

013 IT FORUM

**Anticipate and Manage Change
in Information Technology**

UNI Europa
In cooperation with
UNI Professional and Managerial Staff

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Report of the Conference

Karin Hirschfeld
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info@id-text.de

OPENING

José Girones, FES-UGT, Spain

“For centuries Barcelona has been a city which has welcomed its guests with open arms. Our guests come from almost every part of the world; and we bid them all welcome.”

Carlos Reigt, Comfia, Spain

“We must try to obtain a grasp of reality and to understand what the future holds in store for us. Only in this way can we make use of new opportunities.”

Bernadette Ségol, Regional Secretary, UNI Europa

“The route is mapped out from the IT sector into many sectors – finance, trade and others. IT is playing a key role in the world of work.”

Karen Retwig, HK-Service, Denmark; President, UNI IBITS

“Where work becomes international, unions must operate across frontiers.”

Peter Skyte, Amicus, Great Britain; President, UNI-IT

“We must place globalization at the service of humankind.”

John Vines, APESMA, Australia, President of UNI P&M

“We need flexible forms of approach in order to defend the workers’ interests.”

Gerhard Rohde, Head of Department, UNI IBITS

“If we are to reach IT experts and make unions attractive to them, we must discard old concepts.”

INTRODUCTION

The IT sector is a vanguard element and a pace-setter for wide areas of the economy.

Developments in the information and communications fields have led to far-reaching changes throughout the different sectors. These changes have included the appearance of new types of product on offer, changes in work processes and new forms of division of labour between companies and countries.

These changes affect particularly employees in the IT industry itself. The sector is highly internationalised. Companies are transferring IT-supported services in increasing numbers to distant places. Both the companies concerned and their employees are faced, not only with high levels of competitive pressure, but also changes which are often rapid and largely unpredictable. For the employees this is reflected not only in insecurity and demands for flexibility but also in the need to be continually updating their own qualifications. Radical change has become part of day-to-day existence. The task of the unions is both to keep pace with changes and actively to shape them. In this context IT experts, like all highly qualified knowledge workers, are a clientele which calls for new approaches on the part of the unions.

At the 13th IT Forum of UNI Europa in Barcelona 130 participants discussed the question of where the IT industry stood and what new demands its employees were being subjected to.

The central theme was that of the answers which trade unions must find to respond adequately to the interests of their members (and potential members). The fact that many of these problems could still be resolved only in an international dimension was also reflected in the spectrum of participants and presenters; on the platform and in the hall there were union

representatives not only from Europe but also from Africa, Asia, Australia and America. The Forum was organised in cooperation with UNI Professional and Managerial Staff and thus provided an opportunity to reflect together on a series of themes ranging far beyond the IT sector itself.

TRENDS IN THE IT SECTOR

The first presentations described the background conditions in which IT experts work. The principal trends consist of an increasing convergence between the IT sector and other sectors and the internationalisation of business activities. On the one hand, the range of services offered by IT companies has broadened considerably; IT workers are increasingly penetrating into other sectors, such as consultancy, financial services or the media. On the other hand, IT firms are increasingly becoming subject to the possibilities and dictates of global production and marketing. This is accompanied by increasing change in distribution of work within firms and at international level. These changes give rise to new demands on the skills of IT experts and on the structural shaping of unions.

Convergence of branches?

The British journalist **Andrew Bibby** described the symptoms of a “new convergence” between the IT sector and consultancy and business services (IT-supported, business-process-related services). One of the pace-setters in this trend was IBM. A senior IBM official had said: “I am a strategy consultant, and I know nothing about hardware and software”. In recent years the company had moved into the consulting business and in the process had acquired well-known firms such as PriceWaterhouseCoopers. At the same time it had disposed of hardware-related sectors. For example, by offering “Business Performance Transformation Services” IBM was seeking radically to reconfigure and to optimize the business processes of

its customers. Similar developments could be observed in other IT companies. Conversely, consultancy firms were penetrating the IT field. In addition to acquisitions and participations many IT and consultancy firms were forming strategic alliances.

Where an employer was no longer selling technology only but comprehensive services, IT employees came under pressure to adapt their skills. It had been predicted that during the next few years there would be a change in the roles of many IT experts involving more direct contacts with the business processes of the customers and a detailed knowledge of their respective fields of activity. The demand was for “less techie, more business orientation”.

Notwithstanding the empirical evidence pointing to the convergence of the IT industry with process-orientated services, the extent of this trend was difficult to evaluate. Numbers of IT companies considered that their core business was still clearly in the technology area. This was the view of Hewlett Packard; it stated that, although services definitely played an important role, “we are technologists at heart”. Andrew Bibby’s conclusion was thus a cautious one: “Convergence between IT firms and suppliers of business services is happening – but the extent of that convergence is debatable”.

Gunnar Zetterström, of the Swedish financial services union FSU-S, also demonstrated that the lines of demarcation between IT and other sectors had become fluid. Quoting the examples of several Swedish banks, he described the **transformation of business processes in the financial sector** being introduced through the outsourcing of services to IT companies. There were no uniform strategies among the banks for the outsourcing of services to IT suppliers. He said: “A number of banks are looking for more services from IT firms than just hardware and software. But most of them are not interested.” One bank, which was pursuing

organic growth in the traditional fashion, had centralized all its IT processes: nobody there thought of outsourcing. In contrast, another bank was conducting an intensive search for cost savings and was developing benchmarks for practically every area of services. In line with that approach, individual services – ranging from printing and IT services to the help desk – were being bought in. In other banks cross-cutting services such as HR were being contracted out to external suppliers. From time to time outsourcing gave rise to problems of competence for the unions, specifically when services were outsourced to an IT service provider in which a different union had representation and the employees were also transferred.

Shoji Morishima, of the Japanese NTT union, described the **market changes currently taking place from the standpoint of the telecommunications supplier**. The company was increasingly penetrating adjacent areas in order to secure new sources of revenue. In the field of mobile communications, too, NTT was seeking new types of services to offer on account of severe price competition and falling revenue per user. Thus, for example, in future purchases and financial transactions could be effected with a mobile phone, and a mobile phone could be used as an air or train ticket. The NTT wished to help its members to master change, primarily by the development of clearer career paths and the acquisition of new skills. Proactive skills development should be fostered by the company itself.

The presentation by **Johannes Studinger** (UNI – Media, Entertainment and Arts) concerned the **convergence between IT suppliers and media companies**. Digitalization had a bearing on a number of changes in working practices in the media as well. The relationships between the media and IT industries had become closer and more diverse. In view of the increase in the numbers of IT-supported platforms, suppliers of services and content were endeavouring to make use of different consumption vehicles such as films, video games and the Internet.

Manufacturers were increasingly investing in content production and in so doing were also gaining influence over the creation of content. The work and task areas of the employees were changing accordingly. The speaker said: “The unions must also diversify their services in order to keep up with the movements of their members ... IT and media unions are faced with a number of common challenges and must work even more closely together.” One important area was that of support of freelancers, who hitherto have had to draw on their own resources to obtain expensive further training.

The internationalisation of competition

The EXPORT IT research project being conducted by ISF Munich on the internationalisation of **IT software and services** was the subject of the presentation by **Tobias Kämpf**. IT services and highly qualified knowledge work were increasingly becoming “uniform goods” subject to far-reaching standardisation processes and increasingly fierce (cost) competition. In parallel to that trend, a “global labour market” was developing in which job profiles and qualifications were becoming increasingly homogeneous. Internationalisation was clearly not the same as in conventional exports; but it was not a simple one-way flow of goods. Many services were provided in close interaction with distant partners and were IT-supported.

Contrary to what the often one-sided discussions on offshoring and job outsourcing suggested, internationalisation was accompanied by substantial opportunities – and also risks. On the one hand, the potential sphere of activity of companies broadened with expanded markets for sales and the possibility of reducing costs by global sourcing. In addition, international cooperation offered opportunities for innovation through knowledge transfers. On the other hand, international competition placed companies under considerable pressure. Opportunities for concentrating on national niches were diminishing in number: as the speaker said:

“internationalisation is no longer one option among many; it has become a strategic must”. The outsourcing of services could lead to erosion of a company’s intrinsic capabilities; and above all, purely cost-orientated strategies could give rise to social conflicts within companies. There were several scenarios for internationalisation, depending on the starting-point of the company concerned, each one comprising specific opportunities and risks (details under www.export-it.de); there was no simple dichotomy between winners and losers.

The unions themselves could not escape the pressures towards internationalisation. The increasing mobility of companies, shifts in the balance of power and pressures on labour costs all posed new challenges for them. At the same time, the opportunity was there to reach new target groups and extend their radius of action. But in order to make use of that potential the unions needed to internationalise and modernise their structures.

Günther Jüngling, workers’ representative and a member of the Ver.di service workers’ union in IBM, described what **internationalisation within a large-scale company** was like in practice. At a meeting of analysts held in Wall Street in May 2005 IBM had presented its “New Operating Model”. The model defined “Global Integrated Functions” applicable world-wide which determined the currently most favourable location for each activity. A new benchmark number was used to determine the relationship between revenue and personnel costs and served to measure the “efficiency of investment in the workforce” – an important criterion for decisions on jobs at a particular location. The use of uniform skills, tools and processes throughout the company should permit cross-frontier comparability and integration. As the speaker explained, “this provides the basis for the splitting-up of activities as desired and the transfer of elements back and forth in line with needs.” National managements were increasingly losing their powers; only client-facing services (sales and contact with clients)

remained at country level. At the same time over 10,000 jobs were abolished, most of them in Europe. In these circumstances it had become “practically impossible” for the workers’ representatives to obtain any firm commitments concerning jobs.

Interview with Günther Jüngling and Wolfgang Zeiher, workers’ representatives (Ver.di) in IBM Germany

What has changed in IBM during the last few years?

Previously there was a complete company with all necessary infrastructure and staff in each country. Centralisation has been increasing for some time now. Functions are offered only where they are cheapest world-wide. The different locations stand together in competition. Only the people in personal business contact with the clientele are left at country level.

Has this led to serious displacements?

In Eastern Europe “Centres of Excellence” with global competence have been set up. Our EDP centre is in Hungary. In India thousands of new employees have been taken on in a few years. In contrast, in the older European countries there are downward pressures on wage costs, working hours and social benefits. Many employees have received agreed termination notices. In addition, the high proportion of fixed personnel costs in Europe is to be reduced.

How does this take place in practice?

By reducing the numbers of jobs in companies IBM is attempting to transform fixed costs into variable costs. For example: until now the IBM education department provided employee trainers to training institutes; now they only call in services currently needed. Secretaries are

not replaced when they leave; instead they are hired on a temporary and flexible basis. Similar conditions exist in other sectors.

What are the basic principles followed by the unions to handle the changes?

The very first step is to analyse the situation and inform the employees so as to ensure clarity.

We cannot influence the basic decisions; so we try to shape the consequences in a socially acceptable manner. In future when such major issues come up we want to get involved earlier – as soon as the planning begins. In that way we can take a timely part in shaping change and look for job alternatives; for the company is trying to settle everything on its own, and that gives rise to huge inequalities.

EMPLOYMENT IN THE IT SECTOR: SUPPLY AND DEMAND

A number of presentations were concerned with employment trends in the IT sector.

Statisticians and forecasters have had considerable difficulty in presenting an accurate picture of the rapid development and modification of job profiles and labour markets. In addition, they have been concerned with European initiatives to coordinate and foster the development of IT skills (or skills) in order to improve the competitiveness of individuals and companies.

Désirée van Weisum, of the OECD, presented a survey of **employment prospects for IT professionals**. In the investigation of IT-related employment a distinction had been drawn between “IT specialists” and “IT users”. In most parts of Europe the smaller group of IT professionals made up between 2 and 4 per cent of total employment. In most countries their

numbers had been growing since the mid-1990s. The numbers of IT users (about 15 – 30 per cent of all economically active persons) had also risen.

As regards the ratio of employed to unemployed IT specialists, during the years 1998-2004 the situation had relatively worsened. However, significant differences existed according to individual skills. Demand for basic skills was tailing off; simple tasks were generally in greater danger of automation and offshoring. In contrast, complex tasks, requiring other skills as well as IT skills, were extremely difficult to automate; moreover, offshoring them was possible only to a limited extent. As the speaker said, “IT skills alone are no longer enough. Specialists need business, management and marketing skills.”

In most cases educational systems were providing basic IT user skills in schools. However, “Higher education imparting skills to IT specialists is not yet responding flexibly enough to rapid changes in skills needs and technology.” However, available skills were increasingly becoming the central factor in locational decisions.

The “offshorability” of activities depended on a range of factors. These included the intensive use of IT technologies, codifiability of work content and a relative absence of need for face-to-face contacts. Within the European Union (of 15) the proportion of easily offshorable activities had risen since 1995.

André Richier of the European Commission described the work of the **e-Skills Forum**. The background conditions for the European IT industry and opportunities for employment were to be improved by the development of e-skills. The Forum was seeking to promote dialogue between different stakeholders such as politicians and industrialists, training institutions and

trade unions and thus to arrive at coordinated measures. The concrete activities being undertaken included the improvement of the *forecasting of supply of and demand for e-skills*; many predictions made so far had proved erroneous. Realistic scenarios resting on a solid database were needed. An *ICT Skills Meta-Framework* should comprise a uniform and understandable reference system for the classification of skills profiles (a skills framework was concerned with individual occupational roles and the skills required to perform them). In addition, the e-Skills Forum was endeavouring to define *quality standards for training diplomas* with the aim of enhancing market transparency and comparability and of guaranteeing the quality of commercial offers. In addition, a European *ICT skills and career portal* was in the course of development; it provided links to information in various organisations and countries and offered tools for career and skills development. The Forum had also set itself the aim of making progress towards “*e-learning and e-skills for all*” (information available at <http://communities.trainingvillage.gr/esf>).

Matthew Dixon of CEPIS (the apex organisation of the European informatics societies) described one of the projects supporting the work of the e-Skills Forum, namely the “**e-Skills Foresight Scenarios for Europe**” project. It was seeking to produce a quantitative model and realistic scenarios for trends in the supply of and demand for e-skills. Assessments were needed for 2010 (medium term) and 2015 (long term); assessments for longer periods were feasible to a limited extent only. A number of factors were currently being investigated to determine their possible influence on supply of and demand for e-skills (for both specialist and user skills). Social, technological, economic, environmental, political and value-related influences were taken into account, as was the available alternative of offshoring. A limited number of central factors had to be selected from an extremely comprehensive list of

“drivers”. On the union side representatives of UNI were also working with CEPIS on the subject.

Terry Hook, of e-Skills UK, described the British **Skills Framework for the Information Age** (SFIA), which was being developed by representatives of the political, training and industrial spheres working in cooperation. The skills framework standardized the descriptions of IT skills and brought them to a manageable level (website: www.sfia.org.uk). According to the speaker, this would meet a need for greater clarity and less complexity. A uniform language should be of help to both organisations and individuals; the latter would be able to conduct a systematic self-assessment on the basis of comparable profiles, while organisations would be better able to evaluate their skills basis: As the speaker put it: “Companies know how many employees they have, but they often have difficulty in assessing their most important assets, namely human resources.” Differences between standardized skills profiles and the skills available to them would permit the framing of training or development plans for both individuals and companies. This initiative was also contributing to the work of the European e-Skills Forum.

While the projects described had concentrated mainly on professional IT skills, **Hugo Lüders**, of theCompTia professional association, described an initiative for the improvement of broad-based user skills, the **European Alliance on Skills for Employability**, a project launched by the e-Skills Certification Consortium (e-SCC) together with a number of partners. Its aim was to provide IT qualifications for broad groups of the population. As he pointed out, computer illiteracy was extremely costly. With public-private partnership and an investment volume of € 60 million it was seeking to provide unemployed, older and disabled persons with basic IT-related skills.

In the **discussion** there was general agreement that in future specialist IT workers would need a broad range of skills, not all purely technological in character. The skills mentioned included project management, communication skills, foreign languages and specialized knowledge of the specific field of activity of the client. Skills development played an important role in international competition, as outsourcing processes often took place against a background of missing skills at the location concerned. Some big companies – specifically, in India – with long-term personnel policies were investing large sums in the qualification of their employees. In contrast, it was often to be observed that companies preferred to hire skills from outside rather than develop their own staffs. Companies – particularly small and medium-sized ones – often gave their employees insufficient access to training. Where companies did promote skills development, the range offered was often limited. As one speaker put it, “firms are seeking to gain competitive advantage and only invest in measures specific to themselves”. The unions envisaged their tasks, firstly, to induce companies to adopt sustainable skills strategies, and secondly, to improve market transparency for their members, for instance, by providing bundles of information on available training facilities.

Appropriate forecasting played an important role in assessing future trends in demand. An Australian union representative said: “We use predictions of this kind in our strategy development. They are important for our understanding of the possible future”. At the same time, the participants urged some caution in the use of forecasts, as they were often inaccurate. Actual developments often depended on unpredictable events. For IT experts it was important to maintain the greatest possible flexibility and versatility.

LIVING WITH OFFSHORE OUTSOURCING

The subject of offshoring – the transfer of activities to distant countries – occupied an important place in the discussion on the future of the IT industry. Offshoring had affected a whole series of IT-supported activities, ranging from medical transcription and financial bookkeeping to software development. From the standpoint of the employees it was initially not a central problem whether tasks were transferred to different places within a multinational company or whether outsourcing to external suppliers is involved. However, some presentations on the subject demonstrated that the phenomenon was in no way “one-way traffic” with employees in the Western industrialized countries automatically at the losing end. However, there was consensus that the unions should conduct themselves proactively and must consequently reinforce their action at international level in order to meet the challenges of the international distribution of labour.

In a presentation on “**Myths and Reality in Offshore Outsourcing**” **Jakob Kirkegaard**, an academic at the Institute for International Economics (USA), concentrated on current trends in the United States. Since 1999, approximately one-third of all basic IT-related jobs had disappeared (these included, for example, call-centre activities, desktop-publishing and computer operators). However, that disappearance of jobs was due, not primarily to offshore outsourcing, but principally to the automation of routine jobs; as the speaker put it, “the computer is the cheapest employee of all”. Many activities, too (such as the purchase on-line of air travel tickets), could be transferred, with technical support, to the client.

During the same period the numbers of highly qualified IT jobs had risen considerably. Following the Internet crash unemployment among, say, programmers initially rose sharply, but had fallen back rapidly since. Meanwhile in a number of countries efforts to develop

training systems or lifelong learning had slackened off. Consequently additional skills shortages were to be anticipated in the near future.

The USA and many other countries were increasingly filling gaps in the supply of highly-qualified labour by immigration. Contrary to what had been widely expected, immigration did not automatically set in motion a downward spiral in earnings levels. That gave some idea of the relatively high salaries offered to highly-qualified employees by IT firms in the United States.

Nicolai Laugesen, of the Rambóll Management consultancy firm, demonstrated that outsourcing did not operate in only one direction. A Danish project, covering several different branches of entrepreneurial activity, had sought to determine from where and to where jobs were moved. The investigation covered 1,500 companies in the Copenhagen region. The bottom line clearly showed that on balance inflow and offshoring had led to an increase in the number of jobs in the region; 2,697 jobs had been transferred abroad, while 4,185 jobs had been moved into Danish firms – mainly from other EU countries such as Sweden and Germany. His conclusions: “This is a two-way street”. Here too there were substantial differences in the degrees to which particular groups of employees were affected: “The highly-skilled benefit; the low-skilled are the losers”. A survey had shown that most people agreed in general terms on the need for skills development – but saw no concrete need for action on their own parts.

Sabrina de Marchi of UNI presented the European MOOS project. The programme was summarized in the title: **Making Offshore Outsourcing Sustainable**. The aim of the project was to provide worker representatives with tools enabling them to intervene on an informed

basis in offshoring processes with a view to shaping them. The project thus offered counselling, training and a number of tools, such as the *Moos Handbook*. This practice-orientated guide took the reader through all the stages of an offshoring process, from the analysis of the transfer plans through the negotiations on the shaping of the plan to monitoring of the transfer. For instance, there were references to evaluation of the (often unrealistic) expectations of management regarding cost-saving; as the speaker said, “Many plans for transfers have no clear aims, and hidden drawbacks and cost elements, such as communication difficulties and time differences, are often overlooked”. The handbook also gave a list of criteria for the choice and evaluation of possible outsourcing suppliers. A check list for the negotiation of company agreements offered recommendations on the content of rules. The list was based on the UNI Offshore Outsourcing Charter and covered matters such as participation by the employees concerned, the avoidance of redundancies and the right to qualification and retraining. The subject of rules concerning working conditions and earnings in destination countries was also addressed (website: www.moosproject.be).

Peter Skyte, of the British trade union Amicus, presented the **World Sourcing Agreement between CSC and Amicus** which had been signed in the summer of 2005. It consolidated the interests of employees in the offshoring agenda and stipulated the rules and standards to be complied with in transfers. The US-based supplier of IT services CSC had 78,000 employees world-wide. It had been agreed that full and early information should be supplied and that consultations with the workers’ representatives should take place before any decisions were taken. CSC had committed itself to the principle that World Sourcing would not lead to redundancies at the home location. If the task framework of employees changed as a result of outsourcing, career development prospects and conditions of employment would be safeguarded. Part of the cost savings from outsourcing would be reinvested in improving the

competitiveness of the workforce in Great Britain. The company also agreed to ensure that external suppliers also maintained high working standards and complied with guidelines such as those of the ILO. The underlying aim of the agreement was to secure the interests of the employees without fostering trade protectionism. The speaker explained that the aim of trade unions could not be one of preventing job creation in foreign countries or to or of bolstering up attitudes of hostility to foreigners. It was their task to protect the jobs, skills and career prospects of their members and at the same time to support the collective workers' organisations in India, China and other countries to protect them from exploitation. At the same time the interests of the company were safeguarded in the form of increased flexibility and advantages in terms of cost. In conclusion he stated that the agreement was a milestone marking the way for companies and workers' representatives.

The **discussion** hinged on the subject of the answers which unions could find to the opportunities and risks inherent in international competition. One speaker said, "Employers work and organise internationally; the unions must do exactly the same". Standing together was quite feasible, notwithstanding competition between locations. Central to a non-protectionist approach to the internationalisation of IT services was the securing of high labour standards in the destination countries of offshoring as well. An Indian participant stated that many Indian suppliers were ready to accept standards for conditions of work because they wanted the orders. By issuing certificates of "good HR management practices" UNI could help to make for working conditions more favourable to employees in offshoring destination countries. Another major subject was the question of greater international cooperation among unions. In that context the unions wished to pursue their network-building within multinational firms such as EDS or IBM.

TRADE UNIONS IN IT: THE SEARCH FOR A “NEW DEAL”

A central concern of the IT Forum was how unions could gain members in the IT sector, secure their loyalty and look after them. Unions were not faced only with often rapidly changing conditions of work in the sector; they also had to take account of the particular features of their target group, since IT specialists had working conditions, interests and attitudes which differed in certain respects from those of the traditional clientele of unions. The nature of those features, and what the unions could do to make themselves attractive to knowledge workers, were discussed in several presentations and in plenary sitting.

Gerhard Rohde, Head of the IBITS (Industry, Business and Management Services) department in UNI, gave an overview of different aspects of the **organisation of IT experts**. Many of them were working in small and medium-sized companies, among employees in which levels of organisation were traditionally low. Large numbers of highly-qualified specialists were working in relatively attractive environments with high levels of personal responsibility; as the speaker said, “they have no feeling of being disadvantaged as a group and tend to look after their interests themselves”. In addition, unions often had an “old-fashioned and rather dusty” image.

Trade union activity on behalf of IT experts demanded new concepts. Previously the unions had targeted large groups with common interests; but a change was needed to offer services which supported the interests of members in a flexible manner. In that context one important element was the skills and career development of employees; the unions could establish a presence in that field through counselling or the offer of training facilities of their own.

Another future-orientated task was to forswear allegiance to the myth of secure jobs and help the individual better to cope with changes. As IT experts were often highly mobile, moving from company to company and country to country, the limitations on organisation based on company structures were increasing. “We must extend our coverage to the people who move about a lot”. The UNI Passport was a service which met that need; it offered members union protection throughout the world. Unions should assist their members – independently of any particular employer – through the different phases and locations encountered during their working lives as an “agent helping the members to cope with change”.

Professor Charles Heckscher, of the Rutgers School of Management and Labour Relations in the United States, described an attempt to offer **flexible collective support to employees**. Speaking by videoconference, the speaker demonstrated that the expectancy of stable jobs and working conditions was increasingly vanishing from company realities. Resistance to the trend towards greater flexibility in the world of work made no sense. The central challenge facing unions was rather one of shaping flexibility in a positive manner (from the standpoint of the employees). As an innovative example he described the “Working Today” organisation, based in New York. It had been founded in the 1990s and had some 20,000 members. It considered itself a “trade union for freelancers” and was active in a number of areas. Firstly, it offered its members *services*; these ranged from financial and occupational counselling to upgrading and further training and even health insurance. “Our vision is one of the construction of an integrated safety net for the self-employed which makes possible problem-free change from one type of job to another”, the speaker explained. The second pillar – which presupposed a strong membership and visibility – was the *securing of influence*. For example, pressure should be brought to bear on government and employers to give freelancers equality of opportunities with employees. Last but not least, the union should support the

development of a community through opportunities for contacts and interest groups. That approach should meet the problem of the isolation felt by many self-employed persons.

Liz Maccarten, of the British Communication workers' union Connect, described how unions could encourage their members in their career development. With the **Opus2 Careers** programme Connect helped members to bring their working lives into harmony with their personal capabilities and desires and successfully to adjust their own goals. A range of services were available for that purpose. In five 40-minute sessions members could examine their career plans with a professional coach. The proceedings included discussions, assessments and exercises. "A lot of people get encouragement in what they are doing; others adopt a complete change of direction", said the speaker. To support members seeking jobs Opus2 also offered coaching covering the entire process of job search and applications. Meetings and telephone support were available during working hours, in the evening or at week-ends and could thus be suited to the time-frames of the members. That programme cost Connect members some € 330. The service was also available to non-members, but at a higher fee.

The Swedish salaried employees' union SIF also offered its members **career coaching**. As **Peter Hellberg** of SIF explained, "We see a growing need here and are seeking new ways of supporting members in a flexible labour market ... we want to help our members to help themselves". Members could receive personal counselling or make use of interactive Web-based tools and printed information material. In order to present themselves more effectively members could have their career histories evaluated by SIF experts through the e-mail and receive tips on ways of making the best presentation. Members also received professional support in acting through situations arising when applying for jobs.

Hitherto there had been very few unions anywhere in the world concentrating exclusively on IT experts. **Amar Murthy** and **Ramamoorthi Muthuramalingam** were in Barcelona as representatives of the Indian **IT Professionals Forum**. The ITPF was founded in 2000 with the support of UNI in a number of high-tech centres in India. Its aim was to promote the interests of employees in the IT industry, to expand their skills and to contribute to the growth of the IT sector. Amar Murthy stated that the first task, following the establishment of the network, was to develop services for members.

In Switzerland, too, an initiative had been taken by IT employees independently of the traditional unions. The young **On-line Union Syndikat** was still at the stage of finding the best way of establishing itself. **Antonios Kipouros** gave a survey of the founding of the union and the changes which were currently taking place within it. The organisation, founded in 2002, addressed IT professionals, Web designers and other on-line workers (including freelancers). “We wanted to reinvent trade unions.” Its activities were based on voluntary work; its main communication channel was the Internet. It currently had some 450 members. However, during the last two years both membership and the range of activities had shrunk considerably. In practice the concept of voluntary work had its limitations, as ultimately an attempt was being made to offer much the same as what the unions offered. The activists were currently working on a new concept. Among other things, more flexible forms of membership were being discussed. It had been suggested that there should be a free on-line membership and an active supporter membership; fees would be charged for individual service modules. But the central idea was to offer members a virtual platform on which, on the basis of their own jobs and employers, they could exchange information and organise themselves. “Is this in fact a trade union?”, asked Antonios Kipouros. “We cannot think of a more suitable term.”

The search for suitable forms of organisation for the relatively new and young clientele of IT experts was still continuing.

Interview of John Vines, APESMA (Association of Professional Engineers, Managers and Scientists, Australia)

APESMA is working on the concept of a “virtual trade union”. What does that imply in concrete terms?

The programme is called “Professionals Today”. We want to give non-members the possibility of registering with an Internet-based service. It should provide them with a body of highly valuable information and offer them an alternative to membership- but naturally we should like it to be a stepping-stone towards full membership. The fee would be about € 100 – one third of the normal membership fee.

What would the information package contain?

It should offer great value for money. We are still working on the details. For instance, we are planning to offer model employment contracts, salary comparisons and various advisory services on such subjects as occupational safety, health and law. We also want to provide a set of tools for career development, such as advice on writing career histories. We might also permit access to certain fee-charging services for members. But one important criterion is that we must not make the offer more attractive than membership, otherwise we should give our members an incentive to leave.

Why is APESMA developing an offer which is outside traditional structures?

It is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit new members; our membership level is stagnant. Therefore we are experimenting with different ideas and also trying to follow new paths. With this offer we want to demonstrate that we as a union are offering a genuine value enhancement.

In the **discussion** it became clear that the task facing unions was one of simultaneously conserving old strengths and opening up new fields. New answers and new approaches had to be found for new types of phenomena and problems; as a participant from the United States put it, “If the environment changes, we must adapt our methods in order to reach our goals”. According to some participants, it was important not only to offer new services but also to adopt a “younger language” and “professionalisation of marketing”. But the diversity of the changes should lead one to lose sight of the fact that many familiar problems – such as employers hostile to participation – also existed in the IT sector; as a union member from Sweden stated, “We should not let ourselves be blinded by novelty”.

The discussion revealed that unionists considered collective representation of interests as a fundamental part of their work, but that unions should also offer their members a range of services, such as training, professional guidance and legal aid, and also on-line services and discounts on such items as insurance and holidays. Between the two poles of collective and individual services the accent laid by unions varied in certain respects. A trade unionist from France said: “Above all we should offer the workers security through guarantees of employment and the right to qualification”. A representative from Great Britain also emphasized the importance of collective agreements: “We must anticipate individual

problems which may arise at the workplace and move proactively to ensure that they do not arise”. In order to develop the participation at European level of worker representatives in multinational companies, efforts must be made to extend the rights enjoyed by European Works Councils.

However, in view of the increase in the numbers of individual contractual relationships, unions could no longer rely exclusively on the collective determination of employee conditions of work. John Vines said, “Only half the members of APESMA are covered by collective agreements; the other half are on individual contracts, and 10% work on a self-employed basis”. In future years most of the members would be working under individual contracts “We have to offer them something.” The unions were faced with the challenge of developing new approaches without losing sight of the traditional clientele and strengths of unions. Summing up the discussion, John Vines said, “It is becoming clear that we need both individual and collective services for our members ... Exactly how the mixture should look we can only decide in the light of the specific background conditions and needs.” For that reason “careful listening” and differentiated analyses played an extremely important role.

The participants discussed a number of projects which could be supported by the new UNI Organisation Fund. The proposals made included a stronger message to students and the development of career offers over the Internet.

“In itself technology is neither good nor bad; it is the use made of it which counts”

A workshop at the IT-Forum in Barcelona elaborated a “UNI Code of Good Practice” for the RFID (Radio Frequency Identification tags) surveillance technology. The code lays down rules for the installation of the technology at the workplace and defines rights of workers and their representatives. These include restrictions on the use and storage of data and transparency of installation: in other words, full information of workers on when and in what form they are being watched. Health matters and the use of RFID with other surveillance systems are also covered.
