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Socio-Digital Leadership and the Interaction Paradigm: The SoDiLi Approach

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Across Europe and beyond, organisations are navigating an unprecedented period of transformation. Digitalisation, ecological challenges, and changing societal expectations are reshaping the foundations of economic and organisational systems. In this rapidly evolving environment, the central challenge lies not only in implementing new technologies, but in understanding and leading the interactions between humans, technologies, and organisations within increasingly complex socio-digital environments.

In response to these developments, the socio-digital leadership (SoDiLi) approach is proposed as a conceptual framework for understanding and supporting leadership development in increasingly interconnected socio-digital ecosystems. The term *SoDiLi* is derived from the Turkish concept *Sosyo-Dijital Liderlik*.

In recent years, the concept of the *socio-digital* has increasingly gained prominence in the literature, particularly in the work of Wintermann et al. (2020), Kohlgrüber et al. (2021), Dworschak and Fehrle (2023) and Kopp et al. (2023). The term is conceptually rooted in the tradition of sociotechnical systems thinking, which was originally developed at the Tavistock Institute in the early 1950s. The classical sociotechnical approach emphasises that effective work systems require the joint optimisation of social and technical components.

The rapid progress of digitalisation in recent years has brought the sociotechnical perspective back to the forefront of academic and practical discussions, leading to what can be described as a “renaissance” of sociotechnical thinking. Pasmore et al. (2019) and Hirsch-Kreinsen (2018) emphasise the renewed importance of sociotechnical principles for understanding digital transformation. Accordingly, the sociotechnical systems approach is increasingly regarded as a key reference framework for shaping digital transformation in both research and practice (Kopp, 2023).

Although debates on socio-digital transformation are still emerging, the rapid advancement of digital technologies indicates that digital and social transformations increasingly unfold simultaneously and reinforce each other. As a result, interactions intensify across multiple interfaces among humans, technologies, organisations, and broader ecosystems.

From Sociotechnical Thinking to Socio-Digital Leadership

Müssigbrodt and Senderek (2020) argue that, to support leaders effectively in times of digitalisation, leadership development must be reoriented to address emerging challenges. Despite the central importance of leadership for successful socio-digital transformation, there are still only limited orientation and qualification programs specifically designed for this purpose. The joint research project eLLa 4.0 in Germany aimed to address this gap by promoting good leadership in the digitalised world.

Leaders must be able to actively drive change processes and develop, inspire, and support their employees so that they can successfully address the challenges of digitalisation (Dworschak and Fehrle, 2023).

Successful transformation in the socio-digital age depends on a leadership approach that is technologically aligned, ecosystem-based, holistic, and continuously learning, while fostering shared value creation. It combines continuous optimisation, participation, and the principle of “*leading well together*” (Kopp et al., 2023) with a transformation vision grounded in interaction competence.

Accordingly, the recently published book “*Socio-digital Leadership: Success in the Socio-digital Transformation through Interaction Competence*” by Kurt (2026) proposes a paradigm shift from a predominantly digital perspective toward a socio-digital understanding of transformation and leadership. The book argues for a series of terminological and conceptual shifts from the digital to the socio-digital paradigm, including transitions from sociotechnical to socio-digital systems, from digital to socio-digital transformation, and from digital and other contemporary leadership approaches toward a socio-digital leadership approach.

SoDiLi Development Model

Throughout the book, the intellectual guide SoDiLi – the symbol of interaction-based leadership in the socio-digital age – accompanies readers, guiding them through reflection, stimulating critical thinking, and inspiring new perspectives while introducing the socio-digital leadership model developed in this work.

Within this perspective, the socio-digital age is understood as a phase of transformation characterised by complex, multi-layered interactions between humans, technologies, organisations, and ecosystems (HTO+). In such environments, the principle of leading well together calls for an ecosystem-based, holistic, and interaction-oriented leadership approach that integrates continuous adaptation and optimisation with value-driven design and participation.

Against this background, the development of socio-digital leadership (SoDiLi) becomes a key prerequisite for successfully navigating socio-digital transformation. Kurt (2026) conceptualises this leadership development through the SoDiLi Development Model, which equips leaders with the interaction competencies required to effectively manage complex and networked socio-digital systems.

The SoDiLi development model adopts a perspective aligned with the requirements of the socio-digital age and focuses on:

- a holistic, circular, context-sensitive, multi-level, and balanced approach,
- a systematic, ecosystem-based design,
- the principle of “*leading well together*”,
- collective, continuous, and interaction-based learning,
- psychological awareness,
- purpose-driven and sustainable transformation,
- a learning-oriented, flexible, agile, and adaptive culture,

- an interaction- and experience-based orientation and
- continuous optimisation.

Interaction Competence in Socio-Digital Leadership

The goal of the SoDiLi Development Model is to equip socio-digital leaders with three fundamental interaction levels (according to Dworschak and Fehrle, 2023; Anders, 2021) and interaction competencies, enabling them to successfully shape socio-digital transformation.

1. Individual interaction competence for self interaction

Leaders must develop self-reflection, learning agility, and ethical awareness in order to navigate complex digital environments.

2. Interpersonal interaction competence for interpersonal interaction

Effective collaboration with employees, teams, and partners requires trust, openness, and participatory decision-making for fostering innovation and engagement.

3. Organisational interaction competence for ecosystem interaction

Leaders must engage with broader networks—including technology providers, digital platforms, research institutions, and societal stakeholders.

The agile, interaction-oriented, and competency-based architecture of the socio-digital leadership development model, together with its value-based compass, aims to ensure the sustainability of socio-digital transformation. The SoDiLi approach aims to support leaders in building organisations that are not only technologically advanced but also human-centered, resilient, and socially meaningful.

A Value Compass for Socio-Digital Transformation

Leadership transformation also requires a value-based orientation serving as a guiding framework for holistic leadership development in the socio-digital age. AKCA+DK (in English: NPAO+RD) represents the interaction compass of socio-digital leadership built on a value-based foundation. The model builds upon the VOPA+ leadership framework introduced into the German-language literature by Petry (2019). The AKCA+DK framework introduces two additional complementary values—resilience and determination—to more comprehensively support the human-centered, reliable, and sustainable management of socio-digital transformation.

The AKCA+DK Value Compass provides a conceptual orientation for developing the interaction competencies required of socio-digital leaders through seven core leadership values:

- *Networking* – building meaningful connections within and across ecosystems
- *Participation* – encouraging inclusive decision-making and shared responsibility
- *Agility* – adapting rapidly to technological and societal change
- *Openness* – fostering transparency, curiosity, and innovation
- *(+) Trust* – creating psychological safety and strong social capital
- *Resilience* – strengthening the ability to cope with uncertainty and crises
- *Determination* – maintaining strategic direction and long-term commitment

Together, these values guide leaders in navigating complex transformation processes while maintaining a strong human-centered perspective.

Relevance for Europe's Transformation Agenda

The relevance of socio-digital leadership becomes particularly evident when viewed through the lens of Europe's broader transformation agenda. Initiatives such as Industry 5.0, Workplace Innovation, and the Twin and Triple Transitions all highlight the need to combine technological progress with human-centered organisational design and sustainable development.

The SoDiLi Development Model addresses these needs through a holistic, ecosystem-oriented, and interaction-based leadership framework. By integrating technological innovation with human and organisational development, the model seeks to support organisations in navigating complex socio-digital transformation processes.

