

All or nothing: diversity management requires an all-encompassing approach The 2013 benchmark shows that superficial efforts are not effective

The good news is that diversity management has become established in the Germany business world. But it is only effective when executives give it their full support. That is the result of a benchmark study of the DAX 30 companies conducted by Dr. Petra Koepfel of Synergy Consult. Diversity only translates into profits if top managers are actively involved, both in the design phase and as role models. Executives need to understand and accept the concept and actively display their commitment to it, in order for it to be implemented effectively across whole enterprises. As a success analysis shows, it is not enough to simply integrate topics relating to diversity into existing managing instruments. Diversity Management requires an all-encompassing approach and multi-faceted tools.

For the first time since 2010, the benchmark shows no upward trend as far as diversity management in the DAX 30 companies is concerned. In 2012 the benchmark counted a total of 25 diversity managers (officially appointed staff members) at the companies studied. In 2013 the number of active diversity managers had fallen to 22. That reduction may be due to on-going restructuring processes at some companies. And there are several signs of quality improvements in the field, e.g. the expansion of additional diversity measures such as councils and ambassadors. A constant focus on specific dimensions of diversity also indicates a long-term approach: Gender has been the top priority for a long time, followed by culture and age. In addition, a growing number of public announcements regarding diversity have been observed. They include official commitments regarding diversity and extensive diversity reports on company websites.

Most of the DAX 30 companies implement diversity management by means of processes of cultural change that address internal stakeholders; few try to reach customers or other external parties. Diversity managers consider executives the most important stakeholders when a top-down approach is required. Dr. Petra Koepfel, proprietor of Synergy Consult, explains: "The essential role of executives has been neglected for too long. That is one of the reasons for resistance to diversity projects. Our benchmark proves that executives must be actively involved in diversity management."

The importance of board members is largely due to their function as role models, which the benchmark rates as the most important way to get other levels of management involved in diversity projects. Another common method is the integration of topics relating to diversity into existing management tools and events. This approach saves resources, but it doesn't bring success. The data shows that companies that take an all-encompassing approach that includes a variety of tools are most successful at reaching managers. These tools range from active guidance (via a diversity statement and mentoring programme) to diversity training (which triggers self-reflection and insights) and a long-term communication strategy with regard to diversity measures.

The benchmark's rating of resistance to diversity management is revealing: There is resistance to change in general, which is increased by the requirement to include 'outsiders' in an existing community. In order to convince executives of the value of diversity, programme managers usually rely on rational approaches based on facts and figures. But the benchmark demonstrates that an emotional approach is equally important. Personal experience allows emotional identification, which is more likely to trigger subsequent action than a rational argumentation alone.

Synergy Consult's annual benchmark is based on publications regarding diversity management produced by the DAX 30 companies and a survey of DAX 30 diversity managers.

Koepfel, Petra: Diversity Management in Deutschland 2013: Ein Benchmark unter den DAX 30-Unternehmen. Schwerpunkt: Führungskräfte. Köln 2013
Online: http://www.synergyconsult.de/pdf/Benchmark_DM_2013.pdf