

Press release

Skills shortage poses a challenge to Mittelstand enterprises in the manufacturing sector

IfM Bonn: Pandemic loses its threat potential

Bonn, 15/03/22. The skills shortage will be the biggest challenge for companies in the manufacturing sector in the future. Digitalisation, competitive pressure, and the capacity to innovate follow on the list. These were the findings of a survey of managers conducted by researchers at the Institut für Mittelstandsforschung (IfM) Bonn as part of the research project "Digitisation processes of SMEs in the manufacturing sector – follow-up survey".

The pandemic, by contrast, is losing its threat potential. Nevertheless, it has intensified challenges such as the shortage of raw materials. "There are differences between family businesses and manager-led businesses in their priorities. While Mittelstand enterprises give a higher priority to the shortage of skilled workers, manager-led companies give more priority to digitalisation," explains IfM President Professor Friederike Welter. "This difference is also evident concerning company size: small and medium-sized companies already have more problems finding skilled workers than larger companies. In contrast, larger companies face increasing competitive pressure due to rising raw material prices and market changes".

However, compared to the last survey for the SME Future Panel in 2019, most companies in the manufacturing sector have now developed specific digitisation projects. They focus on optimisations along the whole value chain – from purchasing with the introduction of enterprise resource planning systems to the automation of production and e-commerce solutions. Some companies are also planning to develop intelligent products. Companies also see the challenge of protecting themselves against data theft and cybercrime. Micro-enterprises also mention a lack of technical expertise and resources as implementation hurdles.

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