

Interview Article with Dr. Susanne Wilpers (Professor, Heilbronn University, Germany)



Dr. Susanne Wilpers, Professor at Heilbronn University, Germany, was at SDMIMD to deliver a series of lectures pertaining to ESG practices. During her stay, the Dimension Committee had the opportunity to interview her to capture insights from her experience.

The interaction was as follows:

Dimensions Team: “Covid-19 pandemic has changed the work culture. We see employees predominantly choosing virtual mode of working and companies adopting virtual mode and hybrid mode of working. It is an understood concept that corporate culture is essential for shaping employee’s perception, work experience and brand building, and for all of that employees’ presence is rather important so, how do you reconcile the two?”

Dr. Sussane Wilps: “What we learned from Germany is as in India we all had to stay at home for a period of time and everything was online. What we learned was very essential, very close contact virtually with the team members so, it was not enough just working and not having no contact at all and handing in result but to have social interaction sessions. You would meet and talk or have a coffee break together virtually or even cooking sessions together virtually on your iPad or your laptop in your kitchen, all of this helps in social connectiveness. Working alone with no contact at all is not a healthy or sustainable way to work. So, after the government decided we can work together in offices. In Germany things are different, in Germany society its very important to be and stay in the office and it’s a rare opportunity even in big companies to work virtually. So, what typical Germany companies learned was that even when employees worked from home the work was still good. So, the companies decided to make an offer for our employees to work from home. For employees in most of the cases there were questioners done “what would you prefer? Coming five days per week or three days or two days” in the end it worked out for most of the companies and they decided that three days is an office day and two days is online day. It’s a combination of face to face and virtual but not complete online work. This was a disruptive change in Germany work culture. To have a combination, to have more face-to-face contact. So, the majority of the companies do this now. But we are afraid to do it completely online. We learned that it not only effects the work culture but also is very stressful psychologically. I talked about the concept of zoom fatigue, an effect you have when you are only online and people are really stressed by all of these cognitive variations you have by looking at the screen. There are other issues as well, problem

to talk and listen, you don't know how to react to non-verbally, they don't see that you are relaxed but only see your stressed face. To sum it up you have to have more social interactions, either face-to-face or in a way that has nothing to do with work. Having tea or coffee break and some companies for example offered the opportunity...once per month every Friday is off and fully paid, this is what some companies do today. Zoom fatigue and stressed online work is a new topic and work life balance is a new future field that we have to look at when we talk about online work.”

Dimensions Team: “We took a couple of personalities test in class and were told that some of these are used in recruitment as well. Do these personality traits change over time or with experience? If they do, can it be done intentionally, can we change our personality trait to suit a job profile?”

Dr. Sussane Wilps: “In personality psychology, we study that personality traits are very stable which means they do not change. They may be influenced to a certain extent but to most extent, they remain same throughout and this stability is usually measure in terms of culminated studies in the long term. It is never recommended to change as a person is a culmination of their traits. Nothing is good or bad in all of these 5 traits, it only shows what kind of person you are and it is important that we don't change what we are. You have to find where you fit best. For example, a person not comfortable with a lot of human interaction will not be happy with a job like sales where they have to be interacting with the customers day in and day out. That's why the companies take the personality trait tests to see what kind of a person the candidate is and what kind of job would be suited for them.”

Dimensions Team: “Having been in India for about a week now, how similar or dissimilar are people here to that of Germany in terms of personality?”

Dr. Sussane Wilps: “Not at all. We know that in world-wide studies that the personality traits are same all over the world, there's no difference anywhere else but what helps us is cultural studies, the dimensions in cultural studies to be precise. A huge difference between the 2 nations is the collectivism that Indians show compared to Germans. The example can be as simple as paying a bill at the restaurant, in your case: In India, all choose to get one bill and then split who will pay how much whereas in Germany, it is completely different. In Germany, what we do is get separate bills, what it shows is an individualistic society. This is a huge difference but on personality level, there is not much difference.”