



Information Technology and Diversity Management

Is there a match between information technology and diversity management?

Heterogeneous – Global – Virtual

Yes, there is a perfect match, since IT companies often work with heterogeneous and virtual teams on a global scale. Their productivity is strongly influenced by the quality of the applied diversity management.

User-friendliness – the jury: the users

It also nicely matches from the point of view of the users. Users only pay and continuously use products, solutions and methods if they are user friendly.

90 billion €'s annual gross value in Germany alone

A current study from the Federal Statistical Office in German „[IKT¹ Branche in Deutschland – Bericht zur wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung 2013](#)“ reveals, that in 2010 the gross value generated in the IT and communications industry adds up to 90 Billion €'s. With a figure like this, we need to take a closer look and analyse where we are standing with the IT-Diversity Management alliance. The sophism that people who create technical solutions are doing so solely because of and for technology is over.

These people, and this is what PhD [Carmen Leicht-Scholten](#), professor for Gender and Diversity in engineering sciences at the RWTH Aachen observes on a daily basis, develop technology because they want to change something. The change is not only about the product or solution itself but the impact it has in changing society; for example the Internet, iPhone, Facebook etc.. The „Generation Z“ or „Digital Natives“ (born after 1995), the students of Professor Leicht-Scholten at the University Aachen are pushing forward a change process, which will lead us towards a more holistic approach. A holistic approach in the sense of connecting technology, society and the economy.

Diversity categories and heterogeneous user groups in action: Examples from applied diversity management in the IT industry

[Dr. Armgard von Reden](#), visiting scholar for gender and diversity at the Leibniz University in Hannover invites us to dip into the reality of diversity management in the IT world through real-life examples from economy. Let's have a look at – reprehensively for all diversity categories - gender, interculturality, age and disability.

Gender

The first language decoding systems couldn't detect/understand female voices. Only later developments discovered the importance of this gender based IT development, since many of these systems were fed – especially in context of call centre management – by female users.

¹ IKT steht für Informations- und Kommunikations-Technologie

Facts and figures:

77% of people in Germany above 10 years old were using the internet in Q1, 2012.

74 987 number of registered ICT (Information and Communication Technology) companies in Germany in 2010.

925 911 number of people working in ICT industry in Germany in 2010.

281 521 Million € turnover from ICT industry in Germany in 2010.

90 492 Million € gross value from ICT industry in Germany in 2010.

Figures from the [current study](#) on the ICT Industry from the Federal Statistical Office in Germany.

Disability

The T-Labs develop a communication glove, which enables deaf-mute people to communicate via the five-finger alphabet. Through this IT-development, deaf-mute people experience appreciation and inclusion in the world of the hearing people. As a side effect this development is also valuable for hearing people who work in a noisy environment in which they can't communicate through talking.

Interculturality

Cross-cultural differences are being analysed when testing user interfaces.

For example the colour red has a different meaning in different cultures. In most countries in Europe red is a signal colour and stands for „careful“. In China for example, the colour has a positive meaning and stands for luck and is a symbol for happiness and wealth. Also in the field of IT-security, gender and culture differences play a role. The gender-specific differences are being researched at present, according to Dr. Armgard von Reden.

Age and Generations

IT developers know about the different expectations of their users. As a result different users are being approached via different channels. Commercials and advertisements via social media (i.e. Facebook) where younger potential buyers are being targeted. Representatives of the baby boomer generation are slightly more hesitant with social networks and need to be targeted via different channels.

Foresight: where will the diversity management & IT stand in 10 years?

„The successful management of diversity and the increase and the enhancement of using IT Germany will develop companies, which will - through their acting and via communication - create sustainable surplus values for individuals and society alike. In addition this will decrease the number of products that are being developed without having a market need in mind“, summarizes Professor Carmen Leicht-Scholten.

Through the already created – and ever growing - transparency, Information Technology enables us to verify the authenticity of company cultures. As a result a large change process has started in the quest for the most talented people. It will not be enough anymore to pretend „to do diversity management“. It is about the applied diversity spirit that lives throughout an entire organisation – from CEO to front desk. It is about wholehearted and authentic diversity management. Information technology will continue to support us in separating the wheat from the chaff.

This lead article has been written (in German) for the Newsletter of the German association “Charta der Vielfalt” – Charta for Diversity by Nina Frauenfeld – founder of Success Across. Nina herself has an IT-background (SAS – leader in business analytics) where she served as business development Manager for the EMEA region. If you want to move your diversity management strategy forward, feel free to contact us on +49. (0)6221 – 735 13 71, or drop us an [e-mail](#).