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Why companies must focus on equality and equal opportunities

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Many of our decisions are unconsciously shaped by prejudices, role models and stereotypes that prevent diversity and inclusion. Yet diversity is critical to a company's future.

When our brains trick us, we start thinking in pigeonholes

Men are better equipped to be leaders. Women naturally want to be mothers. People with disabilities can perform tasks less quickly than people without disabilities. Such prejudices are the result of trails we have been walking for ages, and they have been influencing our decisions for a long time. Our brain works extremely efficiently – it uses learned patterns to conserve resources. This creates blind spots or “unconscious biases”. These are biologically determined and independent of our gender, education or social status. They occur not only in individuals, but can also be a group phenomenon found in corporate cultures or societies, such as an insurmountable glass ceiling on the career ladder or in day-to-day interactions. For example, institutionalized biases in the form of fixed role expectations for men and women are one of the most important reasons for the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Prejudices against gender, age, sexual orientation, origin, religious affiliation or disability are quickly made. Yet it is precisely that these need to be avoided when it comes to promoting diversity and inclusion and also success in companies.

Diversity helps companies perform better

By 2025, Erste Group aims to increase the proportion of women in management board and board 1 positions to 37%, and in B-2 and B-3 positions to 40%. This is because companies with a balanced gender ratio and cultural diversity perform better compared to companies with a low proportion of women and a low cultural mix, according to a [diversity report by McKinsey](#). The explanation is obvious: Every person goes through various challenges during his or her life that shape him or her in a wide variety of ways – both positive and negative. From this, skills, perspectives, strengths and weaknesses are formed, and these continue to evolve throughout life. It is these qualities that, in heterogeneous groups, lead to looking at a problem from as many different angles as possible and coming up with comprehensive solutions.

Externally, the luminosity of lived diversity should not be underestimated, because in the battle for top graduates, diversity, if communicated, pays strongly into the employer brand and is an important criterion for many applicants when choosing a career. With “[#glaubandich so wie du bist](#)”, we as Erste Bank und Sparkasse have developed a format that gives these different personalities a stage to tell their story. The stories focus on being different and believing in yourself.

Diversity as part of the corporate culture

However, diversity should not just be a figurehead, but should be anchored in the corporate culture. This means, for example, giving employees the opportunity to get involved with older people, people with disabilities, women's issues or LGBTIQ+ issues (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intergender and queer). Within the framework of our employee networks ErsteColours and Erste Womens Hub, we offer employees at Erste Group exactly this opportunity. ErsteColours aims to shape the corporate culture so that people of different sexual orientations and identities feel welcome, safe and valued.

The Women's Hub's work focuses on promoting women's careers, improving the balance between private life and career, increasing financial education, especially for women, and aiming to get more women into IT-related roles.

It's about something

Overcoming unconscious bias is often the first step in recognizing inequalities and the need for action behind them. This is about much more than just performance and the external image effect; in the end, it is about equal rights and equal opportunities as well as about the joint company as part of society and how it helps to shape it.

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