

DEBAT

Jeffrey FRIEDEN

It was really interesting stuff, and one of the themes of the Conference so far has been that the technological changes of the last decades have tended to concentrate income rather than expand opportunities. Starting with Mathilde, you gave a very optimistic view of the gig economy, but a less optimistic view is that it has allowed employers to break cartels, including labour unions, and capture most of the technological rents associated with these new technologies. The idea is that organised labour has been replaced with monopolistic employers and employees who cannot organise themselves.

That could clearly be addressed by public policy, but it has not been, and I am a cynic, and in my view, whenever you have concentrated corporate interests on one side and consumers and labour on the other, the corporate interests always win. The point that was made about IoT and recycling raises similar questions, because it could be used to encourage or make recycling easier, but it could also simply be used to improve inventory control by firms, which is not a bad thing, but also to evade regulation. Firms now engage in transfer pricing; they could use this to engage in actual transfer to evade regulation, taxation and things like that.

My question, which is also relevant to the regulator, is the following. How can we think of either inherent characteristics of the technologies or public policies that could make sure these technological innovations benefit society more broadly rather than just providing more profits, more rents, to the corporations that are the principal users of the technologies?

Mathilde PAK

I am very glad you asked that question. I will still be optimistic. I did not give specific examples, and it is certainly complicated for self-employed contractors to group together in a union and talk to the platform. However, we have digital problems, but we also have digital solutions. Amazon Mechanical Turk Worker developed an online forum where they will gather their thoughts about how to improve their working conditions or how they see their jobs, voting on which ideas are worth spreading, and at some point they will send something to Jeff Bezos. It is one solution, but there is also some digital potential in that case. I remain optimistic.

Tatsuo MASUDA

I have a question for Mathilde. The presentations were wonderful and very awakening. One thing that comes to my mind is the technological divide. We used to call it the digital divide, but all these digital devices have become so deeply rooted in technology. Looking at sub-Saharan Africa for example, quite a lot of people do not have air conditioning at home and have no access to anything digital, so these people could be very easily left behind by digital advancements in the 21st century. Another thing is that people who cannot understand these technologies are also left behind, so there could be a risk of a widening gap, with those who are left behind by or have no access to technology.

How do you reconcile this risk of a divide coming from all these developments?

Natasha FRANCK

It also goes back to the previous question. We often ask how the current construct will survive with technology. That is the premise. How will policy regulate technology? I think the question almost has to be changed to ask how the system framework will be changed in the light of technology, because big data will reinvent capitalism. We have new technologies like block chain that are destabilising the current constructs of banking and finance, along with the peer-to-peer market. Therefore, it will be more of a shift in terms of technology impacting policy and creating that change in tandem, rather than just the policy framework surviving with technology.

Regarding the question on where this leaves people behind, that is true and it is a scary thing. It is where a lot of policy work needs to collaborate to figure out how we can make technology more open and accessible. Everyone had

this one vision in the 1940s of what the youth would be in the future, and they knew what their job would be, but today a lot of people of younger generations in different parts of the world do not necessarily feel they have access to positions in block chain or in IoT, and that is definitely an education reframing and a skill set that might go along with some work in the gig economy, but policy work does need to step in to make this an open ecosystem and bring more people into this conversation.

James STUEWE

Following up on that question, if we are talking about changing the way we approach policy, what suggestion might you have for governments around the world to take the first step in doing that? Governments, as we know, are risk-averse, and we must move slowly and carefully, protect our data and have valid regulations. How would governments then take the first step or interact with you to reframe policy going forward?

Tarek OUERTANI

It is the same thing for governments that it has been for the bigger corporations, who try to connect with young entrepreneurs, tech enthusiasts and start-ups by creating accelerator programmes and initiatives where they can work together, just to get the communication right and to start the conversation. This is the most crucial part, to start talking together and finding the mutual benefits that you can get.

Hermine DURAND

Government needs to invest in this digital transformation, and make sure they have all the right resources, human and financial. Training is also very important, because if you just go digital and no one knows how to use the tools, it will not be very efficient in the end. Training will be a very important part of what we are trying to do at the Nuclear Safety Authority.

My other thought about what you said is that maybe the government should listen a little more to what the public expects, and maybe the way we open the data should correlate with what people need and what their questions are. We are trying to hold some public meetings and debates around the nuclear question, but in the end it is easier when you are answering the public's questions rather than just giving a big speech about how cool you are and what your projects are. Therefore, focusing on what the public expects is an important part of the question.

Natasha FRANCK

It is often just technology versus government, and the government needs technology more than anybody. The best man for the job is the one with the best resources and the most efficiency to get it done, and if the government does not adapt to having resources to do those things, they will not be the best institution for the job, which is part of what will reshape the situation. Therefore, government needs to think of technology as an asset instead of this "other".

Sebastiaan DEBROUWERE

The discussion around government versus technology is interesting, and regarding governance from a global point of view, governments are not effectively governing how technology spreads, or regulating it to protect citizens. A lot of the actors are global, so there is a huge asymmetry there, in terms of data leaks, abuse of information, etc. How do we address that from the viewpoint that governments can still protect their citizens as well? They have a responsibility beyond the technological, to protect their citizens, and currently they do not manage.

Marco JANMAAT

There is no one right answer, but I think both sides should have a sense of urgency. Looking at it from a tech perspective, we see business models popping up and scaling up globally within years, and impacting our lives very quickly, but now they are also running into trouble because they did not talk to the governments and kept it close. They did not give a lot of insights, and now regulators step in and make hard rules. Looking at the shared economy, we had Airbnb spreading across the globe quite quickly, and now regulators are stepping to regulate it in the city,

which has a really negative impact on the technology company, because suddenly they are not allowed to do what they wanted to do.

There should be a sense of urgency for the technology company to start the conversation. Sometimes technology companies like us feel that we are experts on the technology, and because we are experts we think that others cannot follow, but it is important that the technology companies try to explain what they are doing and talk to the governments at an early stage about how this could work out, because that in the end will also benefit them.

Patrick NICOLET

This question already came up several times, and I will give you one example of where we really have to work together, the cybersecurity space, which is a real issue for the corporate world. We are caught in a kind of asymmetric warfare, because one of the most advanced and persistent threats comes from government, and corporations are used either as targets or channels to get to the target. Some of you might be aware that Brad Smith, general counsel of Microsoft, has launched an initiative called the Tech Accord, with the objective of creating a kind of Geneva Convention around cybersecurity. This is the Wild West, currently. It costs a fortune to the economy. It creates mistrust in technology, rightly so, because things happen that should not. We have joined the Tech Accord initiative and will support it as a place where the technology industry, with other corporations that are highly digital, along with government, have to come together and set up a certain number of rules.

We heard about the climate, and cybersecurity in particular is an area where we have to act together and develop policy at global level, because we will not be able to manage it otherwise, and it is completely undermining the development you have seen. There are other domains where developing a consensus is less obvious. For example, we are behind in terms of a debate on ethics, particularly when it comes to artificial intelligence. When you develop an algorithm, an engine that will crunch a lot of data, you do it with bias. We all have personal and cultural biases, so the way you address the problem with technology in different parts of the world will not be the same. How do you take this into account, notably from a government perspective, while you develop your technology? It is very difficult to engage in this conversation right now, probably because it is somewhat abstract, while we are very active on cybersecurity because people feel it on a day-to-day basis.

Therefore, it is something that a forum like the World Policy Conference should help to develop in terms of the agenda and the topics. The obvious one is cybersecurity, and there are other ones about which we do not yet understand about how critical they are while the developments are taking place.

Thank you very much. I hope we showed you the different perspectives. We have a large organisation, and the vast majority are young people. They are quite determined, move extremely fast and are very focused. They are focused on problem-solving, so what you have just heard will happen, like it or not, because they know they have to face it.