

# Agile and Curious

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## Leadership in a digital world

Are you wondering why millions of people publish strange details of their private lives on Facebook or how already a three-year-old uses a tablet like it was a natural part of an individual's development? Welcome to the Digital World!

by Marion King, Frank Kühn and Michael Kempf

### Complexity growth

Many of our clients have a business model based on digital products or services. Most of them already work or function in different organizational structures, ways of cooperating and corporate cultures. But, there are more and more »other« clients, company owners, CEOs, team leaders or employees who feel that something in their business life has changed and is continuing to currently change even more rapidly.

They see how their kids cope with new technologies and how they communicate with their friends and the wider world. It seems that somehow all these weird things going on around us are slowly but surely coming into our business world. It also seems that they are adding additional challenges to our already existing complex world of leadership. What we see and hear are worries about the increasing amount of e-mail, unmanageable masses of information, inefficient meetings and projects, unplannable and unpredictable future scenarios. At the same time, employees talk about meaningful work, work-life-balance and flexible working models. Bob Johansen calls this the VUCA world in his great book »Leaders Make the Future«. A world of Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. Somehow, we all suspect that these changes are linked to or influenced by this crazy digital thing that is going on around us.



#### For your inspiration

FAST COMPANY (<http://www.fastcompany.com>)

TechCrunch (<http://techcrunch.com>)

Wired (<http://www.wired.co.uk>)

DLD Conference (<http://dld-conference.com>)

NEXT Conference (<http://nextberlin.eu>)

## Interdependent trends

It is not only the internet that has changed our life. There are two major and global developments: on one hand, the so-called »Digitalization« and on the other hand, a growing new attitude or consciousness towards life, caused by demographic and sociological changes. Both have interdependencies and interferences.

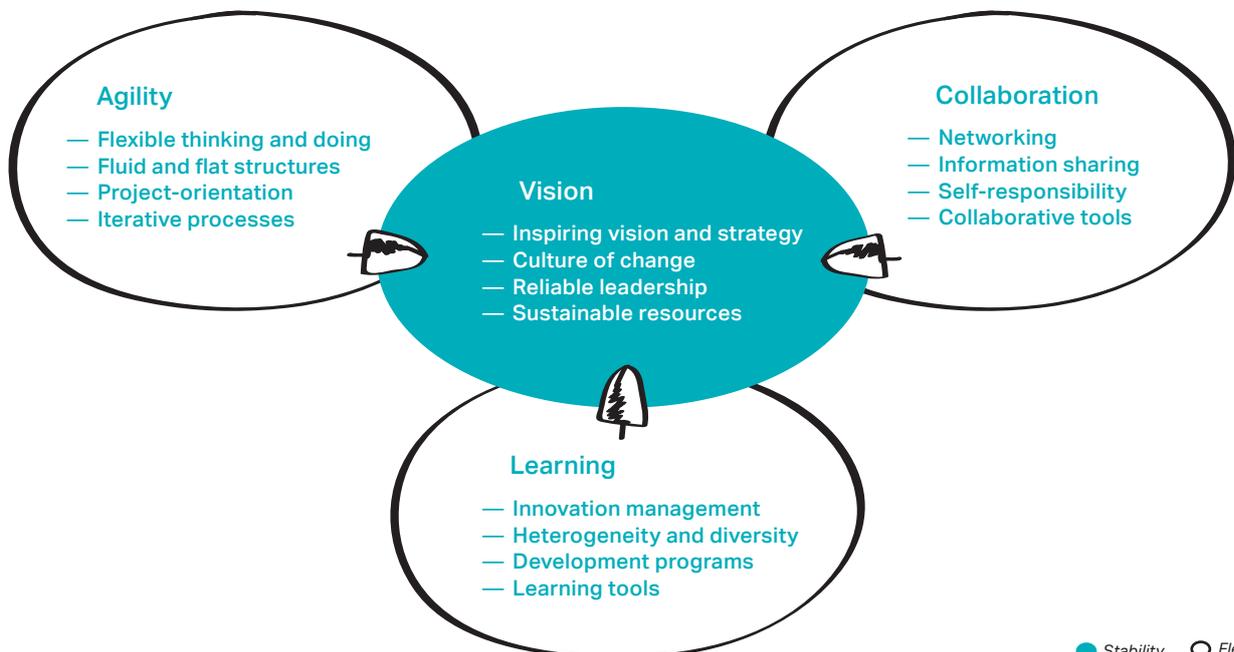
»Digitalization« includes all developments in our private and business life that were, and will be caused by changing communication technologies – fast(er) processors, bigger server capacities, the internet, smart phones, tablets, new platforms and apps etc. These developments have opened up completely new spaces for information exchange, accessibility, communication and cooperation. They have great positive aspects, such as the availability of information for everybody, new opportunities for learning wherever you are in the world, connecting data and predicting developments to solve medical problems for example. At the same time, a movement of new consciousness

for our life, our cohabitation and our environment is gaining ground globally. Subjects like health, sustainability and a more resource oriented life are subject matters for TV documentaries and talkshows, as well as newspaper and magazine articles. People set up organizations, platforms, blogs and even new political parties. This might sound very philosophical. The good thing is, that – thanks to the internet – it is not so anymore. Whatever people already have felt for a long time and have attempted to practice in their »neighborhood« can now be told, read, shown to the world. It can be shared, discussed and spread, supported and grown.

## New leadership culture

On the business-management part of leadership, this means that you have to reflect even more on the future viability of your products and services, the innovation power of your R&D department, new manufacturing opportunities, optimized logistic systems, new opportunities for distribution, marketing and customer ▶

## What it needs for digital leadership



service. It will result in a new, fresh design of your business processes and management, resulting in a competitive advantage. For the people-management part of leadership is above all, an invitation to necessary self-reflection. Being a good and successful leader in digital times is less about easy and pragmatic leadership methods and pattern X. It is all about every single human being, about potential, know-how, personal interests and about cooperation. It is an attitude that demands an open mind, empathy plus inner strength – true self-reflection and self-consciousness. You need to inspire, enable and empower. And you need to be reliable, honest and trustworthy. You have to be robust and versatile at the same time. You have to be very resilient because with all these uncertainties going on, employees will need a strong nucleus, they need belonging and support – even if they are generation Y.

This entrepreneurial nucleus has then to be added by an agile, learning and collaborative attitude, culture and structure – to nurture and to keep it live. Move away from the old heroic management idea based on preserving power. Go to supporting and developing your staff. Combine the power of the individual with the power of the system. Get out of silos, mix teams, know-how and experience and see what wonderful new ideas come to the surface. Best solutions emerge from joint interaction, thus promote communication instead of information. Encourage your team's feedback, let go, give freedom and trust (see illustration on previous page).

### Future settings

Change is the new status quo. You might like it or not. You might even find all this developments dispensable. But it is reality and there is no way back. And no, you are not too old for it. Start by opening up your mind, by learning about and using digital technologies, by creating an environment and culture for innovation. Start by rendering transparency, trust and open communication, by co-creation and teamwork. Give people a place where they can unfold and develop their potential, where they are allowed to participate and bring in all their different skills, where feedback and dialog is nurtured. Social, cooperative and empathetic skills will be key to leadership. And one more thing: support your young digital native colleagues. They also have quite a bit to learn from your experience. ●

## 5 + 5 – working in a digital world

### KEY DEVELOPMENTS

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- 1 **Internet changes everything**  
Lives have changed radically and will even more. There is no way back.
- 2 **From more to enough**  
There is a new consciousness enabled and supported by the internet – it is all about a more resource-oriented and sustainable life.
- 3 **Being heard and seen**  
The »community« decides what is relevant. Therefore power gets a new dimension.
- 4 **Dialog and co-creation**  
People participate, amplify, reinforce and enrich by cooperation.
- 5 **Dissolution of borders**  
The risk of loss of structure and self exploitation increases but there is a bigger chance to develop new models for living and working.

### KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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- 1 **Explore and experience**  
Stop complaining and start exploring and experiencing new opportunities.
- 2 **Start small**  
Start with small projects, search for opportunities, new exciting technologies, useful platforms and tools.
- 3 **Stay agile**  
Be and stay open, flexible and curious. Build flat hierarchies and scalable network organizations.
- 4 **Go co-create**  
Work in close exchange with your colleagues, employees, bosses, clients and suppliers.
- 5 **Live and work resiliently**  
Take over responsibility for your company, your team and for your life.