

‘Good work’ and good services in the digital world

Digitalisation and digital networking are having a profound effect on almost all aspects of our society, particularly the world of work. Technological progress means that a relatively affordable smartphone now has more computing power than an entire computer centre with massive mainframe computers only a few decades ago. The Internet links up virtually the entire world and has long since also become accessible on a mobile basis. New business models have enabled the emergence of new forms of interaction –between individuals, and between people and machines. User-driven innovations are leading to the development of a huge range of different applications.

Digitalisation opens up new worlds. Many people use digital social networks to remain in touch with each other or to establish new contacts with people all over the world; they use them to keep informed about people’s whereabouts, what they are doing, what is motivating them – and others can do the same to them as well. Networking and advanced short-messaging services (like Twitter) also open up opportunities for new forms of political participation and social movements to develop. Digital technologies provide access to knowledge and information via online encyclopaedias. Navigation systems and universal translation applications can make everyday life easier. The Internet opens the door to new consumer options, new business models and global sales channels, even for highly specialised goods and services. Medical diagnoses can be improved with the help of "big data", the impact of disease can be mitigated with the help of advances made in robotics. Laptops, tablets and smartphones enable many working people to decide for themselves when – and above all where – they want to work.

However, current legal and technological structures and ownership patterns are such that there are also enormous risks involved. Some of these have already become reality, as demonstrated by the revelations about surveillance by the US security services and their allies: The progress made by digital networking in its current form makes it possible for private companies, state security authorities and employers to carry out an unprecedented degree of surveillance, monitoring, control and selection that potentially affects us all as citizens, consumers and employees. New types of business model that are as yet subject to minimal regulation are systematically being used to circumvent labour law, workplace codetermination regulations, social security systems and taxation. Work is split up into small packages and advertised on the Internet for completion by large numbers of anonymous individuals. Such crowdsourcing models result in new forms of service provisions which are precarious for those actually providing the service but economically attractive for the companies concerned and put pressure on regular forms of employment to conform. In a number of industries and professions, advances in



artificial intelligence could result in a situation where employees' skills are no longer required, as computers can carry out their tasks more cheaply. We are also experiencing a situation in which time-saving digital applications enable processes that until recently required hours and days to complete to be carried out in a matter of seconds. This results in a stressful speeding up of peoples' working and private lives and an increased blurring of the lines between the two. All too easily the freedom to decide when and where one works becomes pressure to work everywhere and at all times.

If a maximum number of people are to benefit from the undeniably humanizing and emancipatory impact of change and the improvement it brings in levels of well-being, the process clearly needs to be shaped by greater consultation, participation and more regulatory intervention. If it remains dominated by short-term profit motives, the free play of market forces and apparent technical pressures, then there is a danger we will find ourselves living in a society of constant surveillance, with greater social selection, oppressive workplace controls, a growing number of precarious forms of employment and increasingly intensive forms of work. We have reached a crossroads: Will we succeed in putting the potential offered by digitalisation to the service of democratic and social innovation and human progress? Or will it merely benefit a tiny elite and result in disenfranchisement, insecurity and disempowerment for the majority?

It is not just a question of how technology is used, but also of whether we can develop safe, humane forms of technology in a situation where social standards are increasingly based on technical standards. It is vital that we address the issue of technical standards and organisational models as soon as possible, so as to ensure that they serve the needs of people in their roles as citizens, consumers and employees. The humane design of technology is not something that comes about of its own accord - it can and must be the subject of public debate and democratic decision-making processes in which employees and trade unions are closely involved.

We have to ask ourselves what sort of general framework needs to be established for the digitalised world if solidarity and 'good work' are to flourish. People are increasingly dependent on digital services. Some of these are so widespread that they are rapidly becoming socially necessary – in other words, they are of crucial significance for social cohesion, a properly functioning economy and quality of life and therefore must be designed to be of high quality, reliably available, accessible, and subject to democratic control. It is crucial that they should involve 'good work' and employee participation - employees need to identify with their tasks and become actively involved in their design and implementation.

With regard to digitalisation, it is more important than ever to focus on the relationship between 'good work', good services and the public interest. This is task for the whole of society, and ver.di intends to be actively involved in it. There must, of course, be a particular focus on employees: The two-edged nature of digitalisation, the fascinating possibilities and significant risks it involves, the new need to protect employees and safeguard their hopes of freedom and security in a digital world mean that proactively shaping this development is a priority issue for ver.di.

Our aims

For ver.di the central challenge in the next few years is going to be how to manage the unmistakable risks of the digital revolution and utilise the huge opportunities it offers for social and human innovation to ensure 'good work' and good services and improve the basis for sustainable growth. Ver.di is not just focusing on digital work in the narrow sense of work carried out on computers and on the Internet – it is also concerned about a much broader range of work forms. After all, people involved in parcel delivery, care work or bus driving, and many other "non-digital" occupations are by no means unaffected by the potential problems posed by the current technical and economic upheavals. Internet firms are aiming their platform strategies at the global labour market and have long since started acting as intermediaries for domestic services, tradesmen's services and production aid in many sectors.

What we want to do:

1. Secure and promote employment!

Digital networking is a dynamic driver of innovation that makes possible a wide range of new products and services with huge potential for generating added value and creating jobs. This potential must be utilised. At the same time, digital technology can make human work more efficient - and in many cases can replace it completely. Amongst the changes that are currently occurring, automation, which traditionally has been primarily applied to manual production work, is now increasingly also affecting more cerebral activities in the service, knowledge and communications sectors. We should take seriously the many predictions that over the next years, digital rationalisation is set to render many jobs involving medium-level qualifications and remuneration superfluous. Considerable efforts therefore have to be made to ensure that this radical change has a positive impact on employment and creates work for everyone – by specifically promoting innovations and automation-resistant activities that generate jobs (for example interactional work) and diverting increases in productivity and so-called "automation dividends" into areas of social need and using them to increase mass incomes. An increasing proportion of growing value-added in society can and must be used to expand socially necessary services. There is also going to be a need to shelter people from threatened job losses by providing them with further training to ensure future employability and creating alternative forms of employment. The various forms of reductions in working time will also be an important way of mitigating the negative impact of change on employment – especially in combination with forward-looking (re-)training measures for employees.

2. Boost training!

Digitalisation creates new jobs, and many employees find that the nature of their work is radically changed. Skills and knowledge that were once in demand often become obsolete. These shifts in the qualifications required for the world of work call for increased effort at all levels of the education system, particularly in initial and continuing vocational training, to ensure employability and use the employment opportunities offered by change. This will not be achieved without improved funding and



staffing of the education and training sector – and more time also needs to be made available for further training. The yields from digital automation and rationalisation must be used for the benefit of (re-) training of the employees affected, for example in the form of greater investment and more time spent on further training. However this is not just about more training in general, but about providing the specific skills required for mobile and digital working contexts – skills that are not yet sufficiently widespread in areas of employment that were largely shaped in the industrial era: the ability to organise and structure work outside company premises and routines and to draw a line between working and private life; an awareness and knowledge of the importance of protecting personality rights and securing your own and other people's data; respect for other people's accessibility and availability; and technical and communicative skills for using social media, for Internet-based cooperation and for remote leadership. The responsibility for making rapid and sustained progress in these areas of training and qualification does not lie exclusively in the hands of the educational players and institutions; it is also a matter for companies, which – in their own interests – should support this development by ensuring forms of work and organisational structures that promote learning and enhance skills.

3. Make possible healthy and humane work!

On the one hand, digital networking often creates greater freedom for employees. More use should be made of this – with their involvement and in line with their interests. Some of the progress brought about by digital technology – for example in robotics – can also reduce the physical stress of certain types of manual work, and therefore should be promoted. On the other hand, digitalisation of the world of work often involves the removal of lines of demarcation, bringing dangers and additional stress – particularly psychological stress – by increasing the intensity of work and the responsibilities borne by the worker. When resources are inadequate and work and employment become more precarious, any increase in freedom and responsibility can easily entail risks rather than opportunities, and these can be harmful to health. The problem is often exacerbated by a clear lack of regulation: health and safety norms and ergonomic standards that apply to fixed-location workplaces are often not effectively applied to geographically flexible working. It is important for the detrimental impact on employees' health of the greater accessibility and availability created by digital and mobile working to be countered by appropriate company and works agreements, collectively agreed and statutory regulations that give employees the right to be unavailable outside agreed working and standby times. Health and safety regulations, sector-specific labour protection legislation and accident insurance cover need to be adapted to the particular issues involved in digital and mobile working. Healthy digital working also requires the application of ergonomic quality standards for software and hardware – including mobile activities in constantly changing work environments. Splitting up digital work into tiny packages and outsourcing it to 'click workers' working effectively on a piecework basis is neither humane nor meaningful. Such extreme forms of digital Taylorism must be replaced by measures, standards and agreements to ensure that workers have at least minimal scope to carry out complete and meaningful tasks.

4. Protect personality rights!

All activities in a digital environment, in social networks and in diverse IT-based services leave an increasingly large 'data shadow' to which companies are increasingly applying sophisticated analytical techniques in order to gather information and investigate, monitor and control people's behaviour. This includes the use of 'wearable technology' such as body sensors, clothing equipped with chips and sensors, fitness and activity trackers and 'smart spectacles' etc. New forms of employment based on crowdsourcing aim to achieve maximum transparency of employees and contractors and use their 'digital reputation' as the most important prerequisite for them to successfully market their labour. The obvious risks of such practices for the personality rights of employees call for legal, technical and organisational protection measures which, amongst other things, should be incorporated into appropriate legislation on employee data protection. There is a need for basic European legislation that does not prevent national legislatures from establishing even higher levels of protection. Before new (digital) working and business processes are introduced into companies and administrations and 'intelligent' tools are used, they must be examined to ensure that they respect personality rights and protect employee data. New areas of business and employment made possible by the commercial utilisation of the data must not be allowed to infringe civil and personality rights and the principles of informational self-determination and employee data protection.

5. Guarantee media plurality and diversity of opinion!

A properly functioning democratic society requires independent media that are able to make use of their constitutionally protected rights and play their role without undue interference. Diversity of opinion must be safeguarded and plurality of the media retained. In this context it is important to take into account the digital revolution that has occurred in the media sector. As well as involving almost complete digitalisation of production processes and changes in media employees' forms and conditions of work, it has brought about an increase in the pressure of competition that has driven classic business models to the limits of their capacity. News now spreads rapidly across the Internet and social media and as often as not is available free of charge. Publishing houses are increasingly opting out of collective agreements, merging their editorial operations, reducing their permanent and freelance workforce and renegeing on pay agreements. Public service broadcasting and its funding via license fees is constantly under discussion. Global players such as Amazon or Netflix are taking over the film and television market with their own video-streaming services. That is why, to ensure a free, diverse and high-quality media landscape, we need strong public service broadcasting that does not just serve niche markets, proper media regulation that prevents the concentration of market and opinion-forming power in a few hands, and revenue models that ensure the survival of independent reporting. Professional journalism must not be devalued, and copyright legislation, which protects many people in creative professions, must not be played off against the interests of consumers. Copyright holders, the majority of whom are freelancers, and beneficiaries of neighbouring rights, rely on valorisation of their works and therefore require economically viable sales structures, including in the digital sector. Their rights need to be asserted more

strongly, for example on the basis of copyright contract law and comprehensible, relevant copyright regulations for consumers.

6. Realise the right of assembly and ensure confidentiality!

In an electronically networked world with its different forms of work organisation, the right to be involved in union activities at the workplace must also be guaranteed. Even if the central company noticeboard is now a thing of the past and work is increasingly decentralized, often taking place outside the company, employees, staff committee and works council representatives as well as trade unions still require access to the intranet and the e-mail systems of their administrations and companies. All employees require free, uncensored access to the intranet and Internet.

Confidential communications are crucial for safeguarding basic rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly – and for the protection of professional secrecy. This principle must not be endangered by the introduction of data retention – i.e. the random storage of contact and content data. The government should support the development of easy-to-use anonymization and encryption processes. Whistle-blowers in companies and institutions must be afforded better legal protection.

7. Create scope for enhanced quality of life and work!

Digital networking has in many cases created the technical possibility for work to become more flexible in terms of both time and location. However this extra scope must not be used only to the benefit of employers and clients and must not be exclusively at their disposal. It must increasingly be organised in the interests and with the involvement of employees and serve to improve their quality of life and work. For this reason, employees must have an enforceable right to carry out a minimum proportion of their work during normal company hours at a location to be determined by themselves. Such an extension of control over time and location can help to improve work/life balance, but requires appropriate regulation to restrict employee accessibility and availability, so that time-off remains time-off and weekends remain weekends.

8. Expand codetermination – promote economic democracy!

Company codetermination is still largely based on legal provisions dating back to long before the advent of the digital revolution. For example, the massively increased scope that employers now have to geographically transfer work and locations – including crowdsourcing and outsourcing beyond national borders – has not been matched by the creation of adequate scope for workforce representation at national and European level. There is a need to extend codetermination rights for workforce representatives and increase the scope for European and SE works councils to be consulted over outsourcing, crowdsourcing, nearshoring and offshoring in order to prevent a serious loss of influence for works councils and staff committees and a concomitant expansion of precarious employment on the periphery of companies. In addition, codetermination needs to be updated and the concept of



employment extended to include to take into account the growing number of external workers who have a long-term involvement in company processes as a result of digital networking. It is necessary to expand codetermination in order to allow for a stronger influence on planning and localisation of production and services as well as on investment decisions. A general expansion of the codetermination rights of works councils and staff committees is essential if the challenges of the digital world of work and the digital society are to be met. This also includes more codetermination rights for 'quasi-employees' (Para. 12 a Collective Agreements Act) by giving them active and passive voting rights for works council and staff committee elections. In the case of centralised IT structures and activities that transcend individual companies and administrations, active codetermination for local works council and staff committees must be possible. Actively involving employees and their representatives in the creative process contributes towards improving the quality of the service.

9. Introduce social regulation of new forms of work!

The advance of digital technology is resulting in the spread of new phenomena such as 'crowd work', which differ considerably from classic forms of work and employment. On the one hand, this opens up scope for freelancers to access more work and boost their earnings, but on the other hand, models like this – which usually operate via Internet intermediaries – do not have any minimum standards of remuneration, working hours, health and safety and legal and social security. As a result, crowd work is threatening to establish itself as a largely precarious and often exploitative mode of working that can lead to a significant downward pressure on earnings and working conditions for those in regular work. This is exacerbated by the fact that digitalisation also makes it easier for this work to be transferred to countries with lower levels of health and safety standards, wages and taxes. If 'good work' is to be made possible for the 'crowd in the cloud', then these loopholes must be closed and appropriate minimum standards established. Everyone must be covered by social security. When contract work is carried out by a self-employed person, the client must be required to pay part of that person's social insurance contributions – as he would do for direct employees. If clients cannot demonstrate that they or their employees are covered by contributory social insurance, they should be required to pay appropriate contributions. The same applies to many other forms of the digital economy that are commercially successful because they are based on exploitation and infringement of regulations.

10. Achieve fair pay and equitable distribution!

Although digital technology has made possible a huge increase in social prosperity, the main beneficiaries so far have been a small elite of super-rich, economically powerful individuals. At the same time, a growing proportion of employees are coming under increasing pressure as a result of competition from digital structures and global price-cutting based on crowd work for which it is not uncommon to have levels of remuneration and forms of employment contract that fail to cover the basic cost of living. This situation serves to strengthen the hand of employers and clients and threatens to exacerbate the already scandalously inequitable distribution of income and wealth. To counter this development, we firstly have to cooperate with crowd workers to establish appropriate levels of pay;



and secondly, government taxation policy has to be modified to achieve a degree of redistribution that enables a greater proportion of the population to benefit from the wealth generated by the digital revolution. This should be achieved by investing in urgently required infrastructural and social innovation, inter-personal services and a greater humanisation of work. Furthermore, given the expected boost in productivity that digitalisation brings, consideration needs to be given to whether and how part of the high value generated by a small number of employees can be redistributed to meet social needs.

11. Draw limits and overcome the digital divide!

Making the process of digitalisation more humane and socially acceptable also involves drawing limits: not everything that can be digitalised must be digitalized; not all tasks that robots can take over should actually be given to them; and by no means all decisions that theoretically could be delegated to algorithms should be removed from the responsibility of human beings. Person-to-person services that call for warmth and empathy must be preserved and expanded and should not be sacrificed to the logic of key performance indicator optimisation. Another trend that should be limited is the increasing tendency towards 'scoring' individual employees according to their contribution to their company, which is perfected on the basis of Big Data and is often used for automated comparative employee evaluation. The spread of number-fetishism and an obsession with competitiveness are destroying solidarity in the working world and in society as a whole and increasing the psychological pressure on individuals to constantly demonstrate their worth. To combat the effect of excessive digital control and competition we need appropriate employee data protection regulations and collective agreements on performance measurement and evaluation and limitation of requirements. The digital divide that is becoming increasingly visible in the world of work and in society as a whole must be overcome: everyone must have a right to acquire basic digital skills in school, during training and in their jobs, just as they should also have access to a modern broadband Internet connection.

Our demands

Managing the digital revolution in a socially responsible and humane way, overcoming the risks involved and using the potential it offers calls for democratically-legitimised policy initiatives and interventions. We are calling for a digital agenda for 'good work' and good services that includes urgently-required reforms in important policy areas:

With regard to labour, social and data protection legislation, this should include:

- Establishing a right for employees to be 'uncontactable' and 'unresponsive'
- Guaranteeing the right of employees to control their own working time and location



- Establishing legal security for employees' communications on social networks
- Creating mechanisms for establishing minimum conditions for contractors, solo self-employed persons and crowd workers in terms of their contracts and levels of payment that are analogous to the mechanisms in copyright contract law
- Establishing effective work and social standards in bilateral and multilateral trade agreements
- Improving the codetermination rights of works councils and staff committees in the fields of health and safety, awarding of contracts, outsourcing, crowdsourcing and value creation processes in networked 'virtual' structures
- Adapting social security systems to the new scale and new challenges of non-standard forms of employment – amongst other things by including solo self-employed persons and crowd workers and ensuring co-financing of their social contributions by the client
- Ensuring continued risk-sharing based on solidarity in an era in which automated personal data on an individual's risk factors can be evaluated and responsibility for risks individualised. Digitalisation should help strengthen social solidarity rather than weakening it.
- Passing long-overdue legislation on employee data protection that takes into account the specific conditions and dependencies involved in the employment relationship

With regard to health and safety, this should include:

- Updating standards that have hitherto largely applied to activities in specific locations – specifically the current regulations on workplaces and working with visual display units – to take into account the challenges related to working in flexible locations
- Developing and promoting high-quality ergonomic hardware and software standards for mobile digital working equipment
- Increasing the number and enhancing the quality of publicly-funded model and research projects aimed at identifying the specific stresses and strains as well as the potential advantages and necessary resources for digital mobile working, ensuring humane working conditions and developing ideas for the 'mobilisation' of health and safety provisions
- Promoting initiatives for humanising digital work processes that aim to ensure meaningful overall work content

With regard to economic, social, innovation and education policy, this should include:

- Focusing on ensuring as positive a development of employment as possible in the course of the digital revolution, in particular by developing new 'good workplaces' in socially necessary care services
- Specifically researching, identifying and supporting innovations designed to create sustainable jobs – which we see as being mainly in social and caring services
- Promoting investment in a high-quality comprehensive digital infrastructure that offers everyone equal access
- Intensifying efforts to teach digital skills at all levels within the education system, improving the financial, legal and temporal conditions for in-job further training and developing appropriate new occupational profiles for a digitally networked world

Where we go from here

ver.di will make the achievement of 'good work' and good living conditions in a period of digital change one of the main focuses of its activities. We aim to:

- take an active part in discussions on the further development and implementation of the digital agendas drawn up by the German Federal government and the European Commission, as well as engaging in further dialogue with political parties and parliaments
- promote and take part in discussions between the social partners in those service sectors particularly affected by digitalisation-driven change with a view to developing and implementing joint solutions for ensuring 'good work' and good services in a digital age
- carry out sectoral analyses to examine and forecast the likely consequences of the digital revolution for employment and for business, production and labour models
- conclude collective agreements on establishing 'good work' in the digital revolution
- draw up model agreements for colleagues in companies and administrations and make them available online to both full-time and voluntary colleagues



- build on our longstanding positive experience of working with the self-employed and become even more receptive to the needs of crowd workers; work for and with them to develop concepts for trade union support and participation
- intensify our dialogue with other players in civil society and Internet policymakers who are concerned with creating a caring, humane and democratic digital society.

ver.di is in favour of industrial constitution and personnel representation legislation being amended to include a clear legal right for an independent external expert to be brought in immediately in all cases prior to the introduction of new work procedures, work tools and software.

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