

News

Commentary: Encouraging and supporting women needs to be a top priority

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The shortage of skilled personnel is becoming the biggest obstacle to dig-italisation. While women could be part of the solution, few are choosing a career in IT. Dirk Pothén, a member of the Executive Board at the IT ser-vice provider adesso, says companies need to lead the way in order to in-crease the proportion of women in the industry. In his opinion, encourag-ing and supporting women needs to be a top priority.

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Silent nerds sitting in front of computers, women who don't have a clue about IT: even though such stereotypes are long since obsolete, the IT sector remains a male domain. Extensive political efforts have also failed to change this situation. There are simply too few female specialists. Such findings are nothing new. The most recent figures from eco – Association of the Internet Industry document in black and white how poorly Germany continues to fare in this regard. The proportion of women in the country's IT sector is a mere 16 %. Only 10 to 20 % of applicants for new positions are female, even though the digital sector is booming and is desperately looking for skilled personnel, eco laments.

The question of who is to blame – or, more accurately, what the reasons are – has been asked repeatedly. The answers, ranging from insufficient support and a lack of interest to difficulties balancing family with a career, are known. Policymakers have embraced this issue and have launched an ambitious STEM action plan to get children, adolescents and adults excited about the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Between now and 2022, the German government will invest some EUR 55 million in the programme, which accompanies young people from preschool and school through to extracurricular activities and career counselling, and continues on to vocational training, university education, career entry and advanced training. However, schools still lack equipment and teaching staff with corresponding training – various investment programmes notwithstanding.

In view of the ever-worsening shortage of skilled personnel, and to maintain the innovative power and competitiveness of our economy, this needs to change quickly.

Independently of politics, each company needs to make a greater contribution to encouraging and supporting women. It remains to be seen whether those efforts will be coordinated in future

by an association such as the Federation of German Industries (BDI) so as to make more of an impact. For its part, adesso is attempting to get more girls and women excited about IT through various programmes. We go to schools and universities, actively help shape computer science courses and address girls in particular. We also offer trial workshops for girls and young women, such as our Girl's Day and the IT4Kids workshops. Additional components include school sponsorships and bursaries exclusively for women as part of the upcoming "adesso School of Coding and Software Engineering" course of studies at XU Exponential University in Potsdam, with accompanying support to be provided within the framework of student trainee contracts. Time and time again, I am surprised at the extent to which young people today are still influenced by gender stereotypes and are choosing career paths based on whether they are typically male or female. A balance between work and family life is important for women to truly be able to pursue a career. Flexible workplace models and individual childcare programmes are needed for better balance. Here companies should say good-bye to standard solutions and find answers to modern realities of life. The IT sector in particular has far more options in this regard than manufacturing companies, for example, where production facilities cannot simply stand idle.

Would a ratio of women required by law help solve the problem? Only to a limited extent. Getting a few women into the boardroom does not help the majority. Successfully supporting and encouraging women requires a more broad-based approach, and has to include the men who typically hold the top positions and have the leverage to effect change. In my opinion, the benefit of female "parallel worlds" at companies is limited. While women-only networks are certainly important, experience shows that women get farther ahead if they include men in their career as mentors and supporters.

The indisputable fact, proven by empirical studies, is that strong female role models in particular have a great effect on girls and women. For this reason too, we need to succeed in bringing more women into male-dominated occupations and increasing their proportion in leadership positions.

Another benefit is that mixed teams genuinely add value. They respond faster, listen to different points of view, do not discard ideas as quickly and take fewer risks. Research results confirm that companies with greater diversity generate higher profits and are more productive and innovative. Innovation happens not when everyone thinks exactly the same way, but through the interaction of different opinions and personalities. Inclusion and diversity ultimately affect all people regardless of gender, age, origins, religion or possible disabilities. Moreover, companies also have a social responsibility: if we do not succeed in getting more women into well-paid

jobs, which are widely available in the IT sector, the next generation is also at a higher risk of poverty, at the latest upon reaching retirement age.

For the past year, adesso itself has been working hard to reshape its male-dominated leadership. This cultural change process will continue to occupy us for some time. To this end, we offer coaching, talent promotion and continuing education programmes especially for the company's female employees. In cooperation with our "She for IT" patron, Martina Voss-Tecklenburg, the coach of the German women's national football team, we are giving eleven of our female IT experts the tools they need to serve as internal and external role models. In doing so, we are helping to eliminate typical IT stereotypes while giving girls and women a different impression of IT as an exciting job with career prospects and a future. The encouragement and equality of women has to be given top priority if we want things to change.

**Dirk Pothen is a member of the adesso SE Executive Board and responsible for the Human Resources department. In this position, he is a key driving force behind adesso's She for IT initiative. He is also responsible for the business divisions Automotive and Transportation, Manufacturing Industry and Microsoft, as well as for the foreign subsidiaries adesso Austria GmbH, adesso Bulgaria EOOD, adesso Schweiz AG and adesso Turkey Bilgi Teknolojileri Ltd. #ti. The adesso subsidiaries ARITHNEA GmbH and com2m GmbH also fall within his area of responsibility.*

Further press information on the topic:

[adesso launches talent coaching for women with head coach Martina Voss-Tecklenburg Strong women, get into IT! adesso initiative: Women in IT professions! adesso and Martina Voss-Tecklenburg agree on partnership](#)

approx. 7,820 Letters

adesso SE

adesso is one of the leading IT service providers in the German-speaking area and focuses its consulting and software development activities on the core business processes of companies and public authorities. adesso's strategy is based on three pillars: the deep industry-specific know-how of its staff, the comprehensive expertise in technology and the application of reliable methods in software implementation projects. Following this approach, adesso develops superior IT solutions, which enhance the competitive position of a company.

adesso was founded in 1997 in Dortmund and currently employs about 4,200 members of staff. The share is listed on the regulated market. Among the most important customers in the banking segment are Commerzbank, KfW, DZ Bank, Helaba, Union Investment, BayernLB

and DekaBank, in the insurance segment Munich Re, Hannover Re, DEVK, DAK, Zurich Versicherung, Medizinischer Dienst der Krankenversicherung (MDK-IT) as well as cross-industry Daimler, Bosch, Westdeutsche Lotterie, Swisslos, DZR Deutsches Zahnärztliches Rechenzentrum, TÜV Rheinland, Beschaffungsamt des Bundesministeriums des Innern.

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