GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF AI-EMPOWERED LEADERSHIP

Six Guiding Principles for Confident and Responsible Leadership in the Age of AI

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Artificial intelligence is fundamentally changing leadership. This white paper outlines six principles that help leaders use AI confidently, effectively, and responsibly. The central argument: The decisive competitive advantage is not the AI technology itself, but the mindset and capabilities of the people who work with it.

1. LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY REMAINS WITH THE INDIVIDUAL.

With the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, not only is its performance increasing, but so is the uncertainty many people feel. AI systems already significantly surpass humans in certain cognitive areas – for example, in computing speed, pattern recognition, or the processing of massive amounts of data. In the near and distant future, this superiority will continue to grow in many domains.

Artificial intelligence, despite all its levels of autonomy, is a tool created by humans. It is comparable to machines that far surpass humans physically: airplanes, blast furnaces, power plants, or industrial facilities. No human could fly alone, melt steel, or power entire cities. Yet these machines do not control humans. Humans operate them - and remain responsibile for how they are used.

The same applies to AI. It can analyze, prepare, simulate, suggest, and optimize. But meaning, purpose, evaluation, and decision-making remain human tasks. Leadership doesn't necessarily mean being the strongest or most intelligent entity, but taking responsibility for impact, people, and consequences. This responsibility cannot be delegated—neither to algorithms nor to AI systems.

The concern that AI could one day take control is serious. History teaches us that technological power without principles, values, and governance can be dangerous. Precisely for this reason, the answer is not retreat or fear, but conscious leadership. A clear stance acts as an inner compass: AI serves humanity – not the other way around.

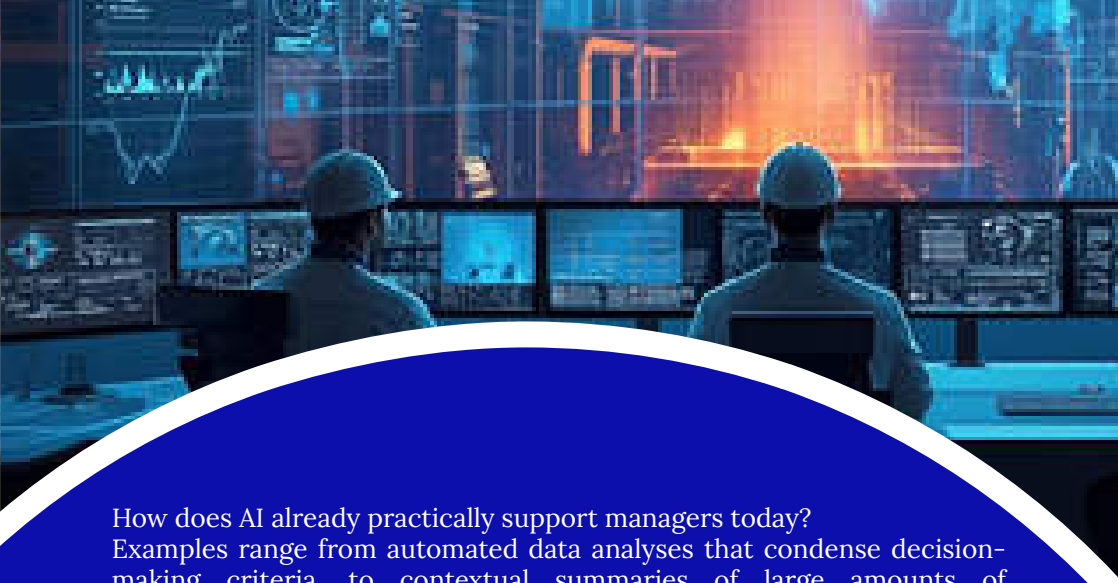
This belief is crucial. Leaders who understand AI as a superior yet supportive tool retain their ability to shape their future. They harness the power of AI without relinquishing their responsibility. This fosters not dependence, but sovereignty – the ability to lead intelligently, thoughtfully, and humanely with powerful tools.

This attitude is reflected, among other things, in the creation of written documents, such as a strategy paper or concept. It usually makes little sense to completely outsource the creation to AI. However, AI can act as a thought partner for the human thought leader. The thought leader considers the objectives, the overall structure, and the most important keywords.

2. AI COOPERATION IS A SUPERPOWER

In a world where AI technologies are maturing at a rapid pace, the decisive competitive advantage is not just the tools themselves, but the ability of leaders to collaborate effectively with these systems. Leading with AI doesn't mean eliminating human intuition, but rather augmenting it with data- and AI-driven insights to enable better decisions, faster responses, and continuous learning. This ability to collaborate with AI is increasingly seen as a superpower that sets leaders apart.

Studies already show that AI-enabled collaboration can significantly increase productivity and efficiency. For example, the German Economic Institute reports that employees using AI applications tend to achieve performance improvements – especially where expertise and experience are present. AI relieves people of routine tasks and creates space for strategic thinking and creativity.[1] An IBM study from 2025 confirms that two-thirds of companies in Germany see productive efficiency gains through the use of AI, although there are differences depending on the industry and company size.[2] Extensive literature reviews also identify that collaboration between humans and AI enables "augmentation" (i.e., productive supplementation) and goes far beyond mere automation.[3] [4] [5]



How does AI already practically support managers today?
Examples range from automated data analyses that condense decision-making criteria, to contextual summaries of large amounts of information, to structured scenario planning – functions that reduce cognitive overload and create decision-relevant transparency. This leads to faster, better-documented decisions and strengthens confidence in strategic direction.

In the near future, this cooperation will intensify even further: AI systems will increasingly be able to uncover patterns in complex relationships, provide real-time recommendations, and generate adaptive learning paths for organizations. Research on human-AI augmentation makes it clear that leaders must increasingly be able to see AI as an active partner in value creation—not just as a tool for increasing efficiency.[3] At the same time, studies on human-AI augmentation show that the greatest benefits arise where humans and AI interact closely, for example, in creative problem-solving or the optimization of complex processes.[4] [5]

In the medium term, this interplay becomes a core strategic competency. Leaders are increasingly evaluated on their ability to integrate AI-powered potential into the organizational culture, build AI expertise within their teams, and simultaneously uphold ethical, humane, and long-term goals. This AI collaboration is no longer a nice-to-have, but a crucial lever for productivity gains, innovation, and sustainable leadership impact.

Put simply: Leaders who actively cultivate AI as a superpower in their daily work will be significantly more productive than those who merely follow the AI trend.

3. PERFORMANCE GROWS FROM THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMANS AND AI IN INTERACTION

Even as teams increasingly work with AI and individual tasks are highly automated or taken over by agents, teams remain fundamentally human. Responsibility, meaning, ethical orientation, and ultimate decision-making authority still reside with humans. AI agents are highly sophisticated tools—powerful, capable of learning, and sometimes acting autonomously—but they lack consciousness, moral judgment, and genuine interpersonal skills. They operate within the goals, data spaces, and frameworks set by humans.

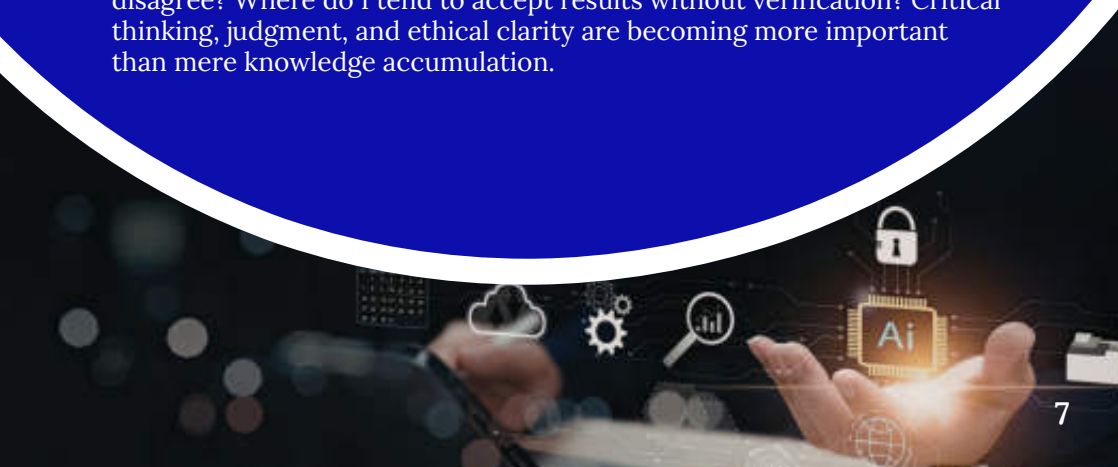
A team is therefore not defined by whether AI is used, but by who bears responsibility and what the work is ultimately about. AI can analyze, structure, simulate, and optimize – but it does not assume responsibility for the consequences. This is precisely why the team remains human, even when augmented by AI. However, the leadership and development role shifts: people now not only lead other people, but also shape an effective interaction with intelligent systems.

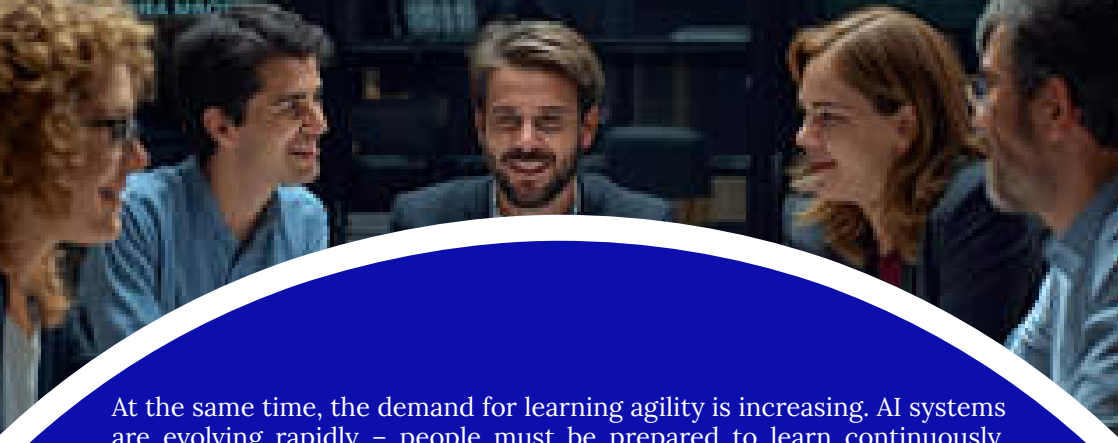
CONSEQUENCES FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

When performance arises from collaboration, then human development becomes the central lever. Three dimensions are crucial here:

3.1. Dealing with oneself

Anyone working with AI should be able to reflect on their own thought and decision-making processes: When do I trust the AI? When do I disagree? Where do I tend to accept results without verification? Critical thinking, judgment, and ethical clarity are becoming more important than mere knowledge accumulation.





At the same time, the demand for learning agility is increasing. AI systems are evolving rapidly – people must be prepared to learn continuously, adapt their working methods, and actively integrate technological innovations. Self-efficacy in dealing with AI is becoming a key capability.

A classic self-management principle is becoming even more important: proactivity. Our interaction with AI, both professionally and personally, tempts us to be reactive. We are constantly bombarded with suggestions, offers, and far more information than we can meaningfully process. To stay grounded, we need distance, breaks, and AI-free times and spaces. This is a struggle, a swim against the current. But it's worth it: a self-determined, reflective life and work are usually more fulfilling, meaningful, healthier, and also more productive.

Is your bedroom a media-free zone? Do you regularly go for walks in nature without your phone? How much time do you spend screen-free each workday?

3.2. Dealing with other people

The more AI takes over operational or analytical tasks, the more central genuinely human competencies become: relationship building, conflict resolution skills, trust, conveying meaning and joint decision-making.

In AI-augmented teams, transparency about how AI is used is crucial. Who accesses which systems and when? How are results validated? How are errors addressed collaboratively? The team's social architecture – feedback culture, learning culture, psychological safety – determines whether AI is used productively or generates uncertainty.

Furthermore, collaboration is changing: roles are becoming clearer as people focus more on value creation, creativity, and integration, while AI takes over routine tasks, analysis, and scaling. This shift in roles requires conscious planning.

3.3. Dealing with AI

The professional use of AI requires new skills: precise goal definition, clear prompting, iterative improvement, quality control, and systematic feedback. AI should neither be mystified nor blindly trusted. It is a powerful tool that must be consciously managed and reviewed.

People need to learn to use AI as a "thinking partner" – to broaden perspectives, accelerate processes and generate options – without relinquishing their own responsibility.

DEVELOPING AI APPLICATIONS AND AGENTS

Performance increases not only through use, but also through the conscious development and continuous improvement of AI applications and agents.

AI agents, like human team members, need clear roles, defined goals, measurable success indicators, and regular feedback. An agent without a clear mandate remains ineffective. An agent without evaluation may produce plausible but inappropriate results.

The development process therefore includes:

- **Clear target architecture: What tasks should the agent perform? What is its added value?**
- **Seamless integration into processes: How are results incorporated into decision-making and workflows?**
- **Feedback and learning loops: Which results were helpful, which were not? How will the system be adapted?**
- **Transparency and governance: Who is responsible for the output, the data basis and the ethical implications?**

Through iterative improvement – similar to employee development – the quality of results continuously increases. Teams learn to configure their agents more precisely, instruct them better, and deploy them more effectively. Applications like OpenClaw enable even non-professionals to build agents. While exploring new territory is a great passion, caution is also advised regarding security architecture.

Depending on the operational environment, the involvement of IT departments may be a necessary prerequisite, dispensable, or perhaps even an unacceptable slowdown.

INCREASED PERFORMANCE

When people develop themselves further, consciously shape their collaboration, and systematically build and improve AI agents, a dynamic learning architecture emerges in the best case scenario.
Performance then does not grow linearly, but cumulatively:

- People become clearer in their judgments and faster in their decisions.
- AI systems are becoming more precise, better integrated, and more effective.
- Processes become more efficient while quality increases.

The interplay of human judgment and machine computing and analysis power creates a sustainable competitive advantage.

Performance is therefore not a static state, but the result of an ongoing development process – by people, by technology, and above all, by their conscious interaction. However, there are also surveys of CEOs who still consider the productivity gains of agentive AI to be modest[1]. The complexity arising from AI prone to hallucinations differs from that of process automation with fixed algorithms. Nevertheless, it is likely that companies with heavy AI users will soon overtake their competitors, also because AI technologies will continue to mature.

4. DIVISION OF LABOR WITH AI IS DYNAMIC

The division of labor between humans and AI is not a static model, but a dynamic system. What is clearly the responsibility of humans today may be partially supported or even taken over by AI tomorrow. At the same time, new tasks are emerging that did not exist just a few years ago. Leadership in the age of AI therefore means constantly and consciously reflecting on and adapting the distribution of roles.

A key guiding question is: What can human leaders do better – and what can AI do better?

Today, the strength of a leader lies primarily in relationship building, creating meaning, sound judgment, and taking responsibility. Leaders can tolerate ambivalence, moderate cultural tensions, perceive implicit dynamics, and make ethical decisions. They provide guidance in times of uncertainty and build trust – a skill based on authenticity and personal presence.

AI, on the other hand, is already highly adept at routines, pattern recognition, and scalability. It analyzes large amounts of data in seconds, identifies trends, structures information, generates decision options, and automates recurring processes. AI does not get tired, lose focus, or react emotionally.

But this division is shifting.

- **In a year, AI systems will be even better at personalizing, simulating, and playing through complex scenarios.**
- **In three years, many analysis and planning tasks will be largely AI-supported.**
- **In five years, a large part of operational control processes could be automated – while the human leader becomes more of an architect of meaning, culture and frameworks of responsibility.**

A second guiding question:

We should also ask ourselves a second guiding question: What do we as leaders want to continue doing ourselves – and what do we consciously want to leave to AI?

This question is not merely technical, but profoundly about identity. What brings us joy, what seems meaningful to us? A computer may play chess more effectively, but we should still reserve essential chess moves for ourselves.

However, what's crucial is not a one-time decision, but the continuous development of collaboration. The division of labor with AI is a learning process. Managers should regularly – ideally daily – try out new forms of cooperation.

A short daily AI meeting can help with this:

- What task did I solve differently today using AI compared to yesterday?
- Where has AI brought real added value?
- Where do I need more human depth?
- Which routine can I automate tomorrow as a test?

This deliberate experimentation creates a dynamic balance. Leadership is not replaced, but augmented. AI does not become a replacement, but an amplifier.

In the long run, team performance increases precisely where the division of labor is clear, reflective, and adaptive. Leadership then no longer means just developing people, but also actively shaping the interface between humans and AI – constantly reshaping it.

- What can a human leader do better?
- What can AI do better? Today? In 1 year? In 3 years? In 5 years?
- What do we as leaders want to continue doing ourselves? What would we rather leave to AI?

Regularly try out something new in your collaboration with AI, ideally every day. Establish a short daily check-in.

Relationship building, meaning-making, judgment and responsibility belong to humans; routines, pattern recognition and scaling belong to AI.

5. SECURING THE FUTURE IS ACHIEVED THROUGH A DETERMINED AND RESPONSIBLE AI TRANSFORMATION.

WHY? – DISRUPTION IS NOT AN EXCEPTIONAL SITUATION, BUT A LAW OF ECONOMIC HISTORY.

A look at economic history shows that technological upheavals rarely proceed linearly – they are abrupt, radical and often underestimated.

- Around 155 years ago, sailing ships dominated world trade with a market share of approximately 90%. Steamships were initially not considered serious competition – they were thought to be suitable for rivers and lakes, not for transatlantic trade.

- But just 30 years later, the picture had changed dramatically: sailing ships held only around 20% market share, while steamships controlled 80% of world trade. Crucially, it wasn't just the new technology itself, but the fact that new companies consistently used it and built business models upon it.

In the industrial revolution, we multiplied our physical strength. Today, in the digital and AI revolution, we are multiplying our intelligence. AI agents are not only changing individual processes, but entire value chains, decision-making logics, and competency profiles. Leadership is thus becoming a permanent design task – at the interface between human competence and machine intelligence.

Securing the future therefore does not come from waiting, but from decisive and responsible transformation. Decisive means: speed, courage, and a willingness to experiment. Responsible means: ethical reflection, transparency, and grounding in meaning and values.

This balance is becoming a core competency, especially for managers.

HOW? – TRANSFORMATION AS A LEADERSHIP ROUTINE

AI transformation is not a one-off project. It is a continuous learning and adaptation process.

Two specific levers:

5.1. Regularly question your own tasks.

- Which of your tasks can AI already take over today?
- Which ones, perhaps in a year?
- Which ones in three to five years?

Administrative routines, data analysis, initial text drafts, market comparisons, and brainstorming can all be automated. By consciously delegating these tasks to AI, you gain time for what only humans can do: building relationships, making sound judgments, creating meaning, and taking responsibility.

5.2. Regularly switch to the best new platform or tool.

Technological progress is exponential. What is leading today may be mediocre tomorrow. Transformation also means questioning technological loyalties. Not convenience, but performance should be the deciding factor.

Transformation thus becomes an ongoing task – comparable to strategy work or cultural development.

WHAT? – A CONCRETE COMMITMENT

Transformation doesn't begin in a strategy paper, but in the calendar.

Ask yourself three questions today:

- What new things am I trying today in my collaboration with AI?
- Which task will I test with an AI agent this week?
- Where can I improve decision quality through AI feedback?

Schedule a regular appointment with yourself – weekly or at least bi-weekly – as a personal "AI strategy meeting".

Reflect:

- What did I learn?
- What worked?
- Where do I need new skills?

Those who consistently live this reflection loop develop a transformation competence that secures long-term competitive advantages.

Companies rarely fail due to a lack of information – but rather due to a lack of determination. Future-proofing arises when leaders see AI not as a threat or a mere efficiency tool, but as a strategic dimension for shaping the future.

The question is not whether markets change. The question is whether we actively shape that change: decisively, responsibly, and with the courage to try out today what will be commonplace tomorrow.

6. THE WELL-BEING OF HUMANS AND NATURE IS THE OVERARCHING BENCHMARK FOR AI DEVELOPMENT.

Artificial intelligence is one of the most powerful technologies of our time. It has the potential to cause immense suffering—and equally great benefit. Rarely before has a technological development been so rapid, so global, and so profound in its impact on the economy, society, politics, and individual lives. Precisely for this reason, it needs a clear normative standard. This standard cannot be solely efficiency, profitability, or geopolitical dominance. The overarching standard must be the well-being of humanity and nature.

We find ourselves in a situation that can be described as a global market and governance failure. AI development is heavily driven by competitive dynamics – between companies, but also between states. Governments are investing billions to secure technological sovereignty. Companies are under pressure to bring innovations to market as quickly as possible to gain a competitive edge. In such an environment, a race to the bottom emerges, easily pushing ethical reflection to the margins.

At the same time, this development cannot simply be stopped or significantly slowed down. The economic and strategic incentives are too great. However, it can be shaped and guided to a certain extent. Companies play a central role in this. Every AI application, every new model, every algorithm deployed is part of a larger technological ecosystem – and thus part of a societal shift.

Recent examples vividly illustrate this ambivalence:

Emotion recognition can help in psychotherapy by identifying subtle emotional states and supporting treatment processes. At the same time, the same technology can be used in authoritarian contexts to monitor, intimidate, or manipulate citizens.

Generative AI can democratize creativity, personalize education, and improve medical diagnoses. At the same time, it can produce disinformation on an unprecedented scale – deceptively realistic deepfakes, automated propaganda, or targeted manipulation of political discourse.

AI in medicine already supports radiologists in early cancer detection and helps to diagnose rare diseases more quickly. At the same time, questions about data sovereignty, bias in training data, and equitable access raise new ethical problems.

AI in agriculture can use resources more efficiently, reduce pesticides, and optimize crop yields – a win for both people and nature. However, large-scale, data-driven agricultural systems can also increase dependence on a few technology providers and displace small farms.

These examples show that technology is not neutral in its effects, even if it may appear neutral as a tool. Its specific design, its context of use, and the underlying interests determine whether it contributes to good or harm.

There is also an ecological dimension that is often underestimated. Training large AI models consumes enormous amounts of energy and water. Data centers require cooling, infrastructure, and electricity – often still derived from fossil fuels. If AI contributes to further accelerating consumption, advertising, and resource use, it exacerbates ecological crises. Conversely, if it is used to optimize energy grids, develop new materials, or improve climate modeling, it can be a crucial tool in the fight against climate change.

The well-being of humans and nature is therefore not an abstract ideal, but a concrete criterion for decision-making.

It raises questions such as:

- Does this application promote or undermine human autonomy?
- Does it increase transparency or does it intensify manipulation?
- Does it support social justice or does it exacerbate inequality?
- Does it reduce resource consumption or further increase it?

At its core, we don't know where AI development will lead in the long term. Forecasts range from technological utopias to dystopian scenarios. Precisely because this uncertainty exists, a clear stance is crucial. In this context, leadership means pausing regularly: pausing before investment decisions, before product launches, before scaling new systems.

Reflection becomes a leadership task. Weighing values becomes a strategic competence. Long-term thinking becomes a matter of survival.

For companies, this means specifically:

- Ethics must not be a fig leaf, but must be integrated into innovation processes.
- AI projects should be systematically assessed for their social and environmental impacts.
- Interdisciplinary perspectives – technology, law, psychology, sustainability – should be integrated early on.
- Transparency towards customers and employees creates trust and reduces long-term reputational risks.

CONCLUSION

Setting the well-being of people and nature as the benchmark does not mean stifling innovation. It means guiding innovation.

It means measuring progress not only by speed or scale, but by its contribution to a successful life and a livable environment.

Managers in particular bear a special responsibility here.

- **You decide which projects are prioritized,**
- **which investments will be made and**
- **which values implicitly or explicitly guide actions.**
- **In a world where AI is becoming increasingly powerful, moral responsibility remains with humans.**

If AI becomes a key technology of the 21st century, then its overarching compass must be clear:

"Not feasibility, not market share, and not power are the ultimate criteria – but the well-being of people and nature."

SOURCES-DECLARATIONS

For 2nd superpower

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Thirdly, performance grows from the development of humans and AI in interaction.

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