



Foto: IKEA

Intercultural Management

Interview mit Helen Duphorn

Helen Duphorn ist seit Dezember 2005 Country Managerin von IKEA Österreich. Die gebürtige Schwedin wuchs in Stockholm auf und hat schon einige spannende und abwechslungsreiche Karriereschritte hinter sich. Bevor sie als erste Frau die Leitung von IKEA Österreich übernahm, war sie unter anderen als Managerin in Finnland und Indien tätig.

How are negotiations conducted? How high are the barriers concerning the language? Are interpreters necessary or is English enough for communication?

Helen Duphorn: In most cases, English works well in Austria. Technical negotiations of various kinds are carried out by our functional managers, and then usually in German.

Are there special strategies when negotiating with certain business cultures?

Helen Duphorn: Yes, cultural differences often require different negotiating strategies. I have experienced such differences especially between Europe and Asia, but there are also cultural differences between the European cultures. You have to know who you are dealing with. For some, personal and social bonding is very important, for others getting to the point as soon as possible is more interesting. But the business cultures are also often differ-

ent between companies in the same country. Some are very formal and hierarchical and others are not.



Helen Duphorn
Country Managerin
IKEA Österreich

What are the success factors when managing a cross-cultural team? What is important when working as a part of an intercultural team?

Helen Duphorn: Most important is that the individuals in the team respect each

other—and make an effort to understand each other. If the cultures are very different, it may be necessary to formalize cultural training and to agree on rules for the internal cooperation.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of a cross-cultural team?

Helen Duphorn: Usually there are hurdles initially (especially in terms of understanding each other), but long-term there are only gains. A diverse team obviously brings more to the table than a homogeneous one.

What is the main challenge in a cross-cultural team?

Helen Duphorn: The main challenge in a cross-cultural team is to invest enough time in understanding each other, to create a respect for different views, ways and preferences and to learn how to benefit from each others differences.

Are there any specific differences (especially in communication) between certain nationalities you have to take care of?

Helen Duphorn: Today I work mainly with Austrians, Germans and Swedes – and in an international comparison the cultural differences between us are not very big.

What are the impacts on the company's strategy and how do you ensure the success when operating in countries with different cultural background?

Helen Duphorn: One of the biggest assets in IKEA is our company-culture and -values, which often bridges over the cultural differences between colleges in different cul-

tures. Most of us have chosen to work for IKEA because of its values, such as honesty, simplicity and transparency. We are not prestigious and believe in equal opportunities for all. This is a good foundation for an international and diverse company.