



# LEADING TRANSFOR- MATION

REPORT 2023



Dear reader,

Four years ago, we embarked on a journey with a clear purpose: to better understand how leaders in Switzerland navigate and adapt to the challenges of change. This endeavor resulted in the creation of the Leading Transformation Report (LTR).

This year, we once again reached out to you to ask for your insights into how our leadership roles have evolved in this complex and ever-changing world. We received insights from over 270 executives and leaders. We are deeply grateful to all of you for taking the time to share your perspectives.

**We provide the LTR as a platform for fostering dialog and a meaningful exchange among leaders in Switzerland regarding the changes around us and how to address them. Our interpretations are grounded in the data generated by the survey, our own experiences, as well as qualitative insights from discussions with leaders. Our aim is for the data, and our interpretation of it, to spark discussions among you.**

We encourage you to compare our interpretations with your personal experiences and actively participate in the discussion. We are looking forward to many valuable exchanges with you.

Sincerely,  
The LTR Team

**THERE IS NOTHING AS  
CONSTANT AS CHANGE,  
AND NOTHING AS  
VOLATILE AS DEALING  
WITH IT.**

As leaders, we must adjust to many factors that affect our companies, our teams, and our own leadership. These include overarching megatrends, current events such as inflation, supply chain disruptions, and unpredictable geopolitical developments. And, of course, an ever-evolving regulatory landscape.

This complexity extends to the inside of companies as well. We navigate processes, structures, and human relationships. At the same time, we manage the expectations of customers, employees, and owners.

And while change remains a constant, how our organizations adapt to it varies. Whereas some thrive in a fast-paced environment with constant, quick changes, others rely on establishing a stable, solid foundation to ensure their success.

In this year's LTR, we look at the world we are engaged in from three perspectives: the Market, the Company, and the Leader. These levels are inextricably linked and incessantly interacting, adapting, and impacting each other.

**In this report, we will begin each chapter by citing the most important outcomes from the survey and then offering our own interpretation. At the end of the chapter, we will present the data for you to evaluate. This year, we also conducted three in-depth interviews with leaders.**

**"The word 'leading' implies movement. You are leading people somewhere. Otherwise, you're just standing still. And then you're managing."**

*Anna Frölander  
Chief of Staff, EF Education First*





# 1 THE MARKET

## TRANSFORMATION IS DRIVEN BY CUSTOMER VALUE AND PURPOSE

### THE DATA

The impact of megatrends on companies remains stable, which is to be expected, as these are significant, long-term forces that shape our society and businesses. This year, the two primary megatrends most impacting our companies are, once again, 'Connectivity' and 'New Work'.

Furthermore, this year's data shows a notable shift in our perception of how customer and employee expectations influence our companies. In contrast to the 2022 report, where employee expectations changed the most, we now see that customer expectations hold much greater sway over organizations.

### AN INTERPRETATION

#### 'Connectivity' translates to convenience and ease of use

The 'Connectivity' megatrend encompasses the technological advancements that customers desire, and employees require. These could include self-service, automation, AI-supported services, and cybersecurity measures. Our qualitative insights indicate that this is not only driven by optimizing cost but also enhancing the ease of doing business.

Customers expect the same level of convenience in their professional dealings as they experience in their personal lives. Moreover, they anticipate this level of service without additional costs. It is a baseline expectation.

**"Customers want to be able to do, and access, everything from anywhere, and at any time."**

*LTR Survey participant*

As companies, we seem to increasingly direct our focus toward delivering enhanced value to customers, be it through digitized and personalized services, faster delivery and ESG-compliant products, and so on.

Because amidst inflation, geo-political unrest and the increased cost of living, products and services must be ever the more attractive and valuable, to get to the top of customers' wish lists and priorities.

### Greeting a new generation presents a steep learning curve

It comes as no surprise that 'New Work' remains a top priority for companies. However, we notice that while it continues to hold importance, many companies have already made progress in implementing flexibility, remote working, and part-time arrangements. Therefore, leaders now perceive meeting employee expectations as less dynamic or urgent than meeting customer expectations. Yet, there are still areas where internal improvements are needed, particularly in providing technical tools that enable employees to work seamlessly. Similarly to customers, employees expect work-related tools to be as seamless as the digital experiences they encounter in their personal lives.

Another aspect that seems to drive employee expectations is the need to effectively motivate and support highly purpose-driven professionals seeking influence and fast learning opportunities. Keeping individuals within the company, especially those who may not be as easily content as previous generations, poses an ongoing challenge with no clear solution on the horizon.

### Regulatory policy is a force to be reckoned with

In addition, it is clear from the qualitative feedback we gathered that a significant influence in 2023 comes from the numerous requirements set by governmental bodies within ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance), health and safety, data protection, and more. Out of these, sustainability is an especially pressing requirement for driving transformation. Complying with these standards and regulations is not just a legal obligation but an obvious customer demand. This dual pressure seems to drive companies to transform rapidly and rather effectively.

**"Customers expect our products to support them in achieving their own sustainability targets."**

*LTR Survey participant*

### IMPULSES FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

- ▶ Addressing connectivity to bring value to customers and employees seems to be a key focus for companies in 2023. Where does your company stand in delivering value through digital?
- ▶ How can we better support highly purpose-driven individuals in our organizations?

## DATA: MEGATRENDS

- ▶ The two primary megatrends most impacting our companies are 'Connectivity' and 'New Work'.
- ▶ 'Gender shift', 'Urbanisation' and 'Silver Society' rank lowest of all megatrends.

### Connectivity

Principle of networking based on digital infrastructures

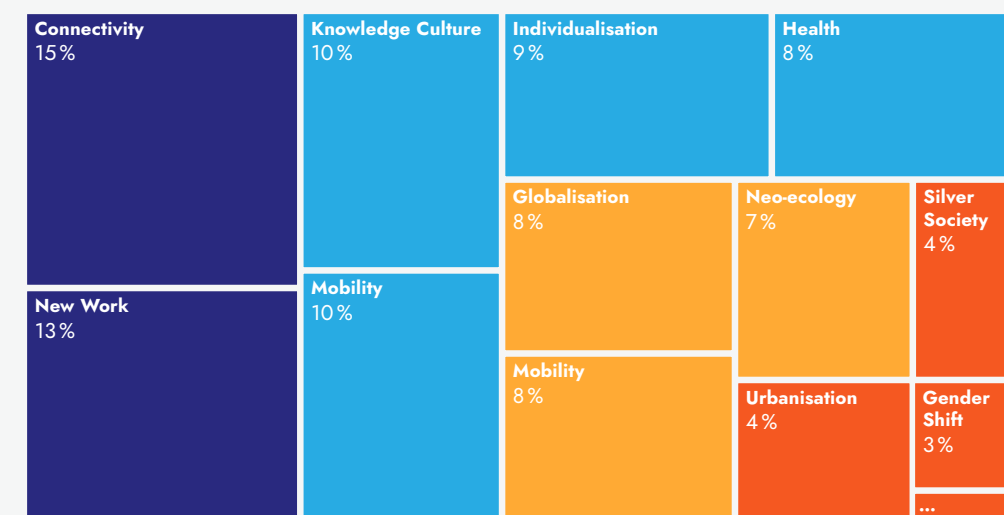
### New Work

Question of meaning, boundaries between life and work become blurred

(Source: Zukunftsinstitut)

### Which of the following megatrends\* have the greatest impact on your company?

Maximum three answers

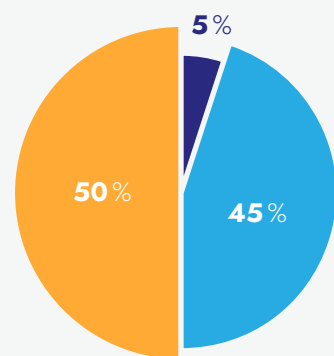


\*[www.zukunftsinstitut.de/dossier/megatrends/#12-megatrends](http://www.zukunftsinstitut.de/dossier/megatrends/#12-megatrends)

## DATA: SPEED OF REACTION

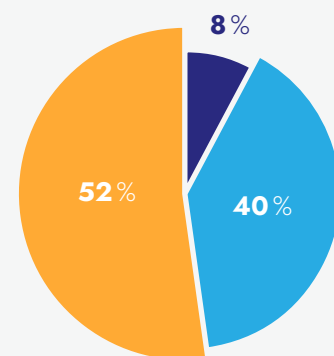
- 'Connectivity and 'New Work' impact companies quickly.

At what speed does your company react to the 'Connectivity' trend?



- Slowly
- At a moderate speed
- Quickly

At what speed does your company react to the 'New Work' trend?



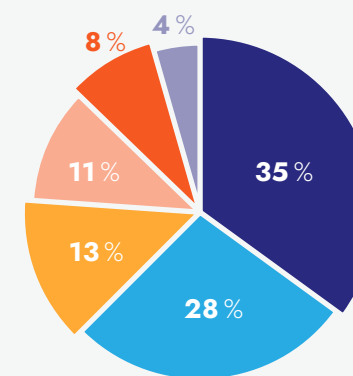
- Slowly
- At a moderate speed
- Quickly

## DATA: STAKEHOLDER EXPECTATIONS

- In comparison to 2022, we now see that customer expectations hold a greater sway over organizations than employee expectations.

In comparison to last year, did the expectations on your company change noticeably? (2022)

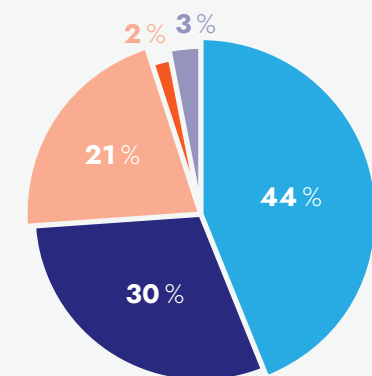
Maximum two answers



- Yes, from employees
- Yes, from customers
- Yes, from business partners
- Yes, from owners
- Yes, from suppliers
- No, the expectations did not change

In terms of expectations, where does the most pressure to initiate change come from? (2023)

Maximum two answers



- From employees
- From customers
- From owners
- From suppliers
- There is no pressure to initiate change

# "You can't just rely on what was true yesterday. You need to keep challenging your thinking."

**ANNA FRÖLANDER**

Chief of Staff, EF Education First

## How do you lead, and how does your leadership scale?

I am interested, I ask questions, and I try to see beyond what is in front of me. I prioritize being accessible, conspicuous and open in my communication. Over-communication is a hallmark of my leadership style, and I frequently engage with our teams, whether it's in sales offices or educational institutions. But of course, I have a core team, and they have a core team, so it also trickles down that way.

## Looking back over the last five years, whose expectations of you as a company and leader have changed the most?

Everything has changed. The people we hire today have completely different expectations than they used to. They want flexibility, but they also have clear ideas about how they want to be managed and led. Regarding our customers – and this varies from country to country and region to region – expectations are generally higher. That has definitely changed. Accreditation standards, health and safety standards, sustainability. Everything is changing all the time, everywhere.

## What current events force a change for you today?

In Europe, for example, we see that uncertainties such as inflation and increased prices on basically everything drives us to improve our products and make them even more attractive for consumers, getting them to the top of the priority list. So, understanding the customer and using creativity are critical to adapting and exceeding expectations.

## As a leader, what do you believe is the most important part of keeping your offering relevant, and prioritized?

It is about customer insight and listening. Not just sitting in your office and thinking about things. We need to have meaningful conversations with our customers, with children and their parents, and with educators. We need to understand what the trends are. At the same time, we must understand that the people we employ today act differently. They challenge your point of view. So, we must consider how to learn from them and take them with us so we can grow together as a company.

## How do you personally manage change at EF Education First?

I constantly challenge myself to stay relevant, to understand the market better, to understand the "why". Change is everywhere, all the time. We are a fast-paced company in a dynamic market, and there is no truth. You can't just rely on what was true yesterday.



## **ANNA FRÖLANDER**

Anna Frölander's leadership journey began as a commander in the Swedish Air Force, where she led a platoon of 60 personnel. She then began a dynamic international career, including sales and business development positions in several industries. She has been with EF Education First – a leading language travel company – for almost 15 years where she has held positions in several departments. In her current role, Anna drives organizational excellence, culture, and communications that impact 5,000 employees in more than 50 markets.



## 2 THE COMPANY

### **DIGITIZATION NOT ONLY OPTIMIZES PROCESSES, IT ALSO EMPOWERS EMPLOYEES TO CREATE MORE VALUE FOR CUSTOMERS FASTER**

#### **THE DATA**

In 2023, data indicates that the primary areas where companies focus their transformation efforts are 'People/Talent', followed by 'Technology'.

Moreover, the data shows a shared awareness among all participating Swiss companies regarding the necessity of being ready for change. Half of leaders report being ready now, while the other half is actively engaged in efforts towards building this readiness.

#### **AN INTERPRETATION**

##### **Focus shifts from internal themes to creating value for customers**

Companies and their leaders have a clear path in mind for their transformation efforts. The focus is on meeting the expectations of existing customers with improved product offerings and service quality. This involves addressing needs such as 24/7 support, faster service, convenient payment options, personalized experiences, and more. It is about keeping existing products and services relevant and easy to use.

Significant work must be done internally to align the organization with these requirements. This entails taking the necessary technological steps to equip teams and employees with the knowledge and tools to meet these new expectations and deliver value to customers effectively.

On the other hand, this also continues to be a question of cost. Technology allows companies to offer added value to customers, scale their business efficiently, and set themselves on the path to achieving profitable growth.

It seems that bringing existing customer relations to the next level is enough for the moment. The next phase would include exploring new markets, business models, and innovative solutions. But this can only happen only once we have established a strong foundation in terms of technology and workforce capabilities.



**Readiness to act quickly and to act proactively are two very different things**

We believe that the readiness of Swiss companies to handle change is built on two parts. The first is about actively searching for ways to transform that will keep the company relevant. It is both possible and valuable to consider future shifts and trends proactively and actively strive to take advantage of them. Often, this begins by understanding underlying customer motivations and finding new ways to answer their needs. This goes beyond fine-tuning existing offerings. Indeed, pursuing these opportunities requires focus, courage, and dedicated resources.

The second part is about being ready for unexpected changes. This means ensuring that the organization possesses the capacity to remain adaptable and resilient, even amid economic uncertainties and unforeseen occurrences such as natural events, pandemics, and logistical challenges. The goal is to equip teams with the necessary skills, tools, and mindset to navigate these complexities fairly, efficiently, diligently, and perhaps even independently.

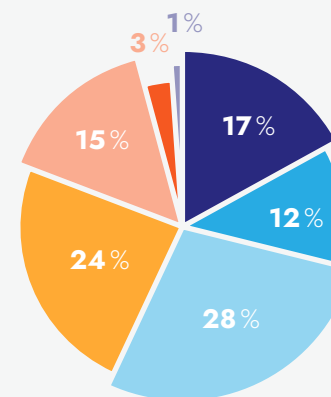
**IMPULSES FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION**

- ▶ With technology being such a key focus for driving transformation, do you think that an even closer collaboration between the business and IT makes sense in your company?
- ▶ At this point, companies seem to be focused on improving the value creation of existing products and services for existing customers. What do we need in order to take another step in actively pursuing the development of new products and services that would move the market forward?
- ▶ ‘Readiness’ can be seen as being ready for unexpected changes or staying proactive. What does ‘readiness’ mean in your company? What do you need to achieve it?

**DATA: TRANSFORMATION AREAS AND READINESS**

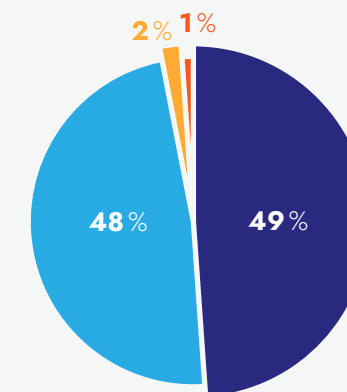
- ▶ The primary areas where companies focus their transformation efforts are People/Talent followed by Technology.

**Within which of the following areas do you think it is most important to drive transformation within your company in order to stay successful in the future? Maximum two answers**



- Strategy
- Market/Clients
- People/Talent
- Technology
- Organisation
- Finances
- I don't think any of these areas are necessary to transform

**Do you believe that your company is ready to deal with the transformation that is needed to be/stay successful in the future?**



- Yes, we are ready
- No, but we are working on it
- No, and we are not working on it
- No transformation is needed in my company

# "It's a balancing act to react quickly and with foresight while maintaining stability."

## BIANCA GEBAUER

Co-Head of Human Resources Management at Swiss Post

### As a public service company with a broad range of activities, Swiss Post must respond to change on all fronts. Where do you start?

We can see from examples abroad what could happen if the Swiss Post does not act in time: the public service shrinks to the bare minimum. Swiss Post wants to prevent this at all costs. With its 'Post of Tomorrow' strategy, it wants to remain a relevant and attractive employer that continues to offer its customers up-to-date services and products – both physical and digital. This is the only way we can secure the public service in the long term and finance it ourselves. This breadth is also a major challenge in operational terms. From logistics

professions to Postbus drivers to office functions, we have around 100 job profiles and around 150 languages represented. There are simply no 'one size fits all' solutions.

### Given this great diversity, what is the unifying element in the leadership culture?

Our common denominator is healthy, human leadership. That means we want to know what's going on in people's minds, convey to them the meaning of their work and, wherever possible, let them help shape it. The challenge, however, is to implement this leadership practice across all management levels.

### Companies that can adapt quickly to new circumstances despite uncertainties are ahead of the game. What leadership qualities are particularly in demand here?

Many companies are in a state of continuous reorganization. The cycles are becoming shorter and shorter. Reorganization also brings with it a loss of energy and efficiency until you are 'set up' again. Perhaps it would sometimes be better to take a deep breath and wait rather than react immediately. But management reacting too late often seems more serious than overreacting. In my opinion, finding a balance here is a leadership quality and a great challenge.

### Decision-making is an important leadership skill. How do you make decisions – in a structured and rational way or on instinct?

Often you don't have the time to think everything through and weigh it up. Then it's important to me that it fits in with my values, and that's where gut decisions are usually not so wrong. When I have more time, I like to reflect my thoughts with another person. Sometimes I still miss that in the leadership role. We take too little time to exchange ideas with others. Everyone has the feeling that they have to make their own decisions, and that can sometimes be very lonely.

### How would you characterize your personal leadership style?

It is important to me to accompany people individually. Picking them up where they are and responding to what they need. I'm very consensus-oriented and exchange with others is important to me. But I also make it clear what is negotiable and what is not. I've always done well with that and also believe that this management style is sustainable.



## BIANCA GEBAUER

Bianca Gebauer is Co-Head of Human Resources Management and a member of the Human Resources Division at the Swiss Post. Together with a partner, she manages a department of around 100 employees and is responsible for the social partnership and all collective employment agreements at Swiss Post. She is also a self-employed mediator, conflict and management consultant, and supports managers in change processes and conflicts.



## LEADERS INITIATE, INSPIRE, AND DELEGATE. BUT SOMETIMES WE FAIL TO TRACK THE VALUE THAT OUR ACTIONS CREATE.

### THE DATA

Participants in the LTR survey ranked the ability to motivate and inspire teams as the most important skill for a leader to have in order to lead transformation successfully. Maintaining consistent, clear communication came in second. This is similar to what we have seen in previous years.

The trait that ranks as least important was accepting situations that cannot be changed.

Furthermore, when looking at companies' strengths and weaknesses in driving transformative initiatives, it seems companies are stronger in the initial stages of a transformation initiative. This includes identifying opportunities, making informed decisions, and getting internal support. At the bottom, we ranked the company's ability to evaluate the value created as the biggest weakness.

### AN INTERPRETATION

**Still true: communication and motivation are everything**

The skill that leaders place at the top of their priorities is the ability to motivate and inspire their teams. This motivation and inspiration are expected to revolve around consistently sharing the company's common goals and purpose, and meeting people where they stand.

Effective leaders must also possess the capability to communicate clearly, connecting with individuals in their day-to-day lives. This closely mirrors past LTRs that have underscored the pivotal role of communication.



**Action for the sake of action?**

When we look at leaders' perceptions of their companies' strengths and weaknesses at different stages of the transformation process, the data shows that the early stages of the process are typically strengths. However, challenges arise when it comes to effectively tracking the value derived from specific transformation initiatives.

Part of this might be based on the actual expectations around leadership. As leaders, we are expected to take action and move forward, not necessarily to evaluate and learn.

This notion is also supported by the low ranking of the leadership trait 'accepting things that cannot be changed'.

**"Perhaps it would sometimes be better to take a deep breath and wait rather than react immediately."**

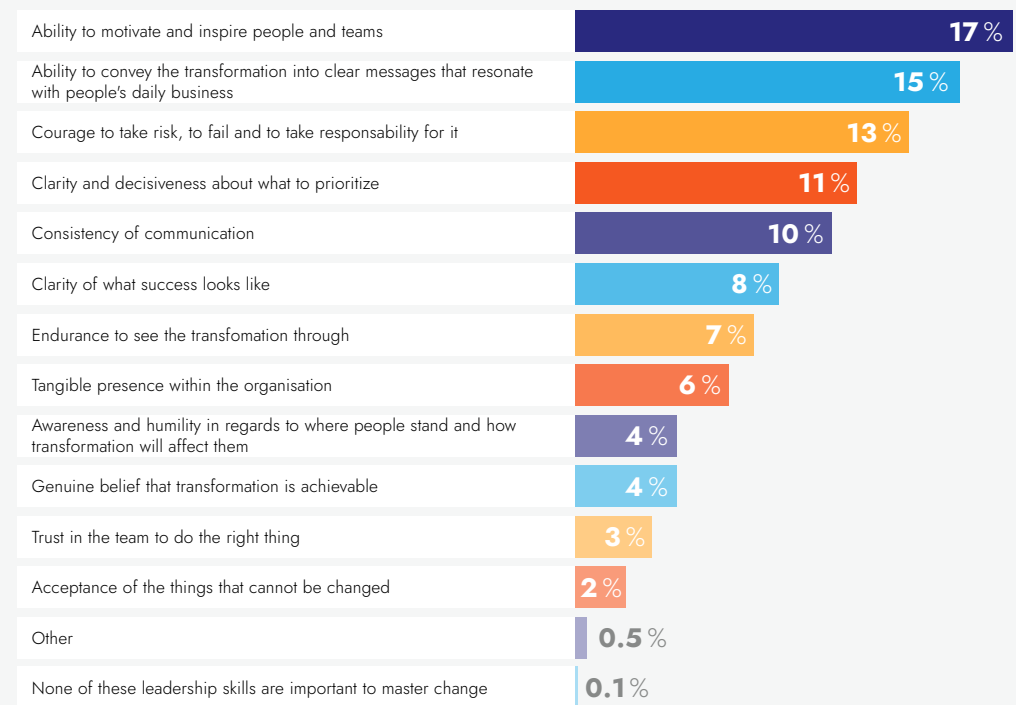
*Bianca Gebauer  
Co-Head of Human Resources Management  
at Swiss Post*

**IMPULSES FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION**

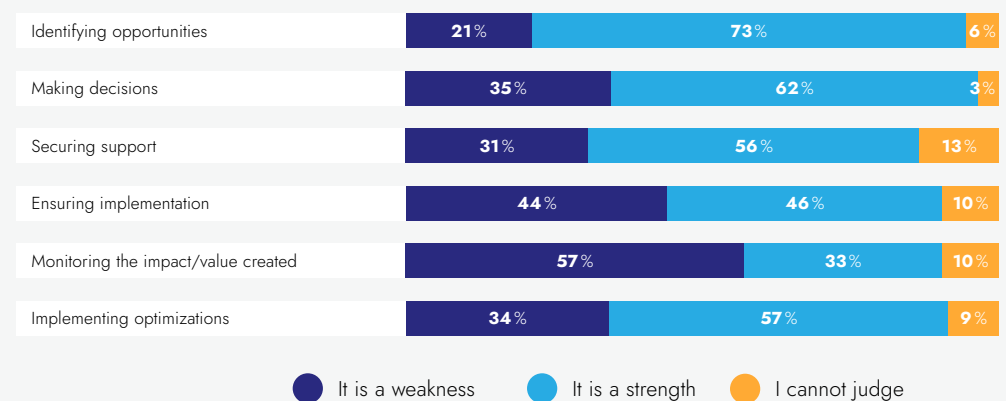
- ▶ Apart from financial reporting, how do you track the value of independent actions that you initiate? Would we be more successful faster if we tracked earlier than top and bottom line?
- ▶ As leaders, we tend to focus more on action and less on monitoring the value of these actions. And we seem to be expected to do this. Is this something we should reflect on to improve our skills further?

**DATA: LEADERSHIP TRAITS AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES"**

**As an individual, which are the most important leadership skills to have in order to master change?** Maximum 3 answers



**Where do you see the strengths and weaknesses of these leadership practices in your company?**



# "My role is to help move the company from a manufacturing focus to a customer success focus."

**STEPHAN SONDEREGGER**

CEO, Variosystems

## What drives the need for transformation in your company today?

The entire customer landscape has evolved dramatically. Customers are now demanding deeper integration into their value chains and new services. We have, therefore, changed the way we interact and collaborate with our customers. They count on us to come up with ideas on how to reduce costs, how to make their supply chain more efficient, or how to improve their products. So, we are more involved in creating value than ever before. This shift means that we have to become more customer-centric and skilled along the entire value chain of electronics solutions. My role is to help move the company from a manufacturing focus only to a customer success focus that includes services in the development, industrialization, and life-cycle management of electronics solutions.

## One of the megatrends respondents in this year's LTR survey say impacts their companies the most is 'New Work. Where does Variosystems stand in terms on this?'

When I joined Variosystems, one of the first question was: "Do you support remote work?" I think that's the wrong question. I support smart work. I want people to be fully focused on their responsibilities, and I don't focus on how they do it. The most important thing is that they demonstrate accountability for what they are responsible for. This approach is new at Variosystems, but it applies to our entire company.

And as a manufacturing and supply chain company, not everyone can work remotely. Therefore, we have to offer flexible models like compressed work weeks, where you work four days instead of five and still get your hours. We must be proactive about these issues because everything is evolving – how we work, how we interact with customers, how we coach and mentor. Because, something that has not changed are our profitability targets, our growth targets, and our customer satisfaction targets.

## Leading transformation is complex. Numerous factors interact constantly. How do you make decisions?

I am a numbers person, an engineer, so I look at data points. I analyze, I listen a lot. I also think about the timing and the people in the background who will make it happen. A lot of the decisions I make have to do with whether it is realistic to assume that this is actually going to happen. Do I have the support, the buy-in, and is the organization ready to execute that decision successfully.

## How do you deal with the new generation of leaders entering the workforce today?

Today, people come in, and they want to lead, they want to take responsibility, and they want to make a big impact – that is good and inspiring. I think it all comes down to how you communicate with them and how you value their drive. As a leader, it's about being approachable and open about your mistakes. It's about creating a safe environment where they can experiment and learn. Take them seriously and make them an integral part of the journey.

## As a leader, it can be lonely at the top. Do you have forums to exchange ideas and decisions?

Absolutely. You need inspiration from entirely different areas, from friends, from leaders in other companies. You need to have a strong network beyond your workplace because, yes, it is lonely now and then. So, exchange with leaders or mentors beyond my industry or workplace is crucial for success and for creating outstanding customer experiences.



**STEPHAN SONDEREGGER**

Stephan Sonderegger studied mechanical engineering and industrial management at the ETH in Zurich. He has worked in the industrial and healthcare sectors and held management positions in China, Singapore, and the United States. After 16 years living and working abroad, he returned to Switzerland to take on the CEO position at Variosystems. There, Stephan applies his extensive expertise to drive the company's growth. His career highlights leadership across industries and geographies, consistently managing transformative periods.

## CONCLUSION

# CUSTOMER VALUE AS THE FOCUS IN TRANSFORMATION



In this year's report, we have shared your collective insights and interpreted them to provide a basis for discussion.

Common themes for leading transformation in 2023 are:

- 1. 'Connectivity' is value-driven:** The overarching trend of 'Connectivity' underscores the importance of convenience and ease of use. Adapting to this megatrend is imperative to meet rising customer and employee expectations.
- 2. 'New Work' is increasingly purpose-driven:** A new generation, entering the market, challenges traditional career development.
- 3. Tracking value creation is complex:** Although initiating and driving change comes naturally to leaders in 2023, we might need to consider ways to measure the actual customer value created by initiated projects.
- 4. Action with (or without?) purpose:** Critically reflecting on how our leadership actions are driven by a genuine sense of purpose and value creation rather than 'actionism' could support us in delivering more value in future initiatives.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report. We look forward to discussing these themes with you over the coming months.



# METHOD

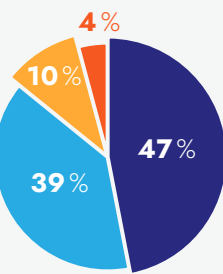
A total of 271 respondents, each addressed personally, actively participated in the Leading Transformation Report 2023 online survey between August 29 and September 29, 2023. These respondents offer a diverse cross-section of Swiss companies, encompassing various sizes, sectors, and markets. In addition to multiple-choice questions, the survey featured open-ended questions, providing respondents with the opportunity to share their personal experiences.

To supplement the report's interpretations and stimulate discussion, we conducted three in-depth interviews. These interviews were structured in nature, and we have included excerpts in this report.

The primary objective of the LTR is to empower leaders in Switzerland to share their perspectives, thereby enriching the ongoing discussion about leading transformation. **The report is designed to serve as a source of inspiration, and a platform for discussion, enabling leaders to thoughtfully evaluate their own experiences and devise improved solutions for upcoming tasks and challenges.**

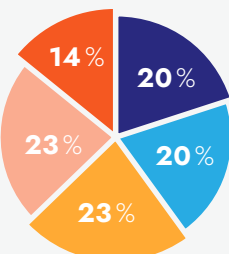
The Leading Transformation Report is an annual publication.

**Role**



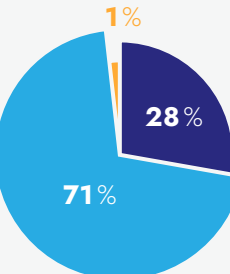
- Board member
- Senior management
- Middle management
- Employee

**Company size**



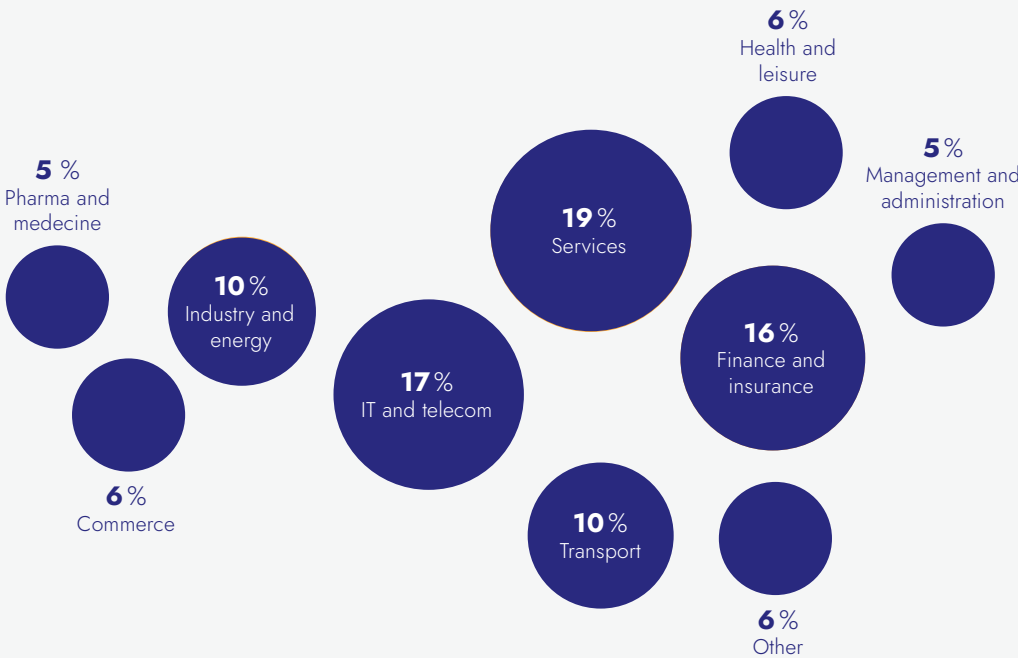
- More than 10,000 employees
- 1,000–10,000 employees
- 100–1,000 employees
- 10–100 employees
- Less than 10 employees

**Gender**



- Female
- Male
- Diverse

**Industries**





## ABOUT US

### **Boyden Global Executive Search**

Boyden is a premier leadership and talent advisory firm with a worldwide reach that enables us to meet our clients' needs wherever they do business. As a global boutique with over 75 offices in 45 countries, we combine a localised approach with global capabilities, connecting great companies with great leaders through executive search, interim management, and leadership consulting solutions. In our Zurich office, we focus on C-level executive and non-executive board positions at leading Swiss companies with whom we have maintained a successful partnership for many years.

### **Futureworks**

Futureworks helps successful companies to stay successful. To do this, we empower them to adopt the perspective of their customers and create fulfilling experiences. This translates into valuable offerings, a growing number of delighted customers and a more profitable business.

Futureworks – from Customer Insight to Business Impact.

### **Information Factory**

Turning data into business value – Management consulting and IT. As a strategic partner for digital transformation, we help companies exploit the full potential of data and process automation. This enables them to improve their core business or establish a whole new business model.

### **Küng Strategy Consulting**

Successful business people follow their goals and ensure profitable growth. Sometimes, they require honest discussion with a skilled, experienced and ambitious partner. Gebi Küng has been that partner for 15 years.

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INFORMATION  
FACTORY

STRATEGY **Küng**  
CONSULTING