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# **HIDDEN CHAMPIONS — CHAMPIONS OF THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?**

A JOINT STUDY PROJECT BY



HCI

**HIDDEN  
CHAMPIONS  
INSTITUTE**





# Hidden champions - champions of the digital transformation?

A joint study project by



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## Success makes sexy



Simon Hülsbömer,  
Senior Project Manager Research,  
IDG Business Media GmbH

Modesty is a virtue. Most players in our economy take this adage to heart. Unfortunately. There are numerous companies that are (global) market leaders in their segment but that no one knows outside their niche. On the one hand, these “hidden champions” have, per se, earned more attention; on the other hand, their success stories are quickly lost because hardly anyone notices them. “Managers of all companies can learn a great deal from them,” writes the Hidden Champions Institute of ESMT Berlin on its website regarding the “unknown global market leaders”. It is an opinion I agree with.

Enough of the hide and seek! With this study, we want to give the hidden champions – which, according to our definition, are largely unknown, market-leading companies with a maximum annual turnover of EUR 5 billion – the attention they deserve. We want to show why these companies are successful, what makes them stand out and, above all, what distinguishes them from “classic” SMEs and corporates.

Do you know, for example, the company Otto Bock? Approximately 7,700 employees produce orthopaedic aids such as implants, individual orthoses and wheelchairs – an annual turnover of EUR 1.03 billion and thus the global market leader in this segment. Or Symrise, a producer of fragrances and flavour additives for food, household products and sunscreen? This company generates over EUR 2.9 billion year on year – this, too, is a world-leading figure.

According to estimates, the number of hidden champions in Germany is approximately 1,300. What is certain is that nearly 100 of them participated in our survey.

Are you also a hidden champion? Then do not be afraid to tell your story. Modesty may be a virtue, but those who are successful are allowed to show it.

I wish you an enjoyable read!

### Hidden champion definition

A hidden champion is a company with a turnover of less than EUR 5 billion that is the (or one of the) market leader(s) in the world or Europe. The two other company definitions are derived from this: In this study, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) refer to companies with a turnover of up to EUR 5 billion that are not market leaders. Large companies are the companies with a turnover of more than EUR 5 billion.



## A wake-up call

The individually unknown and yet, as a group, world-famous hidden champions have always lived innovation. They invest in research and development like world champions and continuously expand their quality leadership in many sectors. Examples include Knauf Gips, market leader in construction materials and systems, Festo, world leader in automation technology, and World of Medicine (WOM), market leader in pump and insufflator technology, which is used in minimally invasive hysteroscopies and coelioscopies.

But are the hidden champions also leading the digital transformation of the German economy? The Hidden Champions Institute (HCI) of ESMT Berlin and IDG Research Services look into this question in this joint study. More precisely than ever before, we study the digital transformation among hidden champions compared to other companies and analyse their challenges.



**Bianca Schmitz and Johannes Habel**  
Co-directors of the Hidden Champions Institute (HCI)

The result shows that the hidden champions in Germany take the digital revolution seriously and are working vigorously on positioning themselves more digitally, both in regard to internal processes and in relation to new business models. In the process, they are considerably quicker and more successful than many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are not market leaders. However, in comparison to large corporates, the digital transformation of the hidden champions frequently lags behind.

A reason for concern? Not necessarily; however, it is a wake-up call: the hidden champions must avoid putting their competitiveness at risk by delaying too much. Here, they can learn from companies from their own ranks that are among the global leaders in the digital transformation. For there are indeed such "hidden digital champions", as our study shows.

We wish you an inspiring read.





## Digitally satisfied

**51 per cent** of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are content with the progress of their digital transformation. Among the corporates and hidden champions, the figure is **71 per cent**.



## On a good path

When it comes to a self-evaluation of their digitalisation progress, hidden champions have already undertaken **more than half of the journey**. SMEs give themselves a worse assessment; the corporates, on the other hand, have already pulled considerably clear.

# Management summary

An overview of the key findings



## The challenges of the hidden champions

**42 per cent** of hidden champions name a silo mentality and approximately **54 per cent** a resistance to change as problems in relation to the digital transformation.



## Keys to success

**49 per cent** of hidden champions describe Industry 4.0 as the key technology of digitalisation.



## Stronger together

**35.8 per cent** of customers of hidden champions are actively involved in the transformation. Among corporates, the figure is **43.6 per cent**.



## Disruption risk

**42 per cent** of all companies and **40 per cent** of hidden champions expect digitalisation to have a large impact on their exposed position in the market. Among SMEs, the figure is **29 per cent**; among corporates, **52 per cent**.



## Structural traditionalists

The hidden champions name co-working spaces (approximately **25 per cent**), job rotation (approximately **27 per cent**) and job shadowing (approximately **15 per cent**) as measures against silos and as pro-innovation measures.



## Sought and found

Approximately **33 per cent** of all companies lure digital experts from other industries. Among the hidden champions it is **37 per cent**, among SMEs, approximately **28 per cent**, and among corporates, approximately **33 per cent**.

# The key findings



Hidden champions -  
champions of the digital transformation?





# 1. Digitalisation – let's tackle it!

Digitalisation has captured the attention of the majority of companies, with three in four companies pursuing their own (digital) strategy. Hidden champions tend to be content with their development – in contrast to regular SMEs.

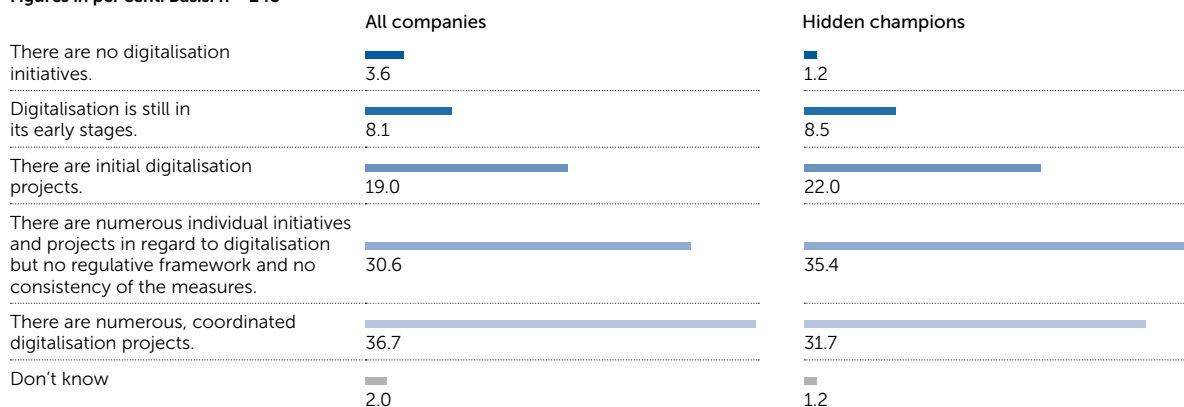
Only around twelve per cent of all survey participants indicate that their organisation does not pursue digitalisation or is only beginning to do so. Among the other companies, the initiatives are sometimes coordinated with each other, while in some cases isolated solutions are worked on. The hidden champions lag behind the average somewhat; however, they are slightly ahead of the comparable group of SMEs.

When it comes to the digitalisation strategy, the big players rank clearly ahead of the medium-sized companies. The “normal” SMEs in particular are far behind the large ones, while the hidden champions are able to keep the gap somewhat smaller thanks to relatively frequent indications of a “rough strategy”.

71 per cent of both corporates and hidden champions and around 51 per cent of SMEs are content overall (unweighted). Thus, here at least, the hidden champions perform better than the average. The high level of contentment could indicate that the “pearls of the economy” are putting their money where their mouth is.

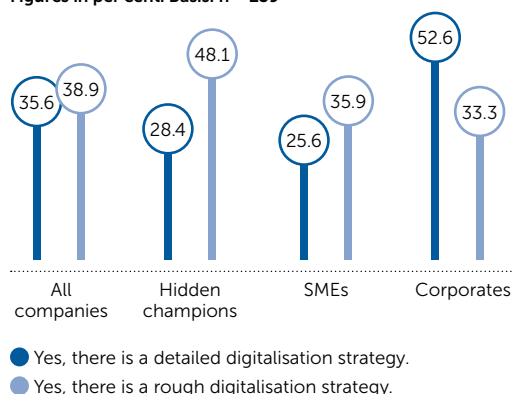
## In which phase is your corporate unit in relation to the topic of digitalisation?

Figures in per cent. Basis: n = 248



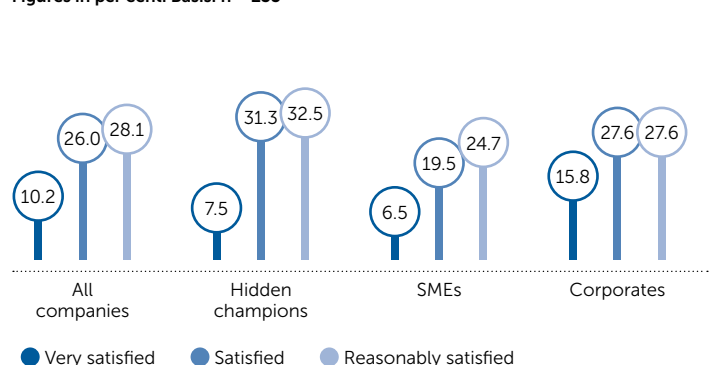
## Is there a digitalisation strategy at your company?

Figures in per cent. Basis: n = 239



## How satisfied are you with the progress of the digital transformation of your company?

Figures in per cent. Basis: n = 235



## 2. The transformation path – between first mover and late follower

There are many challenges on the path to digitalisation. The Corporates fare well in most phases. SMEs and hidden champions lag significantly behind. The latter consider themselves mainly as “fast followers” that do not want to lose any time.

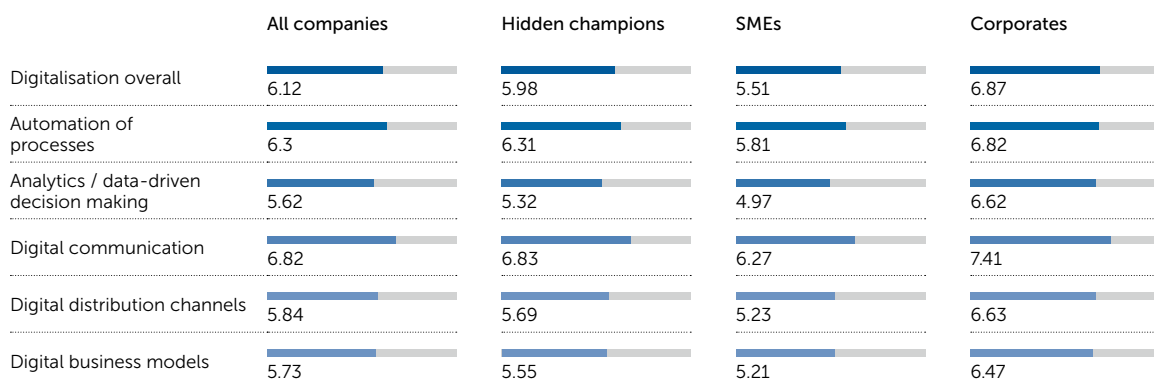
In general, the large companies surveyed are far ahead when it comes to the (assessment of the) different sections of the path towards digitalisation.

The gap between large and small companies is especially big in the field of data-driven decisions, i.e. analytics. Whether this is due to strategic decisions, monetary factors or obstacles such as a lack of specialist workers is unclear.

The picture is supported by the question regarding a company’s own self-understanding. According to the result, approximately one quarter of the big players see themselves as “first movers”, but only 11.5 per cent of normal SMEs. The majority of hidden champions classify themselves as “fast followers”: “We are not pioneers of the digital transformation but do not lose any time.”

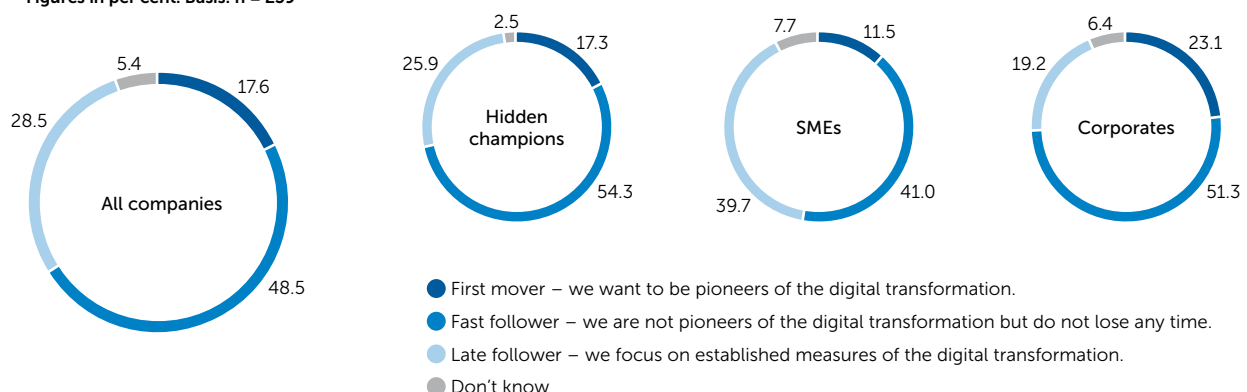
Please imagine the process of the digital transformation pursued at your company along a scale from 1 to 10. Where would you say your company currently is on this scale?

The arithmetical averages are presented. Basis: n = 239



To which of the following categories would you assign your company when it comes to the digital transformation process?

Figures in per cent. Basis: n = 239







### 3. External processes – the customer in mind

Customer focus is a topic that is always near the top of the digitalisation agenda.

In the survey, it is shown that companies of all sizes have taken the customers' wishes to heart. However, most smaller companies are rather reserved when it comes to involving the customers actively in the transformation.

In the question regarding the processes on the customer side, the field of responses is surprisingly homogeneous. In contrast to the previous questions, the dominance of the corporates cannot be determined here.

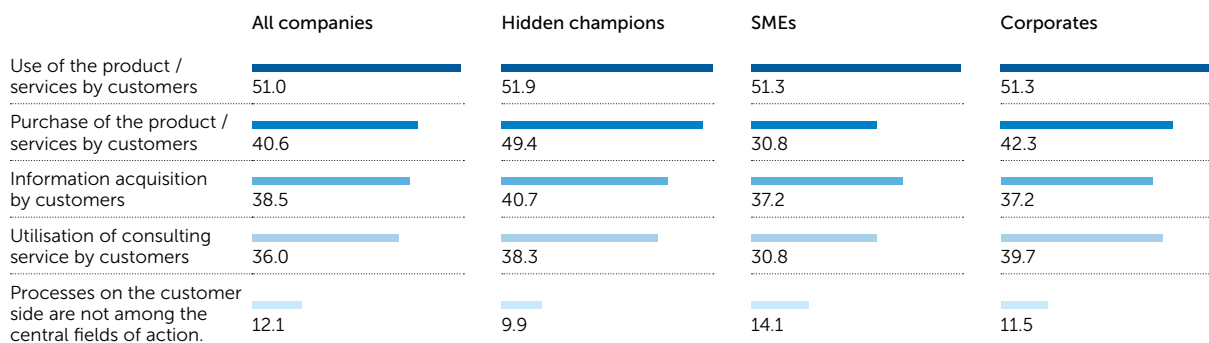
Hidden champions are slightly ahead of the corporates in nearly all processes on the customer side and, in some cases, considerably ahead of the SMEs.

On the other hand, involvement of the customers in the transformation is pursued with greater vigour by big players. Hidden champions and SMEs are not far apart from each other here.

Small companies that are not hidden champions involve customers mainly just in isolated projects. Rule of thumb: the bigger the company, the closer the comprehensive consultation with customers for the digital transformation.

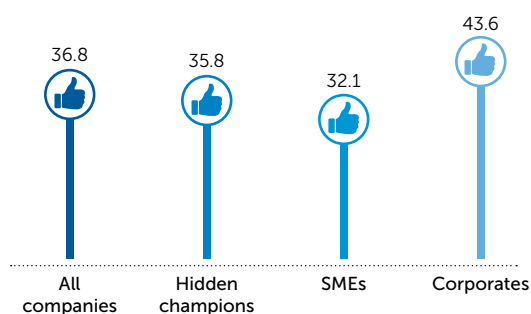
#### Which of the following processes on the customer side are central fields of action of the digital transformation at your company?

Figures in per cent. Multiple answers are possible. Basis: n = 239



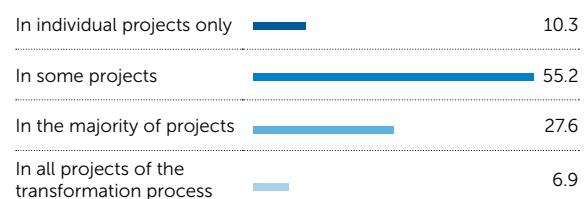
#### Are the customers of your company (actively) involved in the transformation process?

The "yes answers" are shown. Figures in per cent. Basis: n = 239



#### To what extent are customers (actively) involved in the transformation process at the hidden champions?

Figures in per cent. Filter: only companies that (actively) involve their customers in the transformation process. Basis: n = 88



## 4. Internal processes – IT in focus

The digital transformation is an IT building site – as an object of change and a means to an end. Production is in third place only; then come the staff functions. Analytics is currently considered the most important key technology for the digitalisation; the hidden champions in particular view Industry 4.0 as especially important.

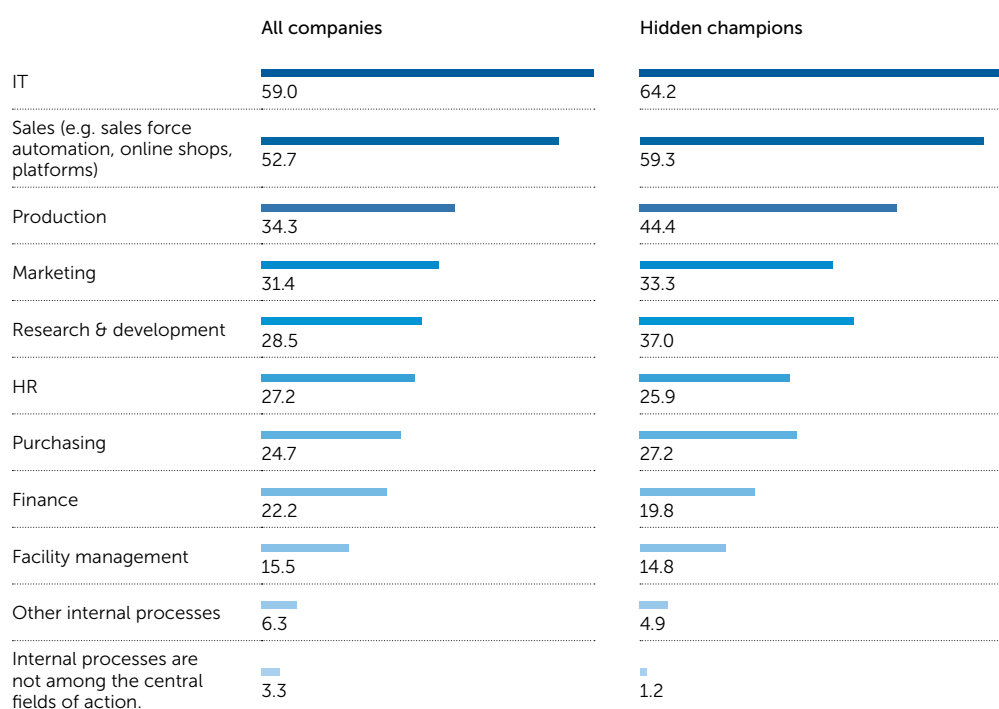
The fact that IT is at the centre of digitalisation is not really surprising. After all, it is both “affected” itself and is a driver of the transformation of the departments. IT is most important for hidden champions; they assign it considerably more importance than the average of all companies.

Hidden champions also focus on the transformation of the areas of sales, production, marketing and R&D to an above-average extent.

The “classic” back office (HR, purchasing, finance and facility management), which is viewed by approximately one quarter to one sixth of companies as a central field of action in this area, is not quite as crucial for the digital transformation. Here, the figures of the hidden champions differ only marginally from those of the market average.

### Which of the following internal processes are central fields of action of the digital transformation at your company?

Figures in per cent. Multiple answers are possible. Basis: n = 239







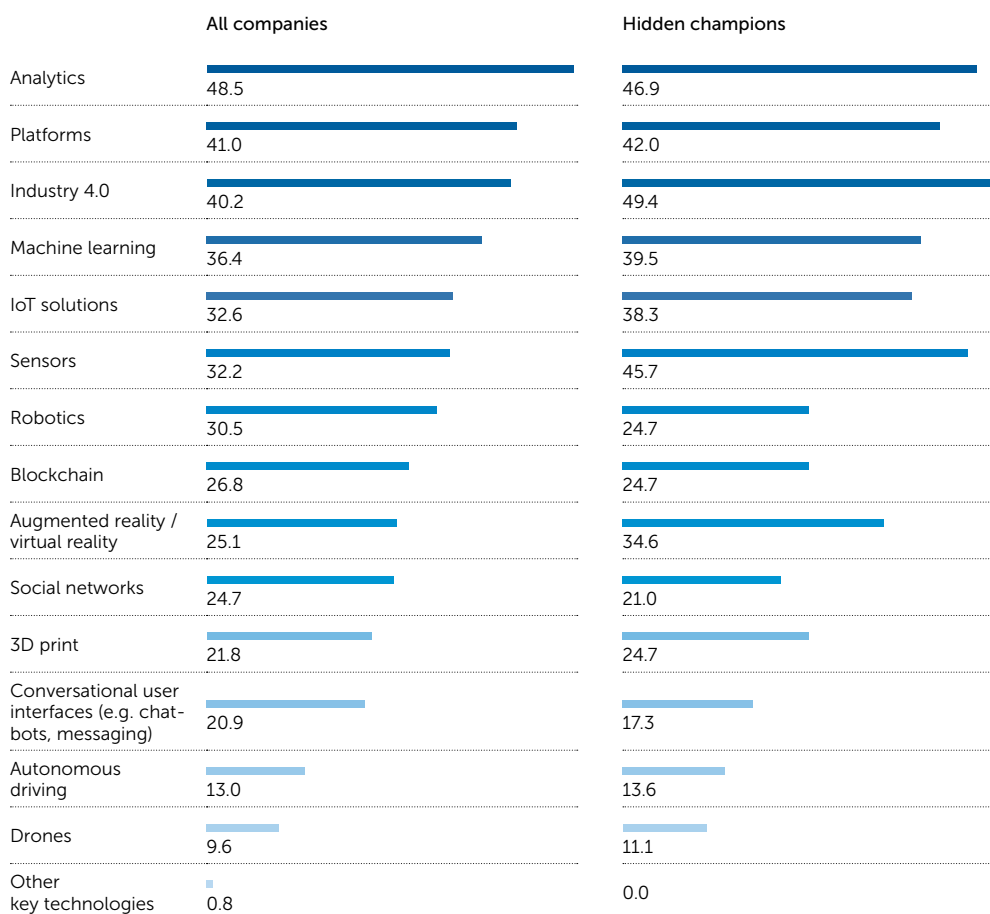
Analytics is in first place of the most important technologies for digitalisation – both in the market average and among the hidden champions, the evaluation and further use of data play a major role.

For the hidden champions, the topics of “Industry 4.0” and “sensors” are also very important – far more important than for the average of all companies. This may be connected to the fact that a large number of the surveyed companies come from the industrial environment (including over 20 per cent from machinery and plant engineering, the automotive industry and the metal-producing and processing industry) and that many classic production processes are currently being transformed in this area.

In line with this, hidden champions also evaluate “augmented reality / virtual reality” much more highly as a key technology than the average. Thanks to this technology, many industrial workflows and processes can already be simplified.

### Which of the following technologies do you consider to be the key technologies of the digitalisation at your company?

Figures in per cent. Multiple answers are possible. Basis: n = 239



## 5. Challenges – many solutions sought

Digitalisation is a task that affects the entire company and its environment of partners, customers, etc. The challenges are accordingly great. Complexity is a problem that causes concern for large and small organisations alike.

Among the organisational and structural challenges, complexity is named as the greatest point of pain. Only for SMEs is the pressure not quite so heavy. Compensating for this, they suffer from unclear divisions of responsibility and insufficient communication on an above-average basis. Hidden champions have another weak point: the highly pronounced silo mentality.

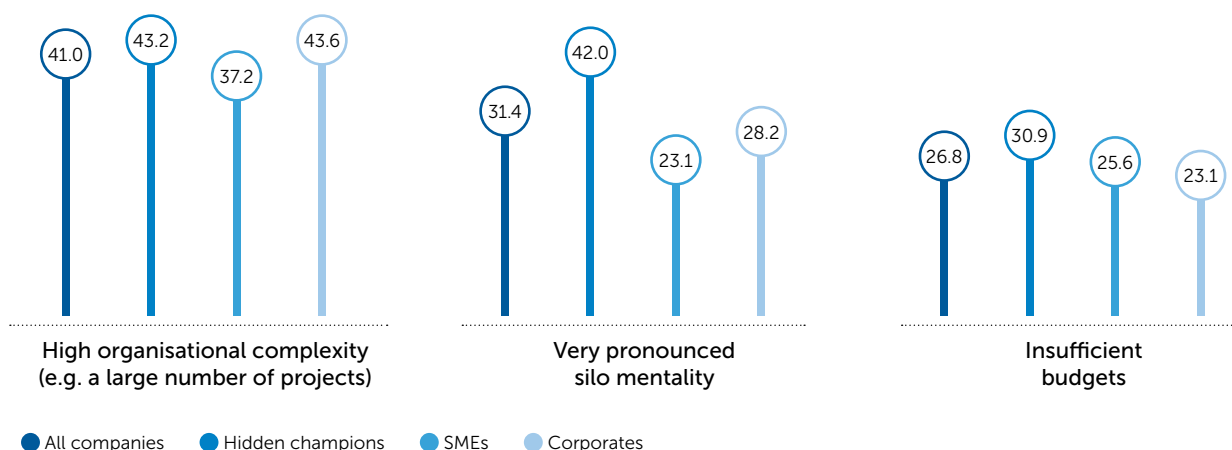
In a human resources / cultural regard, it is shown that at many hidden champions, employees lack the willingness to change. Corporates, on the other hand, tend more to have a problem with their staff showing a "lack of expertise". Their error culture is also not as good as it could be.

Large companies and hidden champions are challenged by IT interfaces, SMEs by a lack of pioneering technologies such as platforms. Hidden champions particularly lack opportunities for evaluating data.

### What are the biggest challenges in regard to your company's digital transformation?

Figures in per cent. Multiple answers are possible. The top three answers are shown. Basis: n = 239

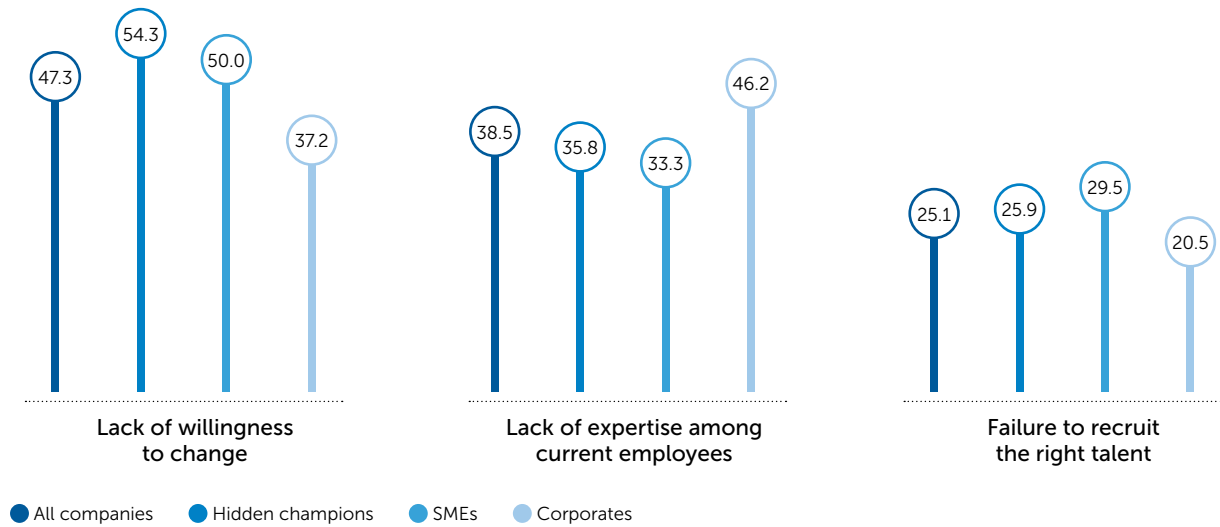
#### In an organisational / structural regard



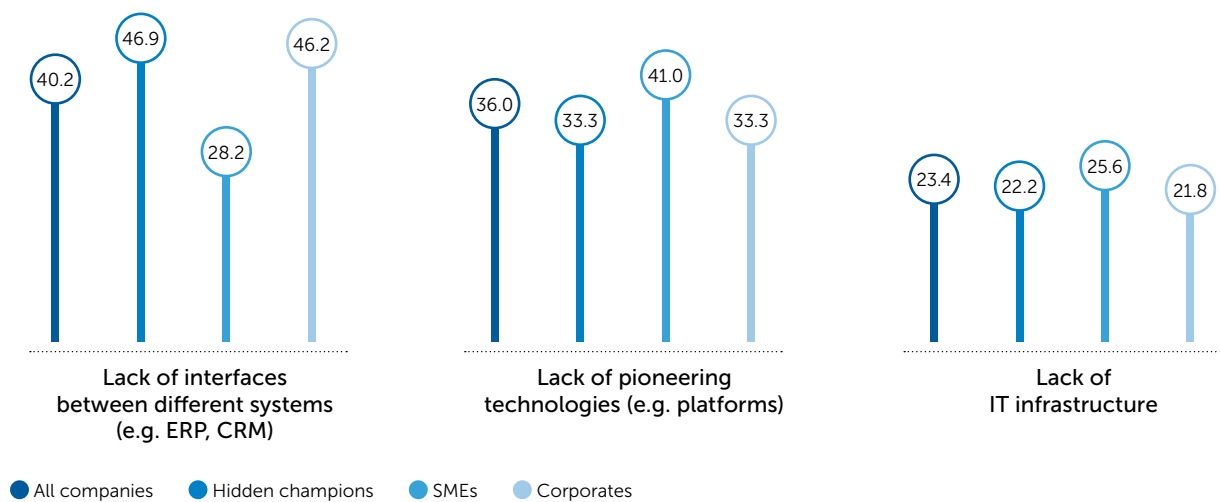




### In a human resources / cultural regard



### In a technological regard



*"Different country-specific approaches to digitalisation"*

*"Elusive risks"*

*"Lack of assignment of the task to existing persons"*

*"Interdisciplinary cooperation difficult"*

*"Finding the right young talent"*

*"There is insufficient qualified personnel on the market."*

**Other challenges**

*"Insufficient human resources"*

*"Clear top-down commitment"*

*"Lack of team building"*

*"Movement of key resources to the competition"*

*"Lack of data quality"*

*"No market standards"*

*"Performance of BI systems"*

## 6. Innovations – agile thinking

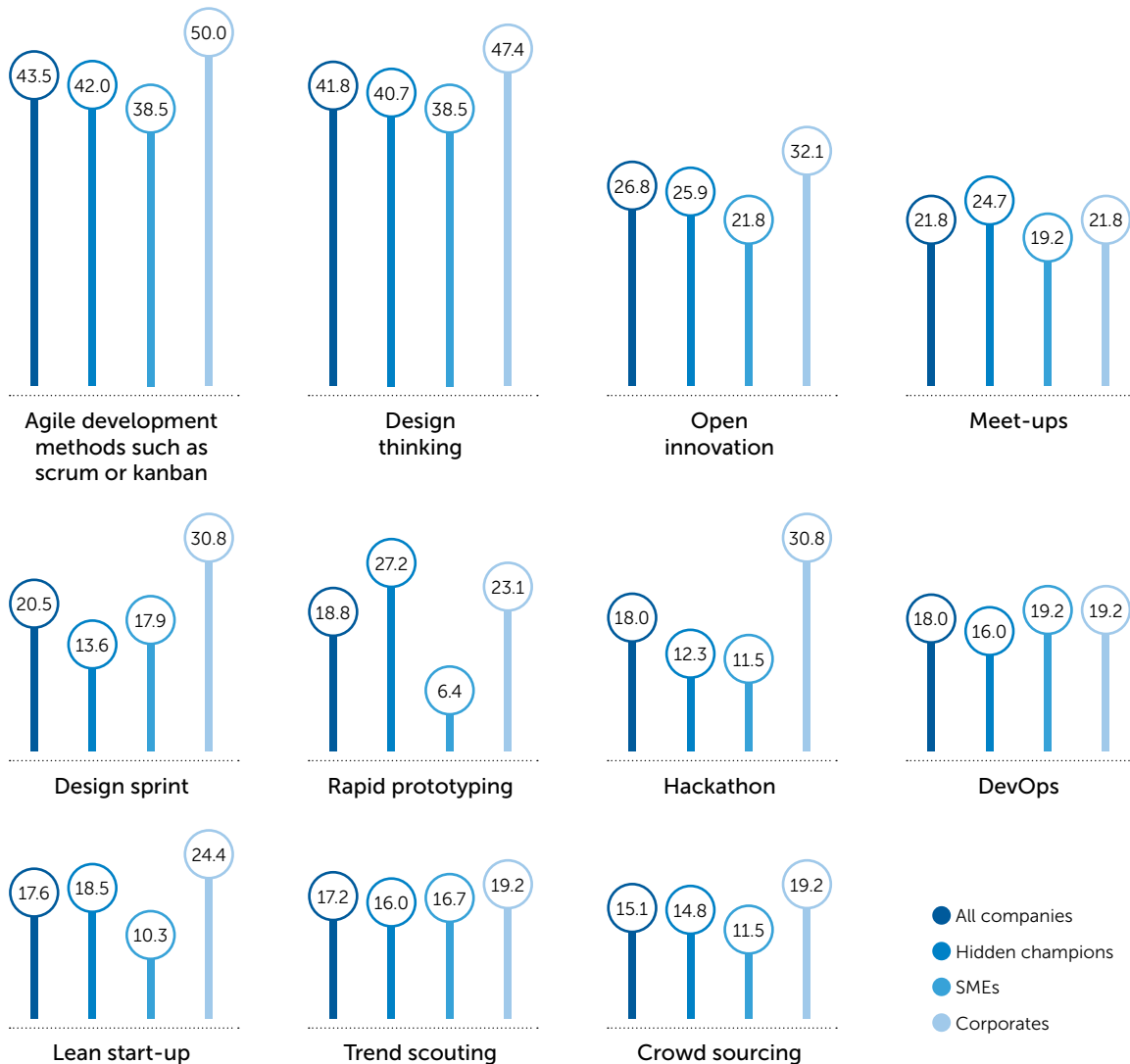
That it is not just IT that is changing is intuitively clear. The methods and the approach are also completely orientated towards digitalisation. Here, there is sometimes a large gap between small and large companies.

The top place for “agile” was to be expected; then come the “usual suspects”. The only clear trend: innovation methods are generally more widespread in corporates than in small companies. Only in the event of DevOps (optimised collaboration of the IT development, IT operations and quality assurance teams) can SMEs perform better than the average. In all the values, hidden champions are mainly at an average level.

Which of the aforementioned methods and approaches have established themselves in your entrepreneurial practice?

Figures in per cent. Multiple answers are possible. Basis: n = 239

Methods for the direct development of innovations

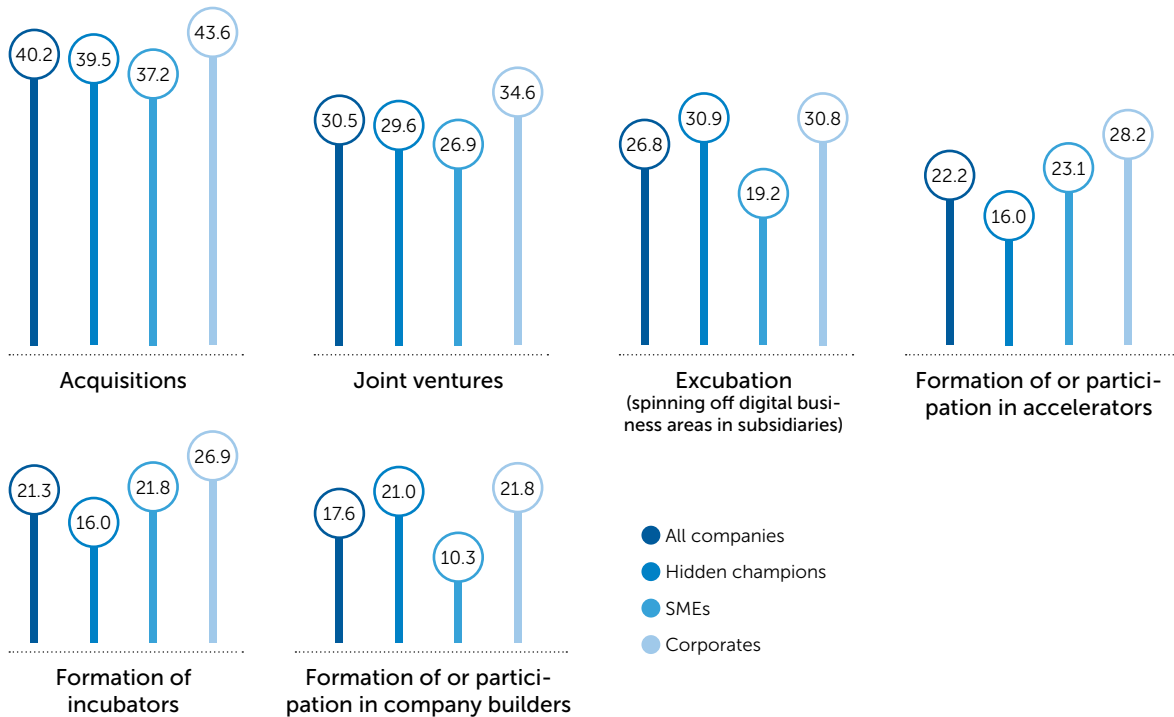




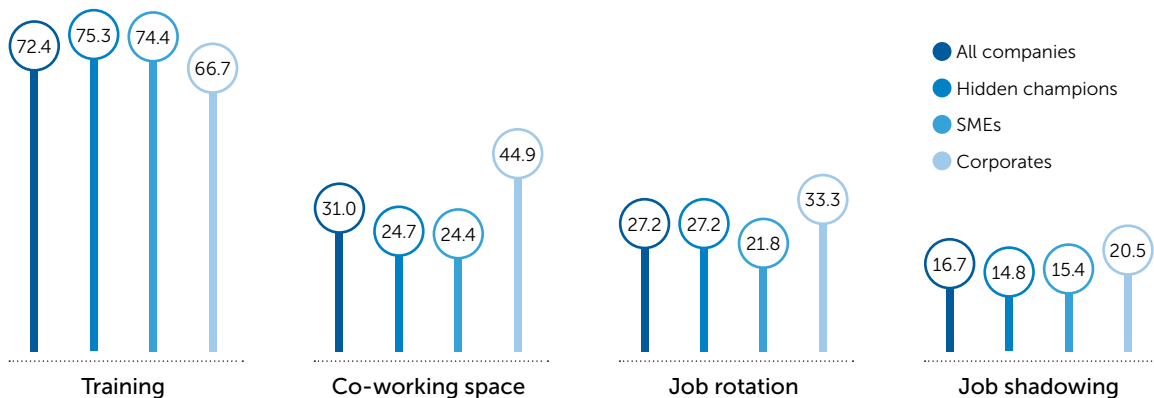
When it comes to new organisational structures, the corporates are again in front; hidden champions perform above average only in foundings of new companies as well as the formation of or participation in company builders. Across all size classes, acquisitions are the most popular means of promoting innovations.

The problem of stubborn silos concerns hidden champions in particular (see key finding 5). In terms of co-working spaces, the hidden champions are a good six percentage points below the average; here, the gap to the big players is 20 percentage points. Otherwise, the commitment is average.

#### Creation of new organisational structures for the direct development of innovations



#### Development of skills and break-up of silos for the indirect development of innovations



## 7. Specialists – needles in a haystack

The IT specialist is a sought-after asset, and not just in corporates. SMEs and hidden champions are of the view that it will be more difficult for them than corporates to get hold of the sought-after skills.

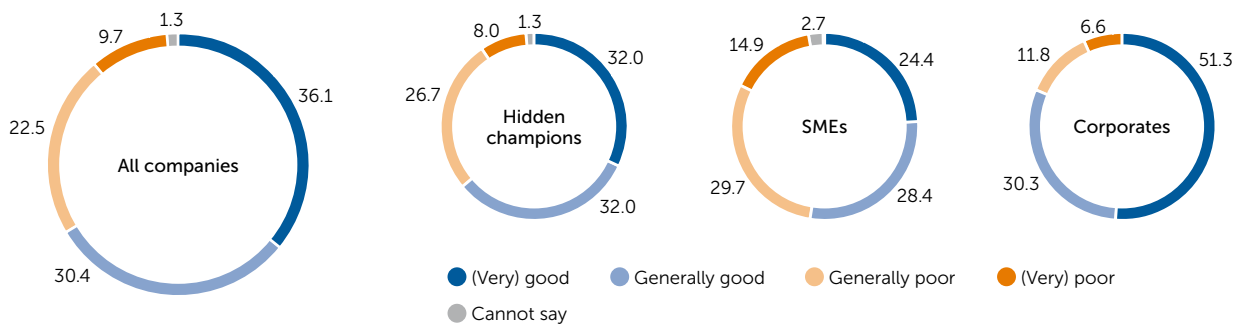
In view of the media endurance runner called “lack of specialist workers”, it is somewhat surprising that, on average, two thirds of all companies are of the opinion that they have at least generally good opportunities of acquiring the digital specialists. Among corporates, it is even above 80 per cent.

Overall, SMEs lag significantly behind with their estimation, while hidden champions are just below the average.

Universities and universities of applied sciences are the first points of contact in the search for fresh skills. Hidden champions and big players like to poach in foreign territories. When it comes to staff training, SMEs are slightly ahead. Corporates fall behind here in comparison – even though many indicated a “lack of expertise among current employees” when asked about the human resources challenges (see key finding 5).

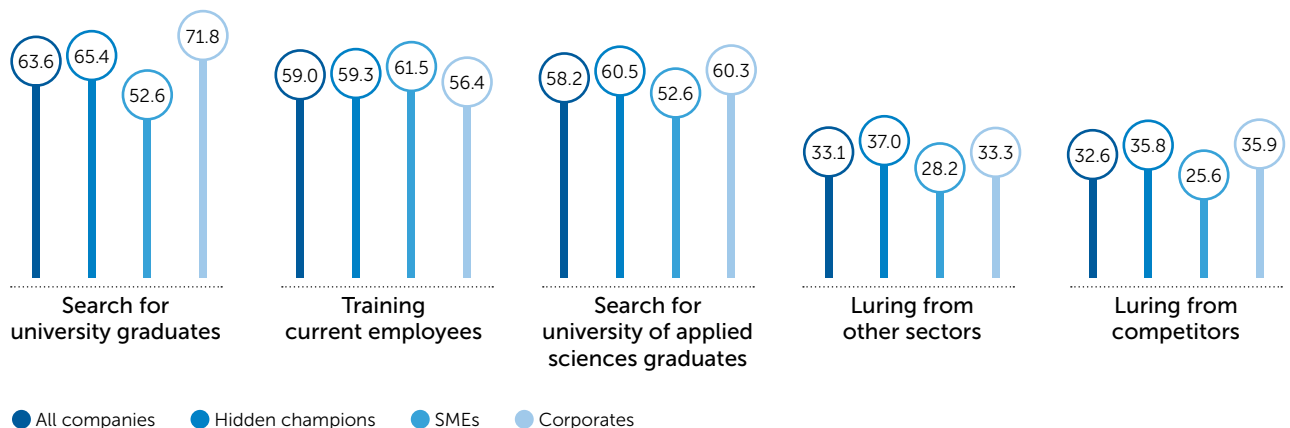
### How do you assess your company's chances of obtaining the necessary specialists for the digital transformation?

Figures in per cent. Basis: n = 227



### Via what means does your company acquire digital talent?

Figures in per cent. Multiple answers are possible. Basis: n = 239







## 8. The future – winners or losers

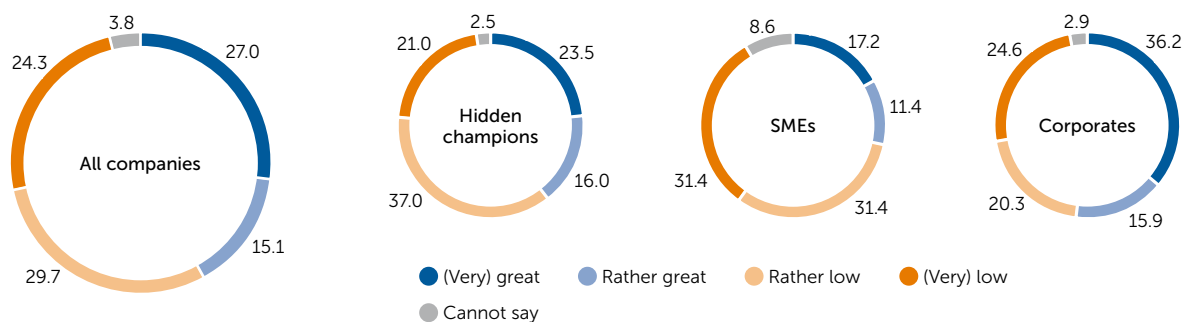
The question regarding the future and the opportunities and risks places the image of the “digitally advanced” big players on its head. Here, concern about the outcome is relatively big. In comparison, the SMEs are showing confidence.

On average, 42 per cent of the survey participants indicate that the risk for their own company due to the digital transformation is rather large. Among SMEs, the figure is only 28.6 per cent; among corporates, it is 52 per cent; hidden champions are slightly below the average at approximately 40 per cent.

In spite of the concerns, the corporates are confident in the question regarding the winners or losers: 77 per cent of them see their organisation as more on the winner side, ten percentage points more than the average. At 74 per cent, hidden champions perform better here, too, while SMEs tend to be indecisive.

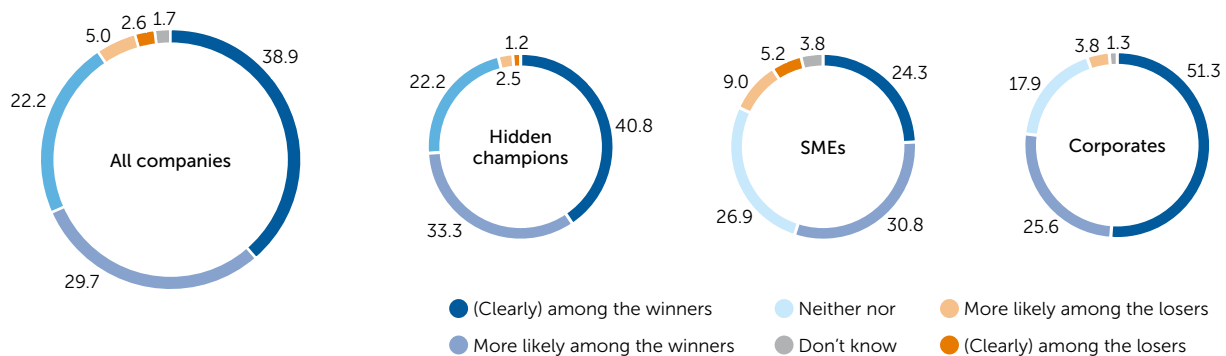
**How great is the danger that your company will lose its exposed position in the market in the next few years due to effects of the global digital transformation?**

Figures in per cent. Filter: only companies that are market leaders in Germany, Europe and / or the world. Basis: n = 185



**Will your company more likely be among the winners or more likely among the losers of the (global) digital transformation?**

Figures in per cent. Basis: n = 239



## What is currently the biggest point of pain in the area of the digital transformation?

Below is a selection of answers from the survey participants; any answers could be provided. The following clusters of pain points are found:

### Strategy

- "Breaking down the inertia in the company"
- "The attempt to tackle digitalisation with old-fashioned and unsuitable methods, processes and systems"
- "Strategic misjudgement regarding the threat to the traditional business model"

### Speed

- "The unrealistic time frame"
- "Slowness of the organisation and connection to the traditional business plan"
- "Everything happens far too slowly here and the responsible parts of the company are often not clearly designated"
- "The inertness of the 'company organism' system"

### IT

- "Letting go of old systems"
- "Absence of standards and proprietary interfaces"
- "Interfaces between systems are absent or must be shaped with considerable effort"

### Employees

- "Finding and keeping suitable personnel to implement the ideas"
- "Rethinking on the part of the employees, fear of the unknown"
- "Breaking down old structures and methods of thinking"
- "Convincing the employees in the departments to follow new paths"

### Control

- "The large number of uncoordinated initiatives"
- "Collaboration of the individual departments"
- "Coordination of the individual projects and project ideas"
- "Complexity of the sub-processes"

## What has been the biggest mistake in the digital transformation process so far?

Strategic, communicative and scheduling inadequateness often prevents a smooth flow of the digital transformation:

### Processes

- "Functional digitalisation instead of process orientation"
- "Digitalising bad processes 1:1"

### Strategy

- "Uncoordinated individual projects lead to parallel developments"
- "Purchase before planning"
- "No uniform digitalisation strategy in place"
- "Belief that tools alone will solve the problems"

### Timing

- "Started too late"
- "Delayed too long"
- "Relied on old sales structures for too long"

### Control

- "Lack of a plan of action, no organisation"
- "Project planning without sufficient prior feasibility analysis"
- "Too many individual projects without coordination"

### Employees

- "Not enough specialists"
- "Not enough experts"
- "Shifting of capacities"

### Communication

- "Not enough 'clarifying' communication"
- "Users not involved in defining the processes"

# Further study results

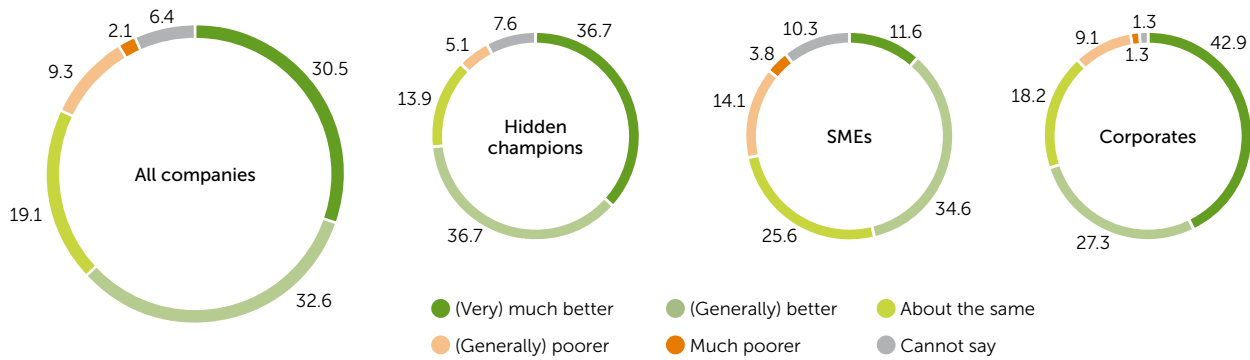


Hidden champions -  
champions of the digital transformation?

## 1. Digital transformation: mainly positive self-estimation

How do you perform in regard to the digital transformation compared to your direct competitors?

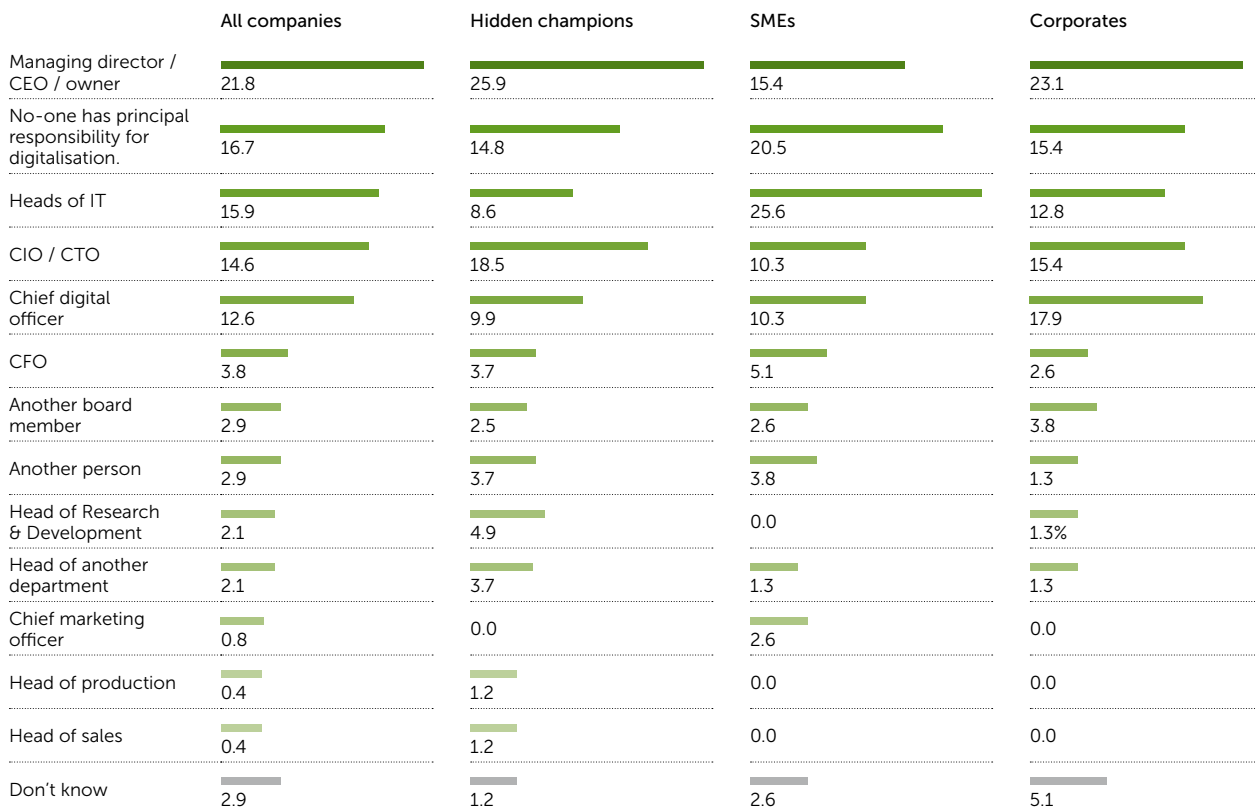
Figures in per cent. Basis: n = 236



## 2. Hidden champions rely more heavily on their managing directors

Who at your company has principal responsibility for the topic of digitalisation?

Figures in per cent. Multiple answers are possible. Basis: n = 239

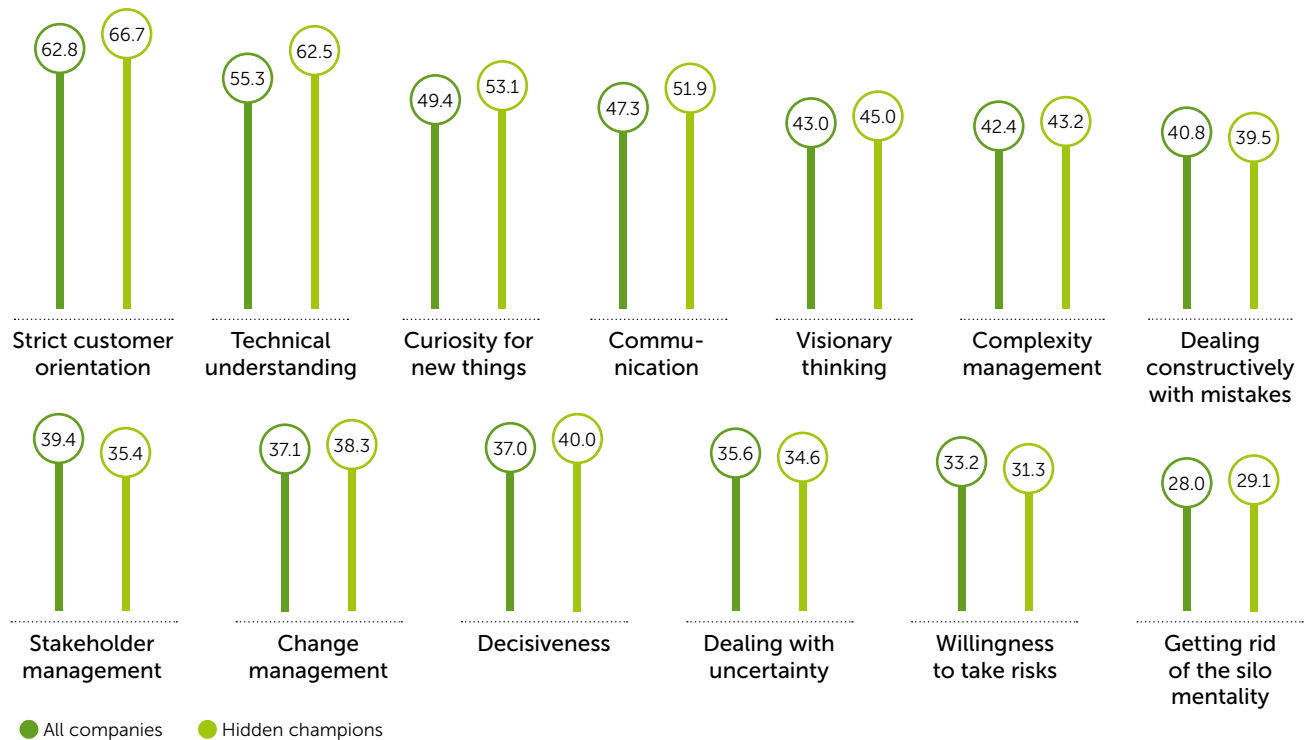




### 3. Close to the customer, visionary, decisive

What is your assessment of the highest-ranking managers of your company in regard to the following abilities?

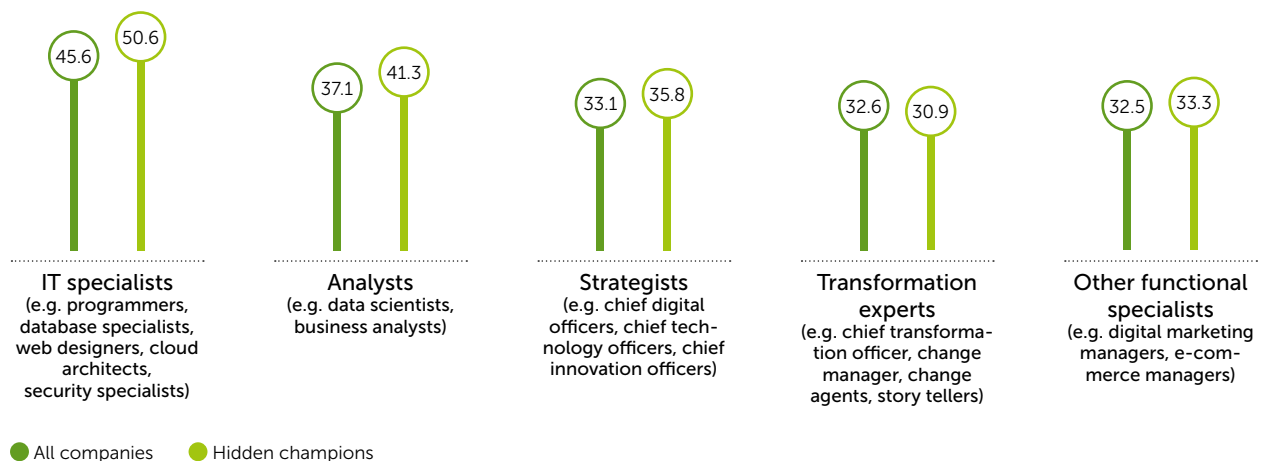
Figures in per cent. Answers were to be chosen from a scale of 1 to 6 – “very strong” to “very weak”. Basis: n = 239  
The proportion of answers 1 and 2 is shown.



### 4. IT specialists urgently sought

What is your assessment of the highest-ranking managers of your company in regard to the following abilities?

Figures in per cent. Answers were to be chosen from a scale of 1 to 6 – “very strong” to “very weak”. Basis: n = 239  
The proportion of answers 1 and 2 is shown.



# A look into the future



Hidden champions -  
champions of the digital transformation?



## Lose no time

By Alexander Jake Freimark

Sooner or later, the digital transformation will have every company in its grip – no matter how well they hide themselves from it. This also applies to hidden champions, whose digitalisation progress has been analysed in this study. Heavily simplified, they take up a position between corporates, the supposed paragons of digitalisation, and “normal” SMEs. The latter lag behind the large organisations in most stages of the transformation.

However, to come to the conclusion of a particularly elevated position in digitalisation based on the assignment to the elite circle of hidden champions alone does not do the matter justice. Firstly, the transformation is not a competition with a winner; secondly, hidden champions cannot be lumped together. Ultimately, each organisation is called upon to determine and pursue its own path into the future. The fact that 90 per cent of hidden champions have already left the phase of early beginnings behind them is a good sign.

However, even if hidden champions are used to walking on the path of success, there are a few stumbling blocks. These include the very pronounced silo mentality (organisational) as well as the moderate willingness to change (cultural). The two merge to produce a comfort zone, for according to the study the opening of the silos is not really being pursued with vigour – there is still potential for improvement here.

However, the good outlooks are in the majority: 71 per cent of corporates, only about 51 per cent of SMEs and 71 per cent of hidden champions are satisfied overall (unweighted) with how

digitalisation has gone so far. And in terms of the digitalisation of the processes on the customer side, the hidden champions are even ahead of the corporates and far ahead of the SMEs. This refers particularly to the use and purchase of their products or services. Customer focus in particular is a traditional strength of the hidden champions and it is necessary to ensure the strong ties in the digital world as well.

Last but not least, they score points in the central fields of action of the digital transformation. Here, IT is most important for hidden champions, in addition to the transformation of the areas of sales, production, marketing and R&D. In these critical fields, the vigour is, in some cases, considerably higher than among corporates and SMEs. The consequence: overall, three out of four hidden champions tend to see themselves as winners of the (global) digital transformation.

Hidden champion is not a distinction that can be pursued. It arises from product quality, customer proximity, service readiness and innovative capacity. A company remains a hidden champion if the organisation does not rest on its laurels. This includes taking on the challenge of the digital transformation and tackling it by making use of traditional strengths. Thus, the majority of hidden champions in this study describe themselves as “fast followers” – with the apt statement: “We are not pioneers of the digital transformation but do not lose any time.” Those who follow this strategic guideline are on the right path into the digital future.

# Study design



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# Study profile

<b>Authors</b> .....	Alexander Jake Freimark, Johannes Habel, Simon Hülsbömer, Bianca Schmitz, Matthias Teichmann
<b>Population</b> .....	Senior (IT) officers of companies in the DACH region: strategic (IT) decision makers in the C level area and in the departments (LoBs), IT decision makers & IT specialists from the IT field
<b>Participant generation</b> .....	Sample-taking in the IT decision maker database of IDG Business Media. Personal e-mail invitations to participate in the survey. Newsletter invitations from ESMT Berlin / Hidden Champions Institute (HCI)
<b>Total sample</b> .....	248 completed and qualified interviews* Sample 1: Hidden champions / n = 82 Sample 2: Medium-sized companies / n = 81 Sample 3: Large companies ("big players") / n = 82
<b>Study period</b> .....	23 July to 28 August 2018
<b>Method</b> .....	Online survey (CAWI)
<b>Questionnaire development</b>	IDG Research Services, ESMT Berlin
<b>Implementation</b> .....	IDG Research Services
<b>Technological partner</b> .....	Questback GmbH, Cologne
<b>Survey software</b> .....	EFS Survey Spring 2018

## Deviations within the population

The population n = 239 of most of the questions results from the difference of the total sample of 248 survey participants minus the nine survey participants who answered the question "In which phase is your corporate unit in relation to the topic of digitalisation?" with "There are no digitalisation initiatives" (see page 9). Questions that have a different population were not answered by all the survey participants.

\* Three survey participants who were not allowed to / did not want to provide turnover information



# Sample statistics

<b>Industry distribution*</b>	Machinery and plant engineering .....	11.3%
	Banks and insurance companies .....	10.9%
	Services for companies .....	10.5%
	Manufacturing of electronic goods, IT industry .....	9.7%
	Chemical and pharmaceutical industry, life science.....	7.3%
	Wholesale and retail (including online).....	6.0%
	Transportation, logistics and transport .....	5.6%
	Automotive industry and suppliers .....	5.2%
	Metal-producing and processing industry .....	5.2%
	Public administration, local authorities, social insurance companies .....	5.2%
	Other industry group .....	4.8%
	Energy and water supply .....	4.8%
	Healthcare and welfare .....	3.2%
	Consumer goods, food and luxury goods industry.....	3.2%
	School, university, university of applied sciences .....	3.2%
	Construction industry, manual crafts .....	1.2%
	Media, paper and print industry.....	1.2%
	Hospitality industry, tourism .....	0.8%
	Agriculture and forestry, fishing, mining .....	0.4%
<b>Company size</b>	Fewer than 100 employees.....	5.6%
	100 to 499 employees .....	11.3%
	500 to 999 employees.....	8.9%
	1,000 to 2,999 employees .....	22.2%
	3,000 to 4,999 employees.....	6.9%
	5,000 to 9,999 employees.....	14.5%
	10,000 employees and more .....	30.6%
<b>Turnover category</b>	Less than EUR 50 million.....	10.1%
	EUR 50 to 499 million.....	24.2%
	EUR 500 to 999 million .....	10.9%
	EUR 1 to <3 billion .....	14.9%
	EUR 3 to <5 billion.....	5.6%
	EUR 5 to <7.5 billion .....	10.1%
	EUR 7.5 billion and more .....	23.0%
	Don't know .....	1.2%

\* Multiple answers are possible

# The Hidden Champions Institute introduces itself



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# THE HIDDEN CHAMPIONS INSTITUTE AT ESMT BERLIN

ESMT Berlin was founded by 25 leading global companies and institutions. The international business school offers a full-time MBA, an executive MBA, a master's in management as well as open enrollment and customized executive education programs.

ESMT focuses on three main topics: leadership, innovation and analytics. ESMT faculty publishes in top academic journals. Additionally, the business school provides an interdisciplinary platform for discourse between politics, business and academia.

The business school is based in Berlin, Germany and has a branch office in Shanghai, China. ESMT is a private business school with the right to grant PhDs and is accredited by the German state, AACSB, AMBA, EQUIS and FIBAA.

Hidden champions are mainly medium-sized enterprises – most of them family-owned – that play a leading role on the global market. Their business success, their global leadership, their innovative capacity and their ability to survive even in times of economic crises are among their characteristics and have made them role models for larger and smaller companies alike.

Like other companies, hidden champions find themselves in a rapidly changing market environment. This places them before challenges that necessitate adjustments and changes that are not always in line with existing organisational structures. Accordingly, hidden champions must also think about preserving and expanding their customer base, new business models, partnerships and new ways to recruit talent.



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Furthermore, topics such as cooperation in a global and virtual environment, dealing with complexity in decision-making processes and the preservation of company culture and company values in strong growth phases must be tackled.

The Hidden Champions Institute (HCI) is the first academic institute of its kind in Germany. It was founded as the fifth institute of ESMT Berlin in November 2017.



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