

## Diversity as a Chance

ars serendi Starts with Active Support of Specialists. KIT's Spin-off Helps Other Enterprises Profit from the Diversity of Their Staff



*Last step towards autonomy: Dr. Rolf Blattner, Dr. Christine Watrinet, Prof. Hagen Lindstädt, and Arno Lagaly sign the spin-off agreement. (Photo by: Jana Mayer)*

**Spin-offs are an important part of tomorrow's innovative university. At the KIT, this issue is gaining relevance. The latest example of its economic innovation power is the spin-off "ars serendi" established in April by Dr. Christine Watrinet. The economist so far employed by the Institute for Enterprise Management (IBU) quantifies the capability of enterprises of using the diversity of their staff.**

Demographic change, globalization, career changers, and lack of qualified workers – many factors make the staff structure of enterprises today more diverse than ever. The assumed chaos, however, must not be a drawback. "Under the heading of diversity management, more and more enterprises try to use individual potentials of their staff in the form of creativity and innovation power", says Dr. Christine Watrinet. But it has been nearly

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impossible so far to exactly measure such “soft” enterprise management actions.

This is where the business idea starts, which is the basis of the spin-off established by the scientists from the Institute for Enterprise Management (IBU) and meets with high interest of medium-sized and large companies: “ars serendi for the first time offers companies a scientifically based tool that reliably measures their efforts in the field of diversity management”. Watrinet interviews employees on all levels with respect to various indicator values, such as their appreciation of the management behavior or their individual integration. Eventually, a reliable figure is obtained, the so-called diversity culture index. It allows for an exact positioning in terms of diverse enterprise culture. Further information can be found under [www.ars-serendi.de](http://www.ars-serendi.de).

Students and staff of the KIT, who wish to found enterprises, like Christine Watrinet, are supported by the new Innovation Department. “Supporting and accompanying fascinating business ideas are the tasks of our department”, says Dr. Rolf Blattner, who is responsible for KIT spin-offs. “In particular in the fields of patenting and funding options, we can offer vast experience and make useful recommendations”, says Blattner.

Together with Arno Lagaly from the University of Karlsruhe, Blattner also helps in the application for EXIST programs, by means of which the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology funds spin-offs from universities and research institutions. Another contact point for enterprising scientists and students of the KIT is the Center of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (CIE) that is funded by the BMWi. It identifies promising business ideas and develops them further to enterprise concepts suitable for the market.

Christine Watrinet also profited from the numerous possibilities of support. Until the start of her spin-off, she was supported by an EXIST spin-off grant: After her Ph. D. thesis on diversity

management, the institute headed by Professor Lindstädt encouraged her to open her own business. “In the following months, both the IBU and the Innovation Department provided major help in completing various applications, making scientific preparations, and establishing valuable contacts”, says Watrinet. “In this way, many obstacles were removed.”

**The Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) is the merger of the Forschungszentrum Karlsruhe, member of the Helmholtz Association, and the Universität Karlsruhe. This merger will give rise to an institution of internationally excellent research and teaching in natural and engineering sciences. In total, the KIT has 8000 employees and an annual budget of 700 million Euros. The KIT focuses on the knowledge triangle of research – teaching – innovation.**

**The Karlsruhe institution is a leading European energy research center and plays a visible role in nanosciences worldwide. KIT sets new standards in teaching and promotion of young scientists and attracts top scientists from all over the world. Moreover, KIT is a leading innovation partner of industry.**

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