

**EVALUATION  
& CONCLUSION  
IT-FITNESS INITIATIVE  
2010**

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BY  
ISW INSTITUTE FOR STRUCTURAL POLICY  
AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
HALLE / SAALE

# EVALUATION & CONCLUSION

## IT-FITNESS INITIATIVE 2010

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## 1. IT-FITNESS INITIATIVE'S OBJECTIVES

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### 1.1 QUANTITATIVE OBJECTIVES / QUALITATIVE OBJECTIVES

The IT-Fitness Initiative's objective is to acquaint people to up-to-date information technologies and to sustainably improve their chances on labour market. Therefore, together with private industry partners and labor market actors, Microsoft launched "IT-Fitness" as the German implementation of the European programme "eSkills for Employability". Quantitative guideline of IT-Fitness in Germany has been to help four million people between 2006 and 2010 to improve their competence and skills in handling computers and the Internet and to increase their job chances by explicit measures of qualification. By December 28<sup>th</sup> 2010, 4,004,567 people participated in the IT-Fitness Initiative's online-based test have not only checked their IT basic competence (IT = information technology) but also actively worked on their improvement. The initiative represents the idea that the private sector is able and also allowed to actively join in educational processes in order to prevent and adjust a mismatch between education and skills demand. It is about increasing the employability of (potential) employees on one hand and the national and international competitiveness of businesses on the other hand. IT-Fitness understands itself as an education initiative, but at the same time it aims at the socio-economic objective to boost Germany as business location, namely by strengthen the qualification of skilled personnel and by increasing competencies and skills in dealing with up-to-date information technologies. This approach is also reflected in the learning platform's name "Be fit for the upswing" ("Fit für den Aufschwung"), which is also provided by IT-Fitness. This title outlines the initiative's positive impetus, which understands personal learning as fundamental part of individual success, as a basis for economical and social participation in modern information society and as a guarantee for economical development.

This self-concept is the current theme of all measures, projects and activities of IT-Fitness Initiative, though the initiative does aim for breaking new ground in individual education and further education. Thereby a reasonable assignment of limited resources resulted in confining oneself to exemplary implementation. The results of this four-year-long work show manifold possibilities how the private sector and corporate social responsibility activities can successfully integrate a modern society's needs as well as in working environment, in education of different organisations and institutions of the society without expecting direct return on investment for themselves.

The range of the initiative's projects, measures and activities has been very complex, differentiated and diversified at the same time. Surely it has to be differentiated between measures of public relation activities, campaigns to strengthen the participation in qualification measures and projects with specific target groups.

## **1.2 METHODOICAL APPROACH AND ITS RESULTS**

In general the IT-Fitness Initiative followed an experimental approach. Pilot projects allow addressing specific target groups and make it possible to concentrate on focus areas. By networking and by establishing co-operative relationships different ways and means have been tested, expanded and/or improved over a period of several months ever. This includes the partner teamwork, the activities of the initiative's project office, the development and improvement of measures and teaching materials, the design of a monitoring as well as a current revision of major tasks and focussing on selective target groups in general (see also evaluations ISW 2007 and 2008).

## **1.3 INSTITUTIONS AND INVOLVEMENT OF PARTNERS / NETWORKS**

Responsible for the IT-Fitness Initiative is the IT-Bildungsnetz e.V., which, based on its experience background as Cisco Networking Academy Training Center (CATC), represents as non-profit organisation in the field of IT education the project coordination and implementation. The organisation guarantees the non-profit approach of the IT-Fitness Initiative and stands for quality management and sustainability within informational education of learning contents and -materials offered in school- and job-related contexts.

The initiative's nine partners and financial supporters are Microsoft Germany, Cisco Systems, State Street Bank, Deutsche Bahn, Randstad Germany, SIGNAL IDUNA Group, Federal Association for Information Technology, Telecommunications and New Media (BITKOM e.V.), German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH) and the Federal Employment Agency (Bundesagentur für Arbeit). The implementation of projects, measures and activities of the IT-Fitness Initiative is coordinated by a project office, which also supports the partners as a service provider.

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## **2. IMPLEMENTATION OF IT-FITNESS INITIATIVE**

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### **2.1 PROJECTS OF THE INITIATIVE**

From the initiative's beginning on, IT-Fitness acted on three levels:

- Developing, launching and dissemination of instruments, customised learning contents and providing these materials to everyone using the initiative's online platform

- Realisation of measures for further training and qualification of trainers and with direct target groups by classroom training and virtual classes
- Awareness raising activities regarding the importance of IT basic competences for individual employability and participation. This objective was met by articles in media and public relations as well as the participation in events, exhibitions and trade fairs

At the beginning the initiative's objective of reaching four million people in Germany within four years, addressing their IT knowledge and encouraging them to participate in verification measures has been a clearly announced key figure. Achieving this objective could only be realised by initiating online-based learning processes, by scalable projects and by a sophisticated address of target groups. In this regard the IT-Fitness Test, an online-based test free of charge for users that predicated on the Certification programme IC<sup>3</sup> (IC<sup>3</sup> = Internet and Computing Core Certification), turned out to be an outstanding instrument. The IT-Fitness Test, as an instrument of sensitisation and as first practise session of a learning process, has been provided via the internet portal [www.it-fitness.de](http://www.it-fitness.de). In addition and contiguous to the test further learning materials with the focus on conventional office applications and handling a desktop PC and the Internet had been provided online. Thereby anyone who visited IT-Fitness web sites had been offered the chance for individual further training free of charge, namely independently from the target groups activities that has been started by the initiative itself. At the same time these materials had been provided free of charge as well to multipliers in the field of academic and professional education.

Since November 2009 users can find on the IT-Fitness website additionally offers as the self-paced online learning programme “Fit für den Aufschwung” ([www.fit-fuer-den-aufschwung.de](http://www.fit-fuer-den-aufschwung.de)). It leads from short ten- to 20-minutes basic modules over interactive exercises to considerably ambitious modules for advanced learners. Its design of short units and a mix of texts, presentations and videos as well as virtual monitoring is reflecting the influence of Web 2.0 elements and addresses younger people and social communities-savvy users. Pilot projects that address specific target groups had been additionally established. This activity was lead by the intention to demonstrate with best-practice examples that IT learning contributes to the integration of disadvantaged target group members. During the initiative's first two years the promotion of disadvantaged persons especially covered assistance and supportive measures for young people in the transition from school to vocational training or from apprenticeship to work respectively. In the third and fourth year the major focus had been put on re-entering working life after maternity/parental leave, unemployment and similar personal incidents. Samples of such specific target group projects are listed in the appendix.

From the very beginning it was a major objective to increase IT-Fitness' popularity in Germany. The actions taken to achieve this target were based on the assumption that only a broad public can provoke

changes in the German system of education. And only by a constant presence of the subject the importance of an adequate individual IT competence for personal and social participation will be realized. In addition to measures of public relations the initiative and its partners took the following actions: sending out a newsletter, which is published by the initiative several times a year, inviting to regular press conferences, lectures, participation in fair trades and events, also policy and social decision makers had been specifically informed about the IT-Fitness Initiative's objectives, approaches and results. Furthermore the involvement of the German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH), the Federal Association for Information Technology, Telecommunications and New Media (BITKOM e.V.) as well as the Federal Employment Agency had been positive effects in terms of introducing the initiative to many employers and to make them aware of the term "IT-Fitness" with the case of having basic computer skills.

## **2.2 TARGET GROUPS REACHED**

To strengthen the IT competences of disadvantaged individuals had been of essential meaning for the initiative's activities. The broad range of measures realised can be notified when looking at the target groups all in all that had been focussed on:

- young people during occupational orientation (pupils, apprentices, trainees)
- persons who intend to change their career direction and returning to work
- "Generation 50+" (people older than 50 years of age)
- persons with migration background
- persons from socially disadvantaged milieus
- multipliers of academic and occupational education

Altogether about eight million people had been reached with the topic of IT-Fitness with the help of a variety of instruments. By the end of December 2010 four million people participated in the IT-Fitness Test, about 2.7 million people had been addressed directly by specific activities, competitions or events. The number of people reached through media work cannot be measured exactly by the design of this evaluation. But it can be assumed that the audience reached was broader than the 1.3 million people that were counted by the internal statistic of the project. This assumption is based on the fact that many articles were published nationwide. Newspapers covered the initiative as well as several events made it to the TV news. Amongst others events a front-page-story in the leading tabloid should be mentioned. Moreover during the last four years about 6,500 multipliers of general education and vocational training have been informed about the need of essential IT competences as a basic skill set in up-to-date work life - in the line with the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics - and became familiar with the learning materials of IT-Fitness and have been trained in using and handling these materials. By training

these teachers and trainers and by integrating the teaching materials of IT-Fitness into the curricula of numerous associations of general and vocational education, a further mentoring of the target groups by these skilled multipliers to a relevant extent can be assumed within the next years.

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### **3. THE IT-FITNESS INITIATIVE'S IMPACTS**

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#### **3.1 RESULTS ACHIEVED DURING FOUR YEARS OF IT-FITNESS**

Basic competences in IT are a prerequisite for a sustainable employability of the individual in a modern economy. IT competence has reached the status as a fundamental competence such as reading and writing. Anyone who leaves the education system without PC and Internet skills has hardly any chance for a good apprenticeship training slot and/or a professional career. IT-Fitness has accepted this as an educational duty.

- The IT-Fitness online-test gave four million people the opportunity to measure their competence in office applications. Furthermore the test was developed with the target to increase the understanding of the subject of IT skills. Test takers were motivated to move on with self paced learning modules
- Many people, among them political decision makers, administration and NGO's were made aware of the importance of adequate computer skills.
- Social partner institutions, associations and organisations do intensively pay attention to improve their pupils', trainees' and their other protégés' computer skills today.
- Schools in the general education as well as vocational training schools use the IT-Fitness instruments made available on the online platform (test, fIT-box, learning platform) to sensitise and to train their pupils.
- The IT-Fitness Initiative reached more than 6,500 multipliers by providing train the trainer courses.
- Disadvantaged target groups received direct training by employees of the IT-Fitness project office or volunteering employees from IT-Fitness partners with special training material that is publicly available without restrictions and free of charge.

“Learning” as a chance to improve the personal job opportunities has been understood by all target groups addressed – even if that does not necessarily mean to come to the conclusion to really take this chance.

### **3.2 COMMON PUBLIC AND SOCIAL INTEREST**

After all constraints caused by the global financial crisis in 2008/09 and in 2010 (investment delay in businesses, short-time work in many sectors and other employment constraints), several forecasts expect now a “job miracle”. According to labor market statistics better qualified workers, who are committed to further development will benefit from job opportunities. To motivate individuals to start learning activities independent of age, time and place is intention of the initiative. Unemployed people who use the learning material provided free of charge can develop new competences and increase employability.

Regarding basic computer skills for standard applications the IT-Fitness Initiative provided learning material, which can be used either as individual learner or in guided classroom situation. There are still many people who react to the challenges of a globalised economy, the ubiquity of competition and changing expectations in the professional world with scepticism and insecurity. If a personal skills gap is the reason for the scepticism the IT-Fitness Initiative's learning materials offer a solution. A collection of learning material and further training options free of charge are available for an unlimited audience without restrictions. The sustainable commitment of the IT-Fitness Initiative's nine partners and the coordinating IT-Bildungsnetz association has to be positively pointed out. It should not be underestimated, as they campaigned together as one man for the objective of promoting IT basic skills in Germany over a comparatively long period of four years without any legally binding agreement and also in economically difficult times.

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## **4. CONCLUSIONS OF THE INITIATIVE AND PERSPECTIVES**

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The IT-Fitness Initiative has not only reached its quantitative objectives but even outreached them. To judge the achievement of the qualitative targets it has to be looked at with more detail. Many ways and instruments have been tested by the partners involved, who have been highly committed, also in financial terms. The effects, however, cannot be evaluated in short perspective. For example the cooperation with Caritas Germany, concluded in December 2009, will not show results until summer 2011, when participants in training courses will try to access the labour market. The effect of the training based on IT-Fitness learning material on the employability cannot be measured before that moment. In the course of organisational development at Caritas Germany the intervention of IT-Fitness, however, has been a step forward to adapt present structures to the modern job market's needs. Also former major projects of the initiative, as for example the school competition “IT-Fitness macht Schule” to update education or to mentor apprenticeship with the project “Lehrlinge gehen online” have to be appreciated alike.

At the end of the IT-Fitness Initiative the partners have published a “manifesto” (see appendix) that is intended as a policy advice. After four years of IT-Fitness activities, in which it has been demonstrated how basic skills in office applications and internet use can be promoted, this subject should be followed up and disseminated at a more general level and within the institutionalized education structures. The IT-Fitness partners call for an approach of lifelong learning by all social actors. IT-Fitness has designed a learning platform and several instruments to motivate learners, materials and structures that resulted in the fact that many people improved their digital skills. Yet protagonists from the private sector, political decision makers and the civil society have to act hand in hand to update the initial and further training all people. IT skills need to become integrated into common “educational routine” in Germany.

IT-Fitness has become a particular term and a “brand” of its own and has even found entry into general linguistic usage within the education systems in Europe. It remains to be seen to which extent also the initiative's idea will find entry into future learning and teaching.

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## 5. APPENDIX

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### COOPERATION WITH EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONS, ORGANISATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS (SELECTION):

- Bundesministerium für Familie, Frauen, Senioren und Jugend (Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth)
- several State Departments
- Stiftung Digitale Chancen; Berlin
- Kompetenzzentrum Technik, Diversity, Chancengleichheit; Bielefeld
- Projektverbund Praxislernen; Potsdam
- Sächsisches Technologiezentrum Zwickau (STZ); Zwickau
- Technische Jugendfreizeit- und Bildungsgesellschaft (tjfbg) gGmbH (chemals tjfbv); Berlin
- Stiftung Barrierefreies Internet; Berlin
- Stiftung Partner für Schulen; Köln
- "A Place For Kids" Henry-Maske-Stiftung; Berlin
- Sport-, Bildungs- und Kulturzentrum "NaunynRitze"; Berlin
- "Die Arche – Christliches Kinder- und Jugendwerk e.V."; Berlin
- Stiftung Computeria; Berlin
- Fan-Projekt Dortmund e.V.; Dortmund
- German Caritas Association; Freiburg
- Cisco Networking Academies Germany

### PARTICIPATION IN NATIONWIDE INITIATIVES (SELECTION):

- „Infotag Wiedereinstieg“ for female job returners
- „Chancengleichheit in der Informationsgesellschaft“
- „MINT“
- „Internet erfahren“
- „erlebe IT“
- „Girls' Day“ / Zukunftstag
- „Lehrlinge gehen Online“ of the Zentralstelle für die Weiterbildung im Handwerk (ZWH)

## TARGET GROUP WORK

At the initiative's beginning several projects have been started and adopted to the target groups' needs between 2007 and 2010 (exemplary selection of major projects):

### 1. PROJECT YEAR:

- Participation in CeBIT exhibition with an individual booth and the official launch of the IT-Fitness test
- Learning programme „Lehrlinge gehen online“ in cooperation with the Zentralstelle für die Weiterbildung im Handwerk (ZWH)
- Participation in ”IdeenExpo“ exhibition with the IT-Fitness track
- Participation in several political events in order to raise awareness for the subject of IT-Fitness
- Integration of IT-Fitness into the school cooperations of Deutschen Bahn
- Integration of IT-Fitness into the work of “Berufsorientierungsbüros”, e.g. in North Rhine-Westphalia
- IT-Fitness summer camp for occupational orientation at Sächsisches Technologiezentrum in Zwickau

### 2. PROJECT YEAR:

- IT-Fitness joins CeBIT exhibition in Hannover with an IT-Fitness Campus, which has been attended by 50,000 visitors
- 245 schools as well as many teachers and pupils compete in ”IT-Fitness macht Schule“
- “Zeugnis-Upgrade“ workshops for students with middling school reports at the beginning of summer holidays
- Development of the “fIT-Box“ to strengthen occupational orientation at schools
- Joining Microsoft's “Innovative Teachers Forum”
- IT-Fitness summer camp for occupational orientation at Sächsisches Technologiezentrum in Zwickau
- Establishing an IT-Fitness room at ”PerspektivFabrik“ for socially disadvantaged young people in association of Henry-Maske-Stiftung
- Training of so-called “Berufswahlkoordinatoren” in North Rhine-Westphalia
- Development of an accelerated IT-Fitness test in Turkish to support people with Turkish migration background at their beginning of learning

### 3. PROJECT YEAR

- Cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and participation in the events “Infobörse Wiedereinstieg” to support the work return of women
- Training of multipliers of several institutions
- Integration of IT-Fitness into events of “CDA – Christlich Demokratische Arbeitnehmerschaft” to address work councils and businesses
- Developing a “Map of Germany“ on the basis of the IT-Fitness test's user figures
- Adding a “fIT-Box 2.0“ to the original “fIT-Box“
- Developing and establishing the learning platform ”Fit für den Aufschwung“
- IT-Fitness summer camp for occupational orientation at Sächsisches Technologiezentrum in Zwickau

### 4. PROJECT YEAR

- Workshops for multipliers during the cooperation with Caritas Germany
- Training for multipliers of Die Arche
- Participation in the European e-Skills Week
- IT-Fitness Easter camp together with the Fan-Projekt Dortmund for students in and around Dortmund
- IT-Fitness summer camp together with the Fan-Projekt Dortmund for students in and around Dortmund
- expanding the learning platform “Fit für den Aufschwung“ by additional learning units
- “IT-fitteste Stadt“ competition
- “IT-Fitness-Helden gesucht“ competition

## **„MANIFESTO“ OF THE IT-FITNESS INITIATIVE**

Abstract of the brochure “IT-Fitness Manifesto” – theses and comments, Berlin 2011

### **THESIS 1**

#### **“With IT skills there is more occupational success and social participation”**

The information and communication technologies are the motor of change from an industrial to an information and knowledge society. Whether occupational or private – working with computers and the Internet distinctively characterizes our everyday life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. IT knowledge as fourth basic skill – in the line with reading, writing and arithmetics – is a basic requirement for success in working life as well as for participating in social processes. Anyone who nowadays quits school without any computer and Internet knowledge, has hardly any chance to get a good apprenticeship training position nor occupational advancement.

Therefore IT competence is also one out of eight key competencies, that has been constituted by the European Commission already in 2001 within the work programme “General and Occupational Education 2010” as part of the strategy of Lisbon then. By the end of their schooling all citizens of the Member States should gain these key competencies. However, the majority of performance figures in the field of general and occupational education - amongst others also comprehensive education in computer skills - appointed by the EU for 2010 could not be achieved. The more urgent the educational function of politics, economy and associations it is to provide all young people, job applicants and employees with sufficient IT skills.

The IT-Fitness Initiative has already made an important contribution to this. At its start in Germany four years ago the initiative aimed to help four million people by the end of 2010 to improve their competence and skills in handling computers and the Internet. By learning and training offers free of charge, projects and studies of “IT-Fitness” this objective could be achieved now. So the initiative belongs to the biggest e-learning projects in Germany.

### **THESIS 2**

#### **“Schools bear main responsibility at preparing young people for the digital world”**

According to an ICD study<sup>1</sup> nine out of ten professions demand computer knowledge in 2014. Even now in many occupations IT skills are tested as a matter of course during the applicant selection for apprenticeship training positions. Therefore educational institutions are challenged to teach young people

substantiated IT competences, which facilitate their learning and to make them ready for the variety of IT applications in working life. Thereto IT education has to find entry in the curricula of schools; the teaching staff has to be sufficiently qualified and schools has to be provided with up-to-date IT equipment.

Experience gained during the IT-Fitness Initiative has revealed the need of action especially in the school sector. Because education falls within the remit of the Federal States, there exist curricula that partly do strongly deviate from each other, each with own educational goals and different ideas in the field of IT education. Furthermore the quality of education depends on the teachers' skills, their initial and their further training. To teach pupils in the subject of IT at an equal level, the multipliers (teachers) have to be correspondingly qualified first. Ideally that should be done according to cross-structural standards. A brain trust could experts from the Laender get together, comparing notes on best practise, writing up federal educational standards and therefore to provide for a standard IT education.

<sup>1</sup> IDC opinion poll of 1.000 European HR representatives on behalf of Microsoft Germany GmbH, November 2009

### **THESIS 3**

#### **“Lifelong learning is indispensable to the IT sector”**

In a world permanently changing each individual is challenged to continuously advance his or her professional knowledge and skills. Especially their IT knowledge – as they have to keep up with technical progress.

An important target-group represents young apprentices and trainees. In nearly all recognised professions IT competences are demanded nowadays: prospective motor vehicle mechatronics technicians diagnose faults via laptop, bakers operate up-to-date baking machines via computer, whereas carpenters design whole timber houses assisted by electronic drawing-boards. That's why the IT-Fitness partner German Confederation of Skilled Crafts (ZDH) launched the programme “Lehrlinge gehen online”, which specifically addresses apprentices in craft. For this project the e-learning platform “www.lehrlingegehenonline.de” has been designed, where apprentices are offered the opportunity to learn the handling of current software on-line processed.

However, not only for entrants but also for employees running business, professional further training in the IT sector is of important meaning. Anyone who is not continuously studying further is running the risk of getting “left behind” and missing to advance in their jobs. The Deutsche Bahn AG, partner of the IT-Fitness Initiative, belongs to those businesses that offer their employees broad and attractive measures to improve their IT competences. In the course of its internal strategy of qualification the Deutsche Bahn

also trains their employees in the field of PC basic skills. The concern offers its employees a comprehensive learning platform that provides IT training courses for important applications.

In general the companies' qualification systems have to be adopted to current challenges. Also against the background of some lack of skilled personnel coming and the changing of age structure in companies this is absolutely necessary.

#### **THESIS 4**

##### **“Job applicants and work returners: IT qualifications raise job opportunities”**

Job applicants and work returners often show IT knowledge shortcomings. Even a short break of occupation can lead to gaps in one's knowledge, which makes the re-entry into former employment difficult. That concerns women who return after a “baby break” into working life, but also all others who had to interrupt their employment due to private circumstances, health condition or other reasons. By the application of IT and technical advance many professions are rapidly developing further. That's why work returners are often insecure in handling soft- and hardware and have their difficulties to find back into their occupation. So the IT-Fitness partner Randstad checked his applicants' IT knowledge by means of the IT-Fitness test in order to systematically compensate weak points. Specific qualification measures help to get ready for the labour market and to raise own job opportunities.

An important player at the qualification of job applicants and work returners is the Federal Employment Agency. This IT-Fitness partner has integrated the IT-Fitness test and the IT-Fitness learning platform into its current study content to offer job applicants the opportunity to upgrade their IT key qualifications.

With their education offers and academy programmes (as the Microsoft IT Academy and the Cisco Networking Academy) the IT-Fitness partners provide beginners and IT professionals useful qualifications for occupational advance. The materials allow for an action-orientated training and are approved as worldwide standards. Taking advantage of learning opportunities is up to anyone taking responsibility for themselves but often requires strengthening and support. No one might be left alone in that sensitive process of occupational consolidation.

#### **THESIS 5**

##### **“A digital split in Germany has to be prevented”**

The fact that many people in our society are not able to use the opportunities of digital media is alarming. That still there is a high percentage of “off-liners” in Germany is less caused by a lack of interest than by the grade of availability of measures to improve IT skills, which are either at no charge or low-cost. By

those four million participants in the qualification measures of the IT-Fitness Initiative it becomes apparent that there is a broad interest in young as well as in old people to advance in the field of IT skills. This is also to be seen in the –IT-Fitness Initiative's activities, especially by its partners Microsoft, State Street Bank and Signal Iduna in the field of promoting disadvantaged persons. Thereby young people from low-income households or from families with migration background had to be involved and failed education biographies to get reintegrated. These IT-Fitness partners' projects have broken new grounds and showed that no one in the working world and in his or her way into future might get lost.