

Future of data-driven society visionary essay competition

Title: Digital morning or manic by design

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Theme: the future of people diagnosed with a mental condition, i.e. bipolar disorder, in a data-driven society

Digital morning or manic by design

It's 4 in the morning when K, who has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder, is suddenly awoken by the upbeat sound of one of her favorite fitness tunes. There is something about the energetic pounding of the drums in this song that always manages to lift her spirits, and her smart home system knows it. Since K herself had not planned to wake up so early, she realizes, while still struggling to get out of bed, that this can only mean one thing: the level of hormones in her body had suddenly decreased overnight, alerting the system that her mood state was trying to take a turn towards depression.

In the old days, such slight modifications of her blood values wouldn't even have been detected, and weeks would have passed before she finally reached the stage when denial would no longer have been possible. By then her state of hopelessness and helplessness would have been so high, and turning over in bed would have required so much energy, that it would have put Sisyphus to shame. Fortunately, smart technologies could now keep track of everything inside and outside the human body. They knew more about people than people knew themselves through the collection, integration and quick analysis of variations in voice and speech patterns, in the quality of their social interactions and professional input, in consumption preferences and lifestyle choices. And they could intervene, not only by preventing things from taking a turn for the worse, but by modifying their blood values as well as their surroundings, to increase their level of productivity and creativity.

The slight quiver of her digital pump releasing additional antidepressants and vitamins into her system notified K that an agreement had finally been reached between her company and the one they had been trying to take over for months. They needed her to be sharp, efficient, indefatigable, and what better way to achieve this than by bringing her into a manic state?! There was no point to wonder anymore whether or not to accept D's invitation to go away for the weekend. She will be spending the coming weeks buried in paperwork, drafting and redrafting contracts, as more and more information about the behavior patterns and risk potential of the overtaken company's employees will be fed into their data processing system. Fortunately, manic states had been broken into individual components, they could be triggered and intervened upon when necessary, so as to make the best out of the high level of energy and creativity characterizing them. Mania had thus not only been tamed among those who would have previously been prone to experience it, but for the lucky few in upper management, it could be triggered and maintained by design for as long as it was necessary. For as long as they were necessary...