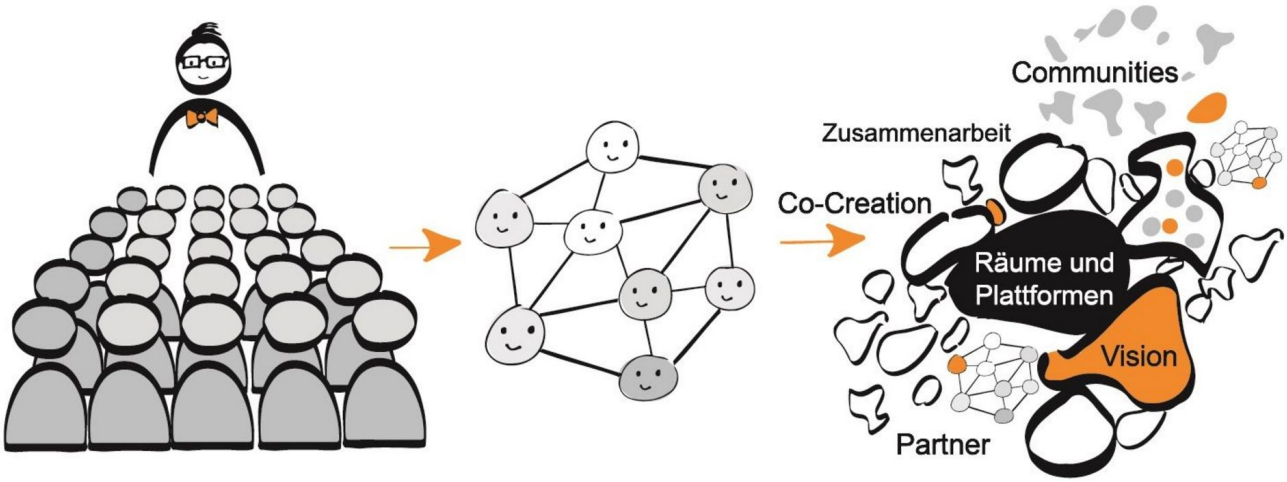

RAMONA HÖNL

Working together is the key to digital transformation

Why companies should be thinking about ambidexterity – and why effective collaboration is so important.

Ambi… what? That's a question Julia Duwe often hears when she presents her specialist topic of ambidexterity. This imposing word comes from Latin and means "both (hands) right", in other words being equally adept in the use of both hands. It's a concept that often comes up when companies are restructuring themselves to embrace digital transformation. Duwe explored the topic as part of her PhD, and in January 2018 she took up the post of chief agile manager in the TruConnect development department of TRUMPF's Machine Tools division. One of her tasks is to embed ambidexterity at TRUMPF. But what does that mean in practice?

> **When companies implement radical new solutions inspired by digitalization, the old tried-and-tested ways of doing things may no longer work.**
>
> Julia Duwe

"Ambidexterity refers to a situation where a company is driving its core business forward while simultaneously creating something new for the future," says Duwe, who is actually ambidextrous herself when it comes to writing. She argues that companies should draw on their own resources to invest in new technologies and digital business models in a timely manner – especially at times when they are in the black. Experts describe this approach in terms of exploitation and exploration, in other words stability and change.



TRUMPF chief agile manager Julia Duwe focuses on the topic of ambidexterity.

This polarity is what creates such a dilemma for businesses on a daily basis, however. And it's something Duwe knows plenty about thanks to her experience working in development at Festo and TRUMPF. "Artificial intelligence and traditional mechanical engineering practices come together at TRUMPF. You have machine tool designers working side-by-side with data specialists whose job is to improve the self-optimization capabilities of intelligent machines. We are basically training machines how to find the optimum solution themselves," Duwe says. She emphasizes that this ultimately involves a tricky balancing act, with TRUMPF striving to establish new competencies right at the heart of its core business of machine tool development. One example is its decision to add innovative data-based features to its systems. "Our development teams speak a range of completely different languages. But only by working together can we create the maximum benefit for our customers," says Duwe.

> **It's not about having just one all-knowing boss who everyone works for. Instead, it's about connecting disciplines within an ecosystem.**
>
> Julia Duwe

Duwe argues that the main thing you need to successfully achieve digital transformation is collaboration. As products become more and more complex, companies need a wide range of skills to develop and commercialize them. A prime example of that trend is TruConnect, TRUMPF Machine Tool's multifaceted range of solutions for connected sheet metal fabrication. The suite of applications paves the way for production facilities to increasingly control themselves. "That's not something a single department can achieve in isolation. You need people from the ambits of hardware, software and services, as well as close links to research, development, sales, partners and customers," says Duwe. The team operates in a connected ecosystem instead of working alone in the laboratory behind closed doors.

New role for managers

This also presents management executives with new challenges. "The managerial role has to change, too. It's not about having just one all-knowing boss who everyone works for," says Duwe. Instead, TRUMPF embraces agile leadership roles and encourages the interdisciplinary teams to make decisions together.

So how does that work in practice? In the agile TruConnect development process, product owners focus on managing the technical content side, while agile managers create the appropriate organizational framework, essentially by making it adaptable and facilitating continuous learning and collaboration across boundaries. "It's becoming more and more important to ask certain questions. For example, what capabilities do we need in addition to the expertise in the realm of mechanical engineering that we already have? And how can I train staff to develop these capabilities and find the best way of combining them with our existing knowledge? That's the everyday reality of ambidexterity!" says Duwe.



TRUMPF

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https://www.trumpf.com/bg_BG/newsroom/stories/working-together-is-the-key-to-digital-transformation/