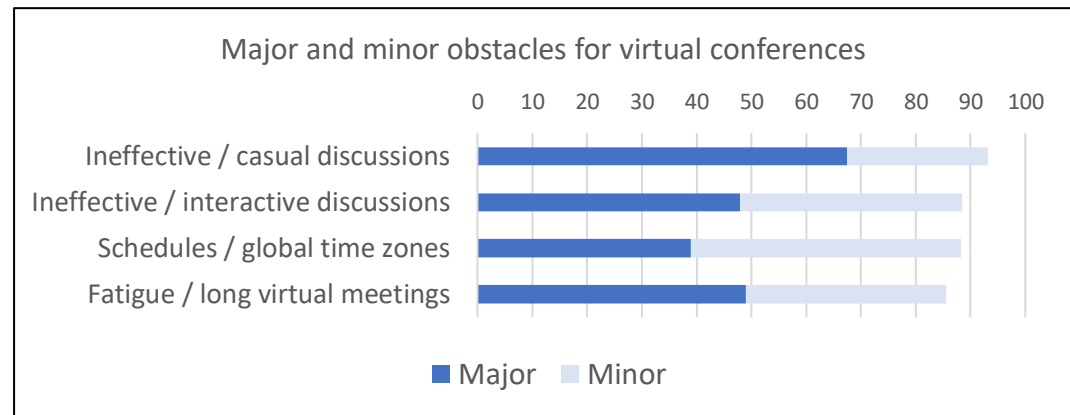


In-Person (36%):

- Traditional conference
- Serendipitous interaction
- Accessibility impacted by:
 - Travel costs
 - Conference logistics
 - Micro-aggression/harassment



Virtual Obstacles



Virtual conferences:

- Ineffective support for casual discussions
- Ineffective tools for interactive discussions
- Inconvenient schedules / global time zones
- Fatigue due to long virtual meetings

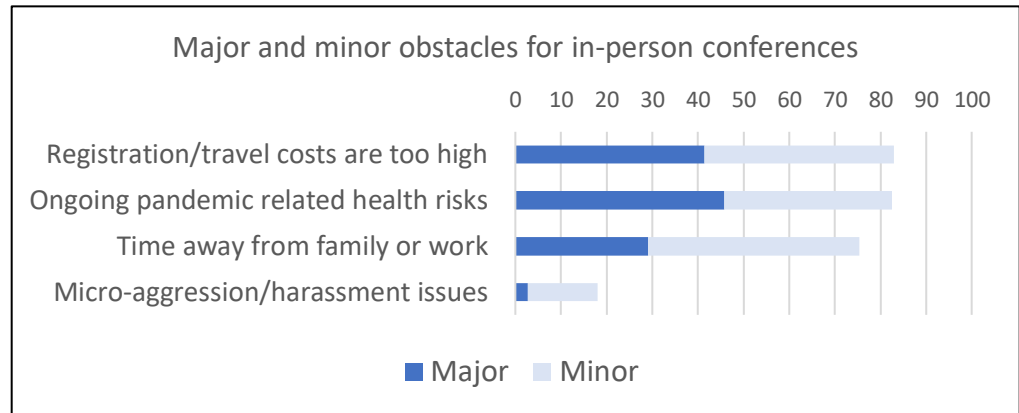


Over 80% of survey respondents said that these four items are either “major” or “minor” obstacles for virtual.

*[At an in-person conference,] there are a lot of opportunities for random interactions that **virtual conferences simply do not provide...***

*Virtual is too much **one-way broadcast...** Most of the virtual ones I go to, I find it really difficult to pay attention...*

In-Person Obstacles



Biggest obstacles to in-person conferences:

- Registration and travel costs are too high
- Ongoing pandemic related health risks
- Time away from family or work

Over 70% of survey respondents said that the top three items are either “major” or “minor” obstacles for in-person.



*Hybrid conferences make conference attendance **more accessible** to researchers who don't/aren't sure about receiving the necessary monetary support from their universities, or are in other ways hindered by attending live conferences.*

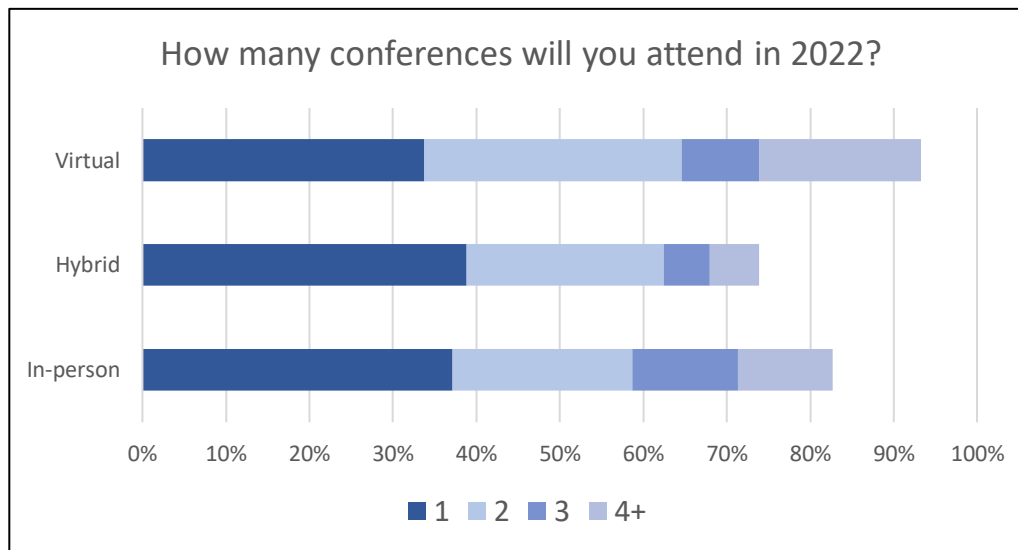
Micro-aggression/harassment issues:
3% say it is a major issue, 15% say it is a minor issue

The community (attendees and organizers) need to address harassment issues!

Economics



Virtual/Hybrid in 2022 is preferred



The average respondent attended 2.5 conferences in 2021 – almost all were virtual.

The average respondent plans 3.5 conferences in 2022, and 41% of them will be virtual.

*I was at 4 conferences last year and even without pandemic, I would have done **at most one** last year, if it would have required international travel.*

Perspectives

The survey authors share what has worked well for them in the past.

Virtual conferences are not new.

- For many years, companies have been using virtual conferencing for internal meetings – and for internal conferences. Here are some lessons learned:

Increase interaction in online Q&A

- Encourage virtual session attendees to type in questions **during** each talk
- Schedule a 30-minute **panel-style Q&A** with multiple speakers
- Get speakers to “**poll the audience**” (with tools like MentiMeter) – it will increase engagement for the virtual audience

- Assign a conference volunteer to **scan online questions**, relay them to the session moderator
- Session moderator should request **questions from the presenters in advance** to prime the Q&A session, in case the audience is initially silent (always be ready to fill silence)

Author Perspectives

Organize the schedule:

- Group the program sessions to create **topic blocks** – it can be a convenience for attendees who might only be interested in one or two topics...
- Consider the **time zones** when setting the schedule, especially for far-away speakers
- Ensure the virtual conference program is **viewable by time zone** to minimize time confusion
- **Stick to the schedule** – don't run early or late

Be ready for problems:

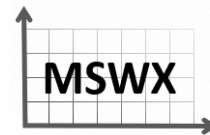
- Be prepared for speakers who don't appear on time – use pre-recorded presentation or a backup presentation
- Network problems and server problems will occur – have a risk mitigation plan such as a backup network or server
- It is essential to have a “help line” or “chat” staffed by conference volunteers to advise speakers and attendees who have technical issues
- Virtual requires good coordination [paid or volunteer staff]

Thank You!

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For more details about the survey: <http://manclswx.com/survey2022.html>