MITTELSTAND 4.0
COMPETENCE CENTRES
(GERMANY)

Authors:
Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy, Germany

The case study takes a policy maker’s perspective on the Mittelstand 4.0 Competence Centres, which support the digitalisation of SMEs, providing information about their mandate, activities, governance, and main implementation challenges.

Topics covered
Digital technology adoption, SMEs, digital divide, Germany

What are Mittelstand 4.0 Competence Centres?
- Network of 25 centres across Germany established and led by public-private consortia (including universities, public research institutions, chambers of commerce, transfer agencies)
- Cross-sector and cross-thematic digitalization ecosystems supporting the knowledge and technology transfer to SMEs

Business services provided
- Provision of training (e.g. workshops, seminars, online learning courses)
- Awareness building (e.g. information brochures, talks at trade shows, webinars)
- Pilot projects with SME generating best-practices
- Demonstration of solutions in practice (demonstration plants, mobile showrooms)
- Develop digitalisation road maps for individual SMEs

Mandate
- Support SMEs develop their own Industry 4.0 and digital transformation solutions
- Foster SMEs’ digitalisation
- Close the digital divide between SMEs and large enterprises

Budget & governance
- 36 million per year (around EUR 1.5-2 million per Competence Centre)
- Operative since 2016
- Completely funded by Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi)
- Supervised by project management accountable to the BMWi

Main challenges
- Skilled employees: Difficult to attract specialised staff due to high competition from private sector
- Knowledge transfer: Academic staff needs to be familiarised with “language” of SMEs

BMWi (2019), “Case study on the Mittelstand 4.0 Competence Centres, Germany: Case study contribution to the OECD TIP Digital and Open Innovation project”, Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Energy, Germany.

Discussant:
Werner Kohnert
*Team leader, Project Management Agency of the German Aerospace Center (DLR)