

Economic and social changes are constantly forcing companies to adapt and redevelop their business models. This study examines how well companies in twelve selected areas of the South Tyrolean service sector are prepared for future challenges. The survey clarifies whether the service companies recognise fundamental developments, how they react to them and whether these challenges are perceived as opportunities or risks.

Positive is that the South Tyrolean service companies are already recognising many future developments and usually see them as opportunities for their business activities. On the other hand, many of the service companies surveyed do not feel sufficiently prepared for these new challenges.

According to them, the megatrends of increasing "technologization" and "knowledge society" are having an impact across all areas. The focus here is on digitization, which is changing the management and business models of many companies in the long term. This also has a strong impact on specific challenges in the individual service company areas. Digitization in the publishing industry is leading to a strong increase in online business and new products, such as e-books, gain market share. South Tyrolean broadcasters are recognizing new opportunities by using social media or Internet radio. For the information service companies, there are new business areas in the field of consulting, IT security, cloud computing and mobile applications on smartphones.

Real estate agents use digital possibilities, e.g. in real estate marketing and sales via Internet platforms. Property managers, on the other hand, recognise the benefits of using special softwares and equipment, e.g. for on-site damage assessment. Digitization, e.g. in the context of telematic litigation, also influences legal advice companies.

In addition to digitization, service companies also face many other challenges. For auditors, tax and employment consultants, specialisation in certain topics, such as incorporation, succession or international accounting, is important. Management consultants must also focus on their consulting topics, e.g. regarding aspects of employee retention, process optimization as well as finances and profitability.

The business activities of architecture firms are influenced mainly by the increasing scarcity of natural resources, which requires energy- and space-saving architecture. Digitalization has an effect in this area by enabling intelligent control of building services within the framework of "smart" architecture. The scarcity of natural resources is also relevant to the business operations of engineering and other technical offices. For companies in advertising and market research, new opportunities arise by using social media, mobile devices or other technologies for marketing. For travel agencies and tour operators, the Internet provides important sales opportunities for the future.

To take advantage of future opportunities, several actors are required: interest representatives and companies, public

administration and the education system. Only a joint approach can open up new business fields and ensure the competitiveness of companies in the future.

Sensitisation and education, counselling and support: There are many challenges that companies are aware of, but they do not integrate them into their actual business activities. Gaps in the perception of supposedly "unimportant" developments need to be closed. Stakeholders have an essential role to play in education and support. The individual companies are also called upon to actively tackle the new challenges.

New educational content through digitization and the knowledge society: The increasing digitalization and development towards a knowledge society require new competences of the workforce, e.g. in dealing with social media and new technologies. Lack of skills of the labor force leads to competitive disadvantages of the local economy. The education system is accordingly called upon to define and communicate new content.

Improving the economic environment: It is the task of politics and public administration to create positive framework conditions for South Tyrol as a business location. The dissatisfaction with the current situation of many service companies shows a clear need for action, especially with regard to increased reliability and stability of the legal framework and the reduction of unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles.