PEOPLE OVER PIXELS

Keeping Humanity at the Core of Digitalization

Leading people is not a question of whether to go digital or stay analogue. It is not either-or, but both: Digilogue leadership.

Everything is turning digital – Everything? The opposite is true: The digital age needs the renaissance of humanity.

The technical sphere has recently seen the rise of an ethical debate. People are talking about data protection and informational self-determination, but also about the nature of work in future: How much of our world of work can we or should we give over to new digital capabilities?

One thing is clear: Humanity is recapturing its relevance in the age of digital transformation. In essence, this means consciously admitting and accepting closeness, vulnerability, and insecurity in the organizational world as the foundations of a culture of trust. We need a mindset shift: Putting the satisfaction of our people before the allure of short-term profits or attractive revenue figures. This means a paradigm shift for many organizations, but it is inevitable. Companies need it to recover the space for innovation and creativity. In a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, we need genuine guidance – we need a new culture of leadership.

In essence, being human means consciously admitting and accepting closeness, vulnerability, and insecurity in the organizational world as the foundations of a culture of trust. This means a paradigm shift for many organizations, but it is inevitable. In a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, we need genuine guidance – we need a new culture of leadership.

Leadership needs development

Being an appreciative and authentic leader and knowing how to motivate people and make them more creative and innovative is a genuine challenge. What might sound deceptively simple is a major challenge for many managers in larger and more traditionally minded organizations. Companies need to do more for their managers and invest more in executive development.

The world of work will not become exclusively digital, and neither will the world of executive education. It will remain both digital and analogue: blended. Companies are opting for a combination of on-site and on-line training, the recent Future Management Development study published by Kienbaum has found.

More specifically, top executives will still prefer individual coaching and workshops as their preferred training formats. Digital services, like online study platforms, web-based training, or webinars, will continue to play an only subsidiary role for top executive development.

In contrast to top executive training, HR developers are turning primarily to online training offerings for their line management users: The most frequent formats are online self-study platforms and webinars. Operational managers will still be attending traditional workshop formats, but they will become less and less relevant in the near future.

The preferred development formats are changing depending on the level of hierarchy: For top executives and upper management, on-site courses remain the format of choice. Digital opportunities are a popular add-on, but no substitute for them. The preferences are different for line managers: Their development programs are witnessing a shift towards digital formats. In essence, the future of executive development will be digilogue.

Lead differently but why and how?

Why is leadership changing? It is because the people who are being led are changing: The much vaunted and highly sought-after digital elites – typically members of Generation Y – have much different expectations compared to their older peers. They want their jobs to have meaning and give them creative freedom. They want to work with interesting personalities from other parts of the world. They want to be part of a cause and work for an employer they can identify with. And they want to know exactly how the business operates and have a say in its strategic decisions.

Managers need to become coaches and mentors for their people and reach out to them as equals. They need to know their concerns and their problems. And they need to understand what their people are best at and what they are passionate about.

Leading people means empowering people and getting them in touch with the right projects, issues, and teams, to keep them fully motivated and ready to go the extra mile. Gone are the days when all-powerful bosses could simply issue orders and expect them to be followed to the letter. Still, people will expect a leader they can depend on, someone to lead the way.
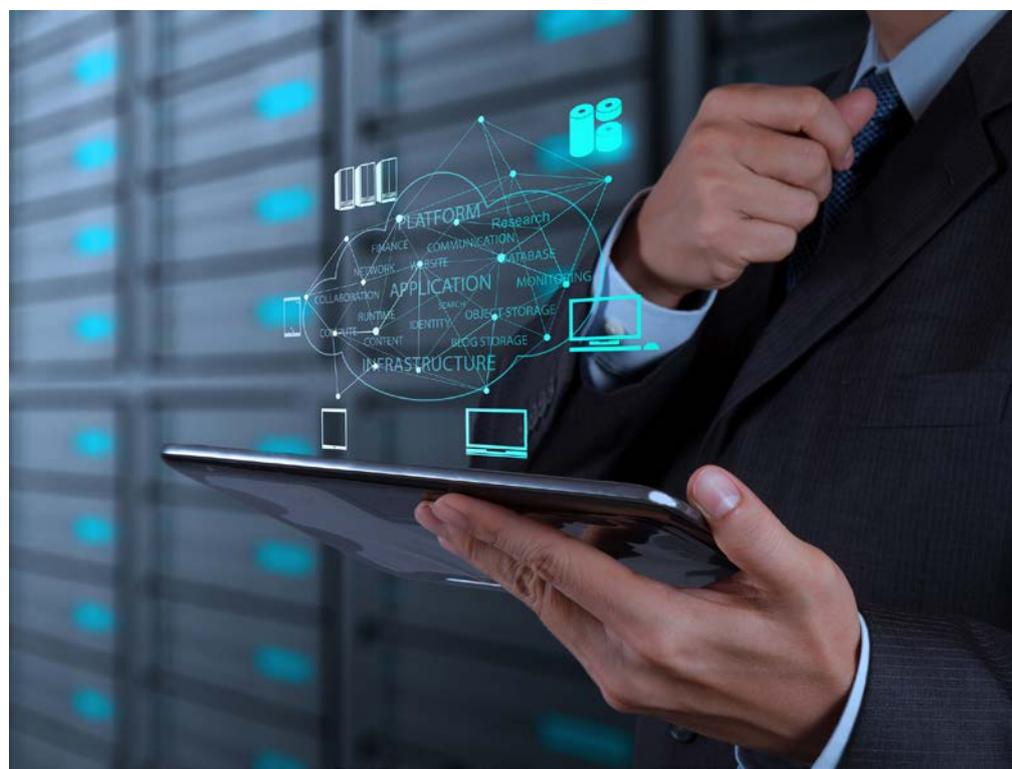
The conditions for leadership have also changed at their core: Today's managers need to lead teams that span across disciplines, cultures, and entire time zones. Leadership is also becoming more transparent by becoming measurable with modern performance management practices. This goes beyond the manager-employee relationships: Entire companies are becoming more transparent, as employer rating sites like kununu are giving employees a new public voice.

People over Pixels: Technology as an Add-On, Humanity as the Kernel

How leadership is changing in the wake of digitalization and what matters now in the face of constantly accelerating technical innovation is not just a topic for the HR community or business at large: This year's edition of the world's leading technology conference South by Southwest (SXSW) concerned itself not just with chatbots, robotics, or AI, but with the experience of digital capabilities in a

(still) analogue world. This apparent paradox brings us back to our need to humanize the world of work – and the debates at SXSW. What makes IBM's Watson such a great "guy" is its ability to convey appreciation, feedback, and motivation. That is what we human beings need, and that is what entertains and captivates us.

This cannot be all there is: Executives need to be challenged. At the latest when ethical principles are at stake, leadership needs clarity and clear values to give people guidance and

inspire trust. We need to truly understand the new capabilities afforded by technology and learn to use them, especially in communication. But we also need to consciously learn to accept weaknesses and ambiguities – nobody is perfect. Is that not a comforting thought? The more authentic we are, the more credible and creative we can be for the future we are building – a digilogue future.

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