



Swedish influence on culture

The learning from each other is key

The Swedish Vattenfall-Group, with its nearly 33.000 employees, is one of the biggest electricity and heat generators in Europe. In 2011 the group re-structured itself towards a cross-European organised organisation, operated out of the Swedish headquarters. The key values of safety, performance and cooperation are the common denominators for the cooperative working approach.



F.v. Kyaw | Foto: Vattenfall

„The Swedish culture has a big influence and our Swedish parent company leads by example, especially when it comes to gender diversity and women in leadership positions.“

Felicitas von Kyaw, Corporate Vice President Organisational Development & Change, has been involved with organisations in change processes over many years. Since 2011 she has supported the change process at Vattenfall.

„When we are talking about corporate culture, I have to say, that there is not “the single Swedish” corporate culture“. Many factors feed into and influence corporate culture. It depends on the perspective from which we are looking at it, for example country perspective, business perspective or team perspective.

Times are demanding for the energy sector in general as well as specifically for Vattenfall and its employees. In parallel to the profound changes within the energy industry we are undertaking our own transformation. This is enthralling and holds many challenges and certainly there are opportunities for us. In 2011 we reorganised ourselves and are working based on a cross-country structure.

In this new international joint structure we put emphasis on our core values, which form the basis of our joint acting. Furthermore, diversity is essential for us. We have diverse cultural backgrounds, and different experiences which each and every one is contributing and sharing with the company. This diversity of perspectives has its right to exist. We want to embrace „the best things“. With all our cultural distinctiveness and the broad spectrum of diversity, we are simultaneously focussed to create something common: a comprehensive Vattenfall identity. Especially our core value „cooperation“ underlines how important it is to work together in an open minded way, to exchange experiences about different countries, organisation units and areas of expertise, and to constantly learn from each other.

The momentum of our European reorganisation has a strong impact on our corporate culture and delivers a significant influence for diversity in all its aspects.

Internationalisation with the integration of different points of view and experiences is a relevant aspect, as is also the topic gender diversity.

The Swedish culture has a big influence and our Swedish parent organisation leads by example, in particular when it comes to gender diversity plus specifically women in leadership positions. The high importance that is ascribed to this topic is manifested internally also through the „Owners Directives“, the guidelines of our Swedish owners.

Our journey and the necessary efforts are not yet finished; we are striving for diversity of gender, age, descent and experience in all areas. The energy sector with its technical job profiles is traditionally a masculine domain. This changes very slowly: only 24% of our worldwide employees are female. On the top management level - managing board and two levels below – we have 22% women, on the first level alone we are at 34%. We are filled with hope when it comes to our Young Management Talents with 35% of female future leader potentials. But especially in Germany we are facing a backlog: only 11% across all management levels are female.



R. Behrendt | Foto: Frauenfeld

„How becomes corporate culture manifest in the organisation? Written adherence is the

beginning – but it is about “lived differences” and the recognition of the added value, that develops through lived differences.”

Romy Behrendt is expert for Diversity & Inclusion in the area of Organisational Development & Change and focuses on the design of diversity driven strategic goals.

„We are convinced that diversity needs to be incorporated in all business processes. It starts with HR processes like recruiting and personnel development and spans across to sales & marketing. Step by step we analyse the individual processes to establish how we can adjust them in order to improve diversity within the organisation.

However one has to say, that it is not about a written adherence to single concepts or guidelines. It is all about the „lived“ differences within the organisation. Every single employee is required, to be a co-creator of our joint culture. Mutual respect constitutes the foundation. When we talk about mutual learning, then we here in Germany can learn a lot about the compatibility between family and work from “the Swedish culture”. The limitations are more fluid; a lot of people leave work earlier and continue working from home in the evenings. It is also self-evident when someone stands up during a meeting and says, I have to leave and fetch my kid from school. And this can be either a man or a woman.

In fact we have flexitime in Germany and working from home is possible too. However, traditionally we are still facing a strong ‘presence culture’. We do feel that the Swedish interpretation is good for the German organisation and that we can also learn from our Swedish colleagues in this area.



T. Gustafsson | Foto: Frauenfeld

„In the past ten years many things have altered within the German organisation, especially the willingness for change has increased. This for sure is also rooted in the Swedish influence.“

Thomas Gustafsson is Head of ERM (Enterprise Risk Management) Development. He is responsible for the coordination of the ERM-processes and the ERM reporting as well as the development of a risk culture across the group.

„When I – as a Swede – came to Germany in 2002, I experienced the German corporate culture as rigid and very hierarchical. It was important to „know your position“ and stay in this position. I came from a culture in which everyone talked to everyone else, irrespective of position. Hierarchy in Sweden is flatter and there is no reverential dealing with it.“

He further describes: „In Sweden the qualification and the network stands in the foreground, in Germany it is more likely to be the position and hierarchy. Today it is not like this anymore, the hierarchy in Germany has become much flatter and the awe has decreased.“

Another cultural differences lies in the implementation of guidelines. „When I came to Germany I was astonished about the preciseness - if you want to choose a positive connotation - or the stiffness - if you want to choose a negative connotation – when it came to the implementation of guidelines or decisions. In Sweden we also establish guidelines and waive decisions. But these are meant as instructions which at the same time leave a lot of room for interpretation and construction. In the beginning I unconsciously dropped a brick since my German colleagues felt that I did not respect them when I interpreted their guidelines. I was not aware of the reaction my behaviour provoked, since from a Swedish perspective the interpretation of guidelines has no correlation with a lack of respect.“

A Swedish solo and a German solo developed into a Swedish-German duet. By now we are a Swedish-German-Dutch trio. In every respect we are working on „speaking the same language“. The operational language is English. However we are of course still facing cross-cultural misunderstandings in addition to the normal misunderstandings because of the different language. All trio partners say the same sentence but we all three mean something different. This is a process in which we can all learn a lot from each other. In an ideal case, the difference serves as enrichment, widens the horizon and increases the diversity of perspectives. Certainly there also is frictional loss which can create frustration. My colleagues in and from all three countries often ask me how I as a Swede/German would interpret the content of an e-mail.

Today I perceive a healthy mix, and mutual completion between the Swedish, German and Dutch culture is taking place.

If we manage and use this diversity well we are in a very good position for the future.“



K. Riesch | Foto: Schröder

„Inner German differences should not be neglected – the „third culture“ creates a common basis.“

Kerstin Riesch is heading the netservice for the East Berlin region and with this she is active in a very masculine and technical division.

„By reason of our history and the field of work in which I work, I face bigger differences in terms of corporate culture on a German-German (East and West)-level than on a German-Swedish level. I feel a big difference in terms of leadership style when I compare the Hamburg and respectively Cottbus managers and the managers from Berlin. When it comes to leadership and change of corporate culture I feel, together with my team, closer to the Swedes and perceive this influence as right and good.

Pertaining to gender-diversity it looks pretty bad in my area since among all managers in the technical department I am the only women. In order to change this I support pupils and students who focus on MINT-subjects (MINT stands for mathematics, informatics, natural sciences and technology) as mentor.

“During the different steps of my career, great mentors were on my side, who supported and developed me. All my mentors were from Vattenfall and were fighting together with me against the glass ceiling. Today we campaign with a VIDA (diversity into the boards) list for a seat on the board. This is our contribution for change, this is possible in our corporate culture.“

Ideally diversity is being understood as lived and applied philosophy. It is about reviewing subject matters openly and with all its diversities of perspectives, and meanwhile learning from each other. In the future Vattenfall will intensify the international co-operation and the cross-country organisation will become self-evident. Colleagues will exchange across borders and benefit from the different experiences. Also the topic „women in leadership positions“ will be experienced across the entire group and continues to have a high significance – so that a women with kids in a leadership position becomes equally natural as in Sweden.