

Executive Summary

The Future Panel on SMEs - Challenges for the German Mittelstand from the Entrepreneur's Point of View

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Based on the IfM Bonn Future Panel on SMEs established in 2014, the Institut für Mittelstandsforschung (IfM) Bonn identified the current and upcoming most important topics that small and medium-sized (Mittelstand companies) and other companies are confronted with. It also ascertained potential needs for support that could be provided by policy makers. By taking the entrepreneurs' point of view into account, this report complements the IfM Bonn Future Panel on SMEs that was designed as an expert survey.

SMEs give highest priority to retaining competitiveness and innovativeness

We allocated 770 statements of entrepreneurs to 56 topics. They, in turn, were classified into nine action fields. Among these action fields, highest priority is given to keeping competitiveness and innovativeness – followed by the challenge to cover the need for skilled labour and the design of framework conditions.

Key topics differ among the subgroups of Mittelstand companies

Though all subgroups of Mittelstand companies concur on the key action fields, opinions differ as regards the top subjects: SMEs put greatest emphasis on the adjustment pressure owing to intensive competitions, followed by lack of qualified personnel. Non-SMEs, in contrast, give highest priority to the development of new products and to gaining highest returns.

Among the 56 topics the subgroup that comprises larger, grown Mittelstand companies of the first generation rank product innovation and securing business succession third, whereas the smaller SMEs rank administrative burdens third. Furthermore, the results uncover that SMEs do not attach a comparable importance to digitilisation as representatives of politics do. Only the small or young SMEs determine digitilisation the third most important action field.

SMEs predominantly do not desire economic policy measures

Mittelstand companies trust in their capacities and predominantly do not desire economic policy measures. Entrepreneurs ascribe educational policy and policy framework important roles. The policy faces the challenge to take the heterogeneity of Mittelstand companies into account when designing SME-friendly framework conditions.

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