

**Alternative Strategies for Union Revitalization:
A Case Study of a Trade Union-Initiated Digital Platform in the Live-In Care Sector**

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Introduction. The changes in the world of work brought about by digitalization and the globalization of labour markets are presenting trade unions with new challenges and, moreover, are reviving or intensifying old conflicts (Lenaerts et al., 2018). Since the end of the last century, employee organizations have repeatedly struggled to overcome crises such as the significant decline in membership (Ebbinghaus, 2002; Kollmeyer, 2021; Visser, 2015) or the loss of influence at the political level (Holst et al., 2008). However, the increase in atypical employment relationships is fundamentally challenging trade union organization and representation strategies (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013; Gumbrell-McCormick, 2011). Studies looking at trade union responses to atypical employment have shown that two basic patterns of action have emerged on the part of trade unions (Benassi & Vlandas, 2016). On the one hand, there are trade unions that continue to close themselves off to atypical employees (Palier & Thelen, 2010). On the other hand, there are trade unions that try to see the external change as an opportunity to renew themselves and open up to new groups in order to strengthen the union's power resources by increasing their membership numbers or gaining political influence (Heery & Adler, 2004; Trif et al., 2023).

Theoretical Background & Relevance. The strategy of embracing experimentation and innovation in atypical organizing methods, commonly known as 'union revitalization,' underscores the dynamic evolution of trade unions (Klöpper, 2010; Trif et al., 2023). In response to changing environmental dynamics, trade unions are compelled to make strategic decisions to adapt and rejuvenate their organizing approaches (Voss & Sherman, 2000; Dörre, 2008). Thus, the contemporary shifts in the labor landscape not only pose challenges but also present opportunities for unions to modernize and establish sustainable organizational models. Despite the considerable body of research on union revitalization, there remains a notable gap in understanding how unions leverage technology as part of this revitalization strategy (Geelan, 2021). Investigating the implementation of a union-driven digital platform in Austria's live-in care sector provides a unique and promising avenue for shedding light on the intersection of technology and union revitalization. This initiative represents a proactive effort to engage in entrepreneurial activities aimed at transforming working conditions, promising

valuable insights into the transformative potential of technology in revitalizing unions and fostering common-good-oriented approaches.

Empirical context & intended findings. In December 2022, an Austrian trade union initiative launched a digital platform in Austria to match live-in caregivers with individuals and families in need. By entering pro-actively into the field of care provision as market actor, the union took an unconventional step and left their usual terrain and organizing logic.

The core objective of the trade union initiative is to improve the working conditions of caregivers and to increase transparency and safety for both caregivers and families. Since the union initiative is usually not engaging in entrepreneurial activity, the union made sure to first understand the problems and needs of the caregivers and collaborated in a comprehensive field study with the University of Vienna to gain a thorough understanding of the current situation in Austria (cf. Schaffhauser-Linzatti et al., 2022). The union's goal is to proactively intervene in the market in the long term (e.g. by setting minimum standards for remuneration), while at the same time aiming at generally improving working conditions in the 24-hour care market (e.g. by setting a standard and forcing competitors to follow suit). Since the platform has been launched, community and quality management are the central pillars to ensure a community driven development of the platform. The caregivers, as well as the care receivers have a point of contact and get a chance to get their voices heard. Their needs are continuously collected by the platform's community managers and passed on to the platform operator so that they can adapt the platform interface and the matching process accordingly. Apart from that, the platform operator not only made sure to develop the platform itself further in the year that the platform has been running, but also sought to build and nurture strategic alliances with different stakeholders such as government organizations on a communal as well as state level, welfare organizations that are also traditionally active in the care sector, and non-government organizations.

By drawing on a diverse array of qualitative and quantitative data sources (observations, interviews, and a quantitative survey) intersection of union revitalization and digitalization. By embracing technology as a tool for organizational renewal, the union demonstrates a proactive approach to addressing the challenges of atypical employment and improving working conditions. The findings of this study contribute to broader discussions on the evolving role of unions in the digital age and underscore the potential of digital technologies as part of union revitalization strategies.

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