

Frog

We are all a bunch of frogs, heated slowly in a pan. The temperature gradually keeps increasing. We do not notice it. Until the water starts boiling. We then become cooked frogs. The technological development has long embraced us like a warm bath. It is inevitable that the water eventually comes to the boil. Also in the area of corporate governance.

Meanwhile, we have come so far that several businesses have appointed a robot as member of the board (e.g. the VITAL robot at the business Deep Knowledge Ventures in Hong Kong). Will everything then get better? No more incompetence, no more power games, no more of time and money? If only that were true. Let's first put a few misunderstandings under the microscope.

Robots are not super beings with a metal head and arms that resemble human beings. Robots are mechanical or virtual structures that operate on the basis of algorithms. These structures only resemble human beings if we place them in a latex body and have them look like a beautiful woman but that does not make them a beautiful woman. Robots are all around us. They range from diagnostic artificial intelligence, which in many areas has already become much more accurate than the most skillful radiologists, to self-driving cars, battle drones, household and care robots and, indeed, sex robots. Non-virtual robots are, for instance, malware that infects all unsecured computers and laptops all over the world entirely independently and with optimal efficiency, simply because that is what the algorithm is all about.

Experts expect that the moment that these 'robots' become more skillful, smarter, faster and more effective than human beings is reached somewhere between 2030 and 2050. That moment (also referred to as Singularity or 'super-intelligence') has significant meaning. These self-learning, intelligent systems are then related to us in the same manner as we are related to chimpanzees. We can think about the question whether the chimpanzee still has a *raison d'être* and not the other way around.

The A.I. philosopher Nick Bostrom (Oxford University) advocates slowing down the further development of self-learning intelligent systems slightly through worldwide regulation. This enables us to better think about potential brakes and stop codes in this development.

Appointing VITAL as a director is, apart from a perfect commercial stunt, mostly a thoughtless and even misleading application of A.I. in boardrooms. After all, we have used automated systems to reach our decisions, also those in the boardroom, in a more effective and more rationally based manner for a long time and to an increasing degree. You do not need an artificial man who resembles

a fellow director for that who, sitting at the table with you, provides you with the information that you can also read on your iPad. Self-learning intelligent systems will, indeed, be able to perform financial controls and assessments very fast and more effectively than the present in-house accountant. However, these systems then provide the information that the 'financially literate' person on the board or the supervisory board uses to do his work better. The same applies to the radiologist who uses a self-learning, intelligent program to optimize the level of his diagnostics. His work and his time allocation change due to these robots and hence also his position. This second 'industrial revolution' does, in this sense, resemble the first. After the first industrial revolution weavers had disappeared. Machines did this work. However, the women who used to sit behind a loom in England in the eighteenth century are now the women who design and steer the technologically sophisticated equipment that produce the textiles. Hence, if we do things well then our place is not taken over by a robot. We actually start performing better thanks to self-learning, intelligent systems. We do, however, need to think about its development and structure, the governance. Otherwise we will be cooked like a frog. Fortunately, we do not notice it.



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