



Still waters run deep or the SME understatement

For a specialised logistics conference, I recently went looking for speakers and companies with topics that would be worthwhile presenting. The selection was diverse and I discovered any amount of innovative ideas and best practice within the logistics environment. However, the concrete possibilities soon narrowed down when many SMEs - unlike large companies - were hesitant to present their responses to challenges and solutions in logistics. Initially, I thought it was a question of competition and maintaining the appropriate level of confidentiality. But that was not what it was all about! Many companies simply felt that their solutions were simply inadequate for public presentation. Attempts to convince them to the contrary generally fell on fallow ground. Reason enough then to take a look into the subject of SMEs in greater detail!

SMEs (defined as companies with <250 employees and/or ≤50 mill. € in turnover) are the unchallenged backbone of Austrian industry. Nine out of ten companies in Austria belong to this category. In the course of a small opinion poll among colleagues as to what constituted or characterised an SME many expressions reflecting esteem elicited: words such as innovation and creativity, market orientation and determination, flexibility and commitment, mutual trust/ cooperation and social responsibility. What was of particular note was, however, that SMEs were multiply associated with a pragmatic, practice-oriented and calm approach. It's clear when you consider the latter that the image described before suits well! The word 'calm' could probably also be replaced by 'non-arrogant', 'reserved', 'understated' or even 'undervalued', and the question already arises: do SMEs hide their light too much under a bushel? Do they possibly evaluate their own ideas and solution approaches too critically?

I think that this may be partially the case. Particularly in terms of process innovation but also best practice - in the sense of using what has been tried and tested - SMEs could come across in a thoroughly more self-confident manner. More self-marketing and promotion, also outside their specific technology and product sectors, would certainly be good for the exchange of knowledge and experience within the Austrian economy. And, returning to the core subject of logistics, there are many pragmatic and proven solution approaches by domestic SMEs. Indeed there are certainly also large companies who could learn from these. Often it is a case of specifically these straightforward and logical solutions that prove themselves in the long-term because of their efficiency, rather than larger and exaggeratedly complex ones.

Hence my appeal to the proprietors and management of SMEs: be bold, be proud of your ideas and tell us about your wealth of experience! Other entrepreneurs also only don their socks one at a time, and would certainly also be capable of learning from you here and there!

Yours
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