



Diversity Management and Mentoring: Potential for an effective interface “Yes” – Magic bullet “No”!

Diversity Management and Mentoring are both relatively young trendy concepts, which are defined very differently given the context, and often suffer from a strong alienation from the original definition. Diversity Management is a management approach, whereas Mentoring is a tool in the field of human resource development. Between the two disciplines are interfaces which can create valuable synergistic effects. However in today's practice many approaches seem to be too limited. Companies and institutions aim to quickly – and with this, unfortunately with little sustainability - tick the box of the topics diversity management and mentoring. Pars pro toto, the quote of a company we have been talking to recently: „We are now doing diversity management, since we introduced a mentoring programme for women“. But it isn't that simple! Gabriele Hoffmeister-Schönfelder, Managing Director of [kontor5 - Personalentwicklung mit Mentoring \(Human Resource Development with Mentoring\)](#), and Dr. Christine Kurmeyer, Head of [Dual Career Netzwerks Berlin \(Dual Career Network, Berlin\)](#), both founding members of the „Deutsche Gesellschaft für Mentoring“ (DGM – German Society for Mentoring), which was

founded in spring 2012 explain, why the challenge is far more complex. The driving force and motivation for founding the German Society for Mentoring lies in the quality assurance, so one of the goals of the society is the introduction of a country-wide quality standard for mentoring.

Mentees and Mentors

Mentoring looks at the needs of those employees in whom the client sees potential for development, explains Gabriele Hoffmeister-Schönfelder. For example: „We are being appointed to find – within a company – potential future leaders (our „mentees“) and the matching mentors. As an external party we can approach all individuals without prejudices. In a 1:1 dialogue we identify the goals of the mentees. Such an inspection delivers the profiles of the matching mentors for us.“ Within the mentee-mentor relationship, the reaching of the goals of the mentee is the single purpose, explains Hoffmeister-Schönfelder. The mentor holds a helping role during the generally one year long programme. Especially when following the diversity management idea, there is subsequently a large variety to design mentoring programmes. One can support potential female leaders, elderly employees or staff with different ethical backgrounds through mentors. „But only by supporting women through a mentoring programme you don't ensure that diversity management is applied throughout the company“, says Mentoring-specialist Hoffmeister-Schönfelder.

Mentoring – a question of timing

Mentoring in the wrong place and at the wrong time can - in the worst case - miss its intended goals. „Often employees perceive the selection for a mentoring programme as a distinction and form of appraisal along the lines of the diversity management approach, but sometimes also as anti-promotion or being side-lined“, explains Christine Kurmeyer. Furthermore, it is crucially important to closely link mentoring programmes to general human resource development and put it in context with the long-term individual human resource development plan. A mentoring programme is not a cure-all tool, which replaces all other HR interventions. Bad timing could also turn the well-intended action into frustration through unnecessarily used resources. If the mentees are not yet mature for the leadership role/position „Reciprocally there is the situation that an employee gets into a leadership position without having had a mentor beforehand, and now needs a mentor on her/his side, says Christine Kurmeyer. „In this case a mentoring programme can be most helpful as the tool of choice. One needs to try to bridge the gap between the support of daily-operational business and the correlating deflections from the operational side in form of long-term career goals of the mentees“. For her the general mentoring convention is key: „If I don't know where I want to go, I won't be astonished if I arrive somewhere else.“ The human resource steering tool coupled with the question, which group with which goal, and at which time one wants to support, can deliver valuable synergies with the diversity management approach. Unfortunately the reality is not as colourful as we would like to see it. In practice the candidates in mentoring programmes are often either young men or

young women, instead of considering all groups of an organisation, and, in this context, advocating the significance of “professional” instead of “biological” age.

As ever so often – the right ingredients are on the table, but unfortunately we continue using the same, well-known techniques and practices and are risk-averse towards experimenting with new things. We can do more in the „land of ideas“.