

BERNHARD VON MUTIUS

**DISRUPTIVE
THINKING**

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DER ZUKUNFT GEWACHSEN IST

GABAL

Bernhard von Mutius

Disruptive Thinking

Thinking that meets the challenges of the future

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A phantom is moving in Europe: disruption. Our world has become uncertain. It's not only in the world of business that innovative start-ups are calling into question conventional business models (and thus the existence of established companies); in the social and societal realm, too, we are experiencing serious upheavals, the transition of our old world to a new one. This is about much more than simply the digitalisation of various areas of our lives: it's about the foundations of our economic and social life itself.

Future thinker und business philosopher Dr. Bernhard von Mutius calls for nothing less than a completely new way of thinking: disruptive thinking. This is thinking aimed at developing new reserves of adaptability and gaining creative freedom. We must integrate discontinuities into our thinking, be constantly mindful of what we do not know and make contradictions productive. This will give rise to a creative revolution that encompasses all areas of life and makes them fit for the future.

Bernhard von Mutius is a pioneer in the field of disruptive thinking in the German-speaking world and one of the most important future thinkers in Europe. The social scientist, philosopher and author is concerned with the digital transformation as well as with the creative revolution and its meaning for humanity, economy and society. He advises companies and organizations on the topics of change, Innovation and leadership. He is Senior Advisor of the HPI School of Design Thinking, co-founder of the Potsdam talks, founding member of the "New Club of Paris", advisory board of the Club of Rome Schools, Advisory Board of the journal Internationale Politik, cofounder of "Unternehmen: Partner der Jugend" (UPJ), and chairman of the "Bergweg-Forum Thinking of the Future".



Testimonials:

"The product of reflection is innovation. Bernhard von Mutius has described what it takes to achieve this." Wolf Lotter in "brand eins"

"Bernhard von Mutius succeeds in arousing curiosity, engaging readers and presenting new insights in a novel way. Advantageous for mind and posture."

Roland Tichy, Editor-in-Chief at WirtschaftsWoche

"Think about the future today! Bernhard von Mutius succeeds in conveying visions of his new ways of thinking solely through the power of words (and a few tools): ingenious building of interdisciplinary bridges and a complex subject, yet also comprehensible, exciting, surprising and immensely gripping, with the result that as a reader, you have the desire to adopt his way of thinking at once." Dr. Susanne Holst, doctor and television presenter

"Thinking like Picasso painted" Wirtschaftswoche

"A must-read for anyone making noise about disruption – and highly recommended for those for whom technology and social innovation are natural bedfellows." Thomas Sattelberger, former Manager at Daimler, Board member at Deutsche Telekom

"Bernhard von Mutius' book explains disruption at a deeper level than "just" in terms of new technologies or digitalisation. It challenges us to decide how we want to work and live in the future – personally and at a societal level." Tim Richter, Board member XING AG

"Anyone seeking to really get to grips with what is perhaps the greatest buzzword of our time should read this book." Jasper Hugo Grote, Founder Dark Horse GmbH & Co. KG

Has our world fallen out of sync?

The winds of change are blowing in Europe – and elsewhere, too. They're blowing in the conference rooms of corporate headquarters, in the editorial offices of business magazines, in the minds of business students and ambitious start-up activists. The source of this change is not a nineteenth century ideology, but a twentieth century idea - one which now, in the twenty-first century, is beginning to take hold at an incredible rate. We're talking, here, about disruption.

Some - as the word "disruptive" might suggest - are torn as to how to respond. On the one hand, they harbour a secret thrill for the way it tears others apart, especially their competitors. First Kodak, then Nokia; next, perhaps, a well-known energy company, a large bank or a world-renowned automotive firm.

On the other hand, they're terrified it might turn on them, rip them apart, destroy them completely...

Davos, January 2016. The international business and political elite are gathering to discuss the issues of the moment, just as they do every year. Officially, the key theme of this year's meeting is the so-called "fourth industrial revolution". Unofficially, most people are talking about a topic that was on the radar at last year's gathering, but now occupies an attention-grabbing spot at the top of the agenda: digital disruption. "Digital disruption is at the heart of all the conversations," wrote Pierre Nanterme, CEO of Accenture, on his blog on January 17th 2016. "Business leaders

tell me that they are intent on disrupting before they are disrupted.” Ajay Banga, President and CEO of MasterCard, sums up how many in Davos feel: "The threat of disruption is a fear for most people."

But what is meant by all this? Is it, so to speak, solely about “disruptive innovations” – described by Clayton M. Christensen as “opportunities arising from the use of digital technologies”? If so, how broadly or narrowly should this term be interpreted? Do disruptive innovations arise exclusively “in new markets and lower market segments,” as Christensen describes, or can they also be found elsewhere? Which of us dares to dictate how the power of human innovation should behave? Is it, furthermore, not only about technical or product innovations, but also about social innovations - in work and cooperation, in leadership and organisation, in learning and in education?

Three Theories

Put simply, “disruptive thinking” means the ability to think in terms of radical change, breaks with convention and non-linear developments – and to accept that these will not merely be a passing trend. Because be sure: they are not about to just pass by. In this regard, I have three theories – or “hypotheses”, perhaps, would be more accurate. I talk in terms of hypotheticals because it will be one or two generations before we know what is actually going to happen.

Theory No. 1

We live in a time of transition from an old world to a new. A big transformation, the digital transformation, equal in scope and impact to the Industrial Revolution. This transformation is not just a technological one - it is also of a social and cultural nature, and is massively changing our patterns of thought and behaviour.

Theory No. 2

In a “time of transition”, it is naturally the case that many old things no longer work properly and many new things are not yet quite right. We often feel this instinctively and intuitively, including through the increasing sense of pressure to which we are subject. We are no longer sure what will happen tomorrow - another feature of this transitional time, characterised as it is by wide-ranging inconsistencies and conflicts. Long-held convictions - old, time-honoured and even archaic - struggle against the new.

Theory No. 3

The transformation we are currently undergoing is not just similar to the industrial revolution; rather, it is a revolution in itself. I call it the “creative revolution”. Its historical significance consists in the development of human creative abilities enabled by digital technologies and networks. Today, anyone who speaks of digital transformation will find consensus almost everywhere. Everyone will nod his or her heads. Some will purport to know exactly what awaits us tomorrow, if only we deploy the right technologies and business models. The “creative revolution” says, “We

have no idea what will happen in five or ten years. The digital technologies - which are only in their infancy - are merely a necessary condition for this revolution to occur. In order for their potential to blossom, we require human creativity and inventiveness on a hitherto unprecedented scale. We need them everywhere: for the environment, for sustainability, in school, education, enterprise, and politics. And disruptive thinking is the art and discipline that will shape this revolution.”

The main principles: What is disruptive thinking?

- Disruptive thinking is thinking that grows with the complex requirements of our time. It is lateral thinking without safety rails.
- Disruptive thinking is a realistic way of approaching the future, one that actively factors in the possibility of disturbances rather than excluding them.
- Disruptive thinking is a bilingual thinking; it is at home in two worlds. It reckons with uncertainty and makes the inconsistencies productive.
- Disruptive thinking is an “operating system with a difference” for organisations facing digital transformation and standing on the precipice of the creative revolution.
- Disruptive thinking fosters innovation potential and strengthens social responsibility.

A few years ago, I heard the following story for the first time:

A teacher at a primary school was teaching a group of six-year-old children how to draw. One of the schoolgirls, who sat on a back bench and usually did not play an active part in lessons, was completely engrossed in what she was doing. The teacher was at once fascinated and curious. "What are you painting?" she asked the girl.

"I'm painting a picture of God," the girl replied, without looking up.

The teacher was surprised. "But no one knows what God looks like."

"Wait a minute," the girl told her, "then you'll see."

I like this story for a number of different reasons. For one, it is a wonderful example of a child's imaginative power. During this period of our lives, we are all creative. Many of us had the creative trust to dare the seemingly impossible and transcend the limits of adult preconceptions.

It is also a great example of the firmly held convictions of adults - and the amazement it provokes when the fabric of these beliefs is questioned.

But these observations alone are not what qualifies this story to appear in a book on disruptive thinking. Dare I say there is another level of meaning and another association that this story calls to mind: that the girl who dares to paint a picture of God is symbol of the present time, the creative revolution that is just beginning. She is a symbol of a new world, of preparing for things that were thus far unimaginable. Furthermore, she stands for the shockwaves this triggers in the old world; perhaps for a thing that we used to term "hubris". Some feel magnetically drawn to this new world; others fear it.

The term “disruptive thinking” consists of two words, the second of which is not intended to mitigate the first. Disruptive thinking does not celebrate any and all kinds of disruptive behaviour, but is rather a reflection of the disruptive era in which we live. At the same time, it stands for creative, responsible practice: practical support for leadership and organisations to enable them to deal better with disruptive change. This, to me, would appear particularly important in an era in which we are overloaded with “do-it-now” offers. We are beseeched to download, order or buy under relentless time pressure; to implement, install and realise in the shortest possible time. In contrast, disruptive thinking says: there is always time to think in action. Furthermore, when one finds oneself in extreme terrain, it is better to still to think before doing anything at all. Disruptions are extreme terrain. Disruptions are not minor bumps on a highway; they are the true backcountry.

Extreme climbers, snowboarders and freeride professionals know how it feels, for they deliberately place themselves in such terrain. They know that behind every mountain lies a summit of new possibilities - but they're also aware of the dangers. As freeriders Melanie Schönthier and Stephan Bernhard put it, “Backcountry is a place full of dangers, where one wrong decision can ruin your day.” This is the reason why effective physical and, above all, mental preparation is so crucial: “Better be ready when the shit goes down.”

It goes without saying that good equipment is important; the tools must be the right ones for the job. Today, however, any beginner can acquire these tools easily. The pivotal part occurs in the mind; it is the combination of attitude and imagination. We must be able to read the terrain. We must have, at our fingertips, the ability both to

visualise things in our mind's eye and to prepare for them. The route we want to take, the path we want to travel, every stone that could become an adversary, every angle from which an avalanche could be triggered. To be able to do both - that is, to be able to conceive of inconsistencies, recognise dangers and, at the same time, have confidence - is necessary for survival in any extreme terrain.

Disruptive thinking is thus the art and discipline of better dealing with upheavals and inconsistencies. It lays the foundations for recognising relevant disruptive developments at an earlier stage and transforming them into opportunities for finding new paths or taking a leap forward.

As such, this book is not simply an instruction manual or a guidebook of a conventional nature, but rather a "code of practice" intended to support the reader in determining their own course.

Disruptive thinking is less a new set of tools than a completely new mindset. It is about thought and behaviour. It is about developing a new ability to adapt and, at the same time, restoring our creative abilities, in turn affording ourselves more freedom and a greater number of choices.

I seek to take the reader on a journey from the old world into the new, a three-part expedition into the conceptual and experiential world of disruptive thinking. One might call the three parts "avenues". What happens during these avenues is to be understood as a result of the gradual development of the thoughts while walking, wandering across country, as we explore the terrain from different angles, observe our perceptions, gather impressions and finally pause to review these impressions

and draw possible conclusions for our future behaviour. Each passage therefore ends with a practical imperative.

In each of these passages, we'll encounter areas of conflict and tension. We will not avoid them; we cannot avoid them in reality, either. Areas of tension, inconsistencies and dilemmas are pivotal to this time of upheaval. Disruptive thinking confronts them head on and attempts to master them and use them for growth:

1st Avenue

Knowledge and ignorance

The disruptive game begins

2nd Avenue

Routines and non-routines

The creative revolution takes hold of our organisations

3rd Avenue

Man and machine

Who decides our future?

In all three avenues, the focus lies initially on observing and describing typical disruptive developments and innovations. Namely:

- ◆ generally, in the markets and the economy (I);
- ◆ with a view to organisation and cooperation (II), and
- ◆ with regard to future cooperation between man and machine (III).

Based on this, for all three avenues, we then take into consideration possible practical conclusions and the assistance we might draw from useful tools in regard to:

- ◆ mental preparation for strategy and innovation (I),
- ◆ the transformation of organisations (II),
- ◆ cultural (in the broadest sense) and personal development (III).

Disruptions are like earthquakes. Earthquakes, famously, cannot be predicted. We can identify earthquake-prone areas, analyse rock layers and carry out ever more accurate measurements, but we cannot know exactly where and when the next tremor will occur.

Disruptive thinking is comparable to this in that we cannot say exactly where and how the next disruption will occur. We can identify technological, economic and social development patterns to prevent ourselves from entering into it blindly; we can make proposals to enable us to better prepare. But when it comes to thinking, decision-making and the assumption of responsibility under conditions of increasing uncertainty, these are things we must do for ourselves.

Disruptive thinking also deals with questions and areas of conflict: knowledge and ignorance, routines and non-routines, machines and people. Disruptive thinking is not content with one-sided declarations. Knowledge, routines and machines are not enough, for they would mean relying on certainties and inevitabilities. They leave no room for choice. There is nothing left to decide, only to do. From this perspective,

the path of digital transformation seems predetermined. Some would prefer it this way. I consider it to be factually incorrect, strategically inadmissible and, practically speaking, negligent. This approach makes no distinction between thinking and merely reproducing the “pre-thought”, making unquestioning use of what has already been put in place.

Disruptive thinking centres around thinking for oneself; thinking with creative confidence and a sense of enjoyment. It is curious, experimental, networked, aware and willing to be held accountable.

What drives us

To have work from which one can live at an acceptable level and feed a family: for many generations, this was one of the most fundamental accomplishments a person could achieve in the industrial age. To do good work and make good money; to have the sense of satisfaction and feeling of security that came with it; to be able to work as autonomously as possible in one’s role due to having mastered a particular field - these were the basic inner desires of many over recent decades. Autonomy, mastery and meaning are fundamental to human motivation, as Daniel H. Pink demonstrated in an interesting study. But what happens when the autonomously operating human subject, so proud of his or her mastery, is subject to serious competition - from a challenger who is demonstrably immensely capable of learning, and who is gradually acquiring more and more of the abilities that have hitherto been reserved for man? How do we deal with this – and how much more difficult does it become when the challenger is a subject of such great fascination?

The autonomous driving example

Autonomous driving is an idea with strong appeal. It makes waves in the media, in business, in politics, in education and training. The more we engage with it, the more we realise how immensely complex a subject it is. Here, I'll explore just three of the various elements or levels.

The first deals with the social vision, formulated a number of years ago by Sebastian Thrun, co-creator of the Google Car: better safety on the roads and a drastic reduction in accidents, especially those involving deaths and injuries. Vision Zero. The European Commission has taken up this vision: the aim is that there will be no more serious injuries or deaths from traffic accidents in the European Union by 2050. Whether this is really possible is yet to be shown. Google has since abandoned the pursuit of a completely self-driving car; instead, Google spin-off Waymo has taken the reins and cooperates on the project with well-known automotive companies as well as with Uber competitor Lyft.

Nevertheless, Google driverless cars clocked up hundreds of thousands of kilometres on the roads of California during their first few years of operation. While, in the intervening period, Tesla has been the subject of rather more negative headlines, the development (or rather, evolution) of the technology continues. It learns from its mistakes and gets better. This brings me to the second level: the issues that arise when a machine becomes autonomous. Not completely, mind you, but in a very comprehensive sense. The old, often metaphorically intended question of "Who's in the driving seat?" takes on a new meaning. This also has considerable social consequences – and not only in a legal sense. Who is actually in control? Who is steering? Do we still need a steering wheel at all? Following the release of their first self-driving cars, Google proposed a self-driving model without a steering

wheel. While their vision may have been premature, it could, at some point, become a reality. The question would then become: do we still need a driver's seat? Indeed, do we still need a driver at all?

If the topic wasn't interesting before, it certainly becomes so now. Who would want a driverless car - and why? Who are the potential customers? Private hire firm Uber is doubtless among them, as is the above-mentioned competitor Lyft. Others include the Chinese ride-sharing firm Didi Chuxing, in which Apple has invested heavily, and other professional car-sharing service providers. Uber began testing driverless taxis at their company headquarters in Pittsburgh back in 2016. For now, they still have a driver in the car, since this is required by law. But the goal - the driverless taxi - is quite clear.

Thanks to the huge potential cost savings, this would make Uber rides truly affordable. Conventional taxis would barely stand a chance of survival. Taxi drivers would need a new job. And what of the automotive firms? Would traditional automotive manufacturers then need to produce driverless, electrically operated and electronically networked vehicles for bulk buyers? How many workers would the manufacturers and their suppliers need to produce new, electrically powered vehicles with far fewer parts? How many workers would they need to provide a diminished base of private customers with driver-driven classic sedans or sports cars? When we consider all this, it quickly becomes evident that the autonomous machine is a social issue.

Now to the third level: when a machine becomes autonomous, it must necessarily be able to do a great deal. Not only that, but it must be able to do these tasks to a higher level than a human. It mutates into a new kind of omnipotent entity, one that:

- ◆ sees everything; very accurately perceives what is happening in its environment, and
- ◆ “cottons on” very quickly, in a matter of fractions of seconds.

What’s more, it looks ahead to what is going on and

- ◆ is able to react to the event both appropriately and at lightning speed.

These are all powerful capabilities which, in many respects, emulate those that have hitherto set humans apart. In some respects, they even surpass those of humans. It is true explosion of performance based on a combination of abilities, skills and features, including:

- ◆ Exceptional computing power
- ◆ Advanced sensor technology
- ◆ Advanced image and pattern recognition
- ◆ Robustness
- ◆ Learning ability
- ◆ Latest generation of artificial intelligence
- ◆ Ability to interpret images coherently
- ◆ Networking at all levels
- ◆ Availability of huge amounts of data

All these abilities and functional characteristics also exist individually, somewhere in the universe of digital technologies. Here, however, they are connected and bundled such that man, with his abilities, begins to look quite obsolete. Is this a

challenge? An impertinence? Both? If machines can become autonomous, can we still be autonomous? And who are we? Who is really in the driving seat?

New world - old world?

Indeed, a whole world of digital machines and experiments exists in addition to the big digital platforms. It is rich, colourful, open and full of surprises. Furthermore, it is not the case that we in Germany lack the necessary know-how to develop independent, forward-looking technologies and platform solutions. The Fraunhofer Institutes have already been mentioned, as have Siemens and SAP. But what about Scopevisio, the German software company that is preparing to snatch market shares away from SAP in the SME segment with its cloud software? What about Tolino, the e-book reader of German provenance which, with a 40 per cent market share in Germany, is providing genuine competition for Amazon's Kindle? "Nothing like this exists anywhere else," says Nina Hugendubel, who went into business after completing her philosophy degree.

There are countless start-ups and innovation teams that develop great, creative products. Sometimes, they have the backing of reputable firms. At Burda, more than 90 people from more than 20 countries are working on Cliqz, an Internet browser with its own search engine. It's hoped that it will compete with Google and is designed to work without users needing to pass on their data. A proprietary anti-tracking technique is being developed for this purpose. The promise is as follows: "We don't need to know anything about you. Data that is required to offer you a tailored service will remain under your control." An exciting experiment - but will it be possible to scale and monetise it?

In 2014, Deutsche Telekom began work on its own messenger service at T-Labs in Berlin - intended, as per the official announcement, to compete with WhatsApp or Facebook's Messenger. The product was introduced under the name "immmr" and will initially be tested in Slovenia and Croatia. From the 70-strong start-up team, one member tweeted: "immmr. It's mobile exploration, it's mobile freedom, it's mobile adventure." But will it work? Will the app really be "a global product," as Telekom CEO Claudia Nemat states?

At this juncture, our gaze is inadvertently drawn to Asia – more specifically to South Korea, the birthplace of the messenger app "Kakao Talk". With an astonishing range of functions - telephone, text messaging, photos, videos and voice messages - Kakao Talk is a free instant messenger that is currently used by over 200 million people in Asia. In South Korea, it can also be used to make payments, just like the WeChat app in China. Kakao Talk is playful and easy to use and runs on over 90 per cent of South Korean smartphones. I might also mention Toutiao, a personalized, AI-based Chinese news app that learns what interests each user the most and provides not only relevant news, but also interesting stories and videos. It is currently used by 600 million Chinese.

The Party is happy. "Thanks to artificial intelligence and vast data sets, we get to know what people are reading about current events," says Zhu Huaxin, secretary of the Public Opinion Research Institute. With tens of thousands of official channels, it's not surprising that even President Xi Jinping has recommended its use. In 2016 alone, 2.4 million stories and videos were shared on Toutiao by the party officials – and were clicked 8.2 billion times.

The Santander example

There are a number of wonderful European examples of intelligent, networked solutions that pursue a conservative approach with regard to personal data. One of these examples is the smart city project of Santander, Spain, which is considered to be one of the world's leading smart cities.

Here, almost everything that is still on other cities' drawing boards has been in use for years. While data is collected at every corner and crossroads, none of it is of a personal nature. Some sensors report on empty parking spots; others measure the humidity in parks, so that the sprinklers only function when the weather becomes too dry. Thanks to the sensors in the street lights, the city is able to save up to 80 per cent on electricity costs. An app enables readers to access important information about museums and shops, and much more - all with a huge positive response from the city's citizens. Santander is the laboratory for the intelligent and sustainable European cities of the future. We must not hide behind the "either" or "or". We must beware of a lack of alternatives, of any automatism that leaves us no choice. Furthermore, we will need "smart" infrastructures and algorithmic systems in many sectors of society in order "to be able to manoeuvre ourselves in extremely data-intensive environments without becoming blind from the sheer quantities of data," says Felix Stalder, a Zurich-based media scientist. "If, for example, we want to convert our energy supply to decentral, sustainable energy generation, we need intelligent, self-regulating networks that can cope with complex fluctuations in production and consumption." The question now is how these systems should be built, how transparent they are, who has access to them and how this is regulated.

The normality of an inconsistent world

Is this not the case with all disruptive processes? We do not know exactly what will happen - but we *can* adapt to some of the possible changes. We can make arrangements: mental, physical, spiritual, practical. And that's what this entire book is about. It's about envisaging inconsistencies so that they do not tear us apart. It's about thinking in a two-sided fashion, not a one-sided one; about combining things in new ways. It's about breaking automatisms apart - including and especially the automatisms of automatic machines. Every automatism that becomes independent is a threat to freedom. Freedom means being able to break things off and start again. It's not about simply saying, "Everything will be great." It's also not about saying, "Everything will be terrible." Don't just close your eyes and hope for the best; have faith that things will be alright. Do not freeze; rather, look ahead and keep both eyes open. Confucius warned that those who do not think about the future will soon run into problems. And thinking about the future without considering future dangers is not thinking, but simply nodding your head.

It is a shortcoming of some publications on digital transformation that the social risks of this transformation, if mentioned at all, are consigned to the margins, mostly appearing under "Read more" at the end of an article. The body of the argument is in place and the topping-out ceremony has been celebrated; there is no room to reflect on the dangers, only rhetorical references to the steadfast march of progress and the necessary optimistic attitude of the actors of progress. Who wants to be left out in the cold? Who wants to be placed in the corner as doubting and nagging?

My suspicion is that the risks are neglected because they cannot be directly solved with technology –a medium that has no feel for contradictions. This can also be seen

in our response to the disruptive effects of climate change. In both cases, we overlook a crucial element: the destructive is contained within the new. The new is not immaculate - it simply seems (mostly) flawless from a technical perspective. The new is destroying the old.

This viewpoint typically proves economically fruitful, but socially disastrous. For many, it is catastrophic – at least until a new, sustainable social model emerges in response. If this were not the case, Schumpeter would not have had to speak of creative destruction.

Being able to see both sides is (...) the challenge. Don't think "digitally": positive or negative; black or white; who is for us, who is against us. This is naïve, ideological. Also, don't assume something is automatically good because it has worked well so far. This is naïve, unhistorical. Instead, ask: What are the approaches that lead to unfavourable development and how can we prevent these approaches gaining more of a foothold? How can we work creatively to develop alternatives and test them for their suitability – for the purpose of strengthening people? In a free society. This is mature, creative, and responsible thinking. Strengthening creativity in the context of disruption is the challenge. It is the role of the creative revolution in digital transformation.

It is this great social disruption - a disruption of society - that stands before us now. This disruption began long ago. It requires broad, public, creative debate of a kind that has never before been seen. It requires good questions, many experiments and much trust. It is a task that will take a century or more.

Strengthening people – involving the individual

One question crops up again and again: will we be needed in the future? The answer depends on how we understand “we” - more specifically, on how we understand ourselves.

If we understand “we” in the most general way - as the sum of our habits and conventions - the answer will most likely be that no, we are no longer needed. We are replaceable. So long as we seek to make ourselves more and more similar to these machines, there is no reason why the digital transformation should be content with human replicas. If, on the other hand, we understand ourselves as individuals - as contradictory, creative beings who, despite our commonalities and ordinariness, are unique and have special abilities - the answer will be that yes, we are needed. We might even be needed greatly; indeed, head-hunters and HR managers everywhere are permanently on the hunt for such individuals. They sometimes call them MVPs, Most Valuable Persons. The demand for these people is growing ever greater. The key words are individuality, authenticity, autonomy, backbone, purpose, compassion - or: "Love out loud!", as the motto of the digital cultural conference re:publica 2017 instructed us.

Some companies find it easier than others to recruit such people. Take Google, for example, which receives approximately 2 million applications annually. For most companies and institutions, the situation is trickier – and this is precisely the reason for the growing demand. History could, ultimately, take a paradoxical and surprising turn: while man as a perfect creature of routine, one that carries out exactly what has been set out for him, might soon be highly endangered by algorithms, man as

a unique, singular, creative and non-perfect being could get a second chance to shine.

In this regard, digitalisation is the enabler. Networking gives rise not only to new forms of cooperation, but also to a whole new form of individuality. The question is now: have we really understood this? Have we truly accepted that networked organizations need “the individual”, with all his or her inimitable character? Have we grasped that teams become better, meetings more enjoyable and changes more successful when we involve the individual?

Here are seven sure-fire tips for making yourself superfluous:

1. Don't ask questions – especially those for which you have no answer. Never admit to not knowing something.
2. Do not approach others; perceive the need for help as weakness.
3. Regard autonomy as desirable only as an attribute of machines.
4. Maintain strict compliance with efficiency criteria. Optimization is everything.
5. Avoid dealing with inconsistency as if your life depended on it
6. Never stray from what Facebook or your Echo tells you to do
7. Go back to number 1 and start again. Repetition is the only thing that counts.

If we flip this list on its head, however, we can turn it into something positive – and condense it into a few useful maxims.

As such, here are four things to remember for keeping yourself in the game:

1. The more networked the world becomes, the greater the importance of the individual.
2. The greater the joint accomplishment to be achieved, the more important the participation of the individual – and the more important it becomes to ask each individual what they need and what they can contribute. In teams, in business, in politics.
3. The higher the pressure of change on the organisation, the more important it is to create spaces, especially spaces in terms of time, where people can do what they can do well.
4. The stronger the pressure to replace the living labour force with digital machines, the more important it becomes to ask: what sets people apart? What can they do better? In which areas are they irreplaceable? What are the strengths and potentials, perhaps also the weaknesses, that make them unique and different?

Final thought

The purpose of the creative revolution is the strengthening of human creativity within the context of digital transformation. This is my final theory (or better: hypothesis, like the three I laid out earlier). The future requires creative partners, mindful participants in a networked world. These cannot be people who, professionally blinkered and selfish, seek merely to optimize their own performance; rather, they must be individuals with an awareness for their social and natural environments, at once courageous and humble, even under very difficult conditions. They must exhibit these qualities in tasks both big and small, but especially in the very small, day-to-day, unfavourable tasks that stand before us.

Digital machines are a great help in this regard. They will relieve us of many of the things that they can do better - but they cannot replace us like-for-like. They can provide us with calculations for operating more sustainably, but they cannot replace our will to be sustainable, our power of judgment or our empathy for others.

They cannot tell us how to remove the rubbish from our seas and our minds. They cannot civilise our social media. They cannot provide us with a formula to make Africa our partner continent.

Above all, they cannot replace that which is demanded from all who assume leadership roles – that is, the ability to drive things forward and support others. Whether as a coach, as mentor, a person who gives feedback, or simply a person who helps those who are not so strong: such people are needed in every company, every team, every administration and every discipline, and their role is only gaining in importance. These skills are something everyone can develop - though small steps, through surprisingly simple ideas, through pausing our daily routines for reflection, if only for a few minutes. They are developed through proper regard,

through attention, through listening. It is the surprisingly simple gestures and moments between us that we perceive as kindness, attentiveness and trust. These are the ones we must rediscover. If we do, many problems can be solved before they tear us apart. If something goes wrong or becomes confused – as, in reality, it tends to do - we do not need to puff ourselves up and assert our hierarchical rank; we can simply experiment with a solution and encourage others to take a new path.

Hence the third practical imperative, and the most important one of all: **give strength to those around you!**

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