

Einhell Delphi study “Home 2030”:

Between pride and status

In the Einhell Delphi study “Home 2030” experts from different industries and fields analyzed and described how the importance and meaning of our own four walls will develop over the coming years. This study was conducted by the Center for Sports and Management (CSM) of WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management. In our interview, the Director of WHU – Professor Dr. Sascha L. Schmidt – explains the findings that came out from the investigation.

Prof. Dr. Schmidt, what is the Einhell Delphi study “Home 2030” about?

Professor Dr. Sascha L. Schmidt: We asked a total of 60 experts in matters relating to the home what significance and importance the home will have in the year 2030. For example, whether people will spend more or less time at home, or which new technologies will be available to us within our own four walls.

Why did Einhell commission this study?

Schmidt: Einhell is one of the leading manufacturers of tools and garden equipment. It is understandable that the management of the company is already thinking about life at home in 2030 so that it can develop relevant products. But our study is of course not only interesting for Einhell, but instead for all who are interested in the way we will live together in the future, or who offer products and services relating to any aspect of the home.

What else are you working on in terms of your research work?

Schmidt: Our research and teaching activities focus among other things on the sustainability, future viability, and diversification strategies of companies, in particular in professional sports, as well as the influence of technologies on sports and leisure behavior. We want to help make companies fit for the future. In our society, we are seeing an increasing convergence between areas of living that were previously separate. Job, leisure time, and social contacts are becoming mixed up, regardless of whether sports or DIY activities.

By its very nature, the future is always uncertain. What findings can you ultimately draw from such studies into the future?

Schmidt: With future studies, it is not primarily about whether or not the predictions actually end up happening in the manner described. Instead, the key is that we examine the future and consider a range of different future scenarios and their impacts. The results of a future study enable us to better prepare ourselves for various different futures. There are basically two methods for doing this. In the first method, we interpolate historical data. However, in the face of disruptive developments this approach is becoming steadily more problematic. This is why we opted for the second methodological approach – the aggregation of expert opinions as part of a Delphi study.

You applied the Delphi method for the Einhell future study. What exactly is the process here, and what is the significance of the findings?

Schmidt: This scientifically substantiated research method is designed to collect the opinions of an expert panel on a future topic, in this case the significance and meaning of the home in 2030, via an iterative consultation process that takes place on an online platform. Selected experts use a scale to evaluate pre-formulated theses about the future, so-called projections, in terms of the likelihood of occurrence and the expected impact and desirability in each case. The experts supplement their quantitative assessments with personal comments and are then subsequently given access to the evaluation results of the entire panel of experts. After this they can then decide themselves whether they would like to stick with their first assessment, or whether they would like to adjust it based on the other opinions that have been expressed. This systematic approach enables a structured, anonymous communication process with high validity, acceptance, and consistency. Over time, a visible opinion making process takes place in relation to the projections, resulting in either consensus or disagreement.

The topic of the “home” is a very broad subject matter. Which criteria did you use to select the experts for the Einhell Delphi study “Home 2030”?

Schmidt: In order to gain the fullest possible picture, we deliberately put together a diversified panel of experts with 60 representatives – architects, operators of DIY stores and garden centers, journalists, editors, and media professionals, tool manufacturers, and scientists. On the basis of the qualifications we were looking for, these experts were identified via LinkedIn, a social network primarily used by professional people, which is also where we recruited them. In the process, it was particularly important to us to not only draw on the points of view of experienced managers, but to also gain fresh insight from e.g. company founders.

As part of the study you must have no doubt heard a lot of opinions and gained a lot of insight. In a nutshell, what are the core findings of the study?

Schmidt: During the course of our Delphi study, our experts offered expert appraisals of 14 future projections, on the basis of which it was then possible to identify three different future scenarios.

The most probable scenario describes the home as a place of change. According to this scenario, people will increasingly move from urban environments to rural ones, and they will invest more in modernizing their own four walls. In terms of usage of DIY tools and garden equipment, users will shift from wired and petrol-powered tools to cordless, rechargeable battery-operated devices. In addition, people will live predominantly in “smart” homes. This scenario not only has the highest probability of occurrence in the eyes of the experts who were consulted, but it also offers the highest desirability – not least because it goes hand in hand with a supposedly significant improvement in terms of quality of living.

The second scenario describes the home as a place of personal fulfillment, with equality between men and women. In this less likely but still possible future scenario, DIY activities are among the most popular leisure activities, and men and women share DIY activities equally. In addition, people view their home with a mixture of pride and status – our own four walls are presented as a significant status symbol in social media. People like to show the world around them what they have done with their own four walls.

The third, but less likely, scenario describes the home as a place of systematic retreat. This means that people spend the bulk of their available time at home in this scenario. However, the experts also felt that this scenario was significantly less desirable, as people are social beings and will remain so in the future.

You have already mentioned the increasing shift to cordless, rechargeable battery-operated technology. How will mobile technologies change life at home in the future?

Schmidt: According to the experts, our lives at home are going to become even more comfortable than they already are. This is because, as a result of the expected development of ever more capable batteries, the tools operated with these batteries will not only become lighter, easier to handle, and quieter to run, but in particular we will also be able to use them for longer.

What do you think is unique about the study?

Schmidt: It is no doubt particularly exciting that our experts believe that, to a certain degree, there might be a reversal of the urbanization trend that has held for so long. They believe that, by 2030, significantly more people will move from the city to the countryside in Germany than the other way round. However, most experts differentiate here between the countryside and the affluent suburbs of the major cities, which means that we shouldn't be expecting a genuine exodus from the cities. But I still find these expectations remarkable. Alongside the predicted continuing rise in property and rental costs, the experts who were consulted also mentioned a desire to improve general living conditions with more living space and more scope for freedom as factors that would drive people out of the city – and these are reasons that might particularly appeal to young families. In an increasingly digitalized world with people working from home or taking advantage of mobile office opportunities combined with ready access to delivery services, further obstacles to this trend are removed.

What particularly surprised you about the findings of the study?

Schmidt: It was certainly surprising that the appraisals of the projections revealed hardly any differences between different statistical groups. This means that, unlike what we might have expected and with only very few exceptions, the expert assessments were not shaped by socio-demographic attributes such as age or sex, nor by the experience of the experts in their particular field. This is quite surprising and is probably down to the fact that the home is a very emotional topic, where professional and private points of view are closely connected.

In which areas of the study findings did you see the greatest divergence in the opinions of the experts?

Schmidt: This actually relates to the degree to which the experts believe that conventional role models will continue to break down in the future. In comparison to their male colleagues, the women among the experts agreed that men and women will in future share DIY activities equally.

What role does the fact play that women will increasingly be reaching for drills and hedge trimmers in the future?

Schmidt: I think that, in the future, the supposed increase in interest among women in DIY activities in the home will have an impact particularly in terms of product innovations. Our experts noted here, for example, that many devices today are still very heavy and in some

cases actually user-unfriendly. Manufacturers should therefore be trying hard to further reduce access barriers and to support users – we are talking about men and women here – with even more carefully targeted user-friendly products and accompanying services.

***About Professor Dr. Sascha L. Schmidt:**



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