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Growth Zone Digital TRANSFORMATION

How the WE-mindset becomes the key driver for success

The digital transformation is currently proving to be the largest and most important growth zone for companies, executives and employees. Technical adaptation of individuals, businesses and societies, indeed entire nations is accelerating. The speed of development is challenging and creates on the one hand uncertainty but on the other a variety of new opportunities for all of us.

What stands out is the growing connectedness of people, data and organizations as well as a multitude of new ways to communicate and opportunities for social interaction. The digital transformation is not just about developing new technical skills but it is, in particular, a human learning journey. The digital transformation is only feasible if we transform our mindset too, from ME to WE. Here are three ways to cultivate a WE-mindset.

Updating Values

Both education and business are based on the principle: "As much competition as possible, as little cooperation as necessary." With this kind of value system, individuals and companies will have the same fate as dinosaurs in the ice-age. They simply will not survive the knowledge age. And yet we seem to be programmed to compete. Here is an example from the world of science: When Dr. Iljad Madisch, a Harvard trained virologist, gets stuck in a project and reaches out for help, he realizes that scientists have a highly developed ego. Instead of receiving support from his colleagues, he gets criticized. They tell him that top researchers should not expose themselves by asking for help but rather project an image of supreme competence. Dr. Madisch, however, thinks that scientists need to come together as a global community in which joined progress is more important than individual egos. This led him to start ResearchGate, a social network for scientists. It is designed to scrape the best minds of the planet together. Today, 10 years later, it is used by around 12 million scientists in 200 countries with 10,000 members more each week and 2.5 million publications uploaded each month. Dr. Madisch is particularly proud of the fact that members share even information that tends not to be published, but which is of great importance for further development, such as negative results.

Sharing Knowledge and Being Allowed to Participate in the Decision-Making

Anyone who hoards knowledge without interacting with others can easily overlook complex interdependencies and miss the boat of digital transformation. Only the ability to link knowledge with other disciplines or perspectives creates additional value. A 2016 study by the Technical University of Munich finds that most employees are open for more involvement. According to the

study, three out of four employees (76 percent) say they would increase their input if they could have a say in new products and developments. 80 percent believe that greater participation in company-relevant decisions would increase their company's productivity. And they are right! Managing a company has become a complex task that can only be solved collaboratively. As Dr. Madisch's example shows, our deeply humanly ability to collaborate these days seems to need the right impetus and environment to flourish. The appropriate set of values for success in today's economy is: "As much collaboration as possible, as little competition as necessary."

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Maximizing Menefits

Competition is a zero-sum game. One wins, one loses or often even many lose. This is not something we can afford these days. We need everybody to be motivated and involved. The new approach is: As many people as possible win. This happens when decisions benefit the interests of as many people as possible. Communication is the key, but on a much more sophisticated level: We're supposed to seek to understand rather than to inform, share our motives and needs rather than cement our stand points and develop ideas together for win-win solutions rather than to fight to become the outright winner.

Involvement in Solution Finding

Only if people are given the opportunity to express their interests and if they are actively involved in finding a solution, there is a chance to bring about win-win solutions. This has become much easier and faster due to advanced communication tools, which allow everybody to participate regardless of where they are at the moment. With an email or a video message, countless people can be informed simultaneously. In internal networks, opinions can be exchanged and different approaches discussed. Documents can be sent back and forth quickly and refined. Consensus and decisions can be achieved much faster.

Dealing with the Tricky Side of Virtual Communication

Of course, it is important to pay attention to the pitfalls since communication is and remains a complex matter. We only send a small part of our message through words. Most of the information flows through voice and body language. Depending on which communication channel we choose, a larger or smaller part of the information is lost. At the lowest level and with the highest chance of misunderstandings, SMS or WhatsApp only consist of a few words and abbreviations. Even longer emails leave a lot of room for interpretation. Live chat is a small step up as it offers at least real-time interaction. Connection via telephone additionally provides the sound and tonality of the voice and gives more meaning to the information. Any additional visual support increases the complete transmission of information and meaning and reduces the risk of misunderstandings. For example, shared documents or a screen presentation offer more clarity. And of course, activating our camera has become so easy today and we can reach a pretty high level of what virtual communication offers. There is one crucial rule: if the chosen way of communication doesn't seem to be working, don't do more of the same, go at least one level up.

Placing Trust in Others First

Today, trust and integrity have become even more important. Organizations are more fluid, hierarchies are flattening, and there is more freedom, but also more responsibility for the individual. The role model becomes one of the most important management instruments. So, if you want your employees to trust you, you need to trust them first. This is, of course, easier said than done. For example, when companies introduce the option to work from home, managers will have a wide variety of responses. While some are pleased to be able to offer their employees more freedom in choosing their workplace, others are primarily concerned about whether

and how their employees will exploit this. But distrust almost ensures a negative outcome as shown by the game theory. The scientific discipline, whose most important researcher John F. Nash has received a Nobel Prize for his work in this field, deals with the consequences of a lack of cooperation displayed by ego-centered decisions. His research is full of examples which display that participants achieve a less successful outcome if they do not work together. Of course, the researchers also looked for the best strategy to ensure that everyone involved benefits. Their findings: Placing trust in others first and acting as if one knew that the other party would also act in the spirit of mutual trust and shared benefits. This is not always easy for us, especially because we tend to underestimate the trustworthiness of others. We need to create an environment where all involved are motivated to work self-responsibly for an aim that benefits everyone. And this

Trust and integrity have become evermore important: The role model is among the most critical management instruments.

only works with transparency regarding context, motives and visions and the opportunity to discuss them.

Enjoying the Journey

Digital transformation is a continuous learning process. It is unlikely that we will ever reach a place where we can rest on what we know. Depending on the prevailing culture and mindset, this can paralyze or release creativity and lead to joint growth.



Restricted thinking makes people tired. Ulrike Stahl experienced this herself when working as a treasurer. A job at the United Nations inspired her for life – when she saw people teaming up for to promote peace, justice and prosperity worldwide. Since then, she has researched the dimensions of cooperative behavior for over 2000 DAX companies, middle sized businesses and entrepreneurs.



Dynamic and Static Self-Image

In her studies with hundreds of students and employees of Fortune 500 companies, American psychology professor, Carol Dweck, has discovered that people have one of two mind-sets: One makes it possible to learn and grow constantly. The other restricts and makes you shy away from new opportunities. She distinguishes between the dynamic self-image, the so-called growth mindset, and the static, the so-called fixed mindset. People with a static self-image are wary of making mistakes or admitting weaknesses. For that reason, they prefer to stay in their comfort zone and are reluctant to expose themselves to situations they cannot control. . On the other hand, people with a dynamic self-image assume that intelligence and abilities develop through trial and error, practice and endurance, and through the support of others. They are always ready to face new challenges and to work on their abilities. They do not claim to be instantly perfect, which allows them to show others their mistakes, lack of knowledge and weaknesses. Leaders who exemplify this, by recognizing and sharing their own fallibility, create psychological security in their teams.

Psychological Safety is the Driver for Team Success

According to a two-year-old study called Aristotle, which Google conducted with over 180 of its own teams, the question who's in which team is not so crucial for team success. The results the teams achieved in the end depended on the degree of psychological security that the team members were feeling.

Professor Amy Edmondson defined the term psychological safety in 1999. A climate of psychological safety makes it easier for people to speak up with their tentative thoughts. They believe that if they make a mistake, ask for help, information or feedback, others will not resent, penalize or think less of them for it.

If the work environment does not provide psychological safety, team members tend not to question the results of others and hold back their ideas out of fear of rejection by other team members and squashes the opportunity to build a growth mindset. Even simple statements like "Maybe I overlooked something here, what do you think?" have an instant positive effect on the level of psychological safety. The higher it is, the higher is the probability

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that the desire for further development will arise and that unusual and new ideas will be expressed and discussed.

By building this new WE in business, the opportunities of digital transformation become the driver for creativity, innovation, and growth by which not just a few will benefit, but as many as possible – in the spirit of the new WE in business.

Written by Ulrike Stahl

Ulrike Stahl is an inspiring speaker, author, and expert on the new 'WE' in business. How does successful collaboration work in an agile and global environment? How do we develop a 'WE' mindset for ourselves, our companies, and employees? As international Design Thinking Coach and Coach for Top Teams she always has her finger on the pulse. She is the author of the book "So geht WIRTSCHAFT! Kooperativ. Kollaborativ. Kokreativ," and over 100 published articles. www.ulrike-stahl.com