

## Leadership and teamwork in the digital age



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**IFA | Scientists at IFA explore digital approaches to leadership and interaction in teams. They support managers in guiding their employees through the turbulent changes that technological innovations and digitization bring about.**

Technological innovations have an increasing impact on the interaction in companies. The digitalization of the world of work is now progressing so fast that individual employees can hardly keep up. Managers are therefore responsible for setting a good example, creating acceptance for the innovations and guiding their employees through the changes. This requires a high degree of leadership competence and above all time for leadership work.

Scientists at the Institute of Production Systems and Logistics (IFA) at Leibniz Universität Hannover are working on a model for leadership and social interaction in the digital age together with colleagues from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) and six companies in the joint research project "Digital leadership and technologies for tomorrow's team interaction (teamIn)".

### Development and piloting

The basis of the guiding principles is the demand-oriented development of new management and communication instruments and their testing at two user companies. These are a manufacturing company and an engineering service provider. Based on the requirements of the two companies, existing tools are supplemented with new ideas and approaches and completely new methods are developed.

The developed methods are piloted in the user companies, i.e. tested under

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- Model for leadership and social interaction in the digital age
- Development of new leadership and communication tools
- Adaptation and development of new role models and competence requirements
- Roadmap for the implementation of the guiding principles including competence development concept
- User Centered Change (UCC) as an approach for a participatory change process

scientific supervision in clearly defined areas. Among other things, the acceptance of the measures as well as the influence of the measures on the performance of the department and on the satisfaction of the employees and managers will be recorded. The results of the piloting serve to further develop the methods within the project and are also incorporated into a structured online collection of methods, which is part of the roadmap for implementing the mission statement.

### **Support of the managers**

The aim is to support managers at the lower levels of the hierarchy in performing their management tasks. According to the researchers, this can be done in two ways.

On the one hand, leadership quality can be improved by supporting individual (further) development, for example. To this end, the project partners are working on a digital feedback system between employees and managers. This enables anonymous real-time feedback on selected questions and the general mood in the team.

On the other hand, a major challenge is to give managers more time for actual leadership tasks. In many cases, they spend much more time on technical or organisational issues than, for example, on promoting, motivating or advising their employees. In the project, a working group is therefore looking into the possibilities of relieving managers of the burden of personnel planning by using artificial intelligence (AI) and thus creating more time for leadership activities.

### **New role models**

With the advent of digitalisation in companies, many procedures, processes and hierarchies are changing. New organisational structures are emerging. A central concern of the project is to determine how these changes affect future roles in the company and the corresponding competence requirements.

For example, there are scenarios in which more decisions will be made decentrally by the employees themselves on the shop floor. Digital shop floor management with real-time information provision can help to make this possible. But more autonomy also means more responsibility and higher demands. A further working group in the project is concerned with the prerequisites for this and whether this responsibility is desired at all by the employees.

The role of AI agents as supporters or even partial replacements for the manager must also be defined. In addition to technical and organisational questions, the focus is on questions of acceptance as well as ethical and legal aspects.

### **Helping to shape change**

In order to ensure that the changes initiated in the companies within the context of the project have a lasting positive effect, the participatory design of the change process is central to the project from the very beginning. This means that managers and employees are continuously involved in the development of the guiding principles, starting with the assessment of the current situation and needs and continuing through to the development and implementation of the methods. Various methods from the areas of User Centered Design (UCD) and User Centered Change (UCC) are used. Meanwhile, the IFA is working on the development of an integrated target system to make the success of change processes in companies assessable.

In order for companies to make use of the opportunities offered by digitization and to successfully manage the changes associated with it, good leadership and the participation of all those involved are required above all.

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