

LIBERAL PROFESSIONALS AND ELECTRONIC PLATFORMS

“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow. The important thing is not to stop questioning”. Albert Einstein



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Most professions are increasingly incorporating innovation processes resulting from the application of artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, deep learning, the ability of machines to “learn on their own” by reinforcement, scanning, robotics, new models of computing and data storage, images, texts and electronic writings, the possibilities of remote work and its combination with the face-to-face, in what is designated as hybrid work.

The increasing use of these technological possibilities is a huge challenge for the professions, managers, regulators, and organisations representing professionals.

Where are we going?

How can we follow and lead these transformations?

How will we be able to pass on these new technological tools in our day-to-day activities, guiding them to better serve the recipients of our services, our customers, patients, or citizens in general?

How can we, consequently, create and identify a tangible, perceptible and recognized value in our activities as liberal professionals, preserving our autonomy and independence, codes of professional and corporate ethics, which are generators of quality improvement in the providing of services?

These challenges are not easy or simplistic.

They oblige us to reflect and rethink in this changing world induced by technology, the COVID-19 pandemic, the economy, regulation, competition, the freedom of choice that everyone wants, the new forms of work and, above all, motivate stems from training and learning in the organizations we lead or where we are inserted, in order to evaluate the traditional processes that can be improved or refined with this type of technology.

What do you want to get at?

What can we conclude?

Electronic platforms are being used for different purposes, in different areas: in people transportation or distribution, Uber, Glovo, etc., in e-commerce, e.g. Farfetch, Amazon, also in financial services, real estate investment, recognition of qualifications and the entertainment industry via streaming such as Netflix, HBO, among others.

Nowadays, also in the provision of qualified services by liberal professionals, there is a growing and disruptive change of paradigm.

Today we have identified within and outside the EU platforms for the provision of the most diverse qualified, legal, translation, communication, consulting in various areas, health care and continuing care, home monitoring, coaching, teaching and research, continuing training, recognition of qualifications, recruitment of among many others.

The so-called electronic intermediation platforms have helped to complement and even replace more traditional forms of dissemination of services via advertising, social networks, advertisements in newspapers, directly connecting providers and consumers, bringing supply and demand closer, in wide geographical spaces, sometimes at local, regional, and even global level.

These interfaces are naturally diverse and increasingly specific and oriented to different types of recipients, to more segmented audiences, constituting a growing challenge in the model of service delivery by liberal professionals, self-employed and freelancers.

And why is that?

Usually a few years ago, it was the client who actively had the initiative to seek the service provider. And sometimes it was not an easy task to identify the appropriate professional, due to information asymmetry, absence of rankings, standards of qualifications and training, identification of ethical and deontological histories, the prices practiced. The classic word-of-mouth, a traditional method of enormous power, is sometimes very slow and fragmented by relational circles in the face of the agility and speed that the parties involved require.

We already knew in some professions the digital nomadism, in which for some activities one works remotely from anywhere in the world to another.

Physical nomadism, with professionals working in diverse geographical locations in more face-to-face activities. Recently, in the health sector, for example, there is also another type of nomadism - that of patients or customers - that referred by platforms and large providers and insurers go in search of surgical procedures, aesthetic sing-in, continuing or palliative care, to locations where they are more accessible, without waiting lists and supposedly with better quality at the lowest price. It is a kind of health tourism, well-being and reform mediated by electronic platforms (e-services).

Let's look at an example in dental medicine and oral hygiene.

If in the traditional clinical aspect in the office environment the approach is face-to-face, what is fact is that the remote work of the teams creates additional value in the provision of video teleconsultations, in the diagnosis, in the follow-up consultation, in the electronic prescription of medicines, in the scheduling of consultations, in the promotion of literacy.

This range of distance services is referenced as an asset by customers and consumers in general.

Are we ready and able to deal with these kinds of complications?

The generalisation of e-services means that many people will have to acquire new capabilities; others will have to change the way they work; others until you change jobs.

Are industry and profession regulators, policy makers properly monitoring and leading these processes in active dialogue?

And do health system insurers and funders incorporate the need to adequately fund the provision of distance services around health and, eventually, including the sharing of essential electronic, hard and software requirements, and good practices in data protection, as well as assessing cybersecurity risks, avoiding vulnerabilities and cyberattacks?

Like it or not, the change that the organization of work is going through around the world, affecting professionals and their organizations, drive the promotion of a culture of adaptation, flexibility, leadership guidance for results and not only for different stages of processes, as well as for the proper involvement of teams in solving problems.

Analyzing the past, focusing on the present and foreseeing future trends, we all have a responsibility to extract the best from these trends by innovating, but always questioning the applicable and available technologies, not allowing them to overlap with the exercise of professions with dignity and focused on People.

And above all by ensuring that Trust, a key concept for the recipients of the services of liberal professionals, freelancers and self-employed workers, is not affected. ■