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Vielfalt in Unternehmenskulturen

Auf gute Zusammenarbeit trotz unterschiedlicher Wertvorstellungen?

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Abstract

The study challenges common assumptions regarding the need for strong and uniform corporate cultures in an effort to foster openness toward new forms of management and work. It highlights the culturual diversity within corporate environments as both a reality and an opportunity. Subcultures are presented as holding much potential. Drawing on a case study based on empirical research, the study illustrates how new and established forms of leadership and work interact and it offers several practical suggestions for management.

The study begins by exploring the popular concept of agile management as a means of bringing fresh impetus into corporate culture(s). However, as a new "silver bullet", it risks becoming absurd, because the liberating effect brought on by the concept of agility can tip over into anxiety when rigid implementation is demanded. In this sense, the study takes a critical view of the myth of a strong corporate culture and the tendency toward cultural standardization. It then takes a structured approach to exploring the reality of corporate cultural diversity, including subcultures with their specific advantages and challenges.

The case study, borrowed from an extensive research project conducted by the Reinhard Mohn Institute, realistically depicts the current diversity and dynamics of corporate cultures: New forms of leadership and work, such as so-called workforce or business agility, do not simply replace established forms, such as bureaucratic processes, but expand, initially, the repertoire of the means to solving problems. If agility is successful in this respect, it will increasingly form the basis of cooperation without being implemented for each and every problem. Other forms of workplace interaction are still required and valued for what they can do: It's the outcomes that matter!

This study therefore does not offer any simple recipes. It also does not advocate the greatest possible culture diversity, but emphasizes the ability to learn. Every organization has its own set of cultural tools that must demonstrate their impact over and over again and can be supplemented or even wholly replaced, but the set itself will always achieve more than any individual tool within it. Leaders can have a positive impact by maintaining a thorough overview of what their organization's cultural toolbox holds and by taking part in deciding which tool is used for a specific purpose.

The study's key message to executives is that they shouldn't just champion certain new (or old) concepts, but instead promote the idea of a diverse corporate culture. They can step in at the right moment when subcultures are working together on a common problem or when new forms of leadership and work are introduced into the organization. The reflexive openness that they must themselves demonstrate can, in turn, be demanded from others. The same applies to the – at least situational – orientation to achieving common goals, which must form the basis of any successful cooperation in a context of diversity: "Let's work together successfully!"

This study is intended to inspire current and future leaders as well as consultants and everyone who advises organizations on issues relating to culture, diversity and new forms of leadership and work.