

Liking or disliking—can there be a world without judgment?

A utopia by Prof. Dr. Kathrin Köster and Helga Pattart-Drexler



Hanna's mother is about to pick up her daughter from kindergarten after naptime. Before she even gets to hug the 4-year-old girl, the daily evaluation of her child's performance is delivered to her via the "We rate your kid" app. Unfortunately, Hanna was not a good

eater today, nor did she fall asleep at nap time. And because she has been feeling a bit out of sorts recently, she has not been her usual self at kindergarten, causing her peers to rate her less favorably. This is bad news for Hanna's parents. They will now have to pay more for kindergarten because the fees are directly linked to their daughter's performance.

Dystopia or reality?

It is a fact that, in this day and age, we rate virtually everything. After visiting the restrooms at airports, we provide information about the sanitary standards and the toilet-paper situation. When we order a customized burger at Mc Donald's, we rate the quality of employee service and the size of cucumber slices. And when it comes to online shopping, most of us would not even think of placing orders with Amazon or Zalando without carefully reading the reviews first, especially the negative ones!

This is how constant ratings, which are binary more often than not, have crept into our everyday lives and have shaped our perceptions of what is "normal". Is anyone still wondering about the side effects of this way of thinking and behaving? Is it beneficial to society? And what alternatives are there?

A world that is not prone to oversimplification through classification—a utopia

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A world without a “pass or fail” dichotomy. How would it be if we made that the “system”? If we realized how intent our minds are on understanding things as ‘black or white,’ ‘yes or no,’ ‘good or bad’? If we stopped limiting ourselves as a result of relying on such categorizations, which are as common in today’s society as the ‘Amen’ at the end of a prayer?



We need a new mindset

We all agree that it is important for individuals to be open-minded, flexible and appreciative of others. But when it comes to bringing these virtues to life, things start getting tricky. Do we really always appreciate others for all the things they are? Are we really always open-minded and positive about things and people we perceive to be “different”. Or are we simply affected by societal influences to such extremes that we cannot help but act the way we do?

A binary way of thinking: like or dislike

Society is permeated with categories, prejudices and beliefs. Remediating the situation by leaving limited and limiting patterns behind is what our utopia is all about.

At school, at university and at the workplace, we are constantly confronted with ratings. Rating has almost become part of our DNA. There are grades, ranging from A through F,



to indicate how well students are doing, selection procedures, and performance targets that serve as a yardstick for evaluating employees. The methodology underlying these rating systems focuses on determining weaknesses, which completely leaves out something pretty important: Our talents and everything we have a passionate interest in. How could

this happen?

All of these learning and rating systems revolve around the ideas of great thinkers, such as [René Descartes](#), [Francis Bacon](#) or [Isaac Newton](#), which are characterized by an emphasis on identifying and conveying objective facts. The goal is to break things down

into their component parts in order to gain a better understanding of the world around us. The process is not about responding to individual skills and needs that are difficult to grasp—and thus to classify. As a result of the division between **“the personal” and “the factual”**, learning takes place in a setting that is reminiscent of industrial production sites. This approach sees people as human resources and tries to train them for one specific task. Teachers are “competent analysis experts” who instill in their students the material defined by lesson plans, examination rules and other guidelines. This machine-like specialist atmosphere is accompanied by the pressure of exams and performance expectations—in other words, evaluations.

Such learning systems put out standardized individuals eager to make the most of what they have learned. In the spirit of an industrial system, learning focuses on the development of **‘human doings’** or human resources that apply knowledge in a targeted manner. We fail to see the individual as a **‘human source’**, i.e. an endless fountain of creativity and innovation.

The world is [VUCA](#), and so is learning

We are in the midst of a gigantic transition that has been called many things, including [‘the age of awareness’](#) or [‘the conceptual era’](#). Everybody knows the symptoms of this transition: The world is VUCA. Things that are valid today are most likely no longer valid tomorrow. There is one environmental crisis and political crisis after another. The only constant is constant and highly dynamic change. This new era demands a new type of learning that goes beyond the rigid boundaries of traditional education. Fostering interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity and general education along the lines of what is known as *studium generale* is not enough when it comes to opening up education and making it more flexible. It takes more than that!

→ We need to move from knowledge-based education to a wisdom-forming approach.

At the center of this approach is the individual as a whole. Considered a unity of body mind and soul, people are to develop in their entire complexity.

The goal is to enable individuals—as *‘human sources’*—to recognize and use all their available potential. People need to focus not only on what is known, which comes in the form of knowledge, but also on what is not known and may initially seem inconceivable. This requires being truly open in one's thoughts and actions.

The utopia is both the method and the solution

Hence, new approaches conducive to wisdom forming are needed. Learning requires plenty of space, **a white box** where boundaries are not defined and evaluations do not exist. As is illustrated by the fundamental values of all the world's philosophies, recognizing the needs of all human beings and the environment forms the framework of this learning space. A learning space that allows for everything we need in order to foster our development. A learning space that is not geared solely towards conveying knowledge. In creating such an environment, we approach the [constructivist view](#), which does not see learning as a process of absorbing, memorizing and internalizing content but instead puts the strengths, talents and qualities of people center stage and builds on individual experiences.



Utopia becomes reality – an experiment

So are we going to wait for education systems to be changed at some point in the future, or do we get active and start changing things at the individual level? What makes learning so powerful is that it is an individual process. Each and every one of us can always learn. It even counts to just decide to do it. Will we decide to stop categorizing people and things all the time? Will we ignore existing, generally accepted and socially endorsed judgments that shape our concept of normality? Will we acknowledge and affirm what each one of us brings with him or her? Will we shape an inspiring togetherness? If we do, utopia will become reality.



Let there be room for curiosity. Everyone can start small and use new approaches; individuals can try out innovative solutions and—through trial and error—just see what happens. What happens if you start an experiment and stop categorizing things, stop “liking” or

“disliking”, stop evaluating and labeling people and things today? Reflect on your new experiences. Greet with open arms what is coming your way. That's how easy innovation is. This open process leads to self-awareness. It causes people to trust more, to dare to do more and to discover new standpoints every day...