

## Mandantenbrief 04 / 2012



### NON-GERMAN MANAGERS IN GERMANY:

In our experience, a role model for good management tends to be low-key, reflective and non judgemental. It seems clear that a strong national emphasis is not especially helpful in this. Yet obviously in business some national traits are reflected and we recommend making use of strengths and to not emphasize weaknesses.

Estimates for non-German managers working in Germany run into tens of thousands. If working for a sizable Mittelstands-company, located in a fairly small town, manager and family may also feel somewhat exotic if coming from another region within Germany.

Typical general characteristics of managers in Germany are

- ✦ “Führung durch Fachwissen”. The average German manager knows exactly what the – female managers are somewhat rare – is taking about and leads – because he is a subject expert. Excellent subject expertise ranks first in becoming a manager
- ✦ “Detailversessenheit”. He is likely to be keen on details and the question “what” is often discussed with passion and at length. The question “why”, “how” and “at what costs” are often less relevant but by no means forgotten
- ✦ “Zielorientiertheit”. With little room for ambiguity or doubt. This may lead to denial of new insights and stubbornly sticking to a chosen way of working. “If it does not work, we double the power, by no means we seek an alternate solution” – the later would mean losing face
- ✦ Bias on hierarchy, with little room for spontaneity – less with younger managers
- ✦ Preferred way of working: efficient, effective, flexible - in this order

Characteristics of employees in Germany

- ✦ Often technical – specialists in their field, yet lacking a more general overview
- ✦ Well disciplined individuals and coherent as a group
- ✦ Order takers, not decision makers, with a keen eye for their “Arbeitsplatz”

Strongholds of non-Germany Managers

- ✦ Ability to understand both their own and German culture
- ✦ Coordination across departmental, organizational and geographical boundaries
- ✦ Specific know-how that is not a local stronghold – e.g. process view as opposed to functional view
- ✦ Soft skills – paradoxically often seen as not-important by German managers

Prerequisites for being successful as non-German Manager in Germany

- ✦ Clear organizational mandate for you as person and manager
- ✦ Plan changes to existing way of working carefully and then implement them quickly
- ✦ Focus on own subject expertise, as this increases acceptance dramatically
- ✦ Willingness to increase cross cultural understanding and willingness to learn German – Do so!

A number of non-German managers and their families we personally know were quite sceptical when coming to Germany as the country is often seen as formal, uninviting and not attractive. However, with very few exceptions managers actually enjoy working and families like to live in the unassuming yet modern and “normal” country that is nowadays Germany.

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