

Digital@Utility 2026

What is the status of digital and AI transformation in the energy industry?

Digital and AI fields of action

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Prologue

Dear readers,

The energy sector is facing a set of profound and interrelated challenges. One of the most pressing is the scale of investment required to enable the energy transition. The global energy industry exceeded \$3 trillion in investments for the first time in 2024, with \$2 trillion in annual investment in clean energy, spanning renewable power generation, grids, and enabling infrastructure.¹ Financing this investment gap has become a central concern for utilities across Europe.

At the same time, the sector is undergoing a fundamental transformation. Digitalization and artificial intelligence are emerging as essential methods for improving efficiency, resilience, and capital productivity. Digital and AI-driven approaches help utilities unlock value along the entire value chain and strengthen their ability to finance the transition organically.

Against this backdrop, the Digital@Utility study, jointly advanced by BDEW, VSE, Kearney, and IMP³ROVE, provides transparency into the status of digital and AI transformation in the energy industry. Since 2016, the study has supported utilities with a structured assessment of digital maturity and concrete impulses for further development.

The analysis is structured along three fields of action (change in value creation, customer centricity, and digital company) and four instruments (data analytics and AI, partnerships, process digitalization, and IT and data protection). This study focuses on the fields of action and on data analytics and AI, with a particular emphasis on renewable power generation and grids in the latter section.

The findings of this study are complemented by two case studies that illustrate how digital and AI-driven approaches are applied in practice: Thüga Group (“Strategic framework for unlocking the potential of artificial intelligence”) and Iberdrola (“Optimizing grid-scale battery storage in the UK”). Together, they provide concrete insights into strategic orientation, implementation approaches, and realized impact.

We would like to thank all participating companies and wish you an insightful read.



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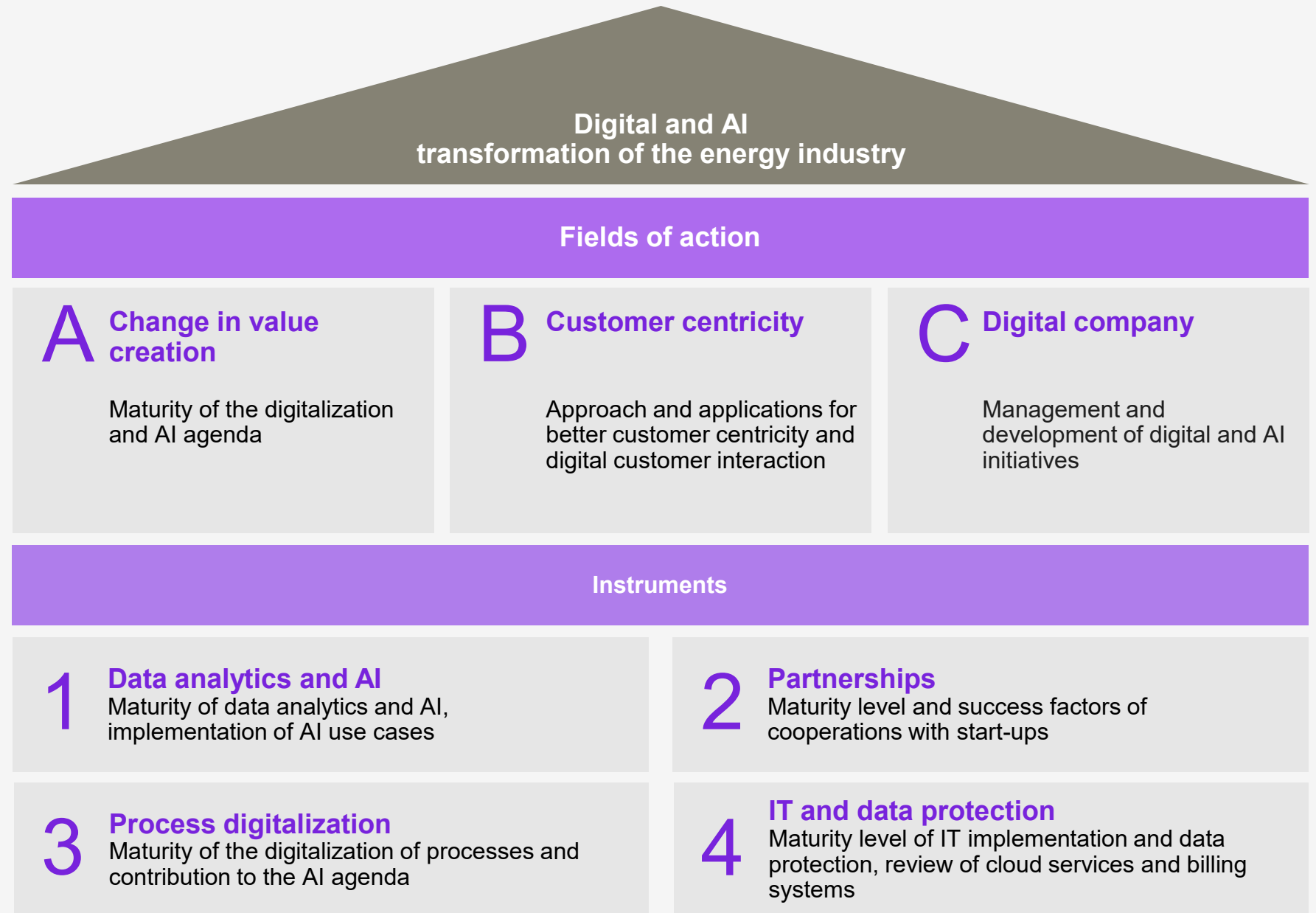
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¹ International Energy Agency World Energy Investment 2024

Digital@Utility analyzes the digital and AI transformation of energy suppliers based on three fields of action and four instruments



Introduction

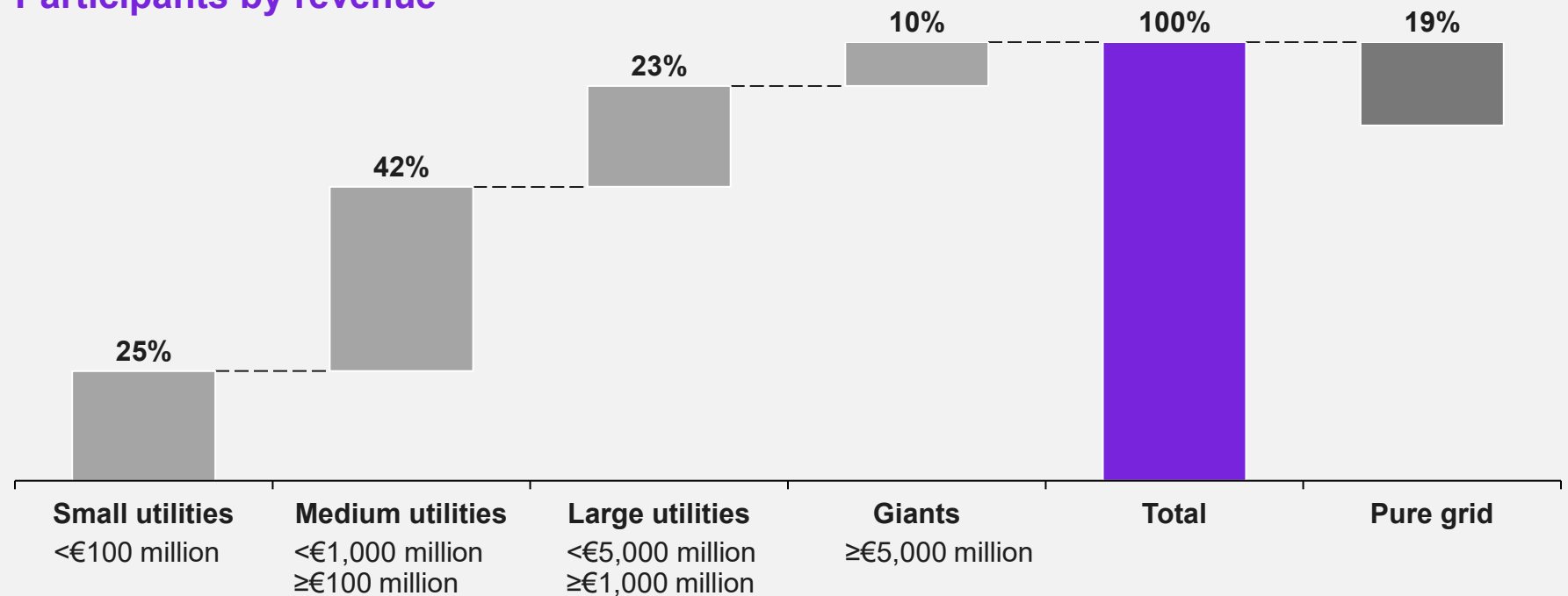
More than 110 utilities participated in this year's Digital@Utility study

Participants by origin

>110 companies participated in this year's study.

7 countries are represented by participating companies.

Participants by revenue



Study at a glance

A Change in value creation

- **58%** of utilities are currently planning an AI strategy while about one third of utilities have already implemented an AI strategy.
- At the same time, **32%** of utilities have clear cost-saving targets through digitalization in the next five years.

B Customer centricity

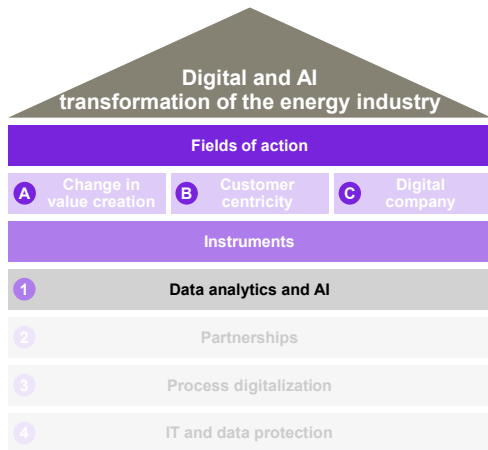
- An app for digital customer interactions is offered by **93%** of Giants; the role of AI to process customer enquiries is growing.
- **32%** have implemented next-best activity (NBA) or next-best offer (NBO) marketing or event-driven marketing (EDM); penetration tripled since the previous study.

C Digital company

- **56%** of companies have a clear picture of the digital skills needed in the future; however, only a third have an HR strategy for developing these skills.
- A dedicated AI/data analytics competence center is operated by **91%** of Giants, either centralized in the company or decentralized in business lines.

1 Data analytics and AI

- The lack of digital infrastructure and security concerns was identified by **73%** of Giants as key hurdles for the future.
- **39%** of companies are using prescriptive analytics; significant progress was made from 24% to 39% since the previous edition of the study.



Field of action A

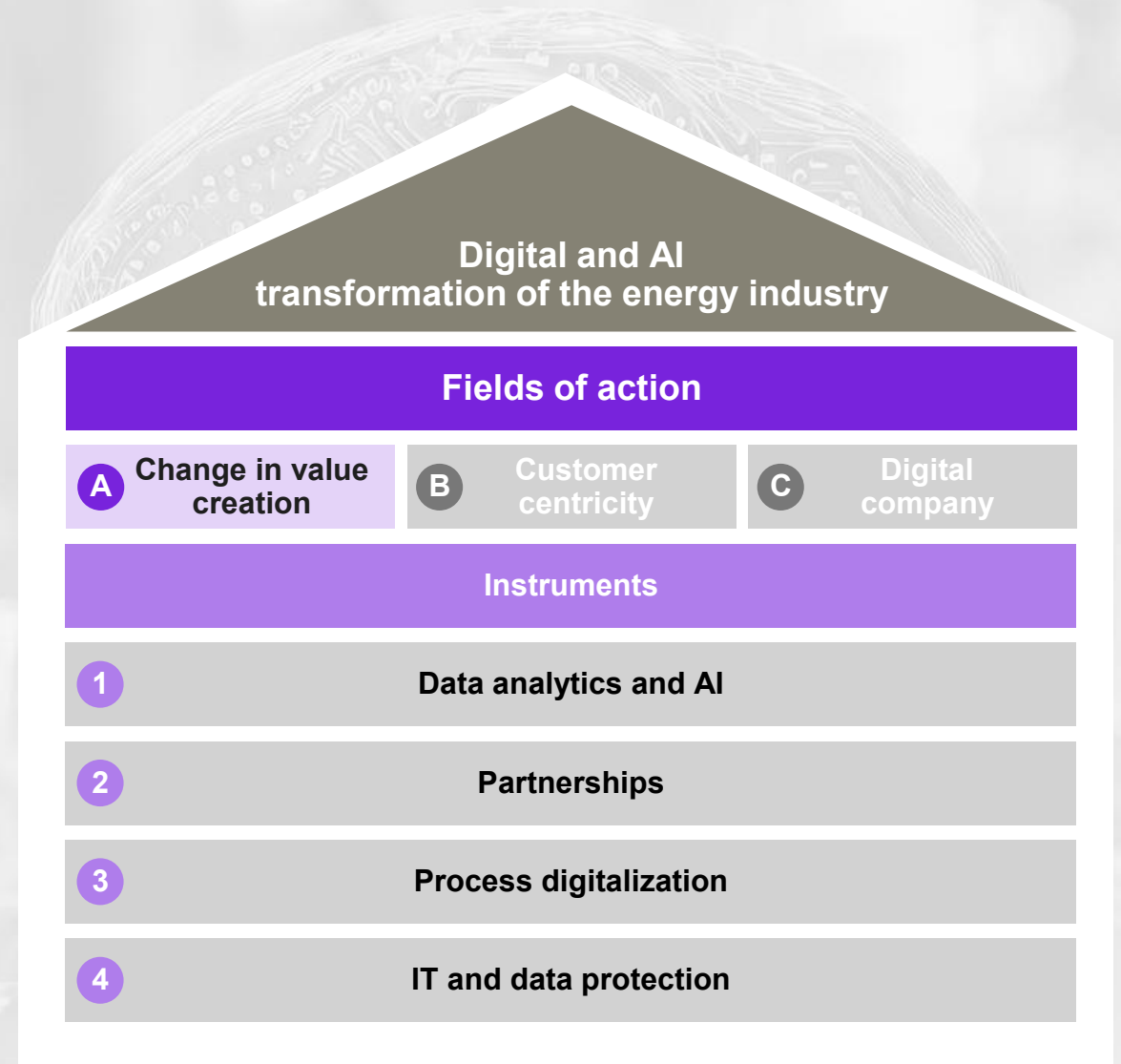
Change in value creation

Utility companies undergo a change in value creation, especially in the context of digitalization and the shift to new possibilities and business models.

In this field of action, we look at the digital strategy that is guiding the ambitions and actions concerning digitalization. We also look at the level of implementation of the AI strategy.

Topics covered:

- Purpose and scope of the digital and AI strategy
- Focus areas along the value chain
- Financial ambitions related to the digital strategy



While utilities' display an advancing maturity in their digital strategy, their AI strategy is still in its early stages



A. Change in value creation

¹ Answer options: mostly applicable and fully applicable
Sources: BDEW, VSE, IMPROVE, Kearney analysis

More than two-thirds of utilities have defined no ambition to lower costs or increase revenue through digitalization and digital products

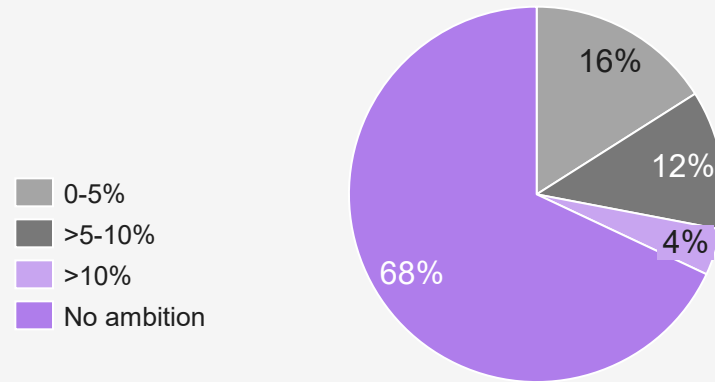
A. Change in value creation

Cost reduction through digitalization



Clear cost-saving targets are the exception in many utilities' digital strategies.

Ambition for cost reduction



>5%

is the median cost reduction that companies aim to achieve through digitalization over the next five years.

>10%

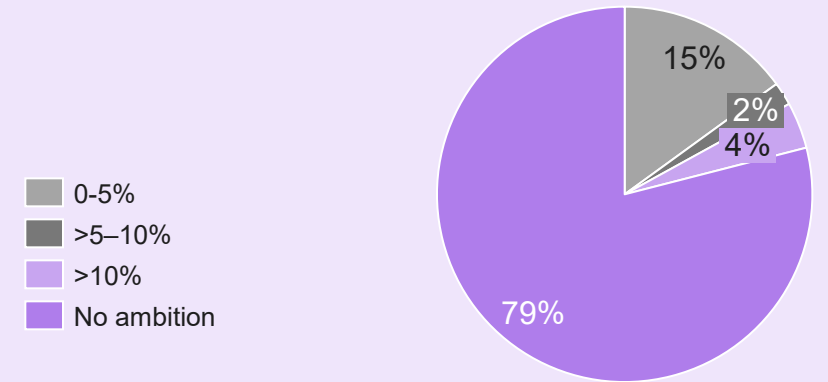
is the 90th percentile cost reduction ambition through digitalization within the next five years.

Revenue increase through digital offerings



For most companies, digitalization is not yet systematically linked to revenue growth.

Ambition for revenue increase



>2.5%

is the median revenue increase companies aim to achieve through digitalization over the next five years.

>17.5%

is the 90th percentile revenue increase ambition through digital offerings within the next five years.

Case study (1/5)



Oliver Herzog
Group CDO/CIO, Thüga AG

Strategic framework for unlocking the potential of artificial intelligence

Question 1: Why did you initiate the project?

Thüga Group recognized that AI is becoming increasingly important, including in the energy sector. While initial AI initiatives already existed in various partner companies (municipal utilities within Thüga Group), a shared strategic orientation, common governance structures, and a systematic approach to knowledge management were missing.

The project was therefore initiated to accomplish the following:

- Unlock the full potential of AI in a holistic manner.
- Establish a common strategic framework for Thüga Group.
- Derive actionable recommendations and a road map for the structured use of AI.
- Avoid common pitfalls in prioritizing and implementing AI initiatives.

“AI is no longer a hype. It is here to stay. It is now up to us to identify its potential and leverage it strategically.”

Case study (2/5)



Oliver Herzog
Group CDO/CIO, Thüga AG

Question 2: What was your approach?

The project followed a comprehensive and strategically grounded approach. The aim was to create a robust strategic foundation that supports both AI beginners and more advanced companies within Thüga Group.

The approach consisted of five structured steps:

- 1. Definition of the target picture and execution of an AI maturity assessment.** Joint development of the ambition level for AI, combined with a structured assessment of each company's maturity across the dimensions of organization, technology, data, and culture.
- 2. Building a common understanding of challenges and success factors.** Systematic analysis of group-wide barriers, enablers, and existing pilot projects to derive the most relevant fields of action.
- 3. Identification and prioritization of relevant AI use cases.** Evaluation of potential AI use cases using a standardized model based on impact, feasibility, and strategic relevance.
- 4. Development of individual roadmaps for different maturity levels.** Definition of specific development paths, including measures for data readiness, governance, capabilities, and technology enablement.
- 5. Provision of practical assets to support enablement and scaling.** Development of templates, role profiles, and an AI canvas, as well as a communication approach to anchor AI across the group.



Case study (3/5)



Oliver Herzog
Group CDO/CIO, Thüga AG

Question 3: What impact has been achieved?

The project established a solid strategic foundation—effectively a “self-help toolkit”—enabling companies within Thüga Group to advance the structured deployment of AI.

Key achievements included the following:

- Transparency and clearer understanding of the AI maturity levels across Thüga Group
- Identification of the core challenges for successful AI implementation
- Evaluation and prioritization of the most relevant AI application areas
- Development of a standardized evaluation model for assessing and selecting AI use cases
- Creation of practical assets to support the development of AI strategies
- Concrete recommendations and tailored roadmaps for companies with different maturity levels



Case study (4/5)



Oliver Herzog
Group CDO/CIO, Thüga AG

Question 4: What were the key success factors for the project?

Several factors significantly contributed to the project's success:

- A comprehensive and structured project approach
- Strong involvement of companies across Thüga Group to ensure a high degree of strategic fit
- A focus on practical AI application areas relevant to the energy sector
- Consideration of different maturity levels due to the heterogeneity of the group
- Leveraging group-wide synergies through digital hubs and central enablers
- Use of collective intelligence (“swarm intelligence”) across the group
- Provision of practical support through templates and AI assets
- Cultural awareness and targeted communication to build acceptance for AI



Case study (5/5)

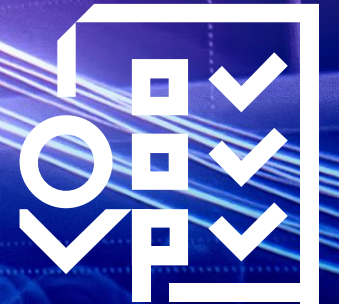


Oliver Herzog
Group CDO/CIO, Thüga AG

Question 5: Which impulses did you get from the Digital@Utility participation?

The Digital@Utility study provides Thüga Group with a recurring and reliable orientation point. By reviewing the study's insights, we gain a clear picture of where we stand in relation to the broader energy industry and how our progress compares to overarching developments in digitalization and AI.

The study also highlights cross-industry trends, emerging priorities, and the typical challenges that utilities are facing, along with the types of solutions that are being explored at a conceptual level. This perspective helps us continuously reflect on our own direction and ensures that our strategic work on AI remains aligned with the wider evolution of the sector.



Field of action B

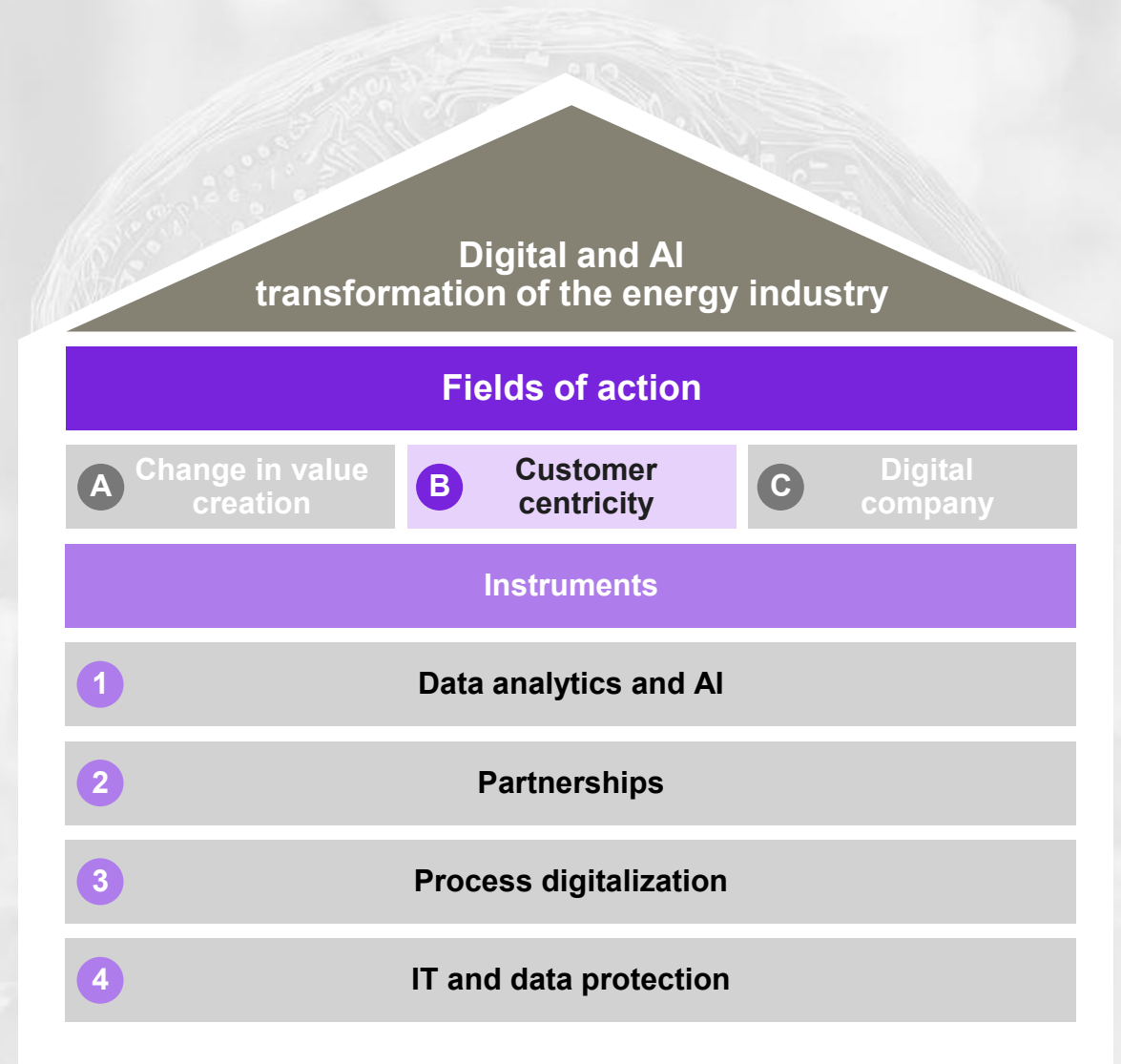
Customer centricty

Data enables a new level of customer centricty.

In this field of action, we assess measures to increase the customer centricty and its impact. We also deep dive into digital sales channels throughout this section.

Topics covered:

- Measures to increase customer centricty and success factors
- Customer centricty use cases
- Digital sales channels implementation and automatization



Five channels dominate customer contact points, with new digital channels increasing sharply

Customer contact channels



Most companies are using five contact channels (the “fabulous five”): face-to-face, written postal service, e-mail, phone calls, and online self-services.

88%

of companies use all “fabulous five” interaction channels.

Company app

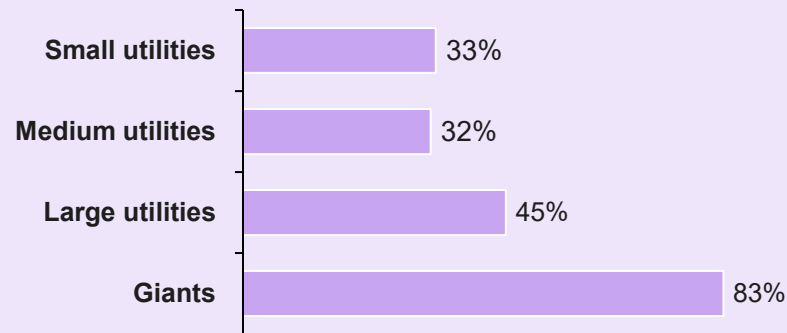


38% of companies offer their own official company app—an increase of **11 pp** since the previous edition of the Digital@Utility study.

Further **18%** of companies are currently planning their own official company app.



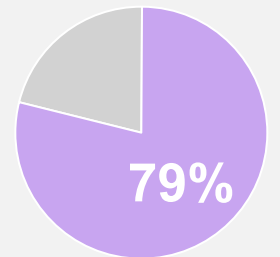
Company app usage by utility size in retail



Other channels (e.g., chat and social media)



79% of companies use other channels, such as chat, WhatsApp, or social media—an increase of **29 pp** since the previous edition of the Digital@Utility study.



B. Customer centricity

AI is enabling a growing degree of automation in digital customer interactions

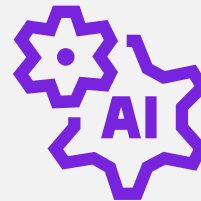
Automation for the 90th percentile of utilities across selected channels:



AI is gaining a significant role in the processing of customer enquiries:

67%

of Giants are using AI to process their E-mails.



40%

of Giants are using AI for their official company app.

B. Customer centricity

Analytics and AI are transforming digital customer centricity

Customer experience sentiment analysis



49% of companies are analyzing customer sentiment and experience using text-based data sources.

Design thinking for customer experience optimization



36% of companies are using design thinking to enhance the customer experience.

Omnichannel marketing optimization (online and offline)



47% of companies are using omnichannel marketing optimization online and offline, reflecting an increase by **25 pp** since the previous edition of the Digital@Utility study.

Personalized targeting and retargeting



26% of companies are using personalized targeting and retargeting via (digital and non-digital) channels.

Next-best activity, next-best offer, and event-driven marketing



32% of companies have implemented next-best activity, next-best offer, and event-driven marketing, reflecting an increase by **23 pp** since the previous edition of the Digital@Utility study.

Digital one-stop shop



33% of companies have implemented a digital one-stop shop to cover key customer journeys for their offer portfolio.

B. Customer centricity

Field of action C

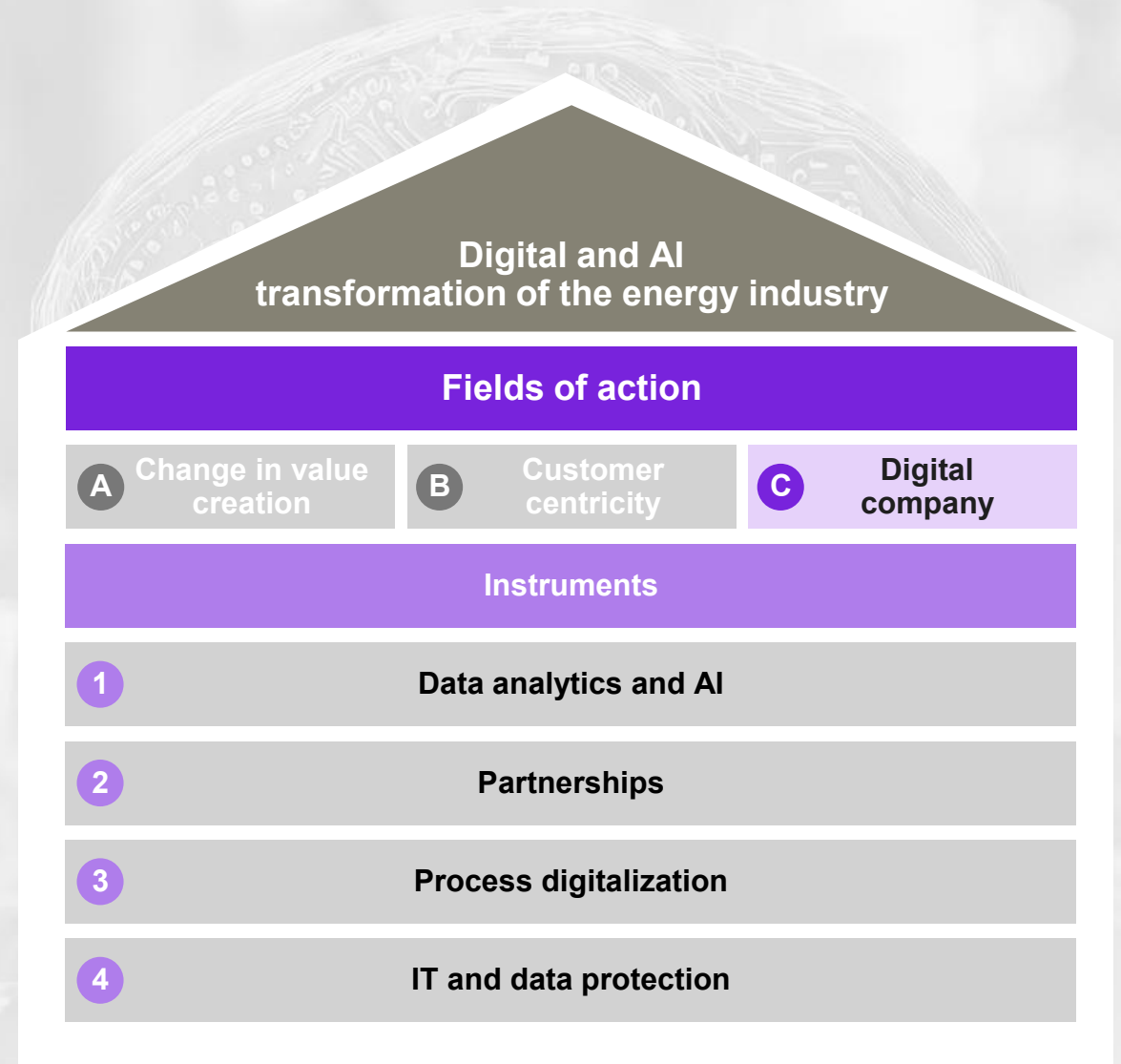
Digital company

Becoming a digital company is a multifaceted challenge.

In this field of action, current and planned digital skills are assessed. We also provide insights on how to organize digitalization, how to execute digital initiatives, and how digital leadership fares.

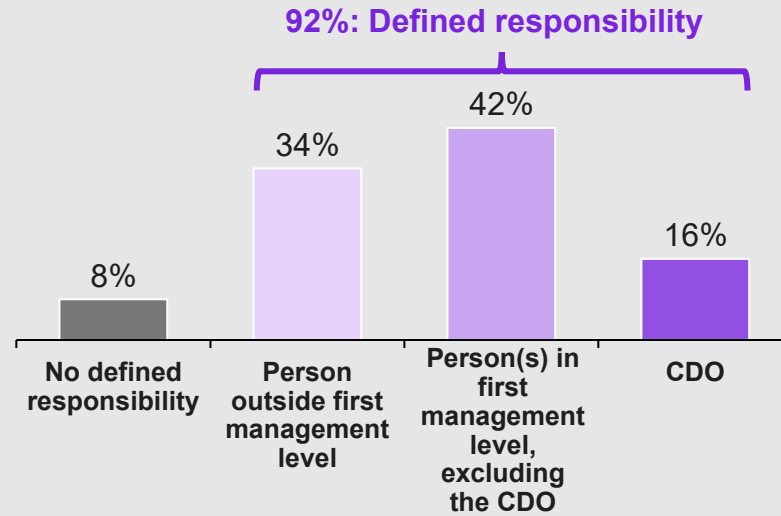
Topics covered:

- Digital leadership
- Digital organization and culture
- Use of agile working methods and agile company structures



Utilities recognize the importance of digitalization and AI by having clear leadership responsibilities and competence centers

Leadership in digitalization



Role of the CDO



The role is becoming more relevant with **16%** of utilities having a dedicated CDO. This is a **6 pp** increase since the previous edition of the Digital@Utility study.

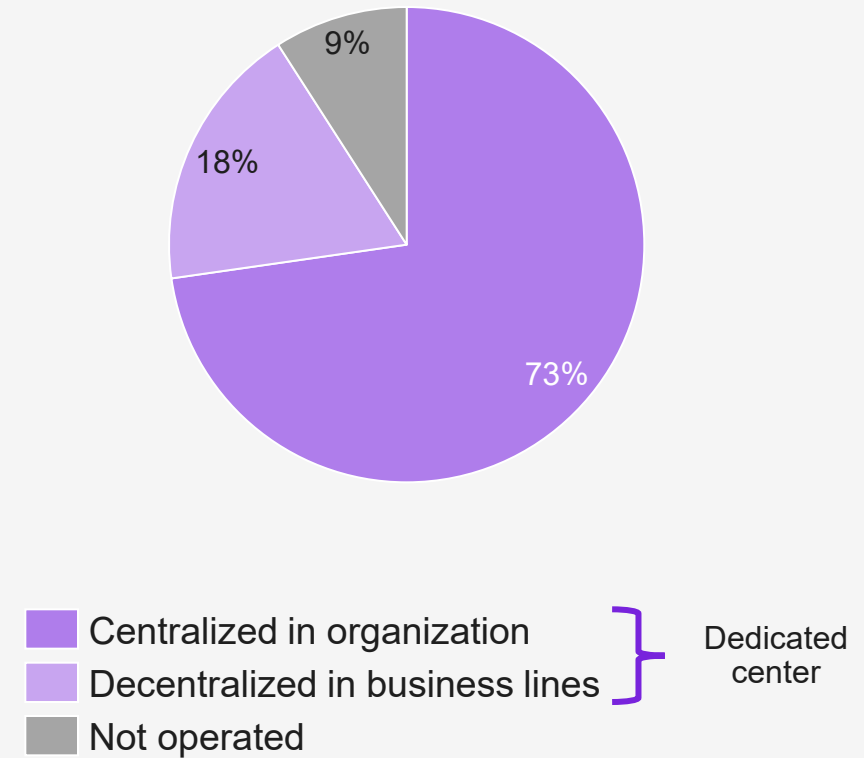
30% of Giants have a dedicated CDO.

Note: CDO is chief digital officer.
Sources: BDEW, VSE, IMP³ROVE, Kearney analysis

Dedicated AI/data analytics competence center



91% of Giants are operating a dedicated AI/data analytics competence center.

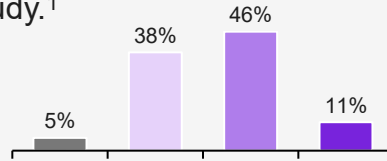


There is room for improvement in defining relevant future skills, capabilities, and a respective HR strategy as an enabler

Future digital skills



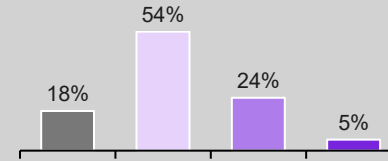
56% of companies have a clear picture of the digital skills needed in the future (e.g., digital learning, data science, agility, design thinking, and cloud), a 10 pp increase since the previous edition of the Digital@Utility study.¹



Digital culture



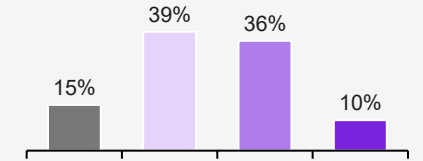
28% of companies have a digital culture that fosters customer-backed innovation, agile working, experimental learning, and hands-on applications.¹



Skill requirements



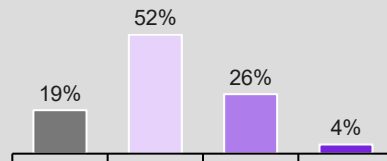
46% of companies are aware of which skills need to be added externally—a 7 pp increase since the previous edition of the Digital@Utility study.



HR strategy



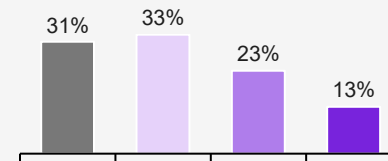
Only 29% of companies have a clear HR strategy for developing these digital skills (for example, training in digital learning, digital data analytics).¹



Job roles and design



36% of companies have defined new job profiles (e.g., solution architects, UI/ UX designer, and product owner) to match required skills, a 6 pp increase since the previous edition of the Digital@Utility study.



- Fully applicable
- Mostly applicable
- Partially applicable
- Not applicable

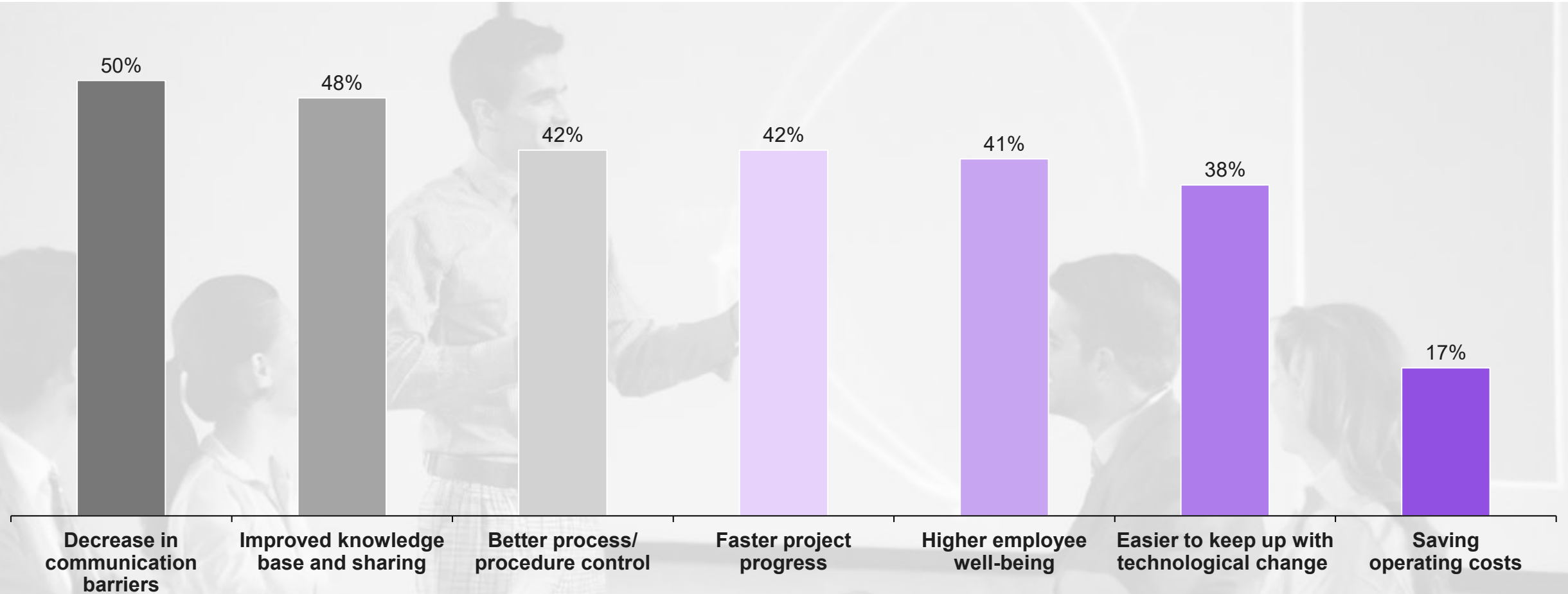
C. Digital company



¹ Difference due to rounding
Sources: BDEW, VSE, IMPROVE, Kearney analysis

Agile working methods are already generating measurable benefits across many utilities

Achievements through agile working methods



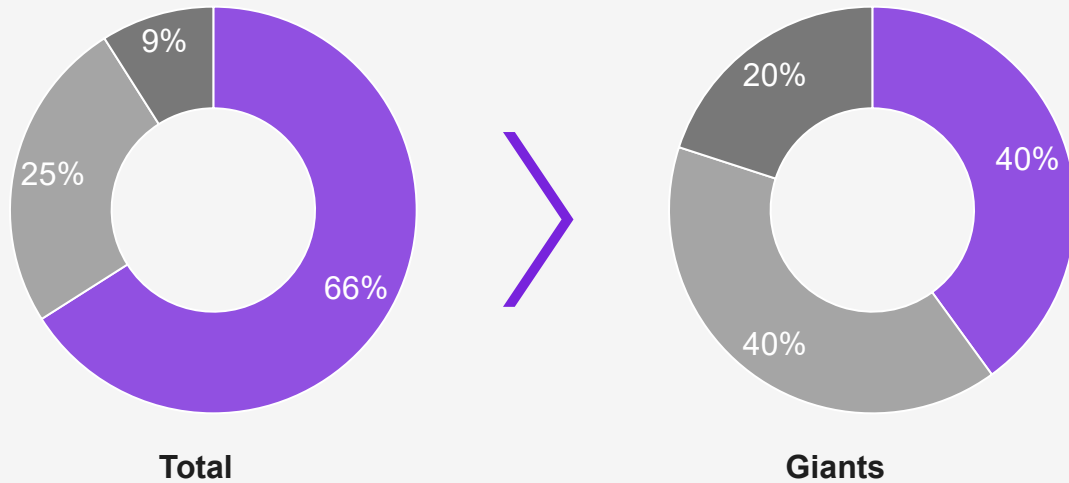
C. Digital company

Note: Answer options: "Mostly applicable" and "Fully applicable"
Sources: BDEW, VSE, IMP³ROVE, Kearney analysis

The implementation of agile organizational structures is still in its early stages, but more large utilities are signaling their intention to adopt agile organizational structures in the near future

Agile organizational structures

9% of companies use agile organizational structures such as squads, tribes, chapters, guilds, trios, and alliances, which marks a 5 pp increase since the previous edition of the Digital@Utility study.



■ Not covered
 ■ Planned
 ■ Covered

C. Digital company



Squads

Cross-functional teams focus on one feature or area with unique work guiding the mission. Product owners give guidance, usually six to 12 members.



Tribes

Organize, structure, and align different squads. The tribe lead gives guidance and fosters collaboration among squads, usually 40 to 150 members.



Guilds

Individual team members with a specific field of interest can form a guild. Anyone can join this guild, it is voluntarily, and no formal leader gives guidance.



Trios

A team is comprised of product lead, tribe lead, and design lead. Each tribe occupies a trio to foster alignment among these perspectives.



Alliances

A team of different trios foster collaboration between tribes, usually three or more trios.

Instrument #1

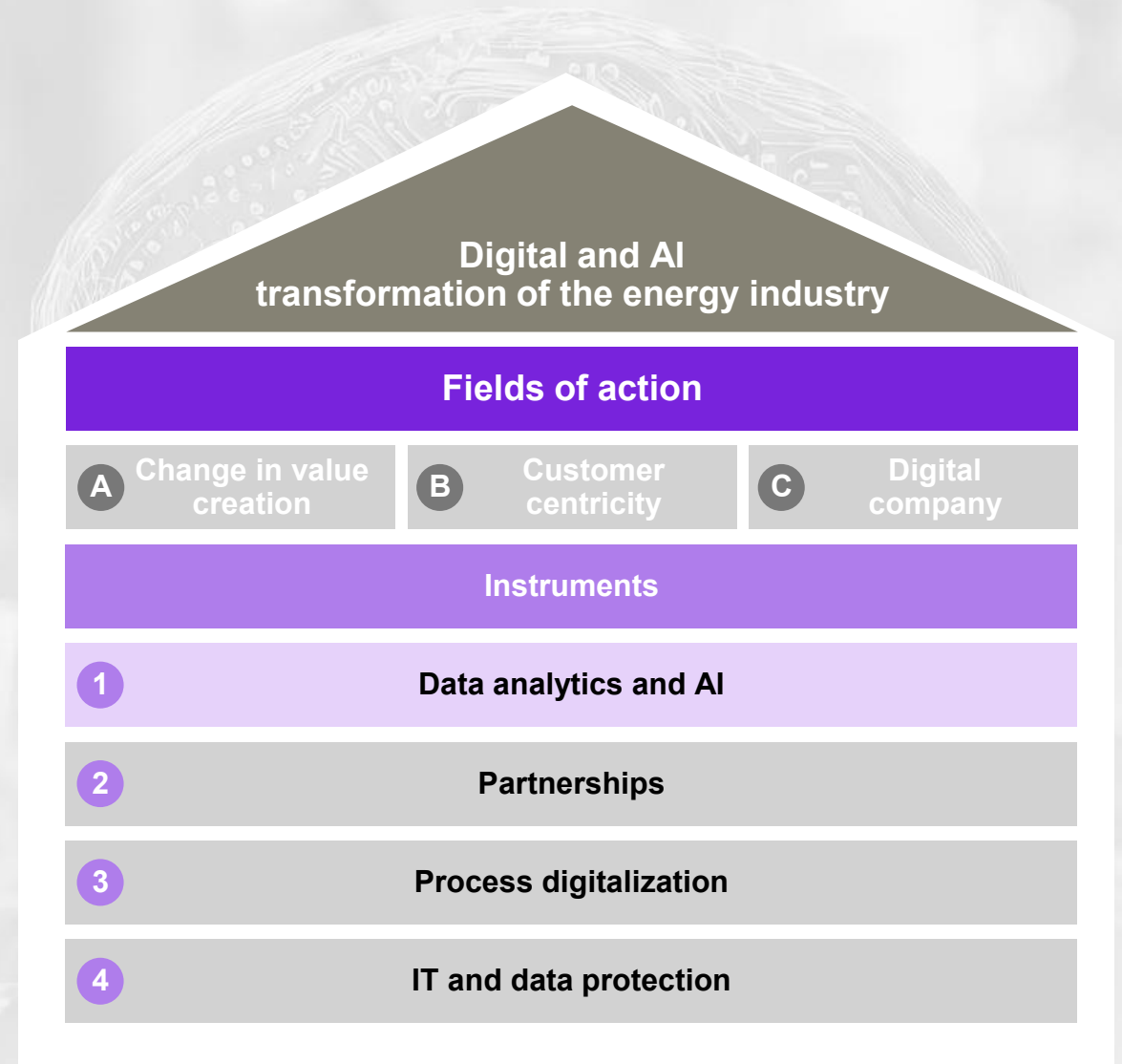
Data analytics and AI

Data analytics and AI are powerful tools that promise new insights and value.

This section assesses the levers for data analytics and AI the industry addresses, and the hurdles faced. It also provides a look at the use cases and deep dives into the current level of AI usage.

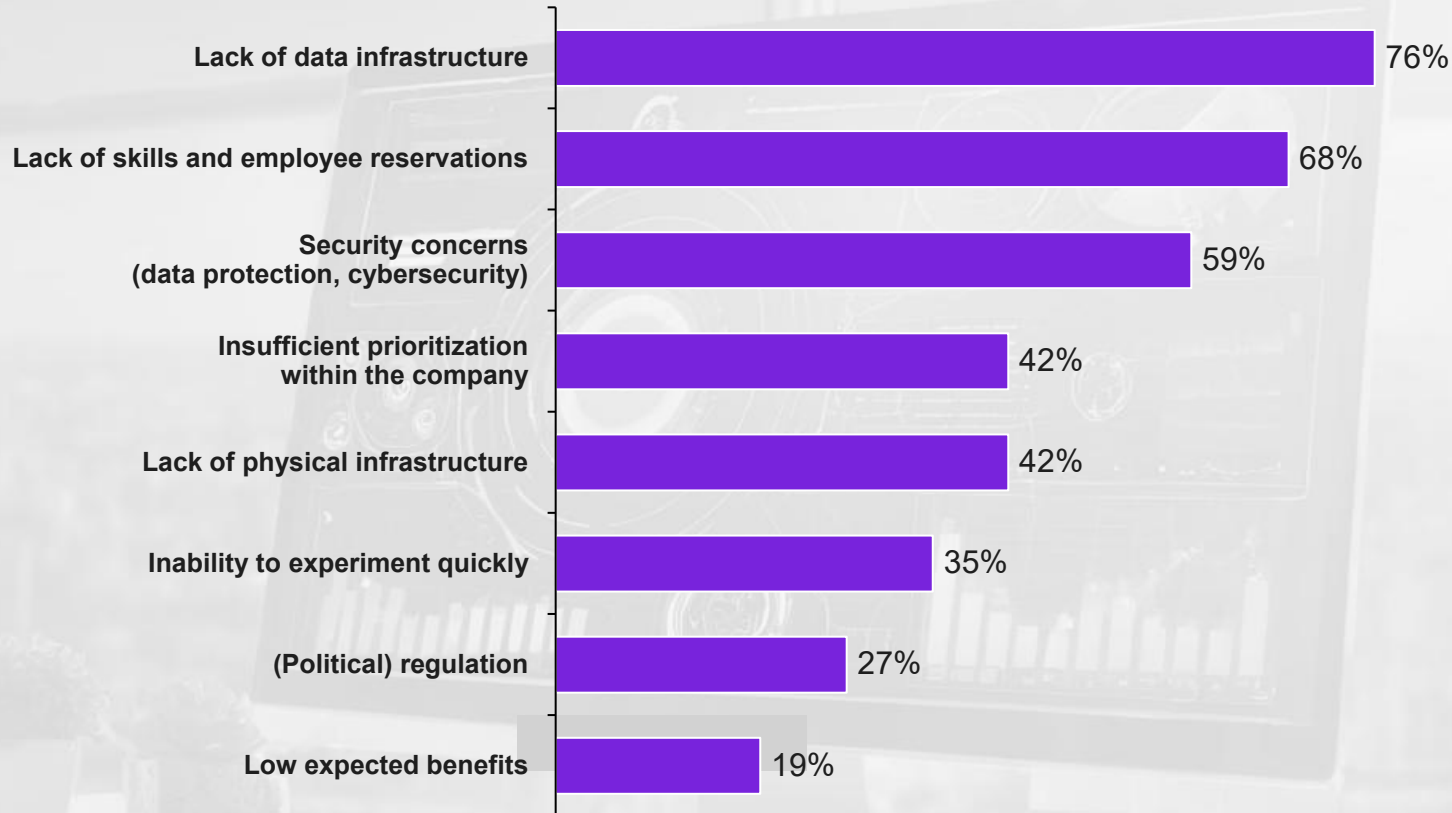
Topics covered:

- Hurdles for use of data analytics and AI
- Data analytics and AI use cases
- Level of Gen AI usage

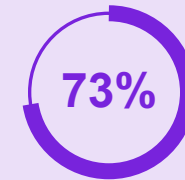


Many utilities still perceive major hurdles for using data analytics and AI; these hurdles differ across utility size

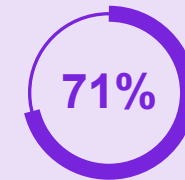
Major hurdles for the use of data analytics and AI



1. Data analytics and AI



of Giants identified the lack of digital infrastructure and security concerns as key hurdles for the future.



of small utilities identified the shortage of internal capabilities as the key hurdles for the future.



of companies indicated that security concern is a major hurdle for the use of data analytics and AI in the future, an increase of **24 pp** since the last edition.

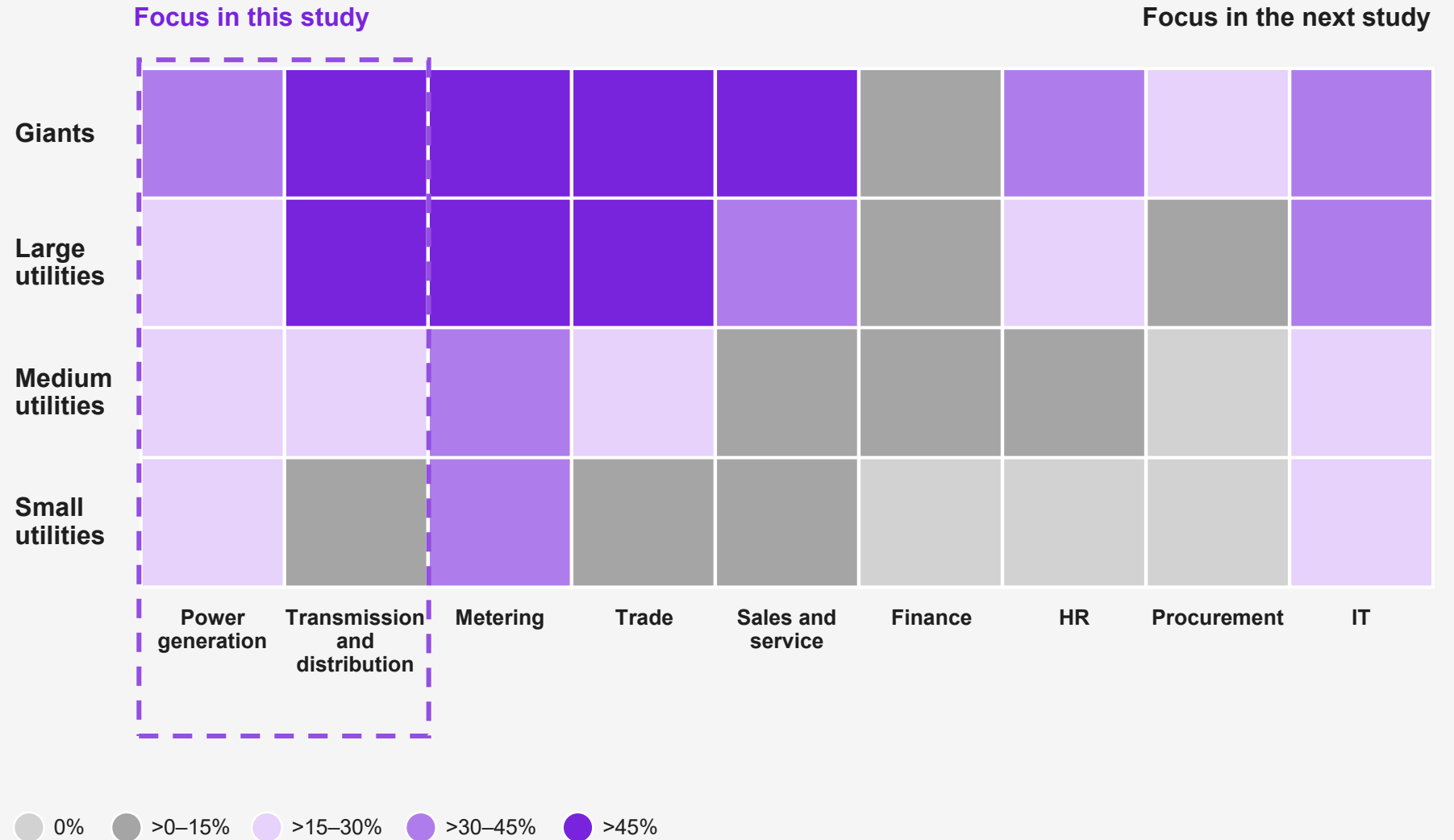


of companies expect a neutral impact of the European Union's AI Act 1, mainly driven by Giants with **70%**.

AI and analytics implementation levels are higher for larger utilities and giants

Implementation level of AI and analytics applications across each value chain step

Average by utility size



1. Data analytics and AI

Notes: Answer options: implemented and implemented with clear P&L impact. In total, 30 application tools were asked for. Sources: BDEW, VSE, IMP³ROVE, Kearney analysis

Leaders are taking a significant step in implementing various AI and analytics applications

Value chain step
<p>Title</p> <p>Description</p> <p>xx% average implementation level¹ of leaders²</p>

1. Data analytics and AI

Power generation

Prescriptive and condition-based maintenance in generation

Analyzing sensor data and historical data to predict possible root causes, failures, impact of the failures and prescribing maintenance plans in the generation

Ultimate goal: optimize profits in generation

40%

Prescriptive operation in generation

Analyzing sensor data to optimize steering of generation (temperatures, pressures, flow)

50%

Power generation

New data-driven business models

New or enhanced revenue streams enabled by generation data, e.g., better pricing and better trading enabled by generation data and/ or sales of generation data

35%

¹ Answer options: implemented and implemented with clear P&L impact
² Leaders are defined as companies that have implemented an AI strategy.
 Sources: BDEW, VSE, IMP³ROVE, Kearney analysis

Transmission and distribution

Digital twins of grids

Real-time monitoring of grids as a basis for optimization and increased efficiency and to realize new revenue streams

43%

Leaders are taking a significant step in implementing various AI and analytics applications

Value chain step
Title
Description
xx% average implementation level ¹ of leaders ²

1. Data analytics and AI

Transmission and distribution

Optimization of flow and load distribution

Real-time analysis and optimization of flow and load patterns and external factors.

45%

Prescriptive grid maintenance

Analyzing real-time sensor data and historical data to optimize maintenance (including prediction of possible root causes, yield patterns, pre-failure patterns, failures, impact of the failures and prescription of maintenance plans in the grid).

39%

Optimization of grid planning

Creation of various planning scenarios and optimization of grid planning, taking into account feed-in, consumption, etc.

54%

Transmission and distribution

Analytics-enabled work force management

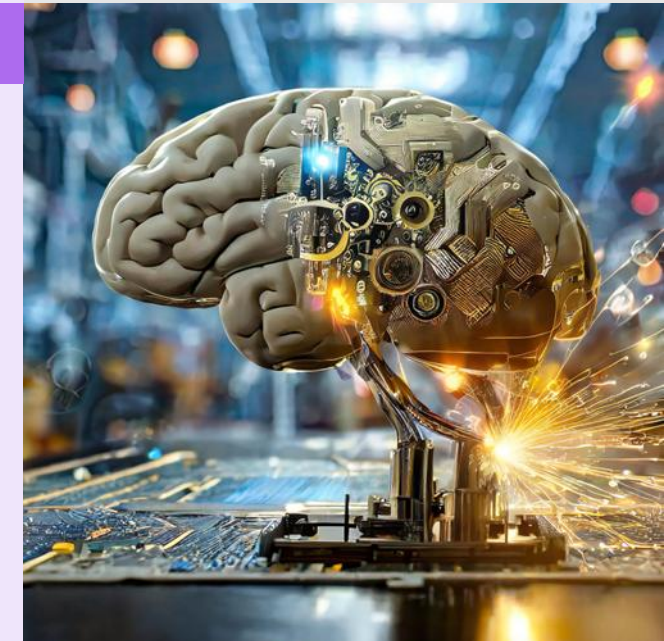
Analytics enabled, self-learning workforce planning using adaptable planning times based on learning parameters; generative AI assistant for real-time recommendations and insights during maintenance.

21%

Prescriptive vegetation management

Intelligently steered/ monitored management of plant growth near grid lines and electrical infrastructure (e.g., based on satellite pictures and digital vegetation twins).

18%



¹ Answer options: implemented and implemented with clear P&L impact
² Leaders are defined as companies that have implemented an AI strategy.
 Sources: BDEW, VSE, IMP³ROVE, Kearney analysis

Case study (1/5)

Optimizing grid-scale battery storage in the UK

Question 1: Why did you initiate the project?

At Iberdrola, integrating energy storage is essential to building the grid of the future. Every storage decision must balance technical rigor with financial viability, particularly in a dynamic market such as the UK, shaped by evolving regulations, multi-service demands, and ongoing market uncertainty.

Traditional tools such as spreadsheets are no longer sufficient as they cannot account for service stacking, asset degradation, or real-time price fluctuations. To overcome these limitations, Iberdrola adopted the Hybrid System Valuation Tool (HSVT), a powerful solution that models real-world conditions, optimizes battery sizing, and builds robust business cases for utility-scale storage. By enabling precise, data-driven decisions, the tool empowers Iberdrola to develop resilient, financially sound storage strategies that support long-term grid reliability and sustainability goals.



Santiago Bañales
Managing Director, Iberdrola

“The drive toward clean electrification demands a new level of system flexibility. AI powered storage sizing and optimized operations are fundamental to unlocking a reliable, efficient, and sustainable energy future.”

Case study (2/5)



Santiago Bañales
Managing Director, Iberdrola

Question 2: What was your approach?

Iberdrola began by defining the functional requirements for a planning tool that could support complex utility-scale battery storage decisions. Key needs included the following:

- The ability to model real-world system behavior, account for technical constraints such as inverter limitations and degradation curves, and evaluate financial performance through embedded metrics such as Net Present Value (NPV) and Internal Rate of Return (IRR)
- After scanning the market for suitable solutions, Iberdrola found that no existing tool provided the needed integrated capabilities, particularly with regard to combining technical simulation, financial modelling, and multi-service stacking within a single platform.
- Faced with this gap, Iberdrola launched an in-house initiative in collaboration with several departments to develop a customized solution tailored to our operational and market context. This effort led to the development of the HSVT, which was designed to be modular, scalable, and aligned with real utility planning workflows.

Iberdrola tested the tool extensively, using actual project data and real-time market inputs to validate both the technical accuracy and financial robustness of the model. These pilots helped refine the tool's logic and usability, ensuring its readiness for broader deployment across Iberdrola's battery storage portfolio.



Case study (3/5)



Santiago Bañales
Managing Director, Iberdrola

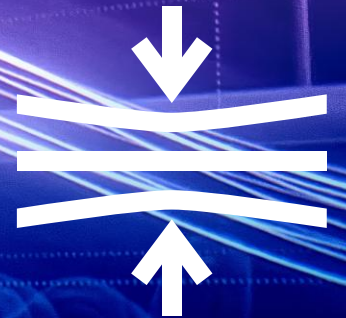
Question 3: What impact has been achieved?

The HSVT has enhanced Iberdrola's approach to battery storage planning by enabling more accurate, data-driven decisions.

Battery sizing is now optimized using real-time market data and technical constraints, replacing static assumptions and improving design efficiency. The ability to simulate stacked services, such as energy arbitrage and frequency regulation, within a single model has allowed Iberdrola to better capture the combined value and technical implications of multiple revenue streams.

Financial metrics such as NPV and IRR are now embedded within the same tool, ensuring technical and economic performance are evaluated together from the outset. This integration has improved internal alignment and streamlined project assessment.

Finally, HSVT's visual outputs and data-backed modelling have strengthened Iberdrola's ability to justify investment decisions to regulators and stakeholders, fostering greater confidence and transparency.



Case study (4/5)

Question 4: What were the key success factors for the project?

A key factor was the integration of technical simulation with financial modeling, which closed a critical gap in battery storage project evaluation. The tool's high granularity ensured accurate representation of real-world conditions, while its scalability supported both standalone and hybrid system configurations.

Its modular architecture allowed Iberdrola to simulate individual services, such as arbitrage, frequency regulation, and capacity participation, either independently or in combination, adding flexibility to project design. Finally, the user-centric design, developed with input from industry practitioners, ensured alignment with actual planning workflows and utility requirements.



Santiago Bañales
Managing Director, Iberdrola



Case study (5/5)

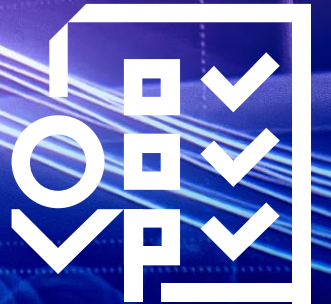


Santiago Bañales
Managing Director, Iberdrola

Question 5: Which impulses did you get from the Digital@Utility participation?

Participating in Digital@Utility provided Iberdrola with a clear, industry-wide perspective on how leading utilities are approaching digitalization and AI in grid operations. The cross-utility exchange helped sharpen our understanding of what constitutes measurable success in digital initiatives, reinforcing the importance of robust KPIs and transparent value tracking for storage and flexibility projects.

In addition, the benchmarking insights enabled us to position our HSTV within the broader market context, validating our direction while highlighting enhancement opportunities. Dialogue with peers and experts ultimately helped Iberdrola refine its strategic priorities and ensure that its digital and analytical capabilities are fully aligned with emerging industry standards and expectations.



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Organizations involved in the study

BDEW

The Federal Association of Energy and Water Management (BDEW), Berlin, and its regional organizations represent over 1,900 companies. The spectrum of members ranges from local and municipal to regional and supra-regional companies. They represent around 90 percent of the electricity sales and over 60 percent of local and district heating sales, 90 percent of the natural gas sales, over 90 percent of the energy networks, 80 percent of the drinking water supply, and around a third of the wastewater disposal in Germany.

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VSE

VSE is the nationally and internationally recognized umbrella association for the Swiss electricity industry. Its members produce, transmit, distribute, or trade in electricity and ensure over 90% of Switzerland's electricity supply.

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IMP³ROVE

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