

Manifesto for Humane Leadership

Six Theses and 14 Principles for
New Leadership in the Age of
Digitalization

Marcus Raitner

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For Marie, Ella, and Valentin

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Pain of Adaptation

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.

Samuel Beckett

After moving from our small but excellent start-up esc Solutions to BMW Group IT, I was asked more than once whether I was serious. Admittedly, I also asked myself that question more than once in the first few months after my move. Looking back, these pains of adaptation in the large corporation were decisive for me and my role as an organizational rebel and corporate jester and are ultimately the reason for this book you are now reading.

Love it

In mid-2010, I started as a Senior Partner at esc Solutions, a newly founded start-up in IT project management with all gradations between classic and agile. There were three of us, full of drive and idealism. Although we didn't yet know exactly what we stood for and what we would offer in concrete terms apart from our workforce and time, we knew for sure that we wanted to work completely different from how we had previously experienced it in IT consulting. So it was more the "away from" and "completely different" than a grand vision that united us. At least that's how I felt.

We didn't have an office initially, and our only guideline for everything was common sense. Essentially, we stuck to Herb Kelleher's motto: "We have a strategic plan. It's called doing things." And we had a lot of fun doing it. I started writing a regular blog in 2010 to position ourselves as a company. That connected me to many other like-minded rebels, and luckily, we also found new customers.

Our company grew, and the more people we became, the more often the question of our identity beyond the initial "away from" and "completely different" arose: Why does someone work for us and not elsewhere or as a freelancer? What defines us at our core and sets us apart from others? After many intensive discussions, we realized in the management team that we had fundamentally different views on this. I still firmly believe that profit cannot and should not be the purpose of an organization. There must be more 'Why' to it: why we get up on a Monday morning and do what we do at this particular company.

However, one thing led to another, and I was (once again) offered an attractive position at the BMW Group IT, where I had been working on various projects for ten years.

Leave it

I took the path many consultants took before me and switched to the customer side. And I went from one extreme to the other. Maximum freedom (and, frankly, sometimes chaos) was followed by maximum regulation. At least, that's how I felt at the time. I quickly reached my limits in my ambition

to make a change for the better. For example, when I invited several project managers from agile projects to a community of practice, which seemed to be a very natural thing to do, the first question was whether I was entitled to do so and who gave me permission.

Everything was perfectly organized.

I wasn't used to that. And I was bothered by things that others no longer even noticed. I understood the necessity of health and safety instructions, but I hadn't done a doctorate, built a house, or started a family to be constantly admonished like a child to use the handrail on the stairs. The opposite of good is good intentions.

I felt overprotected.

I searched for the reason for my dissatisfaction with myself because, on the surface, most of the others seemed quite happy. The cage was warm and comfortable, and there was enough to eat—but it was too tight for me. After all, the company and I didn't fit together, and I was convinced that it would be presumptuous to fight for a change. I didn't want to be Don Quixote.

Of the three known solutions, "Love it, leave it, change it," the only option seemed to move on. I had some interesting interviews, but they did not lead anywhere—fortunately, as I recognized later, because it would have been again a move away from a problem instead of realizing that behind it, an inspiring journey is waiting. Or, as Marcus Aurelius famously said¹: "The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way."

Change it

Back then, I had quite an affinity for social media and soon discovered the internal Enterprise Social Network at BMW. And I was unhappy with it as well because it only replicated the silos of the organization, had just a few open groups, and hardly any relevant discussion took place in it. At least it made me realize why Working Out Loud (WOL)² was a thing in big corporations. Until then, I had utterly underestimated this concept because I took it for granted that ideas could be shared and discussed openly.

I started getting involved in the few open groups, questioning things critically and initiating discussions to become a more agile and modern organization. Through that, I gradually got to know many like-minded people internally, people who, like me, wanted to change the way we worked and the corporate culture and make it fit for the future, like the many people in the Connected Culture Club and the WOL movement.

I was genuinely inspired by the dedication of so many people in those grassroots movements who were fighting for change. It gave me a renewed sense of hope. Perhaps striving for change wasn't presumptuous or utopian after all. What gave me even more hope was that many of these movements also received support from top management; instead of suppressing them, those top leaders used the energy and commitment of those groups to drive change. I still didn't want to be Don Quixote, but I increasingly recognized the value of civil disobedience, cultivated rebelliousness, and my chosen role as corporate jester: change requires disturbance.

The topic of agility gained increasing importance in BMW

Group IT and finally became the very grand “100% Agile” strategy in 2017. Instead of having a few more or less agile projects here and there, we rebuilt the IT into a fully agile product organization that constantly delivers new features instead of treating change as an exception to be handled by a project.

And I was right in the middle of it! In the meantime, I had gained a great deal of visibility within the company, especially around agility (thanks to WOL and managers who encouraged this and were able to deal with rebellious minds like me) and beyond (thanks to my blog, where I continued to write more or less weekly even after joining BMW). As an Agile Transformation Agent, I have passionately taught the elephant many dancing lessons over several years. I am proud that we created a lasting impact as the BMW Group IT is still organized and run according to the principles and guidelines we designed back then.

We had to consider many aspects of this large-scale transformation. At the beginning of 2018, we investigated how the role of leadership changes in an agile organization. We had a workshop with representatives from all layers of the hierarchy, from regular employees to the respective vice president. After three hours of reflecting on leaders’ expectations of their self-organizing teams and, conversely, what those teams require from their leaders, we had several large brown papers full of ideas. In a quick chat at the end of this workshop, a colleague thought it would be nice to distill all the insights into leadership principles for an agile organization, just as in the Manifesto for Agile Software Development.

I happily accepted that challenge and developed the six theses

at the core of the Manifesto for Humane Leadership one after the other, first on Twitter and LinkedIn, and then summarized them in a blog post. After many people had signed the original Manifesto in my blog, I added more thoughts and content to them and finally self-published everything via Amazon, first in German³ and finally in English⁴.

I was also honored to promote agility and our transformation in numerous presentations and workshops inside and outside the company. As my interest shifted more towards agile leadership, I emphasized in my talks the necessary transformation of the leadership role that goes hand in hand with an agile transformation.

I still consider this period of transformation from 2017 to 2019 to be one of the most fulfilling moments of my professional life.

Everything is in flux, “*patha rei*”, wrote Heraclitus. And this high was followed by another low. After several new appointments in BMW’s upper management, the topic of agility was still in demand, but no longer as a steadily progressing transformation. Instead, the agile transformation of BMW Group IT entered a consolidation, operationalization, and industrialization phase. The time of pioneering work was over. Pioneers were no longer needed, but settlers and town planners were required to use Simon Wardley’s very apt model⁵. However, I am a passionate pioneer. That’s why I had to be consistent and find a new professional home where this expertise and passion could be used again.

After a brief detour into the semiconductor industry, my path led me to Allianz Consulting, the in-house consulting unit of Allianz, where I now have the honor of leading a

multinational team of agile coaches. During those moves, I have taken with me the topic of agile transformation in general and the necessary transformation of the leadership role in particular, which is the focus of this book.

What felt like a pile of broken pieces at the moment, in retrospect, formed a very unique and exciting picture. The obstacle became the way. As with the traditional Japanese repair method, Kintsugi, where broken ceramics are glued with a lacquer in which gold, silver, or platinum powder has been mixed. Instead of concealing the fractured areas, this technique highlights them. The flaw is considered an integral part of the object's history, and it is within this unique imperfection that its true beauty is revealed. In this sense, my failures are an essential part of me that I don't have to hide.

Notes

- 1 M. Aurelius and G. Hays, *Meditations: A New Translation* (Random House Publishing Group, 2002), 60.
- 2 John C. Stepper, *Working out loud: a 12-week method to build new connections, a better career, and a more fulfilling life* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Page Two Books, 2020).
- 3 Marcus Raitner, *Manifest für menschliche Führung: Sechs Thesen für neue Führung im Zeitalter der Digitalisierung* (Independently Published, 2019).
- 4 Marcus Raitner, *Manifesto for Human(e) Leadership: Six Theses for New Leadership in the Age of Digitalization* (Amazon Digital Services LLC - KDP Print US, 2020).

5 Simon Wardley, "On Being Lost," *Wardleymaps* (blog), August 27, 2017, <https://medium.com/wardleymaps/on-being-lost-2ef5f05eb1ec>.

Persistent in Efforts, Modest in Expectations

A crisis is a productive state. You simply have to eliminate its aftertaste of catastrophe.

Max Frisch

The yearning for a new and better form of cooperation where we can create value not just despite but because of valuing people is greater than ever. Taylorism and industrialization have degraded people to resources. Back then, only the labor of the unskilled worker was in demand, and Henry Ford once complained that he always got a brain when asking just for a pair of hands. In our age of knowledge work, people's roles, qualifications, and demands have differentiated in many ways. However, the basic principle of viewing and running organizations as machines and treating employees as cogwheels has remained unchanged.⁶

I have a dream

I have this dream of a new and better working world.

I have the dream that the economy will someday serve people and life and vice versa.

I have the dream that people are seen as the ends of economic activity, not just the means of it.

I have a dream that we put the miserably failed attempt to motivate people with incentives on the shelf and instead build organizations that do not demotivate people to the extent that they need external motivation.

I have a dream that people will no longer be used as resources but that the development of individual potential will be seen as a decisive competitive factor.

I have this dream every day.

Let's dream together. Let's create a new and better world of work step by step. And let's build humane organizations for the age of digitalization. "Persistent in our efforts, modest in our expectation of success," quoting the wise life motto of Götz W. Werner, founder of the German dm drugstore chain.⁷

Enabling Self-Leadership

In a world in which it is "normal that many things have become different and are becoming more different faster and faster," as the business education teacher and time researcher Karlheinz A. Geißler aptly put it⁸, the role of leadership is, at the very least, up for discussion.

Leadership is not about you and your ego but making *others* successful. For Götz W. Werner, leadership was only legitimate in enabling self-leadership⁹. Leadership is an attitude, not a position. This book describes this attitude and the principles of new, agile, digital, and, above all, *humane* leadership.

As mentioned in the introduction, I created the six theses forming the core of this Manifesto for Humane Leadership in 2018 during BMW Group IT's agile transformation. They were my first attempt to answer how leadership needs to change to enable empowerment and self-organization as the foundational elements of true agility.

However, in hindsight, this transformation journey was just a welcome opportunity to breathe new life into long-standing concepts of servant leadership. Over time, this book became my idealistic and perhaps naïve attempt to create organizations and working environments that are more "species-appropriate" for knowledge workers.

The starting point amid BMW Group IT's *agile* transformation also explains the specific form of my Manifesto for Humane Leadership, which is deliberately based on the seminal "Manifesto for Agile Software Development"¹⁰. The goal of this format is to avoid black-and-white thinking in favor of areas of tension and growth, such as "Individuals and interactions more than process and tools," where both sides are valuable, but the first mentioned should be given more weight here and now.

This Manifesto for Humane Leadership draws from Peter Drucker's groundbreaking contributions on the nature of knowledge work and the leadership of knowledge workers, as well as on the positive human image in Theory Y from Douglas McGregor's much-neglected book "The Human Side of Enterprise"¹¹. Therefore, the title can and should be understood as an allusion to this *human* side of organizations and collaboration.

About the Author



Dr. Marcus Raitner supports companies as an agile coach, believing that elephants can dance. After earning his doctorate in computer science at the University of Passau, he worked as an IT project manager at msg systems. In 2010, he joined esc Solutions, a small start-up focused on project management and coaching, eventually becoming the Managing Director. From 2015, he worked with BMW Group IT as an Agile Transformation Agent, and later at Infineon as an agile coach focusing on agile leadership. As of April 2022, Marcus Raitner leads the “Agile” practice area at Allianz Consulting, overseeing the agile transformation of the Allianz Group with a team of over 20 agile coaches. Since 2010, he has been writing about leadership, digitalization, new work, and agility on his blog.