

**Start**

**Unternehmer/  
Perspektiven**  
*A Commerzbank initiative*

**COMMERZBANK**   
The bank at your side

# Project future: transformation meets tradition





# Our primary focus: people



The digital transformation has reached the SMEs. With all its technical complexity, its speeding up of markets, and its challenges for company management. What we began in 2015 as an appraisal of the situation we are now continuing in 2016 with a further study in the UnternehmerPerspektiven series, dealing with the subject of digital transformation.

This year, the pivotal question is: how do we manage people in organisations during a period of digital transformation? Many entrepreneurs find themselves facing conflicting challenges. On the one hand, they are supposed to courageously adopt a new course, create room for innovations, and find and retain suitable specialists, while on the other hand they have to proceed with their established workforces, ensure that these employees are properly trained, and reassess their own "error culture". Above all else, they must not endanger the existence of their companies; they must use proven business models to generate enough revenue to develop new ones—"transformation meets tradition". All this applies in particular to Germany with its almost legendary SME sector. Holding on to what we have, yet being open to new ideas is not an easy matter-but one which can be mastered. However

confident I may feel, the results of the survey involving 4,000 companies do give me food for thought. If we take too long with the necessary changes and are not prepared for a faster, more open and more collaborative approach in the upper echelons of German management, then we will simply be swept away by others. Ultimately, the success or failure of digital transformation will be determined in people's hearts and minds.

People are more than ever the focal point. Regardless of how much digital technology has advanced, this still holds true—and especially now, in the tenth year of our SME initiative UnternehmerPerspektiven.

Yours truly  
Markus Beumer  
Member of the Managing Board of Commerzbank AG



# Wanted: visionaries with a clear understanding



A great deal has been achieved in the past ten years since the SME initiative "UnternehmerPerspektiven" was launched. But in no area has change been more noticeable than in the digitalisation of business and industry. From the media to the banking industry: Many different sectors have already felt the full force of this development. Companies which fail to get involved in this process of change will disappear-before very long-from the marketplace.

To prevent this from happening, we need to get our workforces on board. Specifically, this means we have to ensure employability through effective training and qualification; in other words, we need to prepare staff for the demands of digitalisation and deal constructively with the changes which this entails.

The prospects for this are good. Employees are keen to develop their careers, they want to be involved in matters of strategy, they want to be informed, and they want more creative scope so that they play a role in the development of new products, processes and business models. The fact that change meets with resistance is perfectly normal. But where there is resistance, there is also energy-and the challenge is to utilise this energy positively. Managers

are by no means the éminences grises they used to be. Increasingly, they are the drivers of development, they are enablers and, ideally, they are visionaries with a clear understanding. But if digital transformation is to be successful, we also need our employees and their representatives on board.

As the study confirms, if change and the ongoing development of skills and competencies succeed, this transformation can lead to the creation of more jobs-and position the enterprise perfectly for a solid future. This should motivate companies to develop and implement new career prospects, flatter hierarchies and a more innovative climate. Markets will keep changing continually in the years ahead, so companies would be well advised to keep pace with this dynamic trend. A few years ago, product innovations usually served their purpose for fifteen years. Now the average is a mere five years. That's all the time the digital transformation allows us-but it offers more varied prospects and realistic expectations of success.

Yours truly  
Dr. Jürgen Meffert  
Director, McKinsey & Company Inc.



# New ideas



Markus  
Beumer

Business models with shorter lifecycles and companies which need to speed up: In 2015, UnternehmerPerspektiven questioned German SMEs about the technological and entrepreneurial challenges associated with digital transformation.

This year we wanted to find out what consequences this has for corporate culture and for people in the company on all levels of the hierarchy. The findings show that the technological acceleration calls for a serious overhaul of old thinking processes. This is now an indispensable factor and will be part of the DNA of successful SMEs in the coming years. It is no longer sufficient to develop a successful model and then simply build on it. Managers and their personnel are now faced with more and more new challenges. Only those executives, who understand that change is now the normal way of doing business, will be able to keep pace with, and have an impact on the



Anton F.  
Börner



Rüdiger A.  
Günther



Prof. Dr.  
Rüdiger Kabst

digital transformation, with genuine innovations, disruptive business models and new standards.

Another important factor is that companies require more than simply renewal from within. Only those enterprises which have the courage to engage in genuine collaboration and close cooperation—even with competitors in certain cases—will remain viable for the future. Overly rigid hierarchies will prove to be a stumbling-block in this climate of change.

The future credo of management is a simple one: competence triumphs over hierarchy. More than ever, managers are required to be motivators and facilitators. Their job is to spread confidence among their personnel, open up creative space and allow for mistakes, with the aim of gaining trust and achieving individual responsibility



Dr. Jürgen  
Meffert



Hartmut  
Schauerte



Dr. Peter  
Bartels

and engagement in return. But employees are also challenged: Digitalisation offers wonderful opportunities to those who are prepared to undergo continuous, lifelong training and who are not simply satisfied with past achievements.

All in all, digital transformation can lead to the creation of additional high-quality jobs. The challenge for companies will therefore be to have excellently trained and highly motivated employees. In this way digital transformation can be the driving force behind a new approach to economic thinking and work-related habits and processes!

The Advisory Board of  
UnternehmerPerspektiven





# I. SMEs and digital transformation



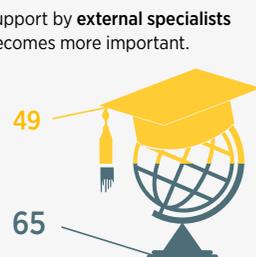
# I. SMEs and digital transformation

## The changing face of corporate culture

A digital revolution is under way among Germany's SMEs. Above all else, companies are striving for greater efficiency. But one in five enterprises is going a step further. These **"digital transformers"** are making systematic use of new technologies for the development of innovations and putting their business models to the test. For them, digitalisation means more than just the use of technical systems and the speeding up of processes. They also tell of a fundamental cultural change in their organisations. The result: a different understanding of work, career and even life itself.

### What effects does digital technology have on work processes and the organisation of work?

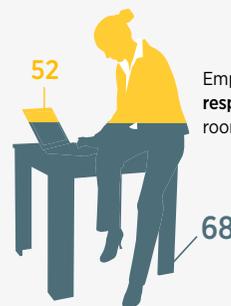
Support by external specialists becomes more important.



Work can be planned, organised and distributed **more flexibly**.



There are more **inter-departmental** teams or projects.



Employees have **more responsibility** and more room for manoeuvre.



More tasks and functions or areas of work can be **outsourced**.

■ SMEs (total)

■ Digital transformers

Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

### Structures and competencies are reorganised

The digital transformation of business models succeeds if the organisational structure also keeps up with the times: Cooperation, networking and controlled autonomy are the determining factors in corporate culture 4.0.

Digital transformers show how it's done: They design work processes flexibly; they open up creative space for their personnel; they give them greater responsibility in the development of their projects; and they emphasize the importance of collaboration—with other departments and even with external partners.

Further graphics

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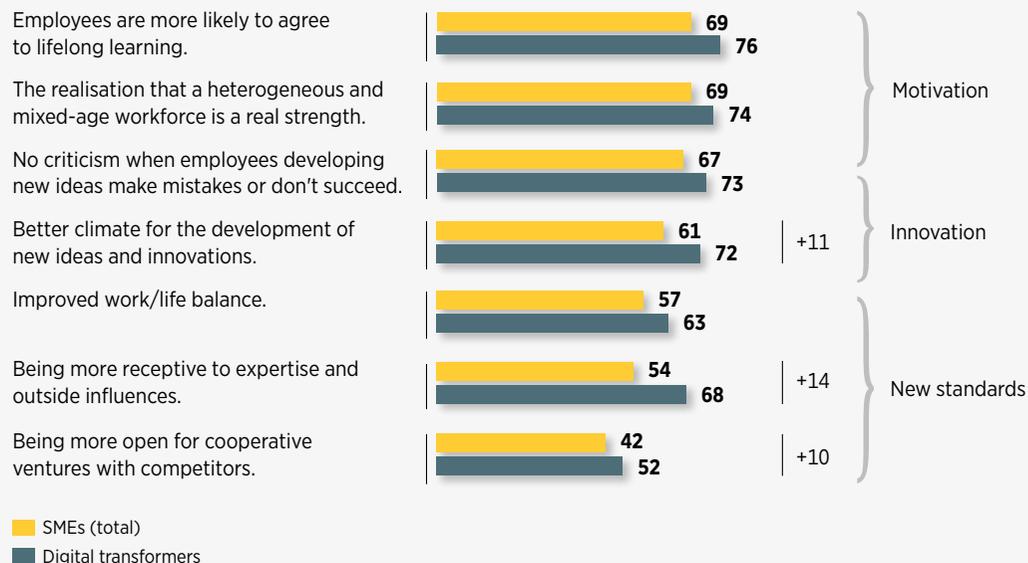
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# I. SMEs and digital transformation

## The changing face of corporate culture

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### What changes in corporate culture are critical success factors for your company?



Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

### A question of mindset

Whether or not digital transformation is successful in companies is also a matter of mindset. The driving forces behind success: on the one hand employees, who consider it their duty to "keep their eye on the ball" at all times, and on the other hand managers, who clear the way ahead for them by creating room to manoeuvre and promoting individual strengths.

Plus: Genuine innovations only come about if companies are open for new ideas. And these usually come from an external source—so an SME aiming to set new standards would be well advised to team up with competitors or with cooperative partners.

Further graphics

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# I. SMEs and digital transformation

## The changing face of corporate culture

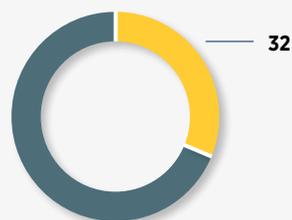
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### Satisfaction with underlying conditions in the regional environment

Proportion of companies which are very or extremely dissatisfied:

with the administration's flexibility and willingness to support/assist

with the digital infrastructure in broadband, mobile communications and public WLAN coverage domains



#### SMEs (total)

Sales EUR 2.5 - 12.5 million | 33

Sales EUR 12.5 - 100 million | 28

Sales over EUR 100 million | 20

Digital transformers | 30

42

37

36

39

Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

### Criticism of administrative processes and digital infrastructure

Many companies are not entirely satisfied with the public infrastructure. 32 percent of all firms complain of inflexibility and an unwillingness to cooperate on the part of public authorities.

The findings are even more drastic in the city states Berlin and Hamburg (not indicated in this graphic), where almost every other company expresses criticism concerning the lack of readiness of administrations to provide support and assistance. The companies also report shortcomings in the digital infrastructure. 41 percent are dissatisfied with the state of the broadband and mobile radio networks.

Further graphics

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# II. Personnel and development requirements





## II. Personnel and development requirements

### Digitalisation: job creator

Does digitalisation create jobs? Or destroy them? SMEs are optimistic: many companies are looking forward to positive developments on the labour market over the next few years, not least as a result of digital transformation. However, digital change is being hindered by a lack of training and qualification.

Among employees, digitalisation is generating at the same time high expectations and a certain resistance to change. On the one hand, there is greater willingness to undergo training and higher demands on technical systems and work/life balance. On the other hand, employees are worried about losing their status and having to face new, unfamiliar structures; they also have difficulties adapting to the new technologies.

What developments do companies anticipate over the next 5 years as far as headcount is concerned?



**Less personnel**  
44% of this group: as a result of increasing automation and streamlining

**More personnel**  
47% of this group: as a result of changes in staff requirement profiles caused by new digital technologies

**Same level of personnel**  
39% of this group: because savings due to automation and increases due to growth will balance each other out

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

**Digital transformation requires more jobs – and jobs with higher qualifications**

Bright prospects for the German economy: as a result of digital change, four out of ten companies are planning to take on more staff. Their forecast: additional employees are required for the new technologies and areas of business.

The majority of managers have no concerns about personnel development: they assume that savings achieved through automation will be balanced out by sustained growth. Only a small minority of firms fear they will have to lay off employees.

Further graphics

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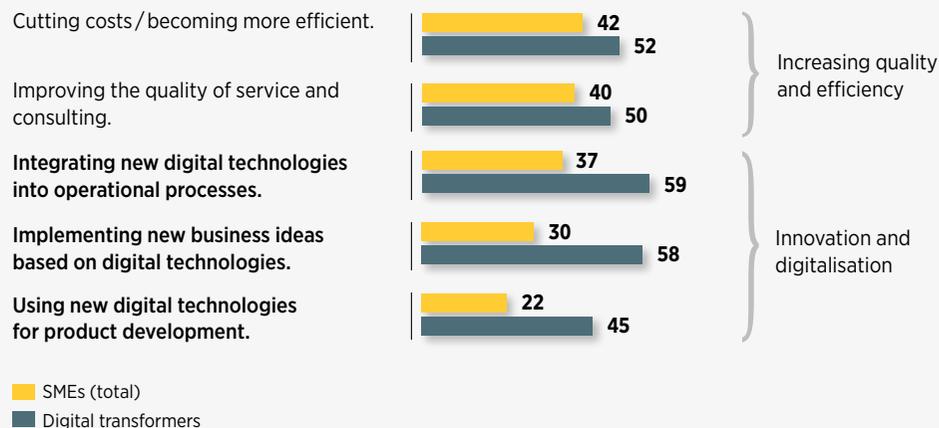
## II. Personnel and development requirements

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### What tasks/functions are adversely affected by the shortage of qualified personnel?



### Shortage of specialists slows down digital change

Companies are reporting that the continued shortage of specialists and experts is standing in the way of many digitalisation projects. The digital transformers, in particular, have a sense of frustration because of the lack of well-qualified personnel. They have difficulties integrating digital technologies into corporate processes and are unable to implement new business ideas. The development of new products based on digital technologies is also suffering from the shortage of specialists.

Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

Further graphics

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## II. Personnel and development requirements

### Digitalisation: job creator

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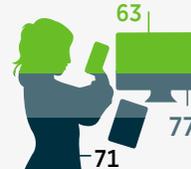
### How do employees respond to changes in companies and in the markets?

#### At least some employees ...

have a greater interest in training and qualification.



have higher expectations in regards to technical systems and equipment.

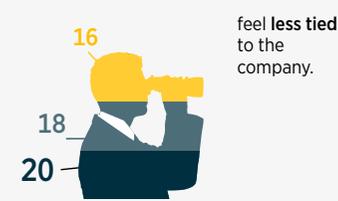
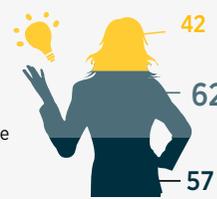


would like to have more information about the strategic focus.

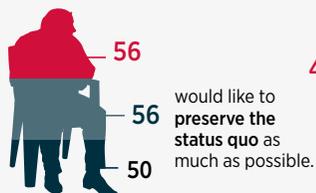


are more demanding as regards work/life balance.

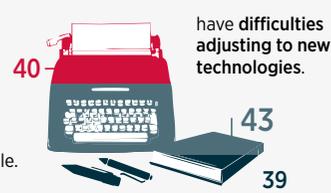
would like more freedom to realise their own ideas.



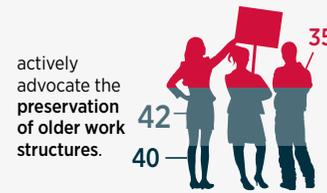
feel less tied to the company.



would like to preserve the status quo as much as possible.



have difficulties adjusting to new technologies.



actively advocate the preservation of older work structures.

■ SMEs (total)

■ Digital transformers

■ Digital transformers with particularly young personnel

Multiple responses  
Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

### Managers see challenges in HR work

Teams are showing greater interest in lifelong learning; many employees are keen to advance in their careers. At the same time, managers notice that a certain proportion of employees would rather preserve the old corporate structures.

The surveyed companies said that it is primarily older employees who are anxious to preserve the status quo. They need to be motivated accordingly. Younger employees are more open to change and have a different approach to work. They want to have creative space for themselves and their ties to the company are less strong.

Further graphics

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# III. Recruitment and qualification





# III. Recruitment and qualification

## Wanted: professionals

In view of the shortcomings in training and qualification referred to earlier, there is huge demand for qualified personnel. Above all, companies are looking for candidates with dual vocational training and/or several years of professional experience.

## What are the qualification categories in which companies are currently short of staff?

### Career beginners

Trainees

SMEs (total)

49

Specialist personnel who have just completed their vocational training

51

Graduates

30

### Professionals

Qualified personnel with several years of professional experience

68

Managers

24

Managers and specialists in the digital technology sector

17

## Wanted: new HR policy concepts

Compared with experienced, well-qualified specialists, career beginners find it much more difficult to get a job with small or midsize enterprises. However, the demand for professionals can really only be met if companies provide younger employees with suitable opportunities, including training.

Another important factor, though not yet in widespread use: individual career models within the company, by which highly qualified and experienced personnel can be retained.

Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

Further graphics

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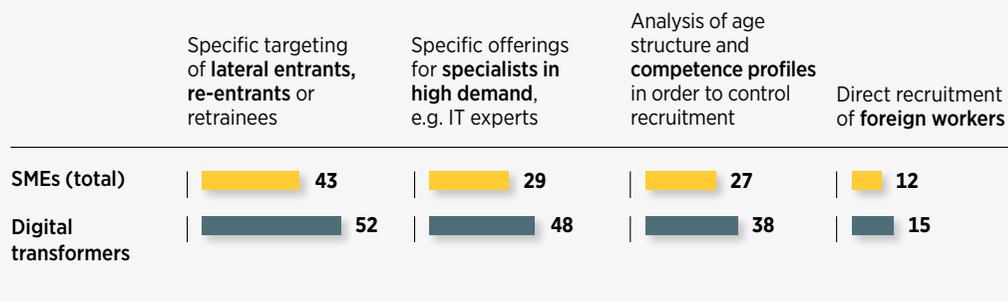


# III. Recruitment and qualification

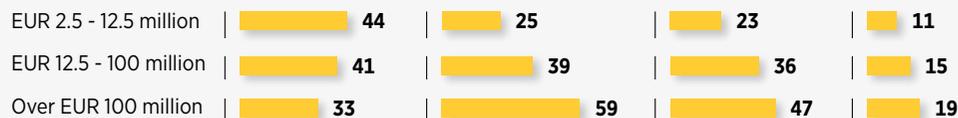
## Wanted: professionals

In view of the shortcomings in training and qualification referred to earlier, there is huge demand for qualified personnel. Above all, companies are looking for candidates with dual vocational training and/or several years of professional experience.

## What procedures are employed during the recruitment process?



## Based on annual sales revenues



Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

## SMEs need to recruit "lateral entrants"

Digital experts are not available "off the shelf": SMEs find themselves confronted with stiff competition as far as the recruitment of experienced specialists is concerned. The larger companies can pick these specialists up from the free market or even scoop up an entire year of graduates about to embark on their careers. Smaller firms, on the other hand, are ideally placed to offer employment to lateral entrants, re-entrants and retrainees—but this area leaves much room for improvement.

Further graphics

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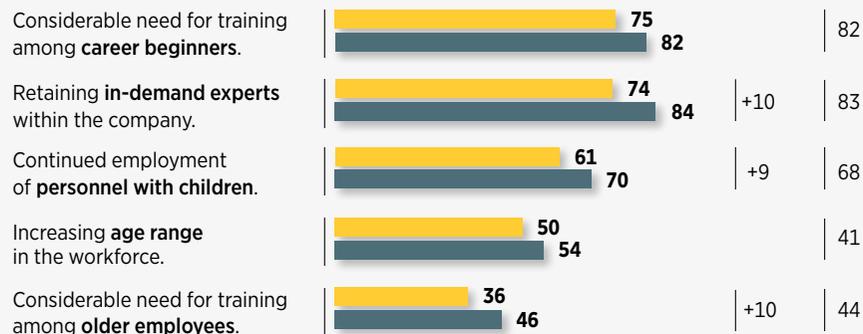
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# III. Recruitment and qualification

## Wanted: professionals

In view of the shortcomings in training and qualification referred to earlier, there is huge demand for qualified personnel. Above all, companies are looking for candidates with dual vocational training and/or several years of professional experience.

## What are the key tasks and functions in HR development?



■ SMEs (total)  
■ Digital transformers

Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

Digital transformers  
with particularly  
young personnel

## Need for training and qualification at all levels

Companies report a substantial need for training and qualification among career beginners. Clearly, their skills and competencies are not always up to requirements. Another important task: creating a stronger connection between qualified employees and the company, e.g. by means of special arrangements enabling them to combine their family life and their job more conveniently. Furthermore, the ongoing training of older employees is underestimated—even though this is an effective means of counteracting the shortage of specialist personnel.

Further graphics

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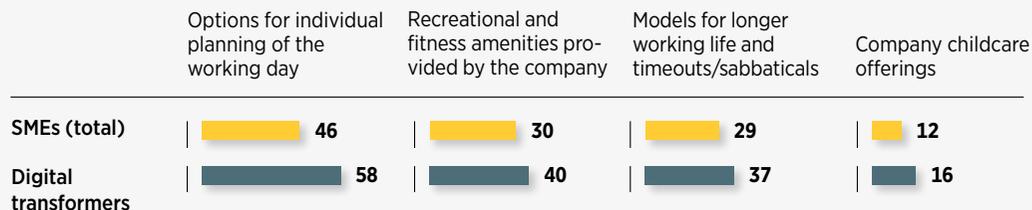
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In view of the shortcomings in training and qualification referred to earlier, there is huge demand for qualified personnel. Above all, companies are looking for candidates with dual vocational training and/or several years of professional experience.

## What measures are offered to ensure a suitable work-life balance?



## Based on annual sales revenues



Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

## Work-life balance offerings: Firms have a lot of catching up to do

A large number of SMEs, especially digital transformers and larger firms, enable their employees to plan their working day individually.

However, further measures aimed at improving the work-life balance are comparatively rare: only one in ten companies offers childcare. In view of increased expectations on the part of employees, work/life balance offerings are a suitable means of recruiting well-qualified personnel.

Further graphics

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# III. Recruitment and qualification

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### What measures does the company undertake to retain and safeguard expert know-how?



### Project work is the rule, expert careers are the exception

Employees are willingly provided with project-related liberties such as resources for individual development projects or interdepartmental pilot projects. Only a small number of companies put new structures in place on a permanent basis: some firms, such as innovation incubators, are an exception to this rule. Freedom is thus created out of corporate necessity—its ability to tie down highly qualified or highly committed employees is still underestimated.

■ SMEs (total)   
 ■ Digital transformers   
 ■ Based on annual sales revenues over EUR 100 million   
 Multiple responses   
 Total random sample n = 4,000   
 Figures/data in %

Further graphics

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# IV. Leadership and cooperation

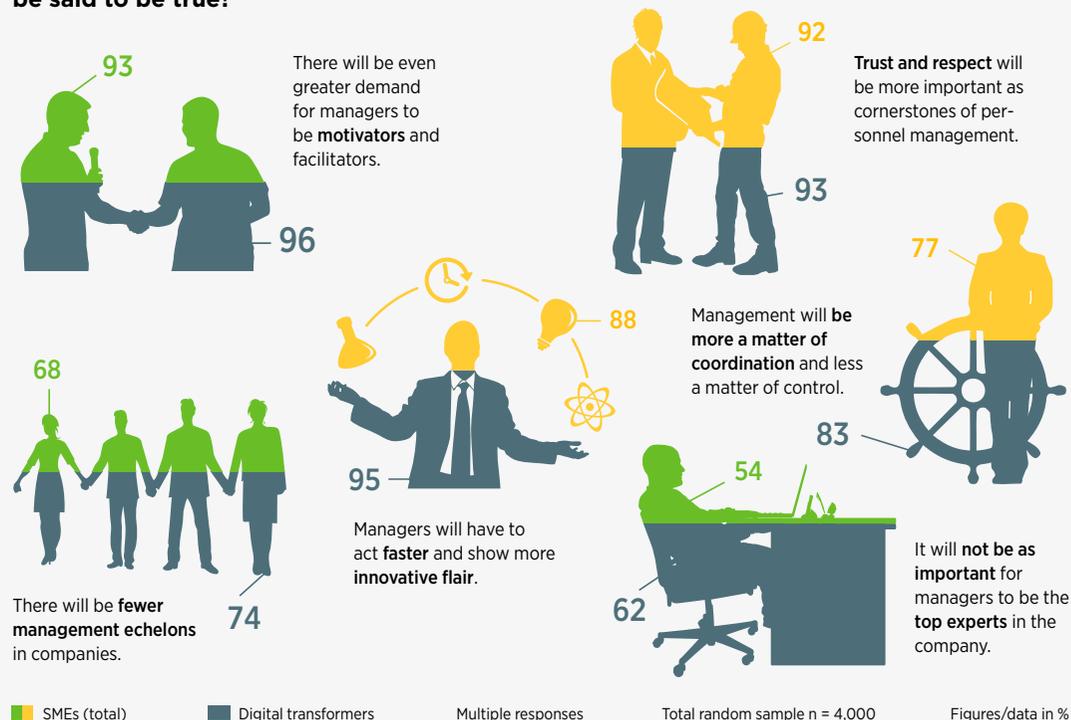


# IV. Leadership and cooperation

## Demonstrating readiness to change

Managers in SMEs are aware that leadership requirements are undergoing change—and this applies to all sizes of enterprises. Above all, they see themselves as motivators who focus strongly on collaboration, facilitating, and the strengthening of competency and independence. Checks and controls are now "out". However, managers are reluctant to forgo the traditional status of the top expert in the company: work contracts with external specialists and direct cooperation with competitors in connection with development projects are comparatively rare. HR and organisational development usually remain a matter for the boss.

Which statements concerning "The management culture of the future" can be said to be true?



**Management's new role: coordination rather than hierarchy**

Digital change doesn't mean turning one's back on traditional SME virtues by any means. From the companies' point of view, top management will be required to be role models more than ever before; they will have to demonstrate trust and respect, and they will need to be courageous, innovative and decisive.

Three-quarters of those questioned are of the opinion that management will have less to do with checks and controls and more to do with coordination in the coming years, because employees will be operating much more independently. As a result, they also believe that fewer echelons of management will be needed in companies.

Further graphics

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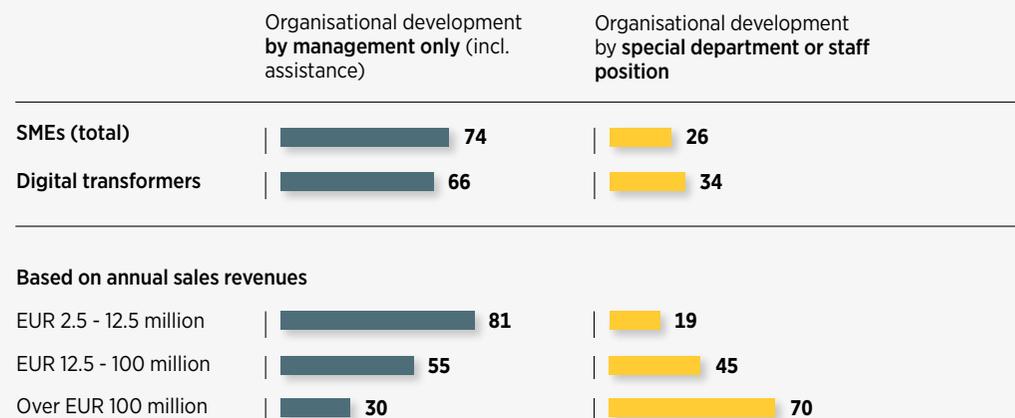
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### Who is responsible for matters relating to transformation and/or HR and organisational development?



### Organisational development is (all too often?) a matter for senior executives

In three-quarters of SMEs, management alone takes care of digital transformation matters—even though HR and organisational development are much more effective, when a separate department or employee handle it.

**▶ The digital transformers are showing the way!**

Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

Further graphics

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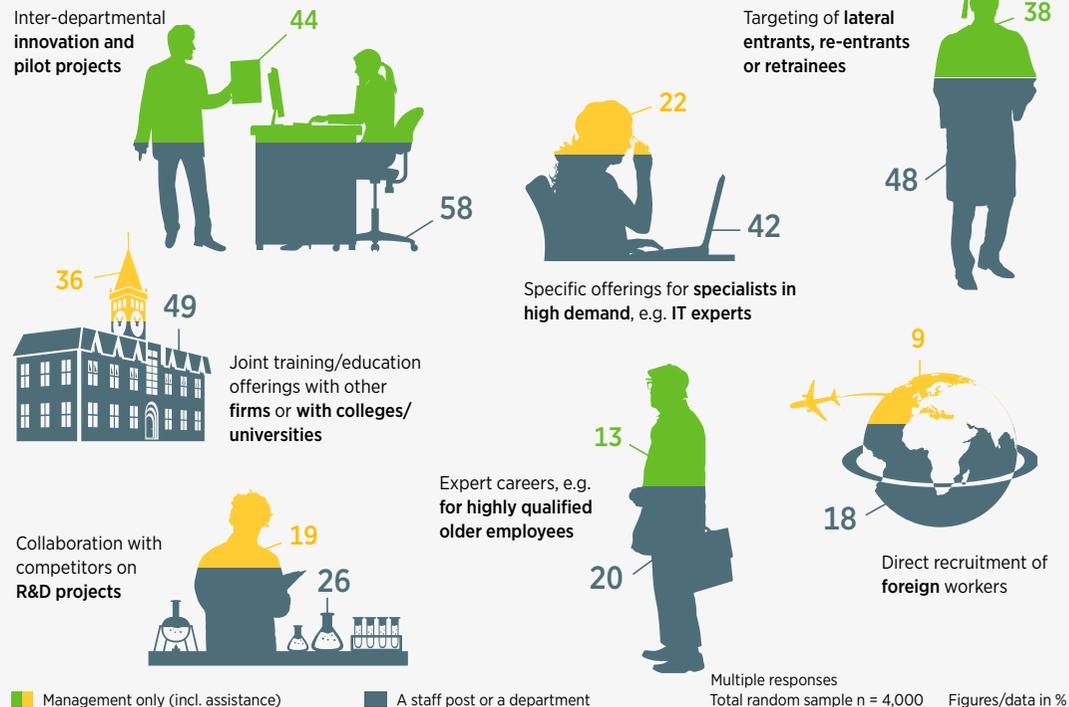
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### What organisational development measures are being taken?



### Measures that are critical for success can only be implemented with the professionalisation of organisational development

The study shows that, evidently, the size of an enterprise determines whether it has a department or at least a person responsible for HR and organisational development. However, a viable option for smaller companies is to enlist the services of external specialists to help with digital transformation.

Further graphics

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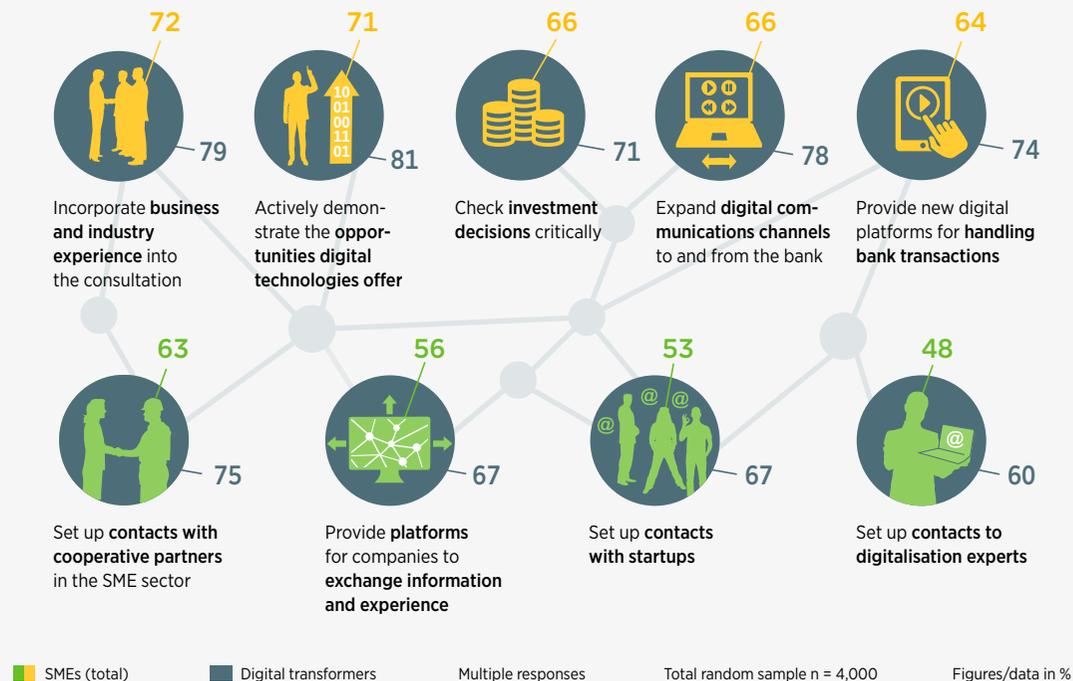
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### In what way should banks, including savings banks, support and assist SMEs with digital transformation?



### Banks: from source of money to source of ideas

High street banks and savings banks in the role of hosts: with remarkable frequency, SMEs expect their financial partners to provide a platform for the exchange of information and experience between companies. Companies want to network and need outside help. Thus, the banks have a much greater role to play: social networking is in demand!

SMEs would also like their financial partners to make use of their business and industry expertise during consultations and to outline the opportunities which digitalisation offers.

Further graphics

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# V. Design of the study

## Representative survey of SMEs with annual sales revenues in excess of EUR 2.5 million

In the course of the study, top executives of 4,000 companies with annual sales revenues of at least EUR 2.5 million were interviewed. The size distribution was based representatively on sales tax statistics.

Method:  
telephone interviews (CATI),  
approximate duration: 20 minutes

Period of the study:  
from November 2015 to January 2016

Study undertaken by: TNS Infratest

## Regional segmentation

UnternehmerPerspektiven is also representative on a federal state level. Individual states were over- or under-weighted accordingly. Lower Saxony was combined with Bremen and Rhineland-Palatinate with Saarland.

The distribution of unweighted cases is as follows:

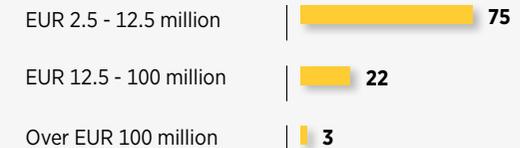
### Federal states

● Baden-Württemberg	547
● Bavaria	657
● Berlin	103
● Brandenburg	95
● Hamburg	127
● Hesse	296
● Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	75
● Lower Saxony and Bremen	363
● North Rhine-Westphalia	928
● Rhineland-Palatinate and Saarland	253
● Saxony	203
● Saxony-Anhalt	107
● Schleswig-Holstein	110
● Thuringia	134

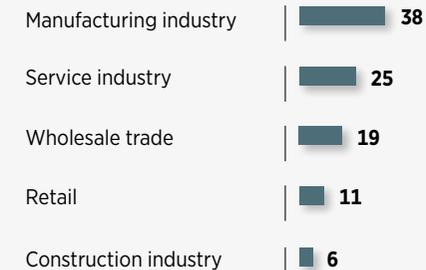
### Companies

## Random sampling: distribution according to size and business/industry

### Annual sales



### Business/industry



Shortfall (from 100): other sectors/no data available  
Figures/data in %

Further graphics

1

2

3

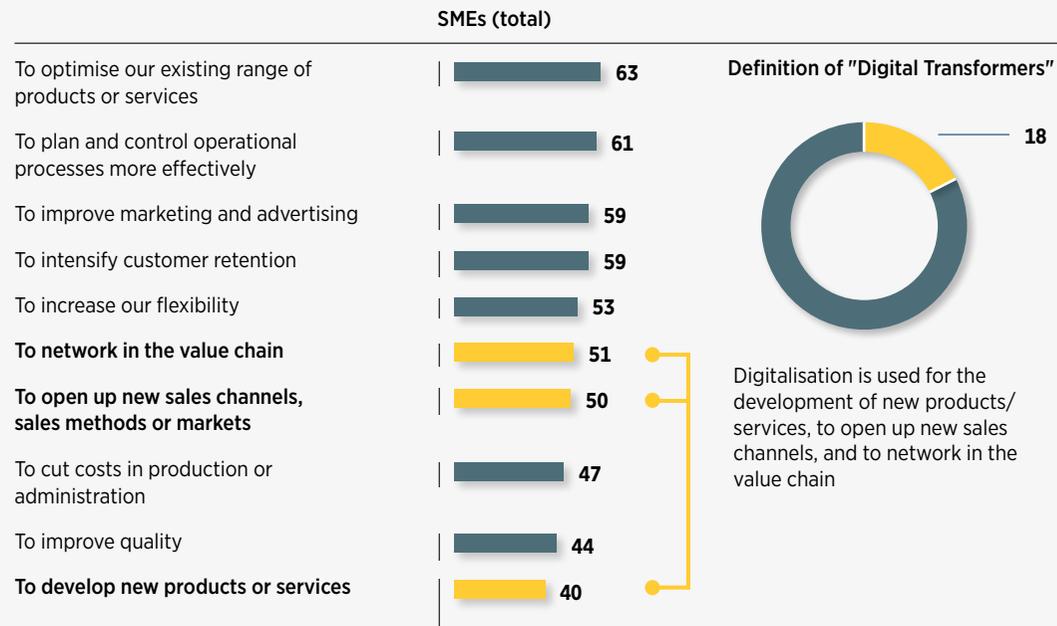


# V. Design of the study

## Evaluation group "Digital Transformers"

Digital technology is relevant for almost all SMEs, mainly for the re-design of existing processes. 18 percent of companies are doing more for digital transformation than all the others combined: they are using digital technology to develop new products or services, to open up new sales markets, and to drive networking in the value chain. These digital transformers can be found in all sectors and in all sizes of companies, but they are all characterised by their growth orientation: They reckon with an increase in personnel numbers in the medium term.

### In what way your company can make specific use of the new digital technologies?



Multiple responses

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

Further graphics

1

2

3



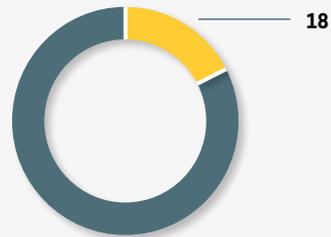


# V. Design of the study

## Evaluation group "Digital transformers with particularly young personnel"

A subgroup of the digital transformers has a particularly young workforce: half of their employees are under 30. These firms opt for digital business models (like all digital transformers) and employ young professionals who have grown up with digital technology. These "young digital SMEs" make up four percent of the total. In the study they are used as an additional comparison group.

### Digital transformers with very young employees



18% of all companies are **digital transformers**

**Of these, 24% have particularly young personnel:**  
Half of the workforce is under 30 (average for the evaluation group)

The digital transformers with particularly young personnel account for **4% of all companies**.

Total random sample n = 4,000

Figures/data in %

Further graphics

1

2

3





# V. Imprint

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