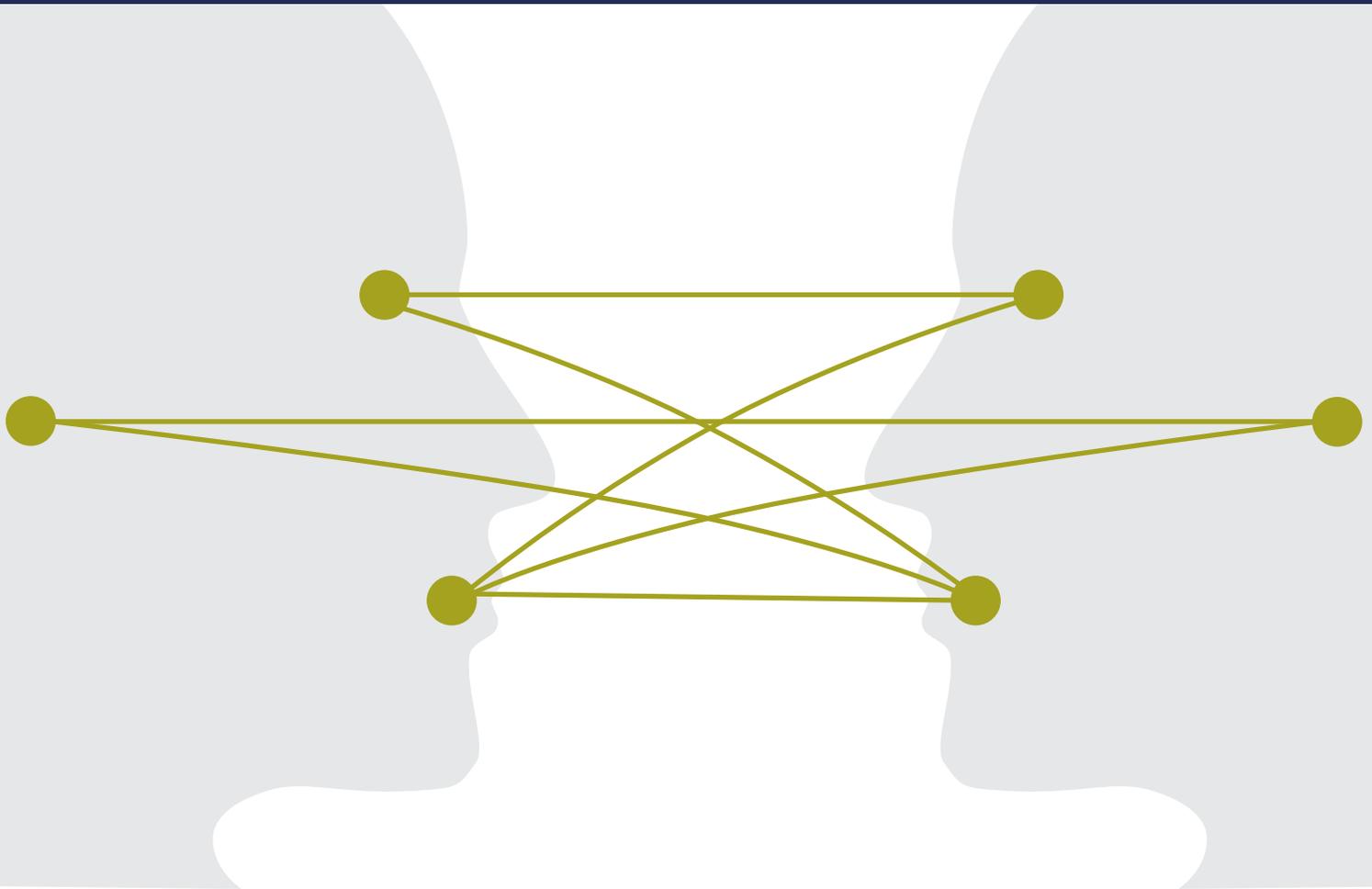# Leadership in the digital age – relevant areas of competence and requirements to be fulfilled by leaders

An analysis of 30 studies and surveys from 2012-2016

- Communication is the meta-competence
- Focus on the human being
- Analogue and digital competences complement each other

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"Which competences do leaders need to lead successfully in the age of digitalisation?"

To find answers to this question, we analysed 30 studies and surveys from the years 2012 up to July 2016 and developed a competence ranking. The result is as fascinating as it is irritating: fascinating regarding the top 10 competences and irritating due to the unexpectedly low ranking position of several competences.

An analysis of 30 studies and surveys is of course not sufficient not sufficient to draw a reliable and conclusive image of the competences necessary for the digital age for the digital age, but we obtain a good and meaningful summary of the current status of the discussion.

Thus, we do not perceive the ranking in the meta-study as a binding specification of relevant competences in the digital age, but more as an initial indicator of which way the journey could be headed.

With this summary, we wish to offer some guidance in the competence jungle and sharpen the senses for what really counts and what aspects could be more relevant than others. Not more, but not less.

1. The leader as "master of the universe"?!

The successful leader in the digital age possesses 71 relevant competences which were named throughout all of the studies and surveys.

2. Communication is the meta-competence

The most important competence by far is the ability to communicate (this was mentioned as a relevant competence in 70 % of the studies and surveys). Due to its high credits, communication can also be referred to as a meta-competence in the digital age. The paramount importance of communication ability is also underlined by the fact that individual aspects of communication are explicitly mentioned, such as "giving feedback" (23 %), "active listening" (10 %) and "analogue over digital" (7 %).

3. Not losing sight of the human being

The second most important skill is human orientation (50 %). This includes attributes such as "appreciation" (23 %) and "respect", "employee-orientation", "amenability" and "understanding the interests of the employees" (3 % each).

4. Analogue competence dominates…

Competences of the analogue age dominate the expectations towards leaders: 85 % of the named relevant competences can be called analogue, i.e. competences which were competences which were also of certain relevance in the analogue age.

5. … but four digitalisation skills are among the Top 10

However, new competences of the digital age form an important addition and have already established themselves in the Top 10 – "networking ability", "transparency", "shedding hierarchy" and "digital media competence".

6. Several competences seem to be going astray…

Some competences come as a surprise by their low relevance e.g.:
"leading from a distance" (20 %), "ability to work under pressure" (13 %), "agility" (10 %) and "consistency" (7 %). Some competences were not mentioned in any of the studies, such as "good buying abilities", "discipline" or "being eager to experiment".

EXCURSUS I: Silicon Valley competences, yes please…but not in Germany?!

In Germany, some competences appear more passive and traditionally innovative, rather than active and innovative in a modern sense. Competences which are associated with the working methods and philosophy of Silicon Valley were named rarely or not at all. These include "agility" (10 %), "disruptive thinking" (10 %), "willingness to experiment" (0 %) as well as "risk tolerance" (0 %).
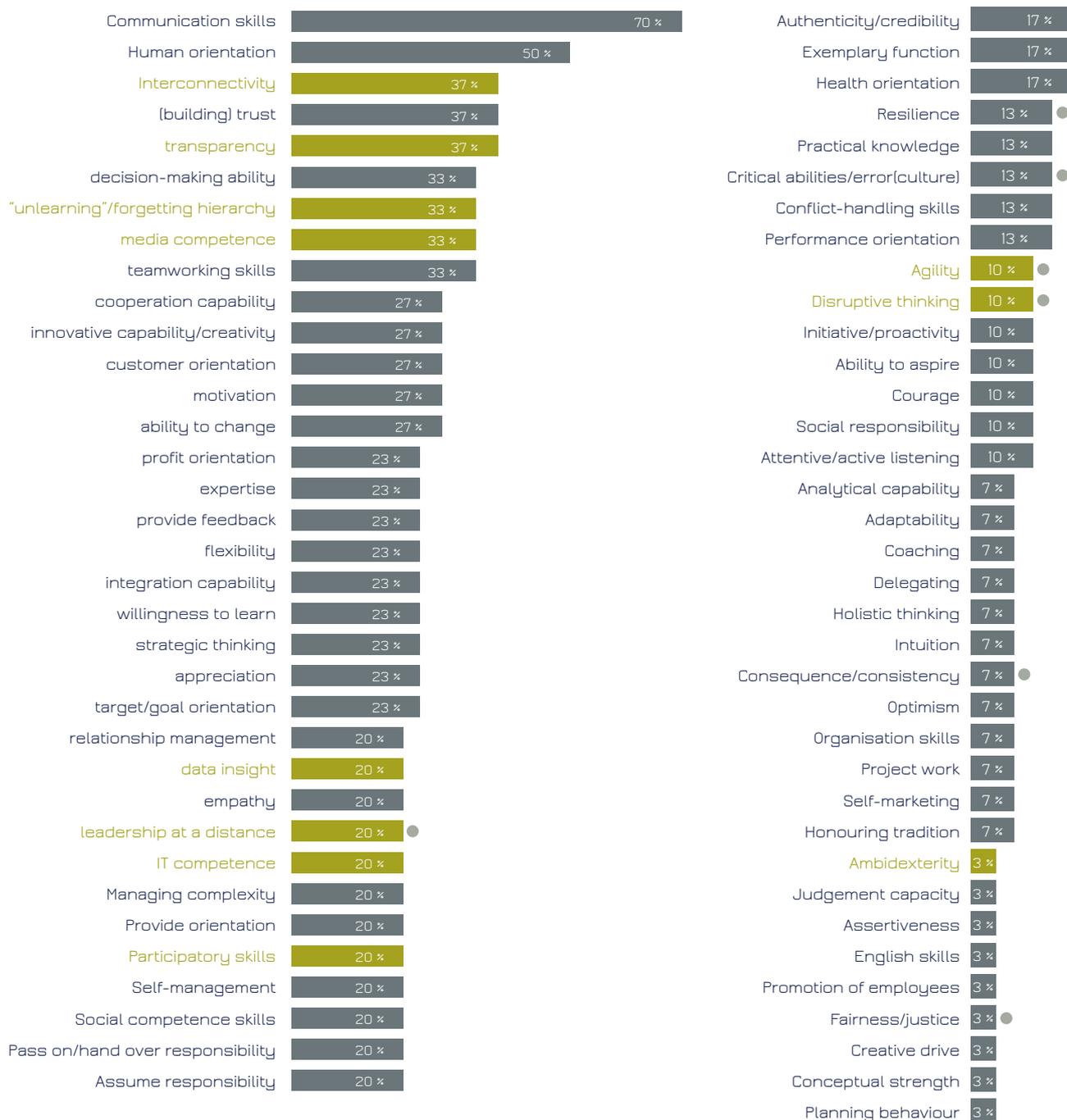
EXCURSUS II: Disruptive thinking and agility: fashionable competences or a trend?

The competences "disruptive thinking" and "agility" were mentioned relatively rarely – in comparison to their presence in (specialist) media and expert groups. This raises questions around their relevance in the long term: fashion or trend?

Competence Ranking Chart

rank 1-35

Competence	Value
Communication skills	70 %
Human orientation	50 %
Interconnectivity	37 %
(building) trust	37 %
transparency	37 %
decision-making ability	33 %
"unlearning"/forgetting hierarchy	33 %
media competence	33 %
teamworking skills	33 %
cooperation capability	27 %
innovative capability/creativity	27 %
customer orientation	27 %
motivation	27 %
ability to change	27 %
profit orientation	23 %
expertise	23 %
provide feedback	23 %
flexibility	23 %
integration capability	23 %
willingness to learn	23 %
strategic thinking	23 %
appreciation	23 %
target/goal orientation	23 %
relationship management	20 %
data insight	20 %
empathy	20 %
leadership at a distance	20 %
IT competence	20 %
Managing complexity	20 %
Provide orientation	20 %
Participatory skills	20 %
Self-management	20 %
Social competence skills	20 %
Pass on/hand over responsibility	20 %
Assume responsibility	20 %

rank 36-71

Competence	Value
Authenticity/credibility	17 %
Exemplary function	17 %
Health orientation	17 %
Resilience	13 %
Practical knowledge	13 %
Critical abilities/error(culture)	13 %
Conflict-handling skills	13 %
Performance orientation	13 %
Agility	10 %
Disruptive thinking	10 %
Initiative/proactivity	10 %
Ability to aspire	10 %
Courage	10 %
Social responsibility	10 %
Attentive/active listening	10 %
Analytical capability	7 %
Adaptability	7 %
Coaching	7 %
Delegating	7 %
Holistic thinking	7 %
Intuition	7 %
Consequence/consistency	7 %
Optimism	7 %
Organisation skills	7 %
Project work	7 %
Self-marketing	7 %
Honouring tradition	7 %
Ambidexterity	3 %
Judgement capacity	3 %
Assertiveness	3 %
English skills	3 %
Promotion of employees	3 %
Fairness/justice	3 %
Creative drive	3 %
Conceptual strength	3 %
Planning behaviour	3 %

Legend:

- Explanation of analogue and digital competences
- Competences of the analogue age
- Competences which had surprisingly low resonance

We refer to competences of the digital age as those which have first arisen or become necessary due to widespread digitalisation (e.g. comprehension of data or digital media competence) or those which may not be new, but have altered their quality and relevance through digitalisation (e.g. transparency and networking skills). By analogue competence we mean competences which were already of certain relevance in leadership practice in the analogue age.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE META-STUDY

Focus on formally descriptive content analysis

The evaluation of the meta-study is a formally descriptive content analysis based on a frequency analysis of the word frequency in the executive summaries. Secondary or detail analyses of the primary studies and surveys (e.g. the study design or the data acquisition) were not performed.

Variety of methods

The primary studies and surveys distinguish themselves by the diversity of methods – the emphasis being on quantitative surveys. More than half of the studies and surveys (54%) were determined quantitatively – through online-surveys or telephone interviews, a quarter (26%) based on expert interviews. 10% of the studies and surveys are based on personal conversations with leaders, a further 10% of standardised questionnaires were additionally complemented by expert conversations.

18,274 respondents in total

In 54% of the primary studies and surveys solely leaders were questioned, in 23% leaders and employees and in 13% a specific group respectively, such as students, scientists, etc. … The remaining 10% included general individuals in the company.
The smallest interview group consisted of 20 and the largest of 3,600 individuals.
The total number of those interviewed in the primary studies and surveys was 18,274.

Contracting Authorities and Publishers of the Primary Studies and Surveys

- Accenture
- Bertelsmann Stiftung
- Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (BMBF)
- Center for Leadership and Behavior in Organizations (CLBO)
- Crisp Research AG
- Data Dimension
- Deloitte
- Deloitte Digital GmbH
- Detecon Consulting
- Deutsche Gesellschaft für Personalführung e.V. (DGFP)
- Deutsche Telekom AG
- Egon Zehnder International
- forsa
- Frankfurt University of Applied Science
- Fraunhofer-Institut für Arbeitsorganisation und Arbeitswirtschaft (IAO)
- Führungskräfte Institut GmbH
- Führungskräftevereinigung ULA
- GfK Verein
- Groß & Cie.
- Hays AG
- Heads! Executive Consultancy
- IBM
- Information Factory
- Initiative Neue Qualität der Arbeit (InQA)
- Initiative Zukunftsfähige Führung (izf) e.V. Stuttgart
- Institut für Beschäftigung und Employability IBE
- Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach GmbH
- Institut für Führungskultur im digitalen Zeitalter (IFIDZ)
- Institut für Performance Management (IPM) Leuphana Universität Lüneburg
- InterSearch Executive Consultants
- Kalaidos Fachhochschule Schweiz
- Kienbaum
- LEAD I Mercator Capacity Building Center for Leadership & Advocacy
- Nextpractice GmbH
- Odgers Berndtson
- osb-international
- Russel Reynolds Associates
- Springer Fachmedien
- St. Gallen Symposium
- Stiftung Neue Verantwortung
- Technische Universität München
- Universität St. Gallen
- Universität Witten/Herdecke
- Wertekommission - Initiative Werte Bewusste Führung e.V.
- Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung
- Zeitschrift Personalwirtschaft
- Züricher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften

IFIDZ – INSTITUTE FOR LEADERSHIP CULTURE IN THE DIGITAL AGE

The IFIDZ researches the effects digital change has on business leadership culture at personnel and organisational levels. It also examines how challenges resulting from this development can be mastered by the businesses and their leaders and which structures and competences are needed in order to do so.

The IFIDZ passes its knowledge of these discoveries on to the business world by publishing studies and holding conferences, seminars and lectures. Thus, the institute contributes to businesses being prepared to face future challenges on the market and being able to actively benefit from the prospects which result from market developments.

To determine which competences business leaders have and which they still need to acquire, the IFIDZ has developed its own analysis tool and method, the Alpha Intelligence Leadership Competence Test Method (AILT).

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CONTACT

Barbara Liebermeister
Leader of the institute
E-mail: b.liebermeister@ifidz.de

Patrick Merke
Director of studies
E-mail: p.merke@ifidz.de