

## Thoughts in a Nutshell:

What if we all became unemployed?

### **Covid-19 crisis as a pre-scenario for digitalization and artificial intelligence**

Millions of people are sitting at home these days, with more or less freedom of movement depending on the country. Many have lost their jobs, at least temporarily, entrepreneurs and employees alike. Others may still have wages right now but they know that they are working in a sector that will have to lay off thousands of employees in the coming months. Even the governments' huge aid packages will not change this. Unemployment will increase.

It is exactly the scenario that has been presented to us in connection with Industry 4.0 for years. Digitalization and artificial intelligence will make certain work processes more effective, more efficient and less costly; humans will become jobless and useless in terms of self-perception. Useless, because work structures our everyday life and gives us a social status. Work gives us meaning, is for many of us the WHY of life, has priority. For those who have a WHY, there is no HOW too hard (Nietzsche).

The Covid-19 crisis gives us a foretaste of what it feels like without work, but also provides us with initial solutions as to how we can deal with it. We as people, we as a society and our governments must work together to ensure that we do not become useless, that we redesign our WHY and keep the HOW bearable.

A first major task is to redefine the concept of work. We equate work with making money. Work that does not bring money must constantly emancipate itself and fight for equality. Work that does not pay enough is considered inferior to work that pays well.

Just these days we are witnessing a re-evaluation. It is the workers with low wages who make us all respectfully take off our hats; we applaud the nurses and shop assistants at the cash desks of the supermarkets and the delivery men who still drive to our homes despite closed shops. Even more: we do the shopping for our neighbours, look after our own parents and children more intensively. Apartments for holiday guests are made available to hospital staff and volunteers help wherever there are not enough hands.

Work is no longer just money, it stands for a contribution to society. We discover a new WHY for us and we realize how much our hamster wheel society is thirsting for it.

We must not forget that when the virus is gone.

But it is also the public sector that has to redefine the concept of work. Cities and municipalities can link financial support to work that makes sense for society. Not just finance loss of wages, but pay wages for work that has no value to the market but is important for our living together. To shape the HOW in such a way that we may adapt our new WHY.

If we do not tackle this now, we will lose our chance to prepare for the changes brought about by Industry 4.0.

Think about it!

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