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Diversity Management in small and medium-sized enterprises.

An empirical study of managers understanding.

Quelle: eDiss-Repositorium der Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (SUB), Göttingen, 2022.

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Abstract

In the course of increasing heterogeneity within society, triggered, for example, by demographic change, the increased influx of people with international histories, or the changing distribution of roles in partner relationships, organizations are facing new challenges. In order to remain competitive in the future, diversity management could serve as a possible concept for dealing with (new) social diversity. To date, there is mainly experience with very large organizations and the concept of diversity management has especially been introduced in large corporations. For this reason, this dissertation explores the question of whether diversity management can also be a suitable concept for small and medium-sized enterprises. More specifically, it examines how the concept of diversity management is implemented by managers in small and medium-sized enterprises. To explore forms of implementation, managers' understanding of diversity and the dimensions of "age", "gender", and "culture/nationality/migration background or similar" will be examined by means of qualitative, guided interviews with experts.

Furthermore, the statements of the interviewed executives were classified into a scientific typology in order to test whether the understanding of “general diversity” and the understanding between the different dimensions of “age”, “gender”, and “culture/nationality/migration background or similar” differ from each other. It is assumed that this, in turn, could have implications for the implementation of diversity management in practice, both for deciding which dimensions or characteristics should be considered and for selecting and evaluating measures.

This study takes an innovative approach that has not yet been applied in current research. The research study thus enhances not only theoretical concepts but also practical considerations regarding the concept of diversity management in small and medium-sized enterprises in Germany by bringing more clarity to managers’ understandings of relevant dimensions. By combining these approaches, on the one hand, practice-relevant findings can be identified from the results. On the other hand, the combined approaches aim to highlight a new approach for the research context and thereby possibly initiate further research efforts in the future.