



Automate work?

- Format** 45-minute workshop with Rolf Arni from RASolutions
- Location** Impact Hub Bern
- Output**
- Mapping of ethical issues that occur in the context of automating administrative work
 - Focused discussion of ethical issues with particular relevance to automation in start-ups
 - Evaluation and discussion of ethical risk zones using the Toolbox
- Follow-up**
- Development of a value compass "Our Values"
 - Mapping of positively and negatively influenced stakeholders
 - Anticipation of ethical challenges, strategic consulting, and communication planning

"With ethix, I was able to quickly and easily get an overview of the relevant ethical key points in my company and to explore potential improvements."

Rolf Arni, founder of RASolutions GmbH.

Automation provides an opportunity for startups and companies to save time and handle processes efficiently. But it also leads to job losses by replacing human labor.

Rolf Arni is the founder of several companies and co-founder of the Impact Hub Bern. He mainly uses RASolutions as a source to accommodate projects in the field of automation, which he then realises as a freelancer. However, the aspect of automation only plays a minor role in his overall work. He is not particularly active in looking for new assignments or projects and acts in a more opportunity-driven way when it comes to automation projects.

At RASolutions he has developed automation solutions for various companies and start-ups. These mainly focus on internal processes (bookings, statistics, course registrations and programs, databases).

Mapping of ethical questions

We identified and discussed various ethical aspects related to automation during the workshop. This resulted in a map showing the most important problems and their positive and negative facets.

Jobs

The biggest ethical challenge concerns the effect on employment. Automation leads to job losses, because manual labor can be performed through an automated digital or physical process.

Acceleration

Automation accelerates everyday life processes and can therefore lead to people feeling more stressed and less in control of their lives. It also reinforces the narrative of efficiency maximization.

Access

Automation results in processes that can only be handled digitally. This may exclude people with limited digital skills or those without sufficient access to the Internet. At the same time, it has the potential to facilitate access to services because they can be handled from a distance or despite a physical handicap.

Dehumanization

Some people prefer to interact with other people (at the counter, when making reservations and providing information). Here, automation can lead to less human interaction and the dehumanization of our social environment. At the same time, automation can also free up resources for additional human interaction that were previously obstructed by standardized workflows.

Purpose

People desire meaningful work. Automation can work in both directions here: on the one hand it reduces repetitive and boring work, on the other it may also lead to a feeling of even greater restriction and definition of one's field of work (e.g. assembly line work).

Focused discussion

Once these ethical issues had been identified, we discussed with Rolf Arni how he could respond to them and where he might focus his efforts.

Automation can be vital for start-ups. Usually there is a lack of both time and money to carry out tedious processes yourself or to hire others to do them manually. Rolf Arni regards automation as an aid in **recovering lost time** and increasing a sense of meaning at work: Meaningless and repetitive tasks are outsourced, creating new priorities that can provide meaning.

When a company approaches him, he commences by determining which tasks cause the most frustration and how they could be automated. His goal is to **free up resources** that can be used for more fulfilling and important work. As a result, automation does not act as a driver of job destruction at RASolutions, but as a tool to facilitate creative work.

Nevertheless, Rolf Arni recognizes the **risk of job losses** due to automation. He believes that we are currently in a transition phase (cf. ethics of transition). It is not possible to oppose change and it is necessary to find large-scale solutions. In this situation he does not think that the responsibility lies with small start-ups that are completely occupied with building up their business. Instead, larger companies, the state, and society must find solutions to deal with the general loss of employment.

He considers a solution like the **unconditional basic income** as desirable because it could help allocate time to people to do what really makes sense to them.

Nonetheless, he is critical of automation that merely serves **profit**. He doesn't want automation to be used to cut costs by reducing jobs. Instead, it should be used where automation opens up new perspectives for people—coinciding with a less negative side effect of not creating new jobs but also preventing job losses.

Rolf Arni has already experienced the **dehumanization** aspect in another company. He leases photographic equipment online via "Rentalens" and has automated most processes. The time freed up as a result is dedicated instead to new forms of human exchange (meetings, photo walks). To him, the time saved is an opportunity to make more purposeful use of social contact.

Follow-up

- Development of a value compass “Our Values”: This provides more clarity about one’s own profile and helps to align one’s communication with one’s values. It also reveals to clients and investors whether there is a match.
- Mapping of positively and negatively influenced stakeholders: In order to develop concrete actions, it is necessary to identify the specific stakeholders (industries, people, social fields) that are positively or negatively influenced by automation.
- Anticipation of ethical challenges, strategic consulting, communication planning: In a final step, one can use what has been learned to shape one’s own (product) strategy according to ethical principles and adapt communication accordingly.

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