
Press Release

Kienbaum Study: Digitalization needs Transformers in Chief

Most companies lack digital leaders

- » Only eleven percent of all DACH companies have Chief Digital Officers (CDO)
- » A mere seven percent plan to appoint CDOs in the next 12 months
- » Executive authority essential for a successful digital transformation, but ideally only required for a distinct period

Gummersbach, 12 February 2016 Few companies have entrusted their digital transformation to a leading executive to break the path for them: Only eleven percent of all DACH companies have an executive manager in charge of the digitalization of their business models and processes, a recent study by the consultancy firm Kienbaum reveals. The situation is not set to change for the vast majority of businesses: A tiny fraction of the companies surveyed by Kienbaum, a mere seven percent, plan to introduce the position within the next twelve months. For the study, Kienbaum spoke to more than 80 companies in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (DACH).

“The job of a Chief Digital Officer is surely one of the most exciting opportunities in the business world of today. Digital transformation is not a one-off event, but a process, and the role of the CDO should be understood in process terms. Ideally, good CDOs will remove their own raison d’être once the digitalization of the business model and important processes has been achieved after several years

of dedicated work. The CDOs will then move on to take over responsibilities in a related function”, Fabian Kienbaum, Managing Partner of Kienbaum, explains.

At many companies, digitalization lacks a dedicated home

Many companies without a named ‘Transformer in Chief’ tend to spread responsibility for the issue out through their organizations: 48 percent have not chosen any one unit to oversee the process. When there is a named unit in charge, the responsibility usually falls to IT: 35 percent of the companies surveyed by Kienbaum have located their digitalization efforts in their IT departments.

Fabian Kienbaum: “Trying digital transformation without central authority does not do justice to the great importance of the issue. First: it needs one person in charge who can steer the entire topic and keep the wheels moving. Second: A promising novel approach is to set up a so-called digital unit, that is, a separate unit in the wider organizational structure, with the mission to develop and initiate digital projects and become a crucible for innovation. That needs the right strategy for the digital age, a competent Chief Digital Officer, and a team trained in the relevant methods for innovation and digital business development.”

Digitalization frequently entrusted to executive staff

Most companies that have instituted a CDO position usually entrust the responsibilities to their executive staff: 56 percent of professionals in charge of digitalization are executives, while a third come from specialist or expert careers, and eleven percent are C-level or executive board personnel.

The typical digitalization officer has only held the position for approx. three years, has academic qualifications, and is usually in charge of digitalization activities in one specific country that the company is operating in.

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organizations. Kienbaum's interdisciplinary consultancy teams combine exceptional competences in HR, management, and communication consulting with substantial industry expertise. We employ the key levers for transformations to achieve a sustainable improvement in our client's performance. Our expertise with reconciling digital and analog processes and business models and the intensive involvement of our Kienbaum research institute complement our consulting profile.

Kienbaum was founded 70 years ago in Germany and still operates as a family enterprise with established management partners. We are present in all major hubs of the German economy and maintain 33 local offices across 18 countries. In addition to successful family enterprises and global market leaders, we count major corporations among our clients.

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