

## **Defining Intercultural Competencies**

A Cross-Cultural Comparison as Attempt to Establish the  
Measurability of being Successful as an Interculturally  
Competent Person

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## **Abstract**

### Defining Intercultural Competencies

In the search for an answer to the question of whether intercultural competence can be defined, let alone measured, this thesis starts by exploring some theoretical models from the field of intercultural research. The focus is on expatriates who moved from Austria to Hong Kong and their acculturation process in the new environment. The theoretical component helps to understand some basic terms, theories, models, and background. On the one hand, terms such as "culture" and "interculturality" are addressed, and on the other hand, theories such as "acculturation", "culture shock" and the "Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)" are explained. The history of Hong Kong's origin is also discussed for understanding the local identity of the residents and its development. For the empirical component, interviews were conducted and analyzed to explore the issue of intercultural competence and how to measure its success. In addition, the data collected will be used to determine what constitutes an interculturally competent businessperson and what it means to be interculturally successful.

The investigations of the collected data show that intercultural competence is an individual construct, which strongly depends on a person's intrinsic perception of their environment and the people in it, but also on a certain degree of a person's intercultural sensitivity and a set of matching traits. Empathy, openness, adaptability, interest in new things, and flexibility have been standing out as particularly useful traits for being intercultural competent, especially for traveling business people and expatriates.

## Kurzreferat

### Definieren interkultureller Kompetenzen

Auf der Suche nach der Antwort auf die Frage, ob sich denn interkulturelle Kompetenz definieren oder geschweige denn messen lässt, führt der Weg dieser Arbeit zu Beginn über einige theoretische Modelle des interkulturellen Forschungsbereiches. Im Mittelpunkt stehen Expatriates, die von Österreich nach Hongkong gezogen sind und deren Akkulturationsprozess in der neuen Umgebung.

Der theoretische Teil der Thesis hilft dabei, einige grundlegenden Begriffe, Theorien, Modelle und Hintergründe zu verstehen. Zum einen werden Begriffe wie „Kultur“ und „Interkulturalität“ aufgegriffen, zum anderen werden Theorien wie „Akkulturation“, „Kulturschock“ und das „Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)“ erklärt. Auch die Entstehungsgeschichte Hongkongs wird zum Verständnis der lokalen Identität der Einwohner und deren Entwicklung besprochen. Für den praktischen, empirischen Teil wurden Interviews geführt und analysiert, um die Frage nach interkultureller Kompetenz und deren Erfolgsmessbarkeit zu erforschen. Außerdem soll durch die erhobenen Daten ermittelt werden, was eine interkulturell kompetente Geschäftsperson tatsächlich ausmacht, welche Eigenschaften dafür von Vorteil sind und was es generell bedeuten kann, interkulturell erfolgreich zu sein.

Die Untersuchungen der erhobenen Daten zeigen, dass es sich bei interkultureller Kompetenz um ein durchaus individuelles Konstrukt handelt, welches stark von der intrinsischen Wahrnehmung einer Person bezüglich ihres Umfeldes und den Personen darin abhängt, aber auch von einem persönlichen Maß an interkultureller Sensitivität und einem Set von passenden Eigenschaften. Empathie, Offenheit, Anpassungsfähigkeit, Interesse an Neuem und Flexibilität sind als besonders nützliche Eigenschaften zum Ausleben erfolgreicher interkultureller Kompetenz vor allem für reisende Geschäftsleute wie Expatriates hervorgehoben worden.

# Table of Contents

<b>List of Figures</b>	<b>VI</b>
<b>List of Tables</b>	<b>VII</b>
<b>1. Introduction and Research Background</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Empirical Basis	2
1.2. Research Background	2
1.3. Research Question	3
<b>2. Being Interculturally Competent</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1. Expatriates & Flexpatriates	6
2.1.1. Expatriates	6
2.1.2. Flexpatriates	7
2.2. What is Culture?	8
2.3. Interculturality	10
2.4. Intercultural Points of Contact: Now and Then	11
2.5. COVID-19 Circumstances and Their Impact on Being an Expatriate	12
<b>3. Adapting Abroad</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1. Concepts, Models, and Theories	14
3.1.1. The Acculturation Concept	15
3.1.2. The Culture Shock Theory	19
3.1.3. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity	22
3.2. Possible Cultural Challenges	24
3.3. Supportive Tools to “Settle In”	25
3.4. The Often-Forgotten Reintegration	26
<b>4. Hong Kong</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1. The Emerging of the City	29
4.2. “One Country, Two Systems”	31
4.3. The Hot Spot for Globalization	33
4.4. So, what makes the local?	34
<b>5. The “Successful Interculturally Competent Businessperson” – Empirical Research</b>	<b>37</b>
5.1. Interview Design	37
5.2. Candidate Information	38
5.3. Relocation Preparation	41

5.4.	Making First Contact	41
5.5.	Impact on Business Relationships	42
5.6.	Expats meeting Expats	43
5.7.	Calling it “Home”	44
5.8.	Useful Traits and Skills	44
5.9.	Reintegration	46
5.10.	The Factor of Individuality	47
<b>6.</b>	<b>Managing a Culturally Diverse Team</b>	<b>49</b>
6.1.	Preparation for Taking Over a Team Abroad	50
6.2.	Challenges and Intercultural Differences	51
6.3.	Internal Measures to Strengthen Intercultural Conflict	53
6.4.	Impacts on Transcultural Management due to COVID-19	53
6.5.	Conclusion	54
<b>7.</b>	<b>Cultural Competence as an Individual Construct</b>	<b>56</b>
7.1.	Acculturation and Intercultural Competence	56
7.1.1.	The Acculturation Process	57
7.1.2.	An Extension on Intercultural Competence	58
7.1.3.	Being Interculturally Competent in Hong Kong	58
7.2.	The Intercultural Businessperson in Hong Kong	59
<b>8.</b>	<b>Outlook and Critical Evaluation</b>	<b>62</b>
8.1.	Critical Evaluation - Research	62
8.2.	Critical Evaluation - Interviews	62
8.3.	Outlook for further research	63
<b>9.</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>65</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>66</b>
	<b>Appendix</b>	<b>70</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Example of Berry's Framework for Understanding Acculturation	17
Figure 2: Original U-Curve Example according to Lysgaard	21
Figure 3: The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity	23
Figure 4: The W-Curve	28
Figure 5: Identity Trends in Hong Kong, 1997-2013	32

## List of Tables

Table 1: Research directions within psychology dealing with the topic of culture	9
Table 2: Expatriates Interview Analysis	48

# **1. Introduction and Research Background**

Intercultural competency is about the competence or ability to act, react, and behave properly and with aiming for the best possible outcome while interacting with and within different cultures with different people. In this paper we want to explore, how intercultural competency is perceived by a specific target group: businesspeople, who temporarily must physically shift their center of life to another country. Over time, a name has been established for this special group of people: expatriates. It will also be investigated, if it is possible to deem somebody successful in practicing these intercultural competencies and who might determine if somebody is in fact successful in doing so. The findings will be put in relation with the process of acculturation, in order to determine to what extent, if any, a causal relationship exists.

The relevance of this topic is based on the increasing internationalization of companies. Due to that internationalization, more emphasis is placed on experienced and qualified staff who can be transferred to new branches. An internal change offers significant advantages to the company, such as no or lower costs for retraining, an expedited recruiting process, and the loyalty to the current employer is already established. It offers opportunities to the employees as well, as in many cases the transfer involves a promotion or furtherment of career. This can also be seen as a long-term return on investment for the company, as the employee will gain valuable knowledge transfer during their time abroad which will be brought back once their expatriation has ended. A successful integration into the host country is therefore mandatory for the company, not just to mark the new placement as the correct choice and see an uprising in the business, but also for the aspired future success of both the company and its employees.

Now that the internationalization of almost everything possible is already quite advanced and rapidly progressing, research regarding this topic is developing as well, especially when it comes to the field of "interculturalization". Studies in areas such as cross-cultural business relations (Zhu et al., 2006), socialization and acculturation processes (Chiriboga, 2004), and cross-cultural adaptation (Nunes et al., 2017) were conducted and some researchers (Herder, 1887; Harris, 1989; Helfrich, 2013) try to show, that a person is not born with a fixed cultural behavior but instead the given environmental influences in the course of growing up are deeply impressed in that person's behavior, the thinking, and the way of dealing with other people. According to them, culture and subsequent culturally consistent behavior is learned and therefore dependent on the environment.



## **1.1. Empirical Basis**

The following contents of this thesis are generated using both research and empirical data in the form of individual interviews. The basic parameters were carefully considered, especially for the selection of the candidates, including, due to the relevance for this work, the origin, the professional choice to migrate to the same destination country - in this case this is Hong Kong -, and the minimum length of stay in the host country. In this case, the interviewed persons all originally come from Austria and have moved to Hong Kong for at least three years because of their work. Based on these interviews, it will be possible to get a direct insight into the interviewees' process of the individual acculturation phases. The findings will make it clear to what extent these individual phases essentially differ - or not - and whether a smoother transition to the new culture was automatically given due to the personal qualifications and (pre-)existing characteristics and qualities of the candidates. The questions asked during the interviews were carefully selected based on the topic of this thesis and the individual perception of each candidate's acculturation process in the host country and they were individually adapted so that each interview candidate was able to freely talk about his or her experiences during an open conversation.

To properly show the intended results for the relations between the intercultural competence of an individual and the influence, the impact, and the importance that might have when applied on a whole team, an additional interview was added in a later stage of the emerge of the thesis. The candidate is a so-called flexpatriate (term will be further explained in chapter 2.1) and was chosen due to his experience as a team leader and his knowledge of leading teams in different locations at the same time.

## **1.2. Research Background**

Why the question of intercultural competence and why Hong Kong of all places? In order to answer these questions, we will first have to take a closer look at the concept of intercultural competence throughout the paper. It is a personal skill that is not absolutely necessary for all people but is ever more desired and even expected due to the changing times and the trans-nationalization of the business world, particularly within companies that deal with foreign and international companies one way or another. When businesspeople deal with partners from other nations - be it in a professional context on site or across borders - it is desirable that these people have the certain sensitivity and the necessary skills to conduct business in the appropriate way in respect to the person they are dealing with. This is an important way to guarantee the long-term success of a

company that intends to grow globally and to compete on the world market. (Gersten, 1990)

There are other factors that must be determined in the course of this work in order to be able to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. What this thesis ultimately aims for, is to explore the possible correlation that the acculturation process and intercultural competence might have, especially when it comes to working professionals who have to move abroad for their company to fill a new position.

In the further course of this paper, we will explore important characteristics and traits of interculturally competent persons. By working on this topic, the aim is to create awareness for the difficulties expatriates can face when arriving at a new destination and how to deal with them. We will fall back on some already existing models and literature regarding acculturation and cultural processes and challenges and explain them in order to create a basic understanding.

Some possible cultural challenges will be explored from the perspective of expatriates in Hong Kong. In the course of this paper, research will be conducted to create a better understanding of how expatriates perceive general intercultural competence themselves. The outcome of this research could then be the optimization of their integration and acculturation experience, both in their professional and private life.

Hong Kong was chosen as a location for several reasons, such as the large number of internationally operating companies that already have branches there. This includes companies that are also based in Austria, such as Lenovo, Vivatis, Hilti, Hutchison, and Blum, just to name a few. Despite the current political situation in that part of the country, Hong Kong is experiencing an upward trend in economic growth and can be seen as an important gate for foreign companies to get into the Chinese and Asian Market and Chinese companies use Hong Kong as a gateway for internationalizing their company. Another reason for choosing Hong Kong was its status of a “Hot Spot for Globalization”. The conditions for international cooperation and growth are beneficial due to the city’s popularity as an international meeting place for companies and entrepreneurs from all over the world. This factor also allows for the findings in this research to be applied when analyzing other such hot spots, or internationalized cities comprised of a large international expatriate population.

### **1.3. Research Question**

With a strong focus and interest on the cosmopolitan, intercultural competencies of an expatriate, and after taking all the already mentioned information into account, the presented work will try to answer the following determined research question:

*“How does being intercultural competent as a businessperson in Hong Kong influence the acculturation process while trying to settle in?”*

The following questions will be a guide to answering the main question and will assist in staying oriented on answering the thesis:

- Are there benchmarks of being intercultural competent? How can we determine that somebody is and another one is not?
- Is successful acculturation an outcome of being intercultural competent or vice versa?
- Can we assume that a well experienced integration implicates that there were existing cultural similarities or advantageous preconditions in the first place?
- Can we also assume, that intercultural competency is an individual construct of personal competency that can be acquired and learned over time?
- What are possible ways to soften the impact of facing cultural challenges for those who experience them?

Each of these questions serves to clarify the facts more precisely, to research new facts, and to create an understanding for these individual and newly acquired facts. Ultimately, the aim is to be able to answer the actual research question by researching and answering all the preceding questions in such a way that eventually the clearest possible and most understandable definition of an intercultural competent person can be presented. In the further course of this work, the concrete aim is to explore further factors using both the discussion of the theoretical aspects and the empirical data collected. The aim is to clarify which competencies are necessary, or at least pose a clear advantage, in order to cope with the obvious differences and changes in everyday life in a new and culturally different environment.

So, our focus will be on answering the research question and therefore trying to determine what qualities, characteristics, preconditions, and mindset a (business)person needs, in order to call themselves *intercultural competent* or see other people in that way. In other words: if there is a way of actually describing what makes an intercultural competent businessperson and if it is possible to pinpoint it down to an understandable and generally admissible answer.

While looking for the answer to that question, we will also consider the following assumptions and try to explore their relevance:

Assumption 1:

Being an intercultural competent person is an individual construct of personal competency that can be acquired and learned over time.

Assumption 2:

The faster a person settles into a new country, the more interculturally competent he or she is.

## **2. Being Interculturally Competent**

In order to understand what this work refers to and what it aims at, a few terms are important to understand first. The paper will categorically focus on the essential explanation of the terms, since in the further course of the work the goal was set to fathom this circumstance of "intercultural competence", and above all its measurability and exact definition on the basis of examples and individual reports of experience. It is essential to understand what is meant when we speak of expatriates or, occasionally, of flexpatriates. Here, too, the description that is most likely and best related to the outcome of this paper is used. Then, we will explain the theoretical background of "interculturality" for comprehensibility to consolidate a general understanding. Terms like "culture" are thrown around almost every day, which makes it quite reasonable to assume that people generally do know the common meaning behind it, even though that perception and knowledge shifts from person to person. Equally relevant is that, unlike "back in the day" - that is, in the days when neither travel nor digital contact was as easy as it is today -, today there are many more points of contact and opportunities to experience this foreign culture. What has changed here and what is still different today will be presented in the following in a compact and comprehensible matter.

### **2.1. Expatriates & Flexpatriates**

#### **2.1.1. Expatriates**

It has proven to be quite difficult to get an accurate description of the term "expatriate" from existing literature, as each author expresses himself in his own way with a lot of freedom in personal description. Prevailing explanations are broadly pointing in the same direction, but the meaning is nowhere specifically mentioned. It is therefore likely to a large extent that, due to the global popularity of the term, the meaning behind it is conveyed quite clearly. According to Mnich (2017), the term is explained in such a way that it concerns internationally active professionals who live in another country or another culture but are not naturalized in that location. This is also where the difference to immigrants lies since the expats are expecting to return to home (often not determined by time) and therefore are not, nor want to be, naturalized and do not necessarily wish to accept the culture of the new living space. The word "expatriate" is made of the Latin words "ex" - which means "out of, out" - and "patria" - the fatherland. They are

businesspeople, who temporarily move their center of life to a new location, in order to fulfill their business.

Example: A 55-year-old businessman who receives an offer from his company is supposed to move to Hong Kong for an indefinite period of time, but for at least three years, to run an office there. If our person accepts this offer, moves away from his home country or his current place of residence, and temporarily moves the center of his life to that city in Asia, he can call himself an expatriate.

However, when talking about an expatriate, it can again be distinguished between two groups. Both groups intend on making their stay temporary:

1. There are those who are sent by a company to a new destination for a further career step / internal change.
2. There are those who dare to take the step into being an expatriate on their own and go to a new country on their own initiative to work in a company there, to start their own company, or for other reasons.

Workers who are sent abroad by companies are often there not only for personal development, but also to acquire new knowledge. This knowledge should already be of great benefit to the domestic market or location during the transfer, but especially after its completion and the expatriate's return. The aim is to gain knowledge about, for example, technologies, networks, local products, business structures, social practices, characteristics and culture-related behavior, as well as about the foreign markets and the purchasing behavior of the inhabitants, since much more can be learned on site than from a distance. (Doetsch, 2016)

### **2.1.2. Flexpatriates**

In addition to the expatriates, there is a group of so-called flexpatriates, a somewhat newer term that combines “flexible” and “expatriates”, a less Latin combination and more English creation of a new word. Broken down, these are flexible expatriates. But what does it mean to be a flexible expatriate? Basically, it's about businesspeople who have business to conduct at international destinations, such as assignments, teams, meetings, where their presence is required for a short period of time. This model does not see the need to relocate the employee rather than have him/her travel back and forth.

Example: A 55-year-old businessman who has some business abroad to attend to is supposed to travel from his company to various international offices, trade fairs, meetings, and other occasions. These trips will never be long because his presence is solemnly expected for the duration of the conducted business itself. So, he does not have to

relocate the center of his life but can undertake all these trips from his home base. The flexpatriates therefore got their name from this flexible and entertaining model of taking frequent business trips to different countries and cultures. (Mayerhofer et al., 2004)

To summarize: Both expatriates and flexpatriates are groups of people who are abroad for professional reasons. Both terms are differentiated from one another in that one is about a global career with long-term stays abroad and the other is about global mobility with more frequent but shorter stays at different destinations. Both can encounter cross-cultural problems during their stay - regardless of the length of time spent there.

## 2.2. What is Culture?

Culture is an important topic of this thesis and will be mentioned in various chapters. For proper understanding it is necessary to briefly explain this term and its meaning. There are several explanations for it, depending on the area and the topic, in which such an explanation is looked for. Often, especially in common usage, the term "culture" is differentiated in two different perspectives, especially when it comes to the usage of objective and subjective. The objective culture deals with "the institutional aspects of culture, such as political and economic systems, and [...] the products of culture, such as art, music, cuisine, and so on", while the subjective culture includes "the experience of the social reality formed by a society's institutions - in other words, the worldview of a society's people." (Bennett & Bennett, 2004)

In psychology, for instance, this term is also of great research relevance and has therefore been subordinated to its own subject areas. The main center of focus is formed by the cultural differences instead of the otherwise typical individual. The following table according to Helfrich (2013) is very aptly summarized and shows the information sought in a very clear and understandable way:

Research direction	Research Goal	Research Assumption	Example
<i>Cross-cultural psychology</i>	Investigation of the relationship between psychological variables on the one hand and socio-cultural, ecological, and	Existence of more universal mental structures and processes which can show culture-specific modifications	Investigation of the degree of adolescent aggression (psychological variable) in dependance of the cultural shaped upbringing style

	biological variables on the other hand		(socio-cultural variable)
<i>Cultural psychology</i>	Investigation of the way, how cultural traditions and social practices in behavior and experience are expressed	Fundamental cultural diversity of mental structures and processes	Examination of special forms of psychotherapy on the basis of a Buddhist's image of mankind
<i>Indigenous psychology</i>	Investigation of experience and behavior based on the premises, theories, and methods that were developed in one's own culture	Fundamental cultural diversity of mental structures and processes	Investigation of the intelligence on a base of a local understanding of thinking
<i>Intercultural psychology</i>	Application-oriented study of encounters between members of different cultural backgrounds in the service of practical management of communication and interaction problems.	Trainability of competent intercultural behavior	Identification of key behavioral standards of a foreign culture and development of training programs to adapt to such standards

Table 1: Research directions within psychology dealing with the topic of culture

Source: Helfrich, 2013

It is very clear to see which different perspectives one can have on the meaning and the workings or the effects of culture. All of the theories mentioned in Table 1 are of relevance to us in this work, but the last-mentioned area of intercultural psychology can surely be emphasized again, due to the significance it has in this paper.

From the anthropological point of view on the other hand, culture was defined more than a hundred years ago in such a way that it emerges as an inevitable consequence - and not as a contradiction - to human nature, especially considering the "phylogenetic tradition", which results from growing up and getting to know the behaviors and manners manifested in a cultural environment. If we split society into many individual parts, each of these parts will have its own kind of culture, which in many points can closely overlap with



other cultures of other parts, but at least as many points will vary in their manifestation. (Herder, 1887)

Harris (1989) describes the term culture as “the learned, socially appropriated traditions and ways of life of the members of a society, including their structured, consistent ways of thinking, feeling, and acting”. Thus, in this sense the term culture refers to the shared environment and the values and behaviors that are passed on there. Sometimes people may not be able to grasp these behaviors and habits properly or do not really notice them at all, because they are built into their everyday life and being as “normality”. Everything happens automatically, without worrying too much about the “how do I do this now or how is it supposed to be done”. When a person grows up in a society, he/she is confronted with different points of contact with that culture, which influences and shapes his/her thinking and acting and happens simply through active participation. It is a process, and this process does not have to be chained to a single culture. Depending on the environment and individual involvement, this can also vary and even change, for example if one moves to another country and takes on the culture there. (Helfrich, 2013)

Culture is therefore a product, a process, and a construct at the same time, all mirroring a society's behavioral habits, values, and tendencies which are passed on and adopted by everyone who's being a part of that society. It is the essence of people, built in deeply in their existence, influencing their thinking and doing.

### **2.3. Interculturality**

The term "interculturality" is explained in the German dictionary *Duden* in the following two ways:

1. *Awareness that is particularly sensitive to the cultural, linguistic, or religious diversity of the members of a society [and is focused on respect or acceptance of diversity].*
2. *Branch of science dealing with the individual and social living and working conditions of different cultures in the globalized world.*

The explanation that an intercultural event is an occurrence that can arise through verbal or non-verbal communication between interacting persons also applies in the progress of this paper. It is the process that takes place between cultures, but on a more individual level in the context of personal interaction. Something happens during that process. When two different cultures meet, one may shake hands in greeting, while the other may not. What results from this cannot be predicted, but there are various ways in which the parties involved can behave; shake, do not shake, or do something completely different. By doing this, they create a new "interculture" between themselves with their

actions. This happens in a fraction of a second and does not necessarily need verbal communication, but fails without any kind of communication. (Bolten, 2007)

The scenario of “interculturality” therefore is a good example of people from different cultures, with different habits and values, interacting with each other and creating kind of a synergy: a third possibility of an outcome of that handshake situation through mutual influence, without necessarily steering it in a direction but rather acting and reacting with the other. It might help understanding one another better.

## **2.4. Intercultural Points of Contact: Now and Then**

Before the widespread implementation of the internet, regular air traffic, the globalization of so many companies, other factors that endorse migration, immigration, and an encounter with foreign culture was not a daily occurrence. It was noticeable when someone who was visiting the region behaved differently, looked different, spoke differently, or even smelled differently. Different from what somebody was used to, what somebody might know in their culture and what they grew up with. To notice this difference in someone else might lead to an internally occurring incomprehension of the experience and an instant change of sentiment towards the person or the situation. Foreign and inexplicable often triggers a feeling of aversion if a person does not have the mindset to deal with it. Nowadays there are more possibilities of creating direct contact with somebody from another culture, may this be through different business-related measures (such as business exchanges through joint-ventures, online meetings, emails), short-trips, vacations to places far away thus reachable faster than it was imaginable just a century ago, through blogs or other platforms on the internet, or a simple phone call. There can also be indirect contact with cultures when a company has to restructure their work process outside of the known company culture in order to being able to compete on the world market and adapt certain ways to more international ones. (Helfrich, 2013)

It is therefore acceptable that the behavior of the individual towards foreign cultures has also changed over the past years, especially if this individual has already had, or regularly had, contact with other cultures via a modern or classical medium. It is becoming more normal to be confronted with other cultures on a daily basis. These encounters may possibly strike some people at the beginning, but one has the possibility to adapt to it, whereby the competence for interculturality in an individual sometimes grows without really being noticed by themselves.

Compared to the past, there is much more individual contact nowadays - whether direct or indirect - with other cultures, even if one is perhaps not aware of it. This added value of contact also gives an expatriate, for example, more opportunities to prepare for

relocation without having to go through the same hassle as was the case a few decades earlier. In the course of this work, it may therefore be relevant to take those changes into account that have occurred worldwide over the course of time.

## **2.5. COVID-19 Circumstances and Their Impact on Being an Expatriate**

In 2020, COVID-19 caused a global pandemic. The private lives of all people were drastically changed, the social area is hardly recognizable, travel is only possible under the most urgent conditions, and much has transformed within the economy. Including the way office work is done. The classic office job no longer exists and wherever it is possible, home office is offered and practiced. Never have so many conversations been held digitally as in this time. However, it has also never been easier to have such conversations digitally than now. The current state of digitization and technology came in handy with the forced but necessary evictions from the offices that were inevitably increasing. A business partner or colleague can be thousands of kilometers away, but that no longer matters. Computer, camera, and microphone on, all interlocutors in front of their own screen anywhere in the world, and the meeting can start. The only thing that is required for this is the equipment: some hardware, the necessary software, and access to the internet. Some companies (including international companies with Austrian founding headquarters such as Bachmann electronic, Blum, OMICRON electronics, and many more) recorded a considerable increase in growth. As a result of this growth and advancement of the economy (especially in the food sector, construction sector, and pharma sector), the new hires of employees are not stagnating in many of these companies and the recruiting continues. (Peintner, 2020)

Problems start to occur when a company needs an internal employee to emerge into a new position in another country, when he or she can not leave their home base due to the current COVID-regulations in place. Those expatriates, who were unable to move to other countries, are mostly doing their new job from home without ever having set foot in that other, new temporary home. One could almost call them virtual expatriates, since it is very likely that they have already signed an employment contract but are currently unable to travel to their new place of work due to the travel restrictions and work completely remotely and digitally. Apart from a few legal difficulties the company might face, this could dampen the experience and might give the whole dislocation and teaming up with new colleagues and business partners a rather lethargic start on its way to success. In such cases there can still be daily virtual contact with the new culture, as both new business partners and new colleagues shape the new work environment, but almost

everything is lost from the expected transnational exchange, which would have taken place not only during digital meetings but for almost 24 hours a day.

The circumstances of the current COVID-19 global pandemic are most definitely impacting the lifestyle and the work environment of supposed-to-be expatriates in a rather intense way without giving them a clear outlook on how things will turn out to be for them. Being an expatriate without being able to properly live up to that term and without getting the expected chance to acculturate to the new surroundings makes it hard to believe that the occupation is currently as desirable for some people as it once was, especially if one is supposed to work and live in new and potentially exciting surroundings, with a new network of people, but is forced to work alone from home instead.

### **3. Adapting Abroad**

By and large, adapting and integrating abroad is ultimately about finding one's way in a strange new environment, and perceiving and respecting the new culture that one encounters there. Before one can speak of a completed, successful "acculturation", "adaptation" or "integration", however, the process must be completed in an individual way as best as possible. The whole process starts with intensive contact and confrontation with the new and foreign culture. (Čuhlová, 2019)

It is important to understand what it means to settle in a new environment and what different forms there are in terms of the intensity of acceptance and absorption of a new culture. There are those who fully embrace a new culture and want to identify with the locals in the best possible way for the duration of their stay and those who know that they will only be there for a certain period of time and who do not consider this process of adaptation necessary or only deem it necessary to a limited extent. As important as the process of fitting in is, an equal amount of attention should go to the fact that at the beginning there might be some challenges one has to face. All of that is part of the process and will be explained in this following chapter.

#### **3.1. Concepts, Models, and Theories**

The more people moved away from their homeland and into a foreign country, the more the process of "moving away" and "moving in" became a relevant research topic. From this research and analysis, many different concepts emerged in which solutions and explanations were sought to explain, simplify, and understand the process of migrants adapting in a new culture. This is followed by a description of some selected concepts and an explanation of their basic facts. The individual concepts are explained in detail in order to be able to get a basic impression of what is to be achieved and to what extent such a model can be used to help with a transferring to a new cultural environment. Even if such concepts exist for a good reason and offer support in preparation, especially in advance, it is always important not to place too much emphasis on them and to act accordingly to one's own thoughts and feelings. Otherwise, many impressions might be lost or misinterpreted during the familiarization phase when trying to adapt.

Not just the following models, but many other existing cultural models that try to determine the acculturation process and intercultural competencies might have shifted in terms of perception and usability during the last decades, especially if scrutinized under the aspect of globalization. Technological advancements, such as the internet, online communities, mobile phones and other devices made communication easier and quicker,

which does not only apply to business discussions. When a person is moving to a new country and only has the option of sending a letter home or going to a payphone, the longing for the familiar and homesickness might spread faster than when that person can simply reach into their pocket, pull out a mobile phone, and create a connection with friends and family back home within seconds. Such possibilities make contact with the country of origin much easier and might take a lot of psychological stress out of the fact of the physical distance.

### **3.1.1. The Acculturation Concept**

Getting used to a foreign or unknown culture is based on several factors, which can vary individually from person to person and thus accelerate, slow down, complicate, or facilitate the integration process behind it. The result ultimately depends on various characteristics of the migrant person which they have in advance or not. (Berry, 1992)

This section will now look at the intrinsic changes that occur when a person decides to leave his or her familiar home, culture, and environment in order to move to a foreign culture that is probably previously unknown to the person. The term "acculturation" is not necessarily self-explanatory at first glance though it could be understood as a kind of an approach to get close to a culture to some extent. Roughly speaking, it is about arriving in a new place or culture and acclimatizing there. It is not just about arriving and being there, but also a far more complex process in the background, that one must live through and is important in order to ultimately speak of "successful acculturation", which is not always the case. Strictly speaking, the question can be asked how people acquire their cultural traits and also change as a result of the process (Zick, 2010) whereby it is important here to not confuse this definition and the meaning of it with the term "enculturation" - the child's learning of all the cultural elements and the social environment while growing up (Esser, 2018). Over the years, as this topic has been increasingly addressed, other terms have been circulated and used in reference to the topic of migration and its field of research, some as stand-alone terms and some as substitutes for the word acculturation (though sometimes not synonymous). These terms include biculturalism, multiculturalism, integration, and globalization (Sam & Berry, 2018). According to Redfield et al. (1963), acculturation can be described as follows:

*„...those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups [...] under this definition acculturation is to be distinguished from culture change, of which it is but one aspect, and assimilation, which is at times a phase of acculturation, is not only a phenomenon which frequently takes place without the occurrence*

*of the types of contact between peoples specified in the definition above, but also constitutes only one aspect of the process of acculturation” (Zick, 2010)*

In many professional circles, especially in those who deal with the various areas of culture, the concept of acculturation has been researched and written intensively, and much attention has been paid to this area. It should always be noted that here too the individual person plays a major role and that this can result in great differences in adapting to changes in the environment. Capturing and displaying these differences can provide information about how well the acculturation process took place. Based on studies carried out so far (Chiriboga, 2004), it can be assumed that life in a new culture functions better if positive or a greater degree of acculturation has taken place. Depending on the status or progress of a person's acculturation, it can sometimes be determined how “fit” they already are in this new culture and how much weight in comparison to that “new cultural fitness” the left-behind culture of the homeland still has. (Chiriboga, 2004)

So, if the term gets broken down to its essence, acculturation represents a process of learning that includes a process of acquiring ways of acting and behaving through direct imitation and copying from examples that have been lived out. Again, this can only happen if contact is made - a person alone in a new culture who is introverted and does not leave the house will probably never really be able to acculturate in a satisfying way. (Esser, 2018)

If a person wants to get involved and go through this process of acculturation in order to be better adapted to the new environment, this process - like many other personal changes - also entails some risks or possible difficulties or complications. Above all, these risks can be of a mental nature and severely affect the psyche of the person concerned. During this transition, one is in the dichotomy of two cultures and this can cause pure stress. After all, the affected person wants to adapt as best as possible and belong to his new environment through the process of acculturation. (Berry & Kim, 1988)

Thus, the change that is brought about by the confrontation with the new and foreign culture can therefore be of a cultural, but also of a psychological nature. In the end, the acculturation process - since it takes place in different ways from person to person - can be successful to varying degrees and is very often experienced through area-wise adaptation with one step and sphere after another (Esser, 2018):

- Partial acculturation:

The new culture is not adopted completely; parts of it are adopted (often selectively)

- Full acculturation:

The new culture is adopted in a full and complete manner

- Unilateral acculturation:  
The new culture is adopted only unilaterally
- Reciprocal acculturation:  
The new culture is adopted on both sides

J. W. Berry has created several frameworks which have gained popularity in professional circles. One of these models (Berry, 2003) provides the viewer with a good overview and initial understanding of the connections and interrelationships created by the interaction of cultures and the changes that can occur on a personal and individual level (see Figure 1). Sam & Berry (2010) describe acculturation and Berry's framework just mentioned in the most understandable way as follows:

*"To fully comprehend acculturation, one must understand and take into consideration key features of the two original cultural groups (depicted as Culture A and Culture B in Fig. 1) prior to coming into contact with each other. Acculturating individuals and groups bring cultural and psychological qualities with them to the new society, and the new society also has a variety of such qualities. The compatibility (or incompatibility) in cultural values, norms, attitudes, and personality between the two cultural communities in contact needs to be examined as a basis for understanding the acculturation process that is set in motion. It is also important to understand the nature of their contact relationships: Is it one based on domination of one group over the other or on mutual respect or hostility? There is also the need to understand the resulting cultural changes in both groups that emerge during acculturation. No cultural group remains unchanged following culture contact; acculturation is a two-way interaction, resulting in actions and reactions to the contact situation."*

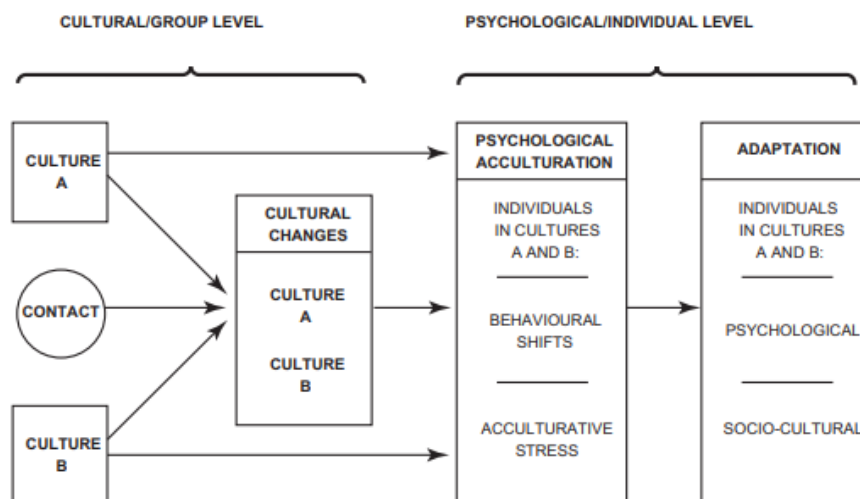


Figure 1: Example of Berry's Framework for Understanding Acculturation

Source: Sam & Berry, 2010



Nonetheless, the changes that take place during the period of adjustment and acquiring of the details of the new culture can bring not only psychological problems but other issues such as problems of a biological, social, or physical nature. (Ward, 2001)

The entire research area of acculturation is a very popular one and there are countless definitions for it, which vary depending on the viewpoint or focus of the research. Although the definitions are all relatively similar, they are subtly different in some fundamental characteristics. This small difference, however, does not make it possible to make a single concrete statement about the "true definition" of acculturation, but it does give us a good picture of what is widely understood by it and the process behind it.

#### 3.1.1.1. Adaptation

Adaptation is a widely used term, that is, especially in common parlance, connected with a feeling of making something or someone fit into a place or an environment. In the fields of anthropologists and other research areas there are other existing explanations for that term as well. To explain that difference of the previous term acculturation, two summarized statements by Berry are sufficient: adaptation is a term that might be used in the same way as acculturation many times, but it actually is a state of being, that occurs after going through a process of integrating at a new place and can be seen as more of a consequence of acculturation than the same as acculturation itself. (Sam & Berry, 2010) In this way, acculturation can be viewed as a kind of facet of adaptation. (Berry, 1980)

#### 3.1.1.2. Assimilation

The third term worth mentioning is assimilation, which is often used on an equal footing with acculturation as well. Strictly speaking, it represents one phase and is often referred to as the desired end state, even if not always completed. The exact definition of this term is also somewhat more difficult than acculturation, as most of the explanations are tied to different theories and specific aspects of the theories. (Zick, 2010) For the necessary understanding in the context of this work however, the concept of assimilation can be summarized as follows: if an acculturation process is more or less complete, and can be assessed as successful, one speaks of assimilation. In this case, the cultural adjustments have already been successfully made and a distinction is defined between four different degrees of assimilation: cognitive, social, identificative and, unlike acculturation, structural assimilation, which involves taking certain positions (Esser, 2018).

### 3.1.2. The Culture Shock Theory

It is completely normal that a certain amount of uncertainty spreads during the first contact with something new, strange, or unfamiliar, and, due to this inner imbalance, the exterior is perceived as shocking, frightening, and often "bad." (Esser, 2018)

The expression "culture shock" was first publicly mentioned by an American cultural anthropologist named Cora DuBois in 1951 while holding a lecture in Chicago at the first Midwest regional meeting of the "Institute of International Education" with the title "culture shock". She described the main problem behind it from an anthropological view and the difficulties of local adjustment during their work in cross-cultural field operations (Goldstein, 2013).

Kalervo Oberg (1954), a Canadian anthropologist, once explained the concept of culture shock as a variation of a minor illness, that had to be handled as such - by considering its cause, the symptoms, and the potential treatment. He explains culture shock as "the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse." What he refers to is the way people are used to doing certain things that are manifested in the subconsciousness, that do not get noticed when done the way they are done. It is what connects a person to their surroundings and the known feeling of habits and belonging when there is a certain way that things are done exactly the way someone is programmed to. If a person moves to another country, things will probably be done differently there and those familiar signs and symbols might be gone. One might not notice it right away or at all, but if those differences of all the tiny, programmed cues manifested inside a person start getting even a light hold of that person's mind, it will affect their integration process and their view of the new place they are supposed to fit in relatively fast. With the decision to leave their familiar surroundings, a person moves into new, foreign territory, after which their understanding of the ways of dealing with people must first be formed. Many of the habits lived in a foreign culture can sometimes not be interpreted correctly. By not understanding these habits right away, one will start to experience a form of culture shock. To what extent it will affect the person depends on various individual factors and people display wide variances in the symptoms. The symptoms can but do not have to consist of the following examples (Oberg 1954):

*„...excessive washing of the hands; excessive concern over drinking water, food, dishes, and bedding; fear of physical contact with attendants or servants; the absentminded, far-away stare (sometimes called the tropical stare); a feeling of helplessness and a desire for dependence on long-term residents of one's own nationality; fits of anger over delays and other minor frustrations; delay and outright refusal to learn the language of the host country; excessive fear of being cheated, robbed, or injured; great concern over minor pains and*

*eruptions of the skin; and finally, that terrible longing to be back home, to be able to have a good cup of coffee and a piece of apple pie, to walk into that corner drugstore, to visit one's relatives, and, in general, to talk to people who really make sense."*

It is important for companies to plan the cost factor of the initial familiarization phase. It is very likely that the agreed service will not be able to be provided 100% at the beginning due to the new circumstances. Many companies anticipate this in advance. In order to calculate how long the adaptation process might take, theories were rarely applied to individual persons, but when this happened it was very often using Lysgaard's (1955) U-curve theory (UCT). This theory represents the original form of the culture shock theory, which mostly speaks of four different levels and according to Oberg (1954) one will go through at least four stages in general (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). When extensive research is carried out in the existing literature, various names are shown for the first few levels, but even if the name of the level may vary, the content and meaning are the same everywhere. The four steps of the theory are: The Honeymoon Stage, the Frustration/Hostility/Rejection Stage, the Adjustment Stage, and the Acceptance/Adaptation Stage. The previous theory was later supplemented by a fifth stage: the Reintegration Stage. This applies if the stay abroad - as is the main topic of this work - has an expiration date and the individual has to return to their home country after a certain period of time (see more under chapter 3.4.). The classic process used in theory usually takes place in the course of the individual stages in such a way that, at the beginning, a rather high degree of enthusiasm and openness towards the new is shown. However, this is followed by a sharp flattening of general well-being and this same enthusiasm, followed by an upswing, which comes about through acceptance and re-evaluation of the situation. (Pederson, 1994)

The UCT works in theory, but the individuality of every single person is not explored in this model.

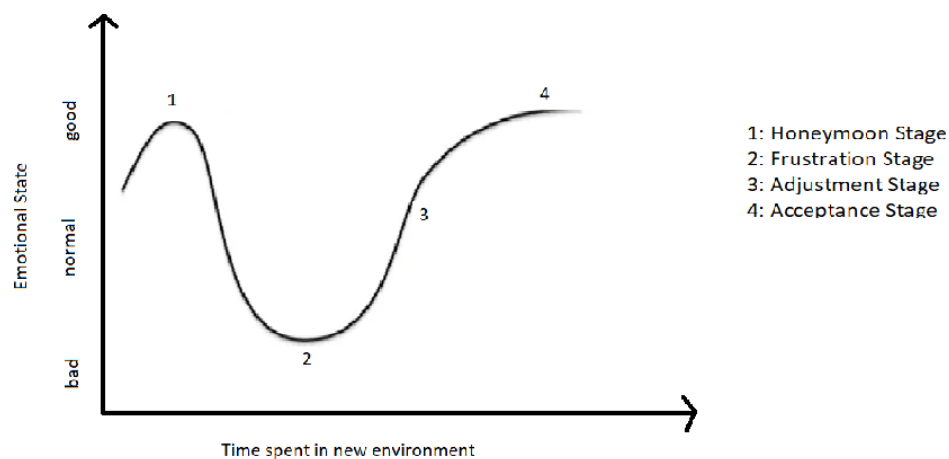


Figure 2: Original U-Curve Example according to Lysgaard

Source: Lysgaard 1955

Oberg (1960) explains the four stages as followed:

#### The Honeymoon Stage

This phase deals with the first impressions in a new country. As it is with a lot of new things, they are almost always better, more beautiful and more impressive than anything that has been known before. This is exactly what this stage is all about (Pedersen 1994). Always depending on individual factors, this can either be over in a few days already, or it might last up to six months.

#### The Frustration Stage

Shortly followed by the peak of the Honeymoon Stage comes the realization of the fact that there are also obstacles that are sometimes not so easy to overcome, such as the language, getting to the office by public transport, different food, etc. In most cases, one quite unconsciously adopts a rather pejorative and sometimes aggressive attitude towards the new country, especially when one sees how the locals light-heartedly deal with all this. This in turn makes them unsympathetic, since the feeling automatically arises that they have something to do with the problems or at least do not care. So, the defensiveness is easily maintained. If this stage with all its feelings can be conquered, one can surely stay in the new country. If that is not the case, that person should leave before it starts being a mental problem.

### The Adjustment Stage

One does not lose all the aggression and the negativity right away but starts to adjust to the noticed problems and troubles. This stage starts, when the person gathers some new knowledge about his/her surroundings, the language, the environment, the people, and so on. Everything gets a little lighter on one's shoulders and even a hint of humor might occur about the personal situation. The way to recovery starts.

### The Acceptance Stage

This stage is the final stage of moving somewhere new and living through the first culture shock. The person accepts the situation and the new customs as his/her *new way of living* and with fully letting oneself grasp every bit of that new life, the person will completely adjust to that and will absolutely and very much like living there. No more aggressions towards the people, the country, or other self-created villains. Just the final acceptance and often enjoyment of being there.

The Culture Shock model is a good starting point to read up on the topic of migration and to deal with immigration into a new culture, especially in order to understand in the first few weeks and months what emotional and psychological strains could happen to someone. The model could be seen and used as mental support. However, one must not rely too precisely on the U-curve, its course, and its effects. Each person is individually equipped in his or her own way with previous knowledge, experience, characteristics, etc., which can be helpful to them during the familiarization phase. To some people, one culture may seem more alien than another, to some people, a recovery of the curve on the ground may not succeed due to various factors. The curve can therefore run very differently: it can stay on the ground longer, create a few more U-curves in itself, run backwards in between, make smaller or larger swings depending on the individual perception of the situation, as well as many other variations. (Pedersen, 1994)

### **3.1.3. The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity**

Milton J. Bennet (2017) developed a theory as early as the 1980s that is about the perception of cultural differences and that the degree of this perception can vary depending on the severity of the situation and in turn depending on the experience and complexity of the situation. It is subject to the acknowledgement that there are alterations and differences between cultures. He tries to illustrate that, with a certain degree of intercultural sensitivity which can be improved through experiences and involvements, a person is conclusively able to improve his/her intercultural communication and

competence. His theory is based on the fact that a person has the ability to perceive that he/she is just encountering another culture and the more pronounced that experience and perception of these cultural differences is, the more distinct is the ability to communicate successfully across cultures. Bennett calls this model the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). He divides it into six different levels (Figure 3) and does not represent different and independent levels, but rather the continuous development process of the way of thinking and learning while dealing with intercultural situations. He divides these six stages into two parts with each three terms. He categorizes the first ones as *ethnocentric* stages and the second ones as *ethnorelative* stages. Ethnocentric meaning that a person's culture is standing in the middle with more focus around that. This could be seen as avoiding *cultural differences*, like he shows with the first three associated stages: denial of differences, defense towards those differences, and minimization of the status of their existing. Ethnorelative meaning, that a person's culture is not in the center anymore but rather perceived in an interplay with other cultures. These ways are more open and developed and move into the direction of *seeking cultural differences*, which is shown with the three other stages: acceptance of the value of those differences, adaptation to a different view of the whole and by taking that into consideration, and integration of those new differences into one's personal ways. (Bennett & Bennett, 2004)

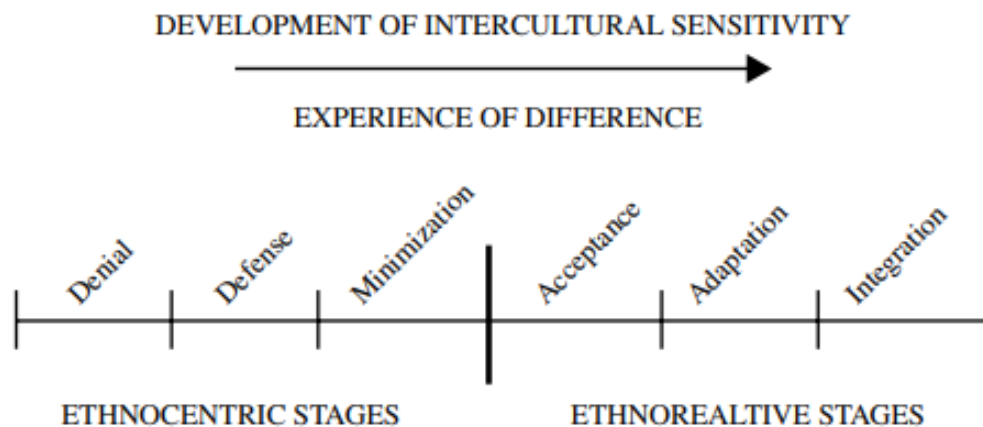


Figure 3: The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

Source: Bennett, 2004

Bennett says:

*"A person can be a witness to a tremendous parade of episodes and yet, if he fails to keep making something out of them [...] he gains little in the way of experience from having been around when they happened. It is not what happens around him that makes a man*

*experienced; it is the successive construing and reconstruing of what happens, as it happens, that enriches the experience of his life.” (Bennett & Bennett, 2004)*

Even though this model is not a typical model for taking into consideration when it comes to adapting at a new location, it might offer some guidelines and a starting ground on discovering one's intercultural sensitivity when self-reflecting in situations with other cultures, that might seem off or more different than expected. Especially whilst trying to settle in at a new location, the chances for cross cultural encounters are relatively high if a person integrates themselves in his/her new environment. For researching a topic such as “intercultural competence” it is important to explore the basics from many different angles and various starting points. Cultural sensitivity is shown as an active learning process, all due to gaining experience and reflecting on it. Analyzing the situations - no matter if they were perceived as “good” or “bad” - will help a person gain knowledge of cultural behavior and how to cope with it. As a result of that, one might already know how to react properly in order to manage the cultural differences eventually occurring during the next encounter with a similar situation as already experienced.

### **3.2. Possible Cultural Challenges**

Moving into a new environment is a tough test for many people and some may imagine this scenario to be easier than it can be. Ideally, you move to a new country, a new culture, unpack your suitcase and immediately feel at home. The mere existence of theories that refute such a situation and explain the different models and levels there are in the course of settling in a new place shows very clearly that in most cases none of these optimal cases occurs. Arriving in a new society can certainly be associated with problems, which can be of different nature, as can be seen very well in the stages of culture shock.

Another existing concept deals with so-called “culture bumps” (Archer, 1991). This phenomenon occurs especially when individual expectations are disappointed, and you find yourself in a situation that has also taken on a completely different form from the people facing you. You feel offended and at the same time you are strongly reminded that you do not belong yet; that you behave differently and think differently. These situations can be very irritating and discouraging, especially if you start with a lot of motivation and vigor. Sometimes such bumps occur very sudden and often leave the person concerned at a loss, without knowing what has just happened or what has gone wrong in what they have just experienced. (Archer & Nickson, 2012)

The most obvious obstacles should not be disregarded, as these might be the cause of frustration, which can serve as a trigger for a person to give up. According to Archer (1991) a few examples for these obstacles are:

- The command of the language
- Correct interpretation of body language
- Correctly understanding and interpreting the message contained in a statement
- Knowing, recognizing, and avoiding possibly compromising gestures
- The right use of humor in the right situations

All these factors and many more can affect the overall integration process and occur as challenges along the way. If the overall experience is not as expected and someone feels misplaced, foreign, or uncomfortable due to similar problems, it might also take its toll on other aspects of life. It might lead to psychological issues which could affect overall health or could lead to difficulties at work or in the private surroundings. In order to avoid being confronted with insurmountable challenges, being well prepared beforehand and getting to know as much as possible about the new society, their culture, and their behaving are essential tools to work with.

### **3.3. Supportive Tools to “Settle In”**

For every person trying to settle abroad, it can come in handy to know where to look for help and what tools to use. After consulting with various expatriates, several useful tools were pointed out by those who went through an adaptive phase. The advice given by them should help other businesspeople to settle in Hong Kong, in order to fully perform at the best level for the company in no time. It is important to arrive with your body and mind in sync, especially if the health-factor is being considered. According to experienced expatriates and websites for expatriates ([internationalscitizens.com](http://internationalscitizens.com), [internations.org](http://internations.org), [expatnetwork.com](http://expatnetwork.com)), these following tips and tools could help settling in easier:

- Internet, Literature, Seminars, Research, Talk to other people from other Companies,
- Get in touch with people at destination upfront, if you do not know any, make new contacts through social media or through other personal contacts
- Go to crowded places and mingle
- Look for Expatriate Magazines, such as “Life as Expat in Hong Kong”, “Expat Living”, with different themed issues, “Hong Kong Living”, “Southside & the Peek”, just to name a few
- Try “being out there” as much as possible to adjust quickly



- Be open, be interested, "just do it", ...

There are also networks for expatriates, such as [internations.org](http://internations.org), [myworldabroad.com](http://myworldabroad.com), [expat.com](http://expat.com), [expatnetwork.com](http://expatnetwork.com), [internationalscitizens.com](http://internationalscitizens.com) and many more. Their sole purpose is to connect people abroad with each other and help them to deal with other issues like housing, legal information, taxes, and other helpful topics. On special networking-events one can meet people of his/her peer or liking.

### **3.4. The Often-Forgotten Reintegration**

One point for most expatriates when their stay abroad comes to an end and the journey back home begins is repatriation. When you go home, you automatically think of returning to something familiar; back to an environment that you know, that you are used to, and that you are familiar with. So, do you need to prepare to move back home? The answer, as is usually the case, is based on an individual level of each person, however, the term "reintegration" exists with a purpose. Models such as the "reverse culture shock model" also exist for a reason: it may well prove difficult to return, depending on cultural, environmental, social, or general economical differences. After a certain point, the former home is no longer experienced as the "familiar country" as it has been in the past (Hirsch, 2003). In the end, one was not only away for a few weeks, but usually for a couple of years, a period in which time in the home country does not stand still. It is also conceivable that, among many other influential factors, the degree of original integration abroad, such as in the host country, can play a major role in the difficulty of reintegration. This is especially the case, if behavioral and thought patterns, norms, and/or values have been adopted that are essentially different from those of the home country. Not to be forgotten are the personal factors that can be equally important here, such as marital and family status and the associated reintegration of the entire family into the "new old environment." (Sussmann, 1986)

Many ethnologists have already dealt with this issue and described it as so-called *double marginalization*:

*"What was experienced during the stay in a foreign cultural environment - being in a foreign country and at the same time remaining a member of one's own society - is repeated on another level upon return: being a member of one's own culture and society and at the same time also being a stranger in one's own country. These diverse experiences of life in the in-between, in the not-more and not-yet, no longer in a foreign country and yet not yet at home [...] (Hirsch 2003)*

In the course of a conceptual study, Velde (2010) examined the deficits in both research and practice on the topic of reintegration and the associated process. One of the results of this study was that, until the publication of the findings, the reintegration phase had actually been neglected in both areas, and returning expatriates in the home country had quite often not been given any understanding or knowledge of the possible complications of reintegration. (Rabet, 2010)

In fact, HR departments only became aware of this problem relatively late, and even today it is not standard practice for companies' "relocation packages" (if there are any) to include information about the possible challenges when the assignment comes to an end, let alone support for proper reintegration at home. Sometimes, this can be ascribed to ignorance and closedness towards this topic inside the companies. (Hirsch, 2003)

The problem in reintegration lies in the fact that the reintegrating person - above all in the sense of the company - should re-establish him-/herself in the environment as quickly as possible in order to contribute to the success of the company with his new knowledge. Often, it is precisely these people who play an important role in this. The integration should therefore take place successfully in professional and private terms and the company should optimally take supportive measures to make the employee's re-entry into the branch as smooth as possible. The rest of the adjustment to the way of life and conditions back in the home country may simply take time. Nevertheless, an important focus should always be placed on the employee's psychological state in order to avoid any mental problems that may arise. After all, the employee has been living in a foreign location for a long time and (in most cases) has actually settled in and acculturated to a very high degree. It is understandable that uprooting from this environment may be associated with a transition period and a renewed acculturation process. (Doetsch, 2016)

The concept of the "Culture Shock Theory" (Oberg, 1960) has already been explained in advance, with the comment that another stage has been added to the four stages mentioned there: "The Reintegration Stage". The so-called "Reverse Culture Shock" model is thus based on the first four stages of the "Culture Shock Theory" from chapter 3.1.2 and the fact that this journey will have an end, which might give the person concerned another of those culture shocks, but this time back in the home country. Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963) extended the U-curve (Lysgaard, 1955) and made a W-curve (see Figure 4) in order to illustrate this scenario and to show that also this last step of temporary emigration follows a process. That reintegration-process is basically consisting of a repetition of the first four stages.

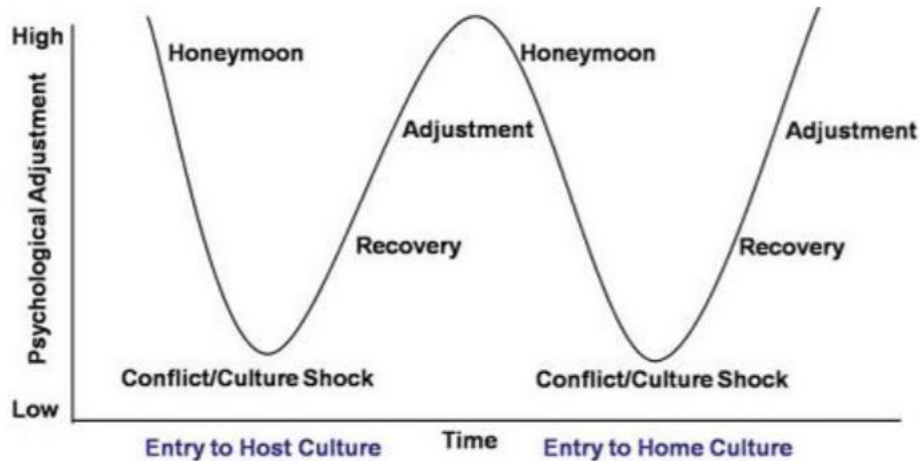


Figure 4: The W-Curve

Source: Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963

Especially the acculturation in the new country, as example the acceptance of the local customs, the local way of acting and thinking, and the local culture, can make the return to the old home country seem alienating and initiate a re-acculturation process. During this process, again quite individually, stages are passed through in various degrees of intensity, like those of Culture Shock Theory. They too show an up and down of emotional states, starting with a euphoric honeymoon stage. Due to the personal, intrinsic change that takes place in the host country, it is also possible that memories and feelings adapt to it in such a way that they are no longer entirely accurate. It is possible that one no longer agrees with old behaviors or can no longer cope with the manners that are common there. Some things also could have changed during the time abroad. Lots of people might have expectations when going home, that might not be met. In that case, returning home can be an as much of an unexpected challenge than going away has been. (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963)

## **4. Hong Kong**

This work is primarily concerned with the measurability of a businessperson's intercultural competence in perspective of the country and cultural differences to the city of Hong Kong. In order to be able to determine this factor of intercultural competence, however, it is first necessary to find out what identity, culturally as well as socially and personally, is rooted in the inhabitants of Hong Kong, where it comes from, what constitutes it, and what has made it to what it is today. After all, we need this information to then be able to determine what qualities a person moving to Hong Kong from abroad needs to bring with him or her, how pronounced the intercultural competence should be, and what this person needs to adapt to in the first place. The aim is simply to examine the overall package of Hong Kong identity. In order to arrive at the desired results, we must first take a deeper look at the history of Hong Kong. This is where the roots and origins of the city lie. Based on this, a lot has happened, and the attention given to this suddenly very attractive corner of the world left its mark on its further history of development. To this day, much has happened, and the city is still going through many and rapid changes, but the popularity and importance of Hong Kong has long been undeniable - especially in economic terms.

### **4.1. The Emerging of the City**

Hong Kong has always been an important hub for trade by sea, which is why the ports were of great importance. Apart from that, however, little attention was paid to the territory. Hong Kong itself was a fishing village. Then, the colonization of the British took place and a big and seemingly unstoppable emerge started. The so-called Opium War between the British and the Chinese took place in the 19th century and lasted for almost three years. In 1841, Hong Kong was conquered and less than three years later the British were already talking about a non-profitable place in which it would not be profitable to continue investing. All in all, a handful of politicians found the country there to be unworthy, partly because of the landscape, but partly also because the conditions for trading were too poor. Not to be ignored here are the circumstances that led to these poor conditions: mainland China did not provided attractive options for traders to settle in Hong Kong. Accordingly, there was hardly a trustworthy trader there and trading itself was cheaper on the mainland. Hong Kong was largely avoided, even by the British merchant ships themselves. The new authority was recognized by few and therefore caused many conflicts between the Chinese dynasty and the Kingdom of Great Britain. This also played a major role in the non-settlement of the territory. Another relevant point may be a

speculation that Hong Kong was used to deport criminals, rioters, and other undesirable people from society. This helped China to improve its reputation and to cleanse its country of crime, at the same time it caused further strife with the British and openly showed the disapproving attitude that was taken towards the takeover of Hong Kong (Carroll, 2007).

The colony, which was hardly populated at the beginning when it was overtaken, consisted of around 7,500 inhabitants in total and hardly any immigrants. Less than 20 years later, however, the Chinese residents were able to show an impressive head count of almost 85,000 people, and the number of immigrants among them rose to around 1,600 (Schenk, 2003). Despite this somewhat difficult start, European businesspeople succeeded in gaining a foothold in Hong Kong and stimulating international trade there. They built up the trading business under the British protective umbrella, which was originally strictly supervised by the Chinese, so that Hong Kong became more and more the focus and received more attention, until the importance of imports and exports was equal to Shanghai. Things continued to improve; on the one hand, business was not regulated by customs duties, and on the other, many businesspeople, especially from abroad, used Hong Kong as a gateway to the rest of the Chinese market (Carroll, 2007).

Settling down was unattractive for foreigners at the beginning, due to unsanitary circumstances and the lack of social infrastructure such as health care and educational facilities, etc., but the trade market was flourishing. Seafarers and workers in the transport sector were the main buyers of the new jobs created and even if no foreigners settled on the peninsula, more and more wealthy Chinese from the mainland did with the intention of building entire colonies and acquiring shares in a soon-to-be-emerging area of power and influence. These immigrants soon started calling themselves Hong Kong-Chinese. Any other Chinese who had emigrated to the other important trading markets strengthened and promoted the expansion of the trade network via Hong Kong from there. Still partly in competition with the mainland, the trade conducted from Hong Kong had the advantage that there were few regulations from the government side and that the habitants and traders were given a great deal of freedom of action, both in private and in business (Dabringhaus, 2020).

With the establishment of a hospital in 1872 and the emergence of other social institutions, such as schools or other higher education institutions, several various social groups began to settle in Hong Kong, which resulted in a rapidly increasing variety of social forms and structures, which clearly shaped, if not fully constituted, the further political polarization of that area (Dabringhaus, 2020). The territory also attracted more and more attention from the Chinese population, especially as the contrast to the mainland became more and more visible. While there was order in Hong Kong with so little effort, China sank into chaos. Many Chinese residents saw this as unacceptable and

began making plans against the regime. Hong Kong also contributed an important part to the development of the revolutionary thinking in China through the freedom of speech and expression lived there: what was not possible for the press in China due to the strictest regulations and ordinances was done by means of press calls in Hong Kong. For this reason, revolutionary groups often settled on the island and directed their campaigns against China from there (Carroll, 2007). With some temporary fluctuations in the number of inhabitants and economic growth, Hong Kong continued to grow in numbers, power, and trade influence and became an international city of immense economic importance through the takeover of the British Crown. For the People's Republic of China, Hong Kong was - despite its defiantly accepted loss during the opium war - one of the most important connecting points to the western economic area and has since been used as a means of supporting and expanding international (business) relationships.

#### **4.2. “One Country, Two Systems”**

The Chinese people of Hong Kong have always liked to protest and were easily encouraged to take such political actions, which were already being written about at the end of the 19th century, not too long after the successful colonization (Dabringhaus, 2020). Further impetus for future revolts was placed in the hands of the locals when the area was returned to China in 1997 after more than 150 years in British custody. Despite an agreement to maintain the current legal situation in Hong Kong for at least 50 years, the first conflicts began shortly after the handover - both from Hong Kong and from the mainland. To run two systems under one government does not meet with the approval of the entire population of China. Especially not if you are sitting in the disadvantaged part of the system division. For China this was a clear victory: not only was it the last of the British territories to decolonize but also the most important one from an economical view (Carroll, 2007). Bit by bit, Beijing tried to influence Hong Kong's politics after regaining the economic hot spot. This act, even if tried to slowly push through from the shadows, led to a rise in peripheral nationalism among the Hong Kong people and increased their resentment at the attempted repression. In a 2015 area-wide telephone survey, this rising trend in peripheral nationalism of the Hong Kong people was researched and the result was as follows: the more respondents were aware that Hong Kong's autonomy was indeed being suppressed and slowly being reduced and that fact was short-tempered felt, the more they identified with Hong Kong identity. These people were also more willing to express their political positions publicly, such as participating in protests or otherwise expressing their anger. It was by no means intended by them to give up their own developed identity (which cannot be compared with the identity of the Chinese on the

mainland) and their lived autonomy (Fong, 2018). Even the new heads of Hong Kong believed that the area - specially the basic way of thinking - should slowly be made more Chinese, which is why they tried to arouse the “old Chinese pride” in many. This happened between 2003 and 2009 with the help of many successful incentives in which, among others, famous Chinese athletes, musicians or other public figures were invited to Hong Kong. During the Olympic Games of 2008, which were held in Beijing, there was a notable peak in people who identify more with Chinese national identity (see Figure 4), but this change decreased again the following year and the Numbers of the "Hongkongers" rose to an unprecedented level. They surpassed the number of Chinese identity habitants by the double (Ping & Kwong, 2014). Unfortunately, there were no further studies accessible with a more recent execution date, so the overview in this chapter was done with the given data from 2013.

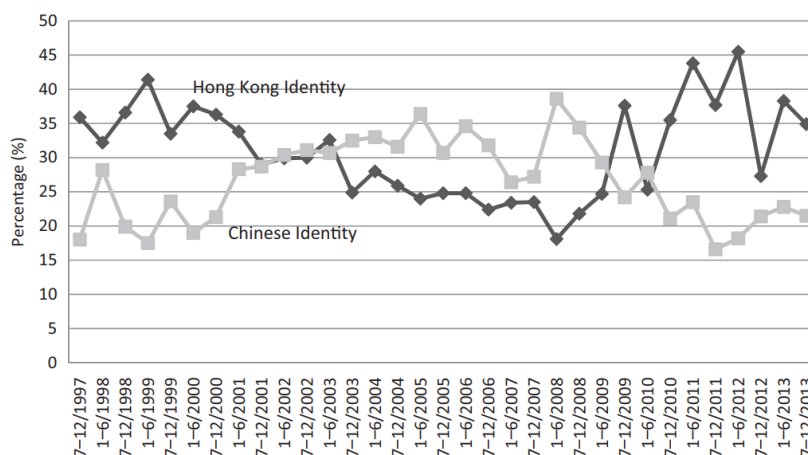


Figure 5: Identity Trends in Hong Kong, 1997-2013

Source: Ping & Kwong, 2014

Nevertheless, the biggest difference between the two identities may be that in Hong Kong politics could be co-decided and influenced for a long time, which created a certain economic free spirit and a fundamentally embedded (psychological) resistance and inner battle with the Communist Chinese Party. This then resulted in an unspoken cohesion among the Hong Kong residents and a community spirit that made the Hong Kong people see themselves ahead of the other Chinese. Those Chinese were foreigners. Measures have been taken to make the city more valuable. Thought was given to the future of the place and local values and interests were increasingly promoted (Ping & Kwong, 2014). That being said, the ongoing protests during the last few years haven't really been a surprise with more people feeling the need to move further away from the incidents, the habitants, and the regime of the mainland in order to protect their identity and their own

ways. It is the special mix of a flourishing autonomy, British influences, and Chinese routes, that shaped the modern and yet traditional culture of today's Hong Kong.

#### **4.3. The Hot Spot for Globalization**

Hong Kong acts as a so-called gateway to China. For many companies, the territory represents an international hotspot with the promising opportunity to bring business to China or vice versa from China to the rest of the world. It serves here as a kind of transformer, which properly takes over the target-oriented and economic space-opening transformation. Apart from the international aspect and the importance for countries that are not China, Hong Kong has two major functions, especially for China: (Dieter, 2020)

1. The Hong Kong financial market is essential for China as there are no restrictions on the movement of capital
2. The port of Hong Kong is important because the tax base creates favorable conditions for exports from the mainland.

Furthermore, a very liberal economic policy is implemented in Hong Kong and the economic freedom lived there makes the city a very inviting place to do business worldwide. Companies see this as an opportunity to establish themselves in Asia and to move their business from Hong Kong further into the Asian region. From the city, the stricter requirements of the mainland can then be better adjusted and implemented, and mainland China and the controls of the government on the onward journey of the goods can often even be bypassed. Hong Kong has an important and renowned financial market, which is relevant to the first point mentioned above. They have one of the highest currency reserves, which is necessary to keep its "exchange rate regime" stable, which connects the Hong Kong dollar with the US dollar. A stable exchange rate is essential, especially for foreign companies with a branch in Hong Kong. Companies based in the mainland also use the rather large availability of credit and rely on possible corporate bonds in foreign currencies in order to be able to acquire companies from other countries. Following on from the second point mentioned above, the large container port plays an important role for both international and Chinese companies: goods are produced on the mainland and then delivered to Hong Kong within the company to a subsidiary, from where they then can be carried further into the world. Of course, the profit stays with the company in Hong Kong and is taxed very cheaply there too. (Dieter, 2020)

According to an interview by Markus Ehmann (in: Markt und Mittelstand, Neu, 2020), a managing director of the Hong Kong office of the German Chamber of Commerce Abroad, who has lived in Hong Kong for 30 years, there is a certain unrest among many



companies that have settled in Hong Kong. The reason for this is a newly signed security law in Hong Kong, which is intended to ensure national security and thus gives the Chinese state the right to intervene and take action if there is suspicion of radicalism, possible unrest or potential danger. The "one country, two systems" principle might be shaken even more than it has been since the protection of the British Crown was given up. However, it is not possible to see far into the future here and speculating on possible outcomes of the conflicts is not advisable. Yes, Hong Kong has already lost a little of its economic attractiveness in recent years (Wallner, 2021), but this is mainly due to the increasing calls from the Chinese state, whose arms are tightening noticeably around the city. Hong Kong is and remains economically indispensable in the current state, if only because of the social society that can be found there and its attitude, its free spirit. There is hardly a city with such an international mix of social groups and people - it does not even have to be businesspeople anymore, as they too often travel with families, especially when it comes to expatriates or migrants. As a "hot spot", the city has many attractive features not only for companies, but also for the businesspeople in the companies, who ultimately contribute to the overall success through their time and well-being in Hong Kong. The merger of this west-east mixture, the sympathy of the population and the recognition and development of this economically valuable location has made Hong Kong this special place that the city represents today.

#### **4.4. So, what makes the local?**

When searching for the identity of a Hong Kong citizen, all the information and data mentioned so far are very important, as these partly represent the foundation stone and partly the structure on it. With all this information now gathered, it can be easier to see how the identity of the residents was created and made into what it is today. Nonetheless, it must be noted that this is individual (or, in some cases, collected and emanating from larger groups) self-perception and a snapshot in time. It is very likely that the perspective of the people is different from that of, for example, members of the government or other power holders. In the context discussed here, however, it is about the cultural identity of the people of Hong Kong and how it can be best understood to understand the people and their roots. Getting to know the cultural identity of people helps connecting with them, understanding behavior, and being able to fit into those surroundings. This cultural identity is the link needed to build a bridge between incoming expatriates and local acculturation in both society and business.

In Hong Kong, emphasis has always been placed on being different than the people of the mainland, and even on standing out from their perceived "backwardness." Anthony Fung (2001) describes this very aptly in a published paper on cultural studies:

*"Compared to them, we were modern and cosmopolitan. On the whole, the rise of Hong Kong identity can be seen as a process of dissociation from the economic, social, and political life of the mainland, as well as a formation of local culture cis-à-vis the colonial cultural domination. Yet before 1997, except through attitudinal distancing from the mainland, Hong Kong people had no urgent need to put up strong defense for their identity."*

Consequently, the current identity only really began to solidify after the handover to China, and the gap between Hongkongers and Chinese went from a crack to a fissure, and the last piece of a common national identity that might have been left no longer existed. In Hong Kong, a local identity has developed which, at least in that place, still stands above the national one to this day. Even though the fact of belonging to China, the strenuous attempt to tame and rein in the territory, and the ever louder call of the mainland can no longer be denied, every effort is made by the inhabitants of Hong Kong to counteract this and to prove and maintain themselves as their own construct from the interaction of various influences. Especially in a political sense. The people of Hong Kong are a very proud society. This can be concluded from the resistance due to the measures that are to be imposed on them. It is these measures and prescriptions that would restrict them in the freedom they have had up to now and thus take up and change a large part of their "being". After all, for those people living there, Hong Kong is not just a financial stronghold, a hot spot for globalization, or an economical gateway to China. It is so much more than that. Edward Leung, a fighting activist for Hong Kong's independence, got arrested during a demonstration that broadcasted criticism against the government said:

*"[...] the identity of the Hong Kong people is not defined by race or ethnicity, but is an open concept: "Those who agree with our values, with our way of life and culture, and who are willing to swear allegiance to this place and to work to preserve all of that, is a Hong Kong man" (Bland, 2020)*

Many Hongkongers have unified in the longing for change and a democracy, especially for freedom and justice; they have united in their anger towards the authorities even if that sometimes would mean cutting ties with close family members and friends that wouldn't see eye to eye. Nevertheless, the people are committed and see the situation as a collective goal, but with the needed and indispensable contribution of every single one of them, by helping and participating in demonstrations or taking other supportive measures. After such a long time as a colonized city, they finally found out who they really were and what they want their identity to look like. (Chow, 2019)

Even though the media mainly reports the violent situations, the conflicts, and the negative events, it is important to look behind the scenes, especially when emigrating to Hong Kong. The people of the region show strength, pride, solidarity, and a certain appreciation towards a lifestyle they want to preserve. In their eyes, this is worth fighting for. The people have a high level of ambition and a very strong will to achieve their goals for what they see as a better future. So, if someone wants to be part of the city, the culture, and the society, it might be a good start to get informed about the people, their history, what they value, what stand for, and most importantly what they are willing to fight for. Because even though they might have found their identity for now or at least know what they want it to look like, the struggle they are currently in is by far not over and the changes that are pushed against them will provide them with an ongoing fight for keeping their life and their way of living the way they want it to. It is an ongoing process of still having to find their “new selves” in this suppressed and monitored society, a process packed with hope and the will to fight for it.

## **5. The “Successful Interculturally Competent Businessperson” – Empirical Research**

In this chapter, the interview design as well as the findings and results of the first five interviews about the acculturation process and possible traits for being intercultural competent will be presented. The analysis will be done in a collective style with the participants' relevant data shown in the specific topics and goals that will be mentioned in the following.

So, what makes a businessperson successful in being “intercultural competent”? Since there are undeniably the most diverse kinds of cultures, contact between these cultures is in almost every case inevitable. At the very least, it can be said with great certainty that the majority of these cultures will be confronted with each other in some way sooner or later. When at least two or more cultures meet, the course of the situation usually depends on how the participants behave in the process. If the goal of this confrontation is to get the most positive outcome possible from the situation, the partakers should have at least a basic understanding that there are other cultures and that they sometimes differ more, sometimes less in each other. One should also have a clear point of view regarding general cultural diversity and intercultural action. So, intercultural competency itself should be seen as a process rather than an achievable learning because it is something that happens during interactions between individuals from different habitats, building up on previous encounters and experiences. (Bolten, 2007)

### **5.1. Interview Design**

The qualitative semi-guided interview for the expatriates was designed to gain access to their individual view and perception based on the resulting information. More specifically, it focuses on individual perceptions in the process of arriving and relocating to a new (temporary) home. The study explored if it is necessary to make preparations during this process or to already bring along certain character traits in order to settle faster and easier in the new environment. The aim was to find out if and how intercultural competence can be measured by the individual feelings and experiences of the interview candidates. The interviews were designed in such a way that after its evaluation it would become apparent how expatriates view the following points:

- Importance of preparation before the trip
- Managing the first few weeks of being in a new culture
- Business relationships and the impact of not being a local

- The need to connect with other expatriates or people from home
- The individual perception of when it is becoming “the new home”
- Characteristic traits for being a successful expatriate
- Their perception of reintegration

The participants were guided through these topics by the interviewer throughout the interview process, which has constantly been adapted to the individual situation and conversation. As a result, the procedure was designed to aid the origin of this thesis and provide important data to determine an answer to the research question. The empirical data collected is intended to provide a vivid insight into reality as a supplement to the literature research and to bring more clarity to the topic of intercultural competence. The goal is to learn what cultural competence means for an expatriate in that specific situation of moving to a new country and to discover what characteristic traits they deem to be important for cultural competence development in that scenario.

The interview questions for the flexpatriate-manager were designed to extract information about the interaction with his intercultural team, the required preparations, the learnings, and his personal perception of the importance of different characteristics a manager should be able to demonstrate. The goal is partially the same as in the previous mentioned interviews, to learn about the perception and importance of intercultural competence on a personal level, but it is also about finding out how significant it is for a manager to have those special skills and necessary intercultural qualifications as an individual, in order to make the team successful as a whole - and therefore bring the desired success to the company. This interview poses as an addition to the main topic.

## **5.2. Candidate Information**

For this chapter, a total of five interviews were held, three of which were done in person or with the help of digital aids (in this case: Microsoft Teams and Skype) and two of them had to be completed by answering the questions in writing due to scheduling difficulties or unforeseen connection problems. In the following, the candidates and their backgrounds are briefly explained in order to develop a more precise understanding of them as individuals. As a result, the given interview answers might be better understood or might give a better insight into the things experienced and the emotions shared. The five chosen expatriate-candidates are all native Austrians and emigrated to Hong Kong at some point during their career or upon starting a new one. Two are still there, three have returned to Austria or relocated elsewhere for a few years. Apart from these similarities, the participants come from different professional groups, two of the candidates are

female, three are male. The age-range reaches from 35 to 62 years. In order to respect the privacy agreement to the interviewees, any compromising information about them is changed in such a way that no conclusions can be drawn about the actual person or their companies. The full interview transcripts can be found in the appendix. The candidates were able to speak openly and impartially about their experiences and impressions.

#### Candidate 1:

This person will be referred to KW. She currently works as a German teacher at a renowned international school in Switzerland and moved to Hong Kong on her own initiative to follow her husband. KW stayed in Hong Kong for a total of five years and had time to explore the city before she started to work as a private teacher for other expatriate's children. She lived in various destinations outside of Europe before relocating to Hong Kong and one of the most important things for her when preparing to move to a new destination is to do as much research as possible about all aspects of the host country, its people, and the culture.

#### Candidate 2:

This person will be referred to as SV. He currently works as a hedge fund manager at a very well-known bank institution in Liechtenstein and has his own side business with travel lodges in Finland and South Africa, which are rented out. SV moved to Hong Kong to get to know the banking sector in the Asian market and worked specifically for Asian customers upon moving back to Austria. The most important thing for him was "to be wherever you are" and embrace it fully. Having fun and enjoying the time abroad were his go-to mantras. SV was a single man moving by himself and had no family which he left behind. He likes to travel but hasn't lived in any other countries besides Hong Kong.

#### Candidate 3:

This person will be referred to as WW. He works in a family-owned multinational Enterprise that provides innovative tools, technologies, and services to the global construction sector. He was transferred to Hong Kong because of another career step from Chief Financial Officer of the German Branch to Chief Financial Officer Asia Pacific, which connected the whole pacific area and widened his area of responsibility. His stay in Hong Kong lasted a total of six years. He has already lived in various locations, such as Germany, the United States of America, and Japan and spent approximately twenty-four years living abroad. He is used to managing international teams with multicultural backgrounds and is invested in learning as much as possible about his employees. Facing

new cultures with respect is very important to him. WW is now the managing director of a family-owned charitable trust foundation and lives in Liechtenstein.

Candidate 4:

This person will be referred to as KH. She moved to Hong Kong in order to fulfill her passion and her personal business in interior designing, especially because she was fond of the Asian market but wanted to go someplace that still connects to the west. KH has lived in different countries outside of Europe so far and has been living in Hong Kong for over ten years. She gave up her business and fully embraces being a homemaker, which gives her the time to explore parts of the city she might not know. She is convinced that every place in the world is different and too many previous expectations make it harder for a person to adjust in a new place. One should just simply go somewhere and make the best out of it as soon as their feet hit the ground.

Candidate 5:

This person will be referred to as RH. He is currently self-employed but went to Hong Kong for his former company on his own initiative in order to follow another career track. He stayed in the city for a total of 6 years, moved back to Austria, and then returned to Hong Kong, where he currently still lives. Before moving there, he lived in Japan, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States of America. In his opinion, one should always fully embrace what he or she is doing and encounter new things with openness and curiosity.

### **5.3. Relocation Preparation**

This category is all about preparation that can or cannot be taken care of beforehand. Most of the participants agreed on the importance of preparation on some level before moving some place new, although not all of them prepared themselves for the trip. Some candidates said that they had already gained experience in the Asian culture through living in Japan or could not really prepare themselves due to the lack of information on the Internet at the time, except on the official Hong Kong website where they could find information for tourists. However, other candidates who also had previous experience in the Asian region prepared themselves more intensively for their new life. In general, the most frequently mentioned topics were culture and language. Language, however, is more needed in other countries that are not as English-dominated like Hong Kong. In addition, WW mentioned the intensive preparation for the professional challenges, which must take place within a short time window, since most relocations do not have a long lead time. Often, companies offer certain "relocation packages" that provide a language course for the employee and often also for the partner, initial help in finding apartments, a first contact person on site, and so on. KW did by far the most preparation for the trip:

*"I read very, very much in online portals and expat forums and researched what expats reported about their life in Hong Kong. How is the medical care, what is difficult to get, what daily small and big problems occur, how is the quality of drinking water and so on. I had also contacted an acquaintance who had lived in HK for a long time and her experiences with the city, people, language, and culture gave more insight and helped with the preparation. The brochure "Life as Expat in Hong Kong" published by German women was full of useful information, addresses, and tips. It was in almost daily use with me for the first few months. I can only recommend it."*

The candidates are unanimous in their opinion that the interest for new things must be there from the beginning. Seeking out contacts one might know or relate to on site also was mentioned as kind of a preparation, in order to have somebody with a few more insights to get to know the city and the people amongst other things.

### **5.4. Making First Contact**

This entails the first contact with the city, with the people, with the culture, and with the new life there. This is about the first time in Hong Kong and the personal perception of it. How did the first time feel for the candidates? Did they have difficulties adapting and "arriving"? Very different answers were given on this topic. What all five candidates had in



common was that there were initial challenges, albeit of a different nature. Candidates with children, for example, had initial difficulties around organizational issues with school and related concerns about the children. Others had integration difficulties in the workplace due to their co-workers and their behavior toward the new workforce or the change. There were also significant other issues mentioned such as missing the family left behind, bringing stress from home which can distract and preoccupy someone, the concentrated load of information and change coming at you all at once. WW reported health problems which resulted from the psychological stress. SV was the only candidate who mentioned the language barrier, as he noticed this aspect strongly during his stay, especially at the beginning. KW, despite facing a few minor challenges, summed it up “in summary, I can say that the first weeks in Hong Kong were filled with joy and anticipation of the new lifestyle and getting to know the city. It was all simply magical.”

The information collected compares very well with the theory previously discussed in relation to acculturation and the "Culture Shock Theory", especially since here, after the first exciting moments, reality and its obstacles began to express themselves.

After that first contact, WW had described living in the city as followed:

*“You arrive in a city that's wonderful. So, it's an incredible multicultural city. [...] It's also so fantastic because it's an Asian center for finance, business and everything is a multicultural place. It's crowded and it's modern and it's efficient and I mean you just meet people from all over the world. Everybody has similar or the same goals. And it still has kind of the traditional Chinese culture that's there. It's super modern, highly efficient, a top city, and yet it has this charm of chaos, of Chinese, and you find that everywhere. And that's what makes it so charming in terms of the way of life. Besides the fact that you're sitting in the center of Asia and can be everywhere in an hour's flight. This multiculturalism is just super exciting. You almost don't experience that in the first six months. Basically, the challenge of the first six to twelve months, when you accept an assignment like this, is simply to make sure that the work-life balance also has a bit of life in it somewhere, and not just work and play.”*

## **5.5. Impact on Business Relationships**

This category was about the impact of being a foreigner on the business relationships in Hong Kong and in the direct surroundings if the offices were spread apart. As it is imaginable, not every person is excited to get a new coworker or manager from abroad. Often there is a sense of distrust, skepticism, rivalry, or even just general dislike in place. Especially, if the “new guy” replaces a liked-by-all person. WW stated his arrival in the new office as follows:

*"[...] they took someone out of the job there and the board transferred me to Asia. The local team didn't want me because they didn't really want a change in the function. But the board wanted this change and the first six to nine months were basically super difficult in terms of integration. Super difficult in the sense that you're confronted with things that don't fit so much into the [company] culture. And that took a long time and of course made it a little bit more complex. Even more difficult. I mean, what do you do? [...]*

*It was difficult for me at the beginning, because you come to a place and realize they don't really want you and make you feel that. Everyone was happy with [my predecessor], they didn't want to let her go. And then, of course, I was much closer to the CFO, the board of directors, than the whole team on site. Then, of course, I was suspicious, because I often talked to [the headquarter] Liechtenstein on the phone and they all asked themselves, what is he actually doing there now?"*

After WW proved himself "worthy", they finally accepted him, and he could only then really embrace being in Hong Kong and get his health back under control. The other candidates did not mention a specific incidence from work, where they felt that their presence or nationality had an impact on their business relationships. RH remembered a modest office mood in general, but he dismissed that on the ongoing financial crisis they just had to go through. KW profited from having an international background and could start private lessons for international students and expatriates' kids.

## **5.6. Expats meeting Expats**

The interest in getting to know like-minded Austrians was limited among all respondents. Only SV mentioned having been introduced to an Austrian circle, with whom he subsequently spent more time. For the other candidates, explicitly seeking out compatriots was more incidental. Also, the multitude of existing expatriate networks was not seen as relevant by any of them. Through existing contacts in Hong Kong, or known places, locales, spots, one could quickly make new international contacts if this was desired. Some even moved to the Chinese neighborhoods specifically to be away from the German-speaking city dwellers. According to the interviewees, this was the only way to have the real experience of being abroad. Why move away and take advantage of such a great opportunity if you end up living only with Germans/Austrians and do not experience any of the local charm? So, the candidates did not intentionally or preferentially make Austrian contacts, but instead there were other, international encounters, which were welcomed. KW, for example, often took newly arrived expatriates under her wing and showed them around. Friendships also developed as a result. For those Austrians in Hong Kong who want to embrace their origins at least one time a year to a fullest, there is an

official gathering for Austrian citizens at the Austrian embassy in the city, to celebrate the national holiday on the 26<sup>th</sup> of October every year. Many Austrians go there to mingle and hear the ambassador start singing the national Austrian anthem.

### **5.7. Calling it “Home”**

Accepting and getting to know a new place until you feel comfortable enough to call it your new home usually takes time. This, in turn, usually depends on very individual factors and happens on a very personal level. Four out of five candidates felt at home after about a year in Hong Kong. SV said it went even faster for him, since he was only there for a year anyway and felt absolutely at home after just a few weeks.

This point of "feeling at home" is incredibly important and almost indispensable during a longer stay abroad, as it contributes not insignificantly to the success of being away. Above all, it is advantageous for the company's success if the new employee can create a new home for himself and thus ensure more balance. The initial feeling of "having arrived" is perceived by everyone individually in a wide variety of situations and most likely a combination of a few of those. It can be a nicely furnished apartment, a husband, wife, or partner who feels comfortable and is also happy in his or her environment and job, getting along with public transportation, a waiter whose name you know and vice versa, and so on. There seems to be a certain feeling associated and conveyed with it. KW described this feeling like this:

*“In Hong Kong, I needed about a year for this "arrival". I can still remember the moment when, on returning from a short vacation, I felt a huge inner joy and was really happy to be back. And I was really aware that I had found my "home" in Hong Kong, when I had still longed for the daily life in Hong Kong during my home leave in Austria and had missed my apartment and the daily routine. The view from the plane of the city on approach and this immense joy to be home again are unforgettable.”*

At a certain point, all expatriates had the feeling that they had arrived in Hong Kong and had made a new home there. Even after visits back to Austria, this new home was no less perceived as such, but even gained in sentimental value.

### **5.8. Useful Traits and Skills**

All candidates were asked for their personal opinion and assessment when it comes to certain qualities an expatriate should bring with him or her when moving abroad and being

confronted with people from other cultures and with other behaviors than one might be used to. These are the qualities mentioned, starting with the most frequently mentioned:

- Curiosity and Interest (in cultures, locations, people, languages)
- Openness
- Flexibility
- Willingness to learn and grow
- Adventurous
- Adaptable (to new environments, cultures)
- Accepting a new culture and all that comes with it
- Being able and willing to integrate yourself
- Empathy
- Humor
- Being cosmopolitan

WW has explained his opinion on the question of the necessary qualities very comprehensibly:

*"I believe empathy. I say the issue is always empathic behavior. To be able to engage with a counterpart, with a culture, to observe, to understand. [...] the reaction you see is a reaction as you feel it according to your experience grid, but it could mean something completely different. [...] having a good feeling, wanting to listen, to ask questions. So, empathy for me is something that helps. You can develop empathy, and then you can work on it. There are people who have a lot, who get vibrations, who know how or what is said, that's one thing and what resonates with what is said is for me just empathy, to grasp that and the feelings all around. [...] An attitude that just puts your own ego in the background and not wanting to know everything or realizing that you don't know everything, but that you want to experience, want to learn. So, also the willingness to learn, the curiosity, and openness towards these topics [...]."*

Most of the candidates somehow mentioned the same traits in another descriptive way, but with the same basic value attached to it. According to their opinion, there are definitive traits and preconditions that can help a person to acculturate and adapt in a new environment through a smoother process. It can also help in forming new contacts and communicating with those. Especially during encounters with another person, it is important to not just "roll over the situation" but to being able to grasp what is being said and done. Showing some of that competence, this paper is aiming to define.

## 5.9. Reintegration

The so-called "coming back home" was experienced very differently by the interview candidates. Two of the expatriates still live in Hong Kong, which is why they have not yet experienced any real reintegration into their old home country. SV did not feel any reintegration difficulties when he came back home after his time in Hong Kong, after just over a year. He comments:

*"I think it was a wonderful time, of course, but it's the same aspect and you're just going back. Maybe it's not an adventure anymore, but it's still [like] you had the feeling that you have changed somehow. Especially when you came home [...] So no, it was just perfectly fine when I came back and let the adventure just go on!"*

For some people, the host country turns out to be a home like the one they had before, a home they were feeling comfortable and familiar in and where they were surrounded by a network of people, they felt at home with. Coming back to a life that was first left behind can take its toll on some people as well and might need the same amount of adaption time as before and the willingness to reintegrate. Due to the individual changes in one personally, it might even need those intercultural competencies with some necessary traits and characteristics, to being able to deal with the people their behaviors back home, still thinking everything in Hong Kong was better. It is all about how things are perceived by the returnee. WW described coming back home quite fitting for this statement:

*"It's an integration, like going away. It's exactly the same in the end, because you have very different developments, and different speeds in the development, how you develop yourself or how the environment develops, where you come from. You yourself have the feeling that [Austria] is rather slower, because it's more traditional, and you yourself have the feeling that you've enjoyed this jet-set life, which in turn is an integration and also takes time. I think you must not lose your down-to-earthiness. Try not to get carried away and appreciate the things you have here [in Austria]. I have listed all the wonderful reasons to live in Hong Kong. But at the end of the day, Hong Kong is also exhausting. [...] You always have speed, there are always millions of people on the street. [...] I think the biorhythm also gets used to it and then you come back and you're there in the quiet. It's a total change to go there [Hong Kong] and it's a total reintegration to come here [Austria]. To appreciate what is here. Not to miss what Hong Kong has. Of course, it's always a balancing act. So, coming back is the same. [...] And especially the issue that you have to decelerate or your lifestyle is different and there you have to adapt."*

The biggest difference is the family that might be in the home country, awaiting the return of the expatriate, helping to speed up and ease the reintegration process as much as possible, and for some returnees this is indeed a helpful fact.

All the help from family and friends might have helped to settle back home in Austria, but the memories of Hong Kong still create deep emotions in a few candidates. KW, after almost four years back in Austria, still describes her sentiment towards Hong Kong very emotionally and descriptive as follows:

*“I miss the beauty of the city, the skyline at night, the lights reflecting in the water. I miss the bubbly busy streets, the smell from the street kitchens when strolling through the streets, I miss the sunset over the ocean while on the boat returning from Lamma Island, with the most amazing seafood in my belly. I miss hiking along the Dragon Trail and then arriving at Big Wave Bay ready for a dip in the salty water. I miss sitting on the double decker bus to Stanley, sitting on the first floor of Pickled Pelican and eating this unbelievable burger while looking onto the ocean. I miss going by ferry to Hong Kong Island, enjoy the most delicious Chinese dumplings and then have a quick visit to the market along Li Yuen Street, having a laughter with some of the vendors. I miss sipping a Signature martini on the terrasse of The One or the Seva bar surrounded by the flashing lights of HSBC. And most of all I miss chatting with my friend while sitting in Starbucks at the harbor enjoying a cup of green tea matcha. Yes, I miss Hong Kong and can’t wait to be back!”*

Even after a few years of being back in the “old home”, one does not simply forget the importance and the hold that Hong Kong once had on them. After all, they have lived there for a long time and have built a new life for themselves. If one has also really felt at home and have learned to love the place and the new life, then it is natural that emotions are involved when they must leave this place, this beloved home, behind again.

## **5.10. The Factor of Individuality**

Through the entire interview process, it was interesting to follow the individual emotions and the individual associations the candidates had towards their stay in Hong Kong, and it was very noticeable how unique each experience was. The different impressions, opinions, and views have played an essential role in the progress of this work. Therefore, it is also very important to include the factor of individuality in the research. Everybody perceives the experience differently, concentrates on other points of view, weights situations differently, takes other things from it for itself. In Table 2, we see a summary of the topics including the candidates and their applicable answers, or whether these points were experienced by them:

	KW	SV	WW	KH	RH
Length of stay over two years	X		X	X	X
Did mentionable location-related preparation beforehand	X				
Previous experience with living abroad	X		X	X	X
Previous experience with Asian culture	X		X	X	X
Faced challenges at the beginning of stay	X	X	X	X	X
Health issues due to difficult start			X		
Language barriers		X			
Personal contact on site	X	X	X	X	X
Active interest in connecting with other Austrians		X			
Needed less than a year to feel like home		X			
Reintegration difficulties when going back to Austria	X		X		

Table 2: Expatriates Interview Analysis

For exactly these reasons, it is always important not to draw general conclusions from collected data, but to really dedicate oneself to the individual candidates one by one. Especially in this variant of information gathering, there are certain risks and critical factors that can arise during data collection and turn out to be obstacles. Such events have also occurred in the course of this work, which will be clearly explained in chapter 8.

It is important to mention what influence everyone has on the outcome and success of such a process of acculturation in a new home country, as well as on the outcome and success of an interaction with a person of a different cultural origin. Especially in the interaction and analysis of such encounters, this factor should be taken into account, as it is an individual construct that varies from person to person.

## 6. Managing a Culturally Diverse Team

The process of globalization in business means that more and more contact is maintained with business partners, customers, or employees from different origins. Often whole projects and the success of the business depend on such interactions. Hiring international workers for your own company is seen as a great asset. The internationalization of the pool of employees also increases the diversity of perspectives, of specialist knowledge of the details of the markets, and the resulting superiority over the competition on the market (both locally and abroad). Thus, functioning immigrations with few obstacles and a quick acclimatization phase are more than just desirable for expatriates; for the success of the transfer and the company itself.

One perspective that therefore should not be ignored is the view from a team-angle. This paper talks about individual intercultural competencies and their importance, but not every individual is able to strictly distinguish between the individual and the team, especially when they go hand in hand. Many expatriates are delocalized during an internal transfer to another country and then work on site in a team or lead a team on site, depending on the career step they have taken. If this person gains a foothold in a new culture, proves their cultural competence, and can quickly settle in on a personal level, it does not mean that this is the case in their work environment as well. It is also possible that the new work environment and the new team members contribute a large part to how quickly and smoothly the acclimatization process takes place. From this point of view, it makes sense to also consider the factors of intercultural competence within a team structure and to analyze how different individuals, through adapted intercultural behavior, together become a construct that leads to personal and corporate success. After all, companies have quite a few benefits from hiring an international workforce, such as a richer workplace culture with more different perspectives from various cultural backgrounds, more effectiveness due to different experiences and diverse angles towards solving problems, and cross-cultural knowledge about countries and markets, just to name a few. (Maslow, 2019)

It is therefore important to investigate these points in more detail and to analyze how in-house measures can be taken to ensure that a culturally diverse team achieves the best possible success for the company despite possible misunderstandings and cultural discrepancies. It is just as important that a new employee quickly integrates into his or her new work environment. The more comfortable the employee feels about the new placement, the more successful and better his work will ultimately be. (Čuhlová, 2019).

Managing a multicultural team and having multiple cultures in one's structure, which all depend on competent leadership and intercultural competence for the sake of the team



spirit and the company success, can sometimes be tremendously challenging. To get an accurate insight and another individual point of view to get the “big picture” how the competency of a team leader affects these intercultural situations, another interview with a sixth candidate was conducted this paper:

Candidate 6:

This person will be referred to as GS. He is working as the head of a business unit in a leading control-technology company for renewable energy based and established in Austria. He is currently leading an international team with a head count of 62 people, all distributed in India, China, the United States of America, Denmark, and Germany. To properly fulfill his duties in his position, he travels extensively and must be on site for customer negotiations, team meetings, trade fairs, and other business-related appointments. GS is a flexpatriate by heart and loves what he does. Under normal circumstances without a global pandemic limiting his options, he would be travelling to different destinations of his company and customers a lot. According to him, being interested, open, and capable of learning from experience are good skills for being successful in dealing with other cultures, whether the interaction is with employees or customers.

The following subchapters are structured into different topics including preparation, challenges, and internal measures regarding the management of an international workforce and its expected success. The interview held serves to explain the following subchapters and is intended to provide a more detailed insight into the behavior of a manager in relation to the intercultural team structure. The information used was given from the interviewee himself.

## **6.1. Preparation for Taking Over a Team Abroad**

GS very much welcomed the takeover of the international teams as a challenge and approached this new chapter with a positive mood from the outset. Nevertheless, a positive basic attitude is far from enough preparation. He says:

*“I think without the preparation I would have gone for a swim. Despite the preparations I had made, a lot of things turned out differently than I had “learned” and, especially when dealing with other cultures, you need a certain amount of understanding and experience, which I first had to acquire. [...] Especially because there were three countries with completely different behaviors and cultures that I had to slowly get to grips with [...] and not just one.”*

When taking on a team in more than one country, it is important to find out about the culture and behaviors, not only in business but also socially. Countries such as Germany and Denmark sometimes have quite few cultural differences and preparation for this can prove to be quite simple and not intensive. Other countries, however, such as China, India, and the United States of America, have very large economical and social differences, not only compared to Austria, but also compared to each other, which must be taken into consideration by a competent manager. Another important point on the topic of preparation that was mentioned was the exchange with other companies and their managers who already had experience in leading teams across countries, especially in the countries concerned. In the Lake Constance region, for example, there is a manager network for this purpose, which regularly exchanges information on these topics, but also on the general economic development of the region. Regular events are also held in this circle, where those involved can network further and build up reliable potential sources of information.

Another possibility for optimal preparation is, as in the previous interviews of expatriates mentioned as well, the research and collection of country-specific information in advance. Seminars are offered on many topics such as business cultures, specific cultural behaviors, economic country characteristics, always tailored to the countries concerned, which can often provide a good insight.

## **6.2. Challenges and Intercultural Differences**

Leading an international team undoubtedly brings with it certain challenges and a certain pressure to succeed. That is why it's important that the person in charge is able to successfully meet these challenges and, through the right individual competencies, manage to achieve joint success with the team. These competencies can be strained and pushed to their limits when, for example, three different video conferences are held consecutively with three different countries in one afternoon. According to GS, such situations are very tiring and exhausting, even if a familiar culture is among them as a middle appointment or at the end.

*“Without a short break in between, there was little I could do, I noticed that quickly. It simply takes an enormous amount of energy, because you have to really put yourself into the whole thing. Into your counterpart. After all, you want to get the most out of the conversation and that's the only way to do it, at least that's my opinion. I want to understand what my employees are saying, even between the lines. And of course, they should also understand what I want from them. And that is not always so easy. It takes patience. Especially because you also have to understand their views.”*

The cultural differences can be researched and there is enough literature about it, but in real life everything is partly different and unpredictable surprises occur again and again, “in the beginning, I didn't realize that in India an agreement is seen more as a letter of intent than a commitment. You can imagine my joy when I became aware of this fact during a rather time-consuming project and the agreed presentation data was not available.”

Due to the cultural differences, incidents also occur between teams in such cases, which can sometimes be attributed to the cultural backgrounds and the associated intercultural communication difficulties. Individual team members or even entire teams may show a lot of caution and skepticism towards others, especially at the beginning. The greater the cultural differences or previous histories between countries, the more negative energy this can bring. As a team leader, it is important to counteract this as best as possible, as this can throw the entire team structure out of kilter and in turn harm the company's success. Sometimes companies also offer internal working groups on this topic, as is the case at GS' company. Apart from this, the company or the responsible manager can internally check if the employees are the right fit to the teams, by seeking out necessary characteristic criteria.

*“I expect my people to be able to take criticism. Both in accepting criticism and in dishing it out. Then drive is important to me. That is, that they really show a willingness to perform, in other words, that they are strongly performance-oriented. This also promotes healthy competition among each other, as I always like to say. What else. They have to be team players. Respectful of each other and the customers, and then there must be an awareness of responsibility. Personal responsibility, too.”*

Not only do the employees need specific characteristics to fit into the company, the leaders should show some necessary competencies as well, especially if they have to keep an intercultural team managed and on track. They are the link between employees and the company and actively contribute to the company's success through their behavior and skills. Just to name a few of those traits that are a good precondition to have:

- Being communicative
- Actively listen
- Being empathic
- Willingness to keep learning
- Showing interest
- Being Open
- Being respectful
- Being able to adapt to situations

### **6.3. Internal Measures to Strengthen Intercultural Conflict**

In most companies, measures are introduced to make cross-national cooperation as smooth as possible. Especially in multicultural teams, it is important to establish basic ground rules and norms to enable everyone to work equally and fairly in the team. A so-called code of conduct is set in place. People should treat each other with respect and show respect for each other. The following was mentioned by GS about this topic:

*"[...] my employees know how to behave toward each other. And they must do so respectfully, with respect for each other. I want them to be open, especially when it comes to criticism, factual criticism, which must be allowed to be expressed without being misunderstood. This is not easy for everyone. But it never is. If a conflict arises somewhere, my employees know that I'm always ready to listen to them, that they can talk to me, and that we'll try to resolve the conflict together."*

In addition, interactive measures can also be taken within the company to get to know each other, which can strengthen the team structure. Informal meetings together or informing each other about their own country of origin during a meeting are examples of this. Never to forget that they might not only mistrust or be wary of each other, but also about their new manager. This new person, guiding the team, also must prove him- or herself and let the employees have a chance to get to know him or her as well, in order to build up trust. It is a constant process to keep the good spirit up and keep the team motivated. As soon as a team member does not feel valued or comfortable anymore, a lack of motivation will spread. This will also influence the other direct team members as well. Constant communication and openness towards each other is a key rule to go after. Trust has to be established. Both ways - from the employee to the leader and the other way around. (Jang, 2017)

### **6.4. Impacts on Transcultural Management due to COVID-19**

Social distancing, travel restrictions, curfews, no open hotels, or restaurants: these examples play a big role in proper the execution of a flexpatriate's job, which is being hampered due to the current global pandemic. When a manager has different teams to lead, which are based in different countries, it might appear even more difficult to achieve a common team spirit and lead all of the employees equally when all you can offer are virtual meetings and digital contact. Contact within the company and with other sites are extremely limited. Although there is probably still contact with the own team members, the other employees at the respective locations sometimes seem to have been erased from

the picture, as the previous contact with them usually took place in person on site. The meetings have to be held via video-chat, what did start off with a few mentionable difficulties, as GS reports:

*“You can only see each other digitally, [...] No one wanted to turn on the camera. We then introduced it throughout the entire company. And then there were the next issues. New rules of conduct had to be introduced, because people also have to treat each other with respect online, and this includes behavior during a meeting, such as being there on time, being attentive, answering and cooperating, and so on, just like in “real life” [...], except that in the home office you apparently have to say again that you don't go and get a coffee 10 minutes after the start of a meeting, but wait until the break or until the end. It's a bit as if people had forgotten how to behave in meetings [...].”*

He also mentioned a more difficult approach towards getting people's emotions online and understanding their feelings. That is why an open communication culture is again very important, even more during times like these. Another problem might be the constant availability in front of the computer. Even if managers are in meetings and marked as “busy” in their schedule, some employees or co-workers still just see that they are currently online and expect an instant feedback on their request or concern. The time-factor plays a big role in this change during the pandemic and even though one might save travelling-time from one country to another or even just from home to the office, the time that work consumes during the day seems to have risen. In order to ultimately avoid undesirable overstretching here, appointments should be made for even the smallest tasks and completions, especially when it comes to competent management of several teams at several locations, which are sometimes not fully efficient without the right organization and leadership.

## **6.5. Conclusion**

All in all, it is particularly important for a manager who manages an intercultural team to have certain competencies to be able to manage this intercultural aspect properly. It is about knowing your people, learning from your own mistakes, and taking internal measures to ensure proper functioning of the team-structure. Also, through a single interview with one of these executives, it was possible to highlight the role played by various factors such as proper preparation, permanent learning and analysis, openness and communication, and many more in relation to the topic of intercultural competence. Just as with the expatriates, the success of the process - in this case the optimal management and instruction of the team - is exposed to individual influence. Without the intercultural competencies of a manager, a cross-national team cannot be led in the

interest of the company's success, certainly not when face-to-face meetings are temporarily impossible. Without mutual trust, it is highly unlikely to work. This trust must first be built up. This happens much faster when an employee realizes that the person of contact, the team leader, understands their culture and approaches them openly, with interest, understanding, experience, and forbearance.

## **7. Cultural Competence as an Individual Construct**

First, it will be restated that the perception of acculturation is always individual, that much was discovered during the previous analysis. So, what is it that defines an interculturally competent businessperson in Hong Kong and to what extent are acculturation and intercultural competence linked to each other if at all? This chapter serves to answer this question and to present the information obtained from the data collected.

### **7.1. Acculturation and Intercultural Competence**

When talking about expatriates, intercultural competencies, and the promising possibilities the concept of globalization has to offer, it is necessary to pinpoint down the fact, that there is no real guideline with a “one size fits all” guarantee, no handbook of “three easy steps to settle into a new culture with no problems”, no universal adaptation miracle cure, that eases the process of adaptation at the beginning of a move. The degree of initial difficulties is in fact completely individual and can vary from “no difficulties at all” to “difficulties that affect daily life”. By trying to find out if there are actual benchmarks of being intercultural competent or how it can be determined if somebody is or isn’t interculturally competent, a few discoveries were made. In our case and with the people interviewed, it was found that it is very possible to assume that there are certain benchmarks by which intercultural competence can be measured or at least be pinned down to a few important personal traits one should show. By interacting with others in a new culture and the successful or less successful outcome of that interaction, it can be analyzed what behaviors were used to make the situation turn out the way it eventually did. So, if a person makes the same mistakes repeatedly, without gaining knowledge or experience in order to make a difference the next time, there might be a missing element of interest or of that aforementioned competence. Intercultural competence can manifest and show itself in very different ways in different people. Often, a connection to acculturation in a new country can be drawn here, particularly in the case of expatriates. Especially in connection with getting along in the new environment with the new people and the exchange with them. Relevant factors for a successful integration into a new environment could be determined on the basis of the personal interviews and the associated emotions, what leads to the believe that the topics of being intercultural competent and undergoing a successful acculturation process might be corelated, but not dependent on each other.

### **7.1.1. The Acculturation Process**

As can be concluded from the preceding and gathered information, a successful settling in comes down to how comfortable one feels in a new place and how in tune one is with the environment. The first few months can indeed be challenging for most expatriates, especially if they have to jump directly into professional life and don't take time to take care of themselves and settle in properly. But if one does not take that time to look after the personal well-being at the same time, this acculturation process can drag on even longer without the outlook of a positive ending, which as a result could have an impact on further cultural encounters.

Just to name a few examples when expatriates felt like they successfully completed the integration:

- Having created a home in one's own four walls.
- Feeling homesick for the host country when visiting the "real" home country
- The familiarity of the surroundings and people
- Interacting with the locals without fears or an uneasy feeling of doing something wrong
- The feeling of "coming home" after a short time away from the host country
- The creation of your own network or having a network

However, there were also some character traits that have been mentioned which can be advantageous for a successful integration and can also contribute to the success of being called interculturally competent:

- Having an open mind towards new cultures and people
- The ability to adapt to new things
- Staying positive
- Being interested / curious / adventurous / flexible
- Being able to accept the countries values, behaviors, customs, and traditions

Being successfully intercultural competent has a lot to do with the inner attitude and the emotions that are connected with it. If these factors interact properly and if one uses or rather possesses the helpful characteristics for successful acclimatization, then these two points - for example successful integration and existing intercultural competence - can certainly be connected.



### **7.1.2. An Extension on Intercultural Competence**

In the course of the paper, we could also find out that intercultural competence very well depends on how much a person can get involved with their feelings, or how good their perception of what is happening around them is, how they subsequently deal with this perception, and what they do with it. It sometimes takes a certain degree of intercultural sensitivity that is ideally available in advance, on which it can then be built. With this initial sensitivity, the process of developing intercultural competence can be started. In general, it can be said that one is not "naturally interculturally competent". One learns from experience and builds on it. It should therefore not be seen as a learning goal in this sense to be able to call oneself an "interculturally competent person", but rather an ongoing process that is continued through constant reconstruction, analysis, and active perception of situations. We live in a world of constant change, in which not only our environment changes, but also our inner being, our way of thinking, our actions, our values. As this happens to many individuals, it is important to keep this process going in order to keep up with the change. There is much more contact with other cultures than in the past due to globalization. Consequently, intercultural competence is indeed a process-oriented characteristic, arising from a collection of different skills, which can nowadays be acquired or mastered through the change of time much easier than in the past.

### **7.1.3. Being Interculturally Competent in Hong Kong**

Experience already gained in other cultures and countries can therefore be extremely helpful when moving to a new country. Take, for example, an expatriate who has lived in Asia before. In the cases analyzed in this thesis, certain experienced prior knowledge of Asian culture was present, and these individuals started the adventure from the outset with an uncertain, but on some level familiar feeling due to their prior knowledge. It can therefore be said that it is advantageous, especially for the perception of the acclimatization phase, if cultural similarities to the host country are already known and accepted, and if the experience of this has been gained in advance. This can dampen the impact of possible culture shock and make integration easier.

Hong Kong is teeming with different nationalities, some of which really want to adapt culturally, but others do not. However, it is noticeable that many of them gradually behave more like the locals and adopt their way of thinking. Especially when it comes to their identity and their struggle and the retention of the slowly escaping freedom against the Chinese state. Many expatriates root for the locals, hope for Hong Kong to retain its Western influence, and to some extent identify with it through their newly created home in

the host country. After all, it's about preserving their lifestyle there as well. This for sure also shows sort of a cultural competence and plays a big role in being successful as an intercultural person in Hong Kong.

According to age, gender, ethnicity, or education there were no indicators found, that any of that would have a negative impact or an impact at all on how well the acculturation process is proceeding. This could possibly be due to the internationality of Hong Kong in the first place. Interestingly, the automatic and sometimes even unintentional integration of expatriates into groups of their peers occurred. They found themselves among like-minded people in certain areas, where they then returned again and again, and friendships were formed through meeting new expatriates or networking locally. Such contacts, as an example, can soften the sometimes-hard impact a new culture can have on someone. There are indeed ways to prepare a for the upcoming time of uncertainty and newness, especially if one is already in the middle of it and in fact experiencing cultural difficulties in a new location:

- Researching everything related to the culture, people, history, food, hot spots, and so on of Hong Kong
- Finding a network. It does not have to be Hongkongers; it can be other contacts that one acquires through social media or personal contact recommendations. The important thing is "to do it!" One should go out and meet with people. If one has kids, visiting a new playground with them is always a good idea. Depending on the neighborhood or the district, other expatriates might be there as well
- Being aware that Hong Kong is a city full of contrasts, where not only East meets West, but also rich meets poor.
- Trying not to wallow in the negative, but to pick out the positive and possibly trying to analyze the badly experienced situations to the best of one's ability.

## **7.2. The Intercultural Businessperson in Hong Kong**

When all these findings are taken into account, we can come back to the original question of how - and if so - being interculturally competent influences the acculturation process. We will see that we have already anticipated the answer to it by all the mentioned factors. However, in order to make a few additions and get the full picture, it is important to mention relevant supplementary points when it comes to defining what intercultural competency could look like in a businessperson in Hong Kong.

An intercultural competent businessperson is, according to the data collected and the research conducted in the course of this work, a person who already possesses or

otherwise acquires various characteristics. These characteristics serve to be able to deal better with the environment and to rethink quickly in intercultural interactions, if necessary, in order to get the best possible success out of the situation. There are competencies in a person that can not only be advantageous for personal intercultural success, but also necessary. These include, above all, a certain openness to the new, the will and interest to engage in this new, and to start a permanent learning process. We can describe a person as successfully interculturally competent if he or she has integrated himself or herself in the best possible way, not only in his or her own eyes, but also from the outside, into an environment, but also into a network, which is not within the framework of his or her own culture. Finding one's way in this new environment (both socially and locally) and coping positively with the daily interactions and confrontations associated with it can, in addition to the other points already mentioned above from the characteristics, preconditions, and skills, be considered good indicators for attributing intercultural competence to this person. Especially in Hong Kong, intercultural competence and adaptability can be closely linked to local identity thinking. Thus, there is also a communal hope that the situation will not deteriorate, and that Hongkongers will be able to retain their freedom to a certain extent. By sharing these values and hopes, a person might not just be able to acculturate faster in the city, but also get that feeling of belonging.

On the basis of the insights gained, we can therefore now also address the following two assumptions posed at the beginning:

#### Assumption 1:

*Being successful as an intercultural businessperson is an individual construct of personal competency that can be acquired and learned over time.*

As already mentioned throughout the paper, it is indeed a process of acquiring and learning this competence. Being successful in being an intercultural businessperson is definitely to be seen as an individual construct of personal competencies, but also as an individual construct of personal willingness to enrich oneself with this step of becoming more and something in between that person's old culture and the new one.

#### Assumption 2:

*The faster one settles into a new country, the more interculturally competent a person is.*

As has been shown in the course of the work, intercultural competence is a quality that can be acquired, but it should be seen more as an ongoing process, which is closely linked to a permanent evaluation and learning of the experience. Since settling into a new host country very often also depends on previous experiences and skills already acquired,

the speed of settling in is on an individual level and has by and large nothing to do with the intercultural competence of that person. It can be linked to each other, and cross-characteristics can be drawn, but those two factors don't depend on each other. Even after a longer process of settling in, which can be based on several causes, a person can have a strong intercultural competence and be quite successful in practicing it. So, the answer to this posed assumption is no, one is not automatically more interculturally competent just by settling into a new country faster.

## **8. Outlook and Critical Evaluation**

### **8.1. Critical Evaluation - Research**

In the field of literary research, it is always important to draw on new and timely literature. In the course of this work, however, it was necessary to fall back on older theories, some of which were established a few decades ago. Even though they still retain most of their validity today and are certainly still applicable, this must always be viewed critically. Especially taking into account the enormous technical development in terms of cross-country communication that has taken place since then, which can change the individual process flow for each person many times over. On the other hand, studies have been made that are highly relevant to the analysis of Hong Kong people's identity, but again the data is not up to date. For the completion of this work, it was not possible to use more recent specimens, so the most recent data available was used.

### **8.2. Critical Evaluation - Interviews**

In the course of the interview process, some complications arose that were only partially anticipated in advance. It was already considered during the preparation phase that technical and organizational problems could occur. Exactly these two cases happened indeed with two interview candidates: in one of the cases, the connection could not be maintained during the video call despite several attempts and the interview was thus terminated prematurely. In another case, the meeting was postponed twice and due to the participant's busy schedule, this appointment could also not be held as expected. The two interviews were therefore completed in writing in the form of a questionnaire whereby the personal aspect was lost and thus also much of the desirable information. Setting up a new appointment was not possible with both candidates.

Another point that was not taken into account is the difficulty of conducting an interview with a person with whom communication can be considered rather burdensome. A perceived talking past each other and a tenacious flow of conversation made it a challenge to remain objective and professional towards the candidate - who, after all, was voluntarily participating in this interview. Especially when the questions asked are not answered in any way that meets expectations. In precisely such cases, however, it is incredibly important to read between the lines, continue with asking the questions more clearly, and to remain objective. Does the candidate possibly not want to admit that he had initial difficulties? Is he hiding his insecurity behind his humor? Or is it really the truth

and his way of remembering what he perceived during that time? Even though lots of these factors could probably be considered, it does not change the fact that this interview could only be used to a limited extent for the evaluation of the work. Even in the evaluation and analysis of the interview it was still difficult keep the personal feelings to oneself and maintain an objective mind. Nevertheless, this experience was a very important and memorable one, as it showed the other side of this interview process. The other three conducted personal interviews were one of the most positive experiences regarding this topic.

Four of the five selected candidates, in retrospect, had too many similarities. Same age group, similar backgrounds, similar family situations, previous experience with Asia and living abroad, and so on. The information obtained is still very interesting and of great use for this work, but the spectrum of results could have been even broader and more decisive with more varying participants and a larger group of candidates.

### **8.3. Outlook for further research**

The reader of this paper may have already noticed that this is a much more extensive topic than can be completely covered within a single master's thesis. There are several approaches for doing further research in this area; an effective way of acquiring more detailed research materials may be to conduct more qualitative interviews, in which a larger number of people are asked about their acclimatization process in Hong Kong. It could also be useful to support expatriates in Hong Kong for the first time in the course of a study. They could be asked regularly by means of a quick daily questionnaire or answer a few questions with a short personal statement (by phone, digitally, or in person). In this case it might be advisable to ask the candidates about their personality before they move in order to determine what qualities they may have which may favor the acculturation process. These results could also be achieved, for example, in cooperation with one or more companies. Particularly if many internal transfers from Austria to Hong Kong are made in these companies.

The area of the topic "acculturation" alone is so extensive that a whole paper could be filled with it. In the course of this paper, only the most essential information has been referred to in order to generate a basic understanding of the contents of the previous work for the reader. J. W. Berry has many sources of reference to delve even deeper into this area and there are also numerous critical perspectives and reinterpretations of his proposed models. If there is interest in further research on the subject of acculturation, taking such a direction by exploring the modern viewpoint with an adaptation to the interconnectedness and the current progress of society, technology, economy, the

globalization, and so on, can be recommended. The results of this could eventually provide quite interesting conclusions, especially in terms of to the duration, individual progression, and potentially emerging problems of the process.

As already mentioned, further research about this topic, leaning on the previous presented methods and findings, can also be conducted with other international hubs with a strong commercial influence, such as Dubai. The degree of a possible correlation of intercultural competence and acculturation could be investigated there.

## 9. Conclusion

Attempting to define intercultural competence may involve a great deal of research at the outset, but the construct of the associated significance of individual character traits becomes increasingly apparent until it is finally tangible and comprehensible. Particularly in the case of expatriates, who ideally adapt to their new environment within a very short time, this competence can be well demonstrated on the basis of personal experience reports and an insight into their life, both professional and private. The competence to adapt to the environment as well as to the fellow human beings in a foreign culture. This includes analyzing situations through intrinsic perception in order to guide their outcome in the requested direction without letting one's counterpart sense cultural differences. Depending on a person's experience and previous history, intercultural competence may already be more pronounced or may be in the process of being developed. What is certain, however, is that it is an ongoing process in which what has been experienced is constantly reanalyzed and critically examined in order to learn new things from it and to be able to apply them. However, intercultural competence is not only of great relevance for the individual businessman in order to act and present himself successfully in foreign countries. It also plays a major role for a team structure, consisting of different cultural backgrounds, if the individual members and managers possess a certain intercultural competence. Thus, although it remains an individual construct, it plays an essential role on a level with several people involved, who suddenly contribute together and are no longer individually responsible for the company's success.

Especially in Hong Kong, a businessperson who wants to call him- or herself successful in applying his or her intercultural competence needs an additional quality based on the history and identity of Hong Kong people. One must not only know but understand their journey to this day. One must see their suffering and aspirations and share hope with them. One must accept that the identity currently found is most likely not yet in its final stage, as a constant process of change has been established due to China's interference. Nonetheless, one must empathize, feel, and hope with them. At the end, the mix of all those points together is what makes a successful intercultural businessperson in Hong Kong.



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## Appendix

Expat Interview Number 1, p. 70

Expat Interview Number 2, p. 78

Expat Interview Number 3, p. 86

Expat Interview Number 4, p. 98

Expat Interview Number 5, p. 100

Flexpatriate Manager Interview, p. 103

### **Expat-Interview Number 1**

IE: Interviewer

KW: Candidate 1

**IE: Vielen Dank, dass du dich bereit erklärt hast, mit mir zu sprechen, insbesondere weil ich weiß, dass dies eine arbeitsreiche Woche für dich ist. Ich wird dann auch gleich reinstarten. Es gibt also auf der Welt diesen Hot Spot namens Hong Kong und du warst eine der Auserwählten, die dort hinziehen musste oder durfte. Was waren deine ersten Gedanken, als du von diesem Umzug erfahren hast? Erinnerst du dich an die Situation?**

KW: Ich sehe den Umzug definitiv als ein Dürfen und nicht als ein Müssen, das steht fest. Ich und mein Mann kannten Hongkong von früheren Besuchen, das heißt wir kannten die Stadt aus der Sicht eines Touristen und halt noch nicht als Resident. Und wir waren da schon begeistert. Von allem dort, dem Flair, dem Feeling, den Leuten, einfach allem. Als seine Firma mit einem Job Offer für die Region Asien mit Sitz in Hongkong auf ihn zukam, war es für ihn und eigentlich uns beide ganz klar, dass er es annehmen würde. Die neue Position war höchst interessant und er hatte schon lange den Wunsch gehegt, für einige Zeit in Hongkong zu leben. Ja. Also auch wenn ich mich mit dem Gedanken an ein Leben in Hongkong vorab wirklich schon öfters beschäftigt hatte, kam für mich das Angebot dann schlussendlich doch etwas zu überraschend. Ich hatte zu der Zeit gerade eine führende Position für die Dauer von zwei Jahren an einer internationalen Schule in München angenommen und unser Sohn stand kurz vor seinem Schulabschluss. Ein baldiger Umzug nach Hongkong war für mich nicht möglich und kam auch ehrlichgesagt nicht in Frage. Ja, wir entschieden uns also dazu, dass mein Mann die Position annimmt, nach Hongkong zieht und ich nach gut einem Jahr nachkomme.

Mein Mann mietete sich in Hongkong dann im Stadtteil Whampoa ein Serviced Appartement, einem eigentlich chinesischen Stadtteil von Hongkong, und ich flog in den Ferienzeiten zu ihm. Es war zwar nicht die perfekte Lösung, da wir uns nur alle zwei Monate sehen konnten, doch war es für mich ein softer Umzug und ein großartiges „Sich Hinein Schnuppern“ in die Stadt.

**IE: Wow, das klingt nach einem wirklich interessanten Start. Gerade wenn du recht „soft“ in diesen Umzug reingegangen bist, kannst du dich noch daran erinnern, welche Erwartungen du gegenüber der Stadt, dem Lifestyle, den Leuten oder einfach dem neuen Leben da hattest?**

KW: Nur zu gut. Ja. Mit dem Umzug nach HK wollten mein Mann und ich einen neuen Lifestyle beginnen. Wir zogen das erste Mal ohne unsere Söhne um und da ich nicht mehr berufstätig war, wollte ich ihn nun auch ab und zu auf seinen Geschäftsreisen begleiten. Noch einmal richtig durchstarten und das Leben genießen! Abends ausgehen, das fast überwältigende Angebot an unterschiedlichsten Restaurant nutzen, verreisen, und so weiter. Alles, was man sich vorstellen und wünschen kann.

Hongkongs Lage war der ideale Ausgangspunkt für Reisen innerhalb Asiens. Kurzurlaube in Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Malediven nur wenige Flugstunden entfernt. Wir wollten das Leben in dieser Metropole erfahren, mit all den Vorteilen und Nachteilen. West meets East, das wussten wir. Wir wussten auch, dass Hongkong eine Stadt voller Gegensätze ist. Darauf war ich alles richtig gespannt.

**IE: Das kann ich mir vorstellen! Also hast du zu Beginn dort noch gar nicht gearbeitet?**

KW: Nein, das kam dann kurze Zeit später dazu. Auch wenn die Stad so vieles bietet und man sich locker täglich dort beschäftigen kann ohne einen Job zu haben, so war es für mich doch naheliegend, wieder zu unterrichten. Also began ich, auf selbstständiger Basis Privatunterricht zu geben. Ines, ich sag es dir, da hab ich so viele schöne neue Fleckchen entdeckt!

**IE: Na das klingt doch wunderbar! Hat euch die Firma deines Mannes beim Umzug eigentlich irgendwie unterstützt oder habt ihr das alles alleine geregelt?**

KW: Nein nein. Die Firma übernahm alles Organisatorische. Wir suchten ein neues

Appartement, als ich nach HK nachkam und die Firma übernahm die Kosten und die vertraglichen Erfordernisse. Das hat alles sehr gut geklappt.

**IE: Hat dir jemand vorab die lokale Kultur dort nähergebracht oder hast du dich irgendwie speziell informiert?**

Jain. Wir hatten Jahre zuvor für vier Jahre in Tokyo gelebt und da ich eine große Affinität gegenüber Asien und den unterschiedlichen asiatischen Kulturen hatte und habe, war es für mich ein großes Vergnügen mich über das Leben, die Geschichte und Kultur Hongkongs zu informieren. Wann immer ich meinen Mann besucht habe, war ich auf Entdeckung, habe beobachtet, erforscht und dabei gelernt. So konnte ich mich individuell darauf vorbereiten.

**IE: Das ist ja spitze! Man merkt immer noch, wie interessiert du diesem Thema gegenüberstehst. Hattest du dann vor Ort außer deinem Mann auch noch jemanden, den du kanntest und der dich da ein wenig herumführen konnte**

KW: Mein großes Glück war, dass eine Freundin aus meiner Zeit in Japan bereits seit drei Jahren in Hongkong lebte. Ich wurde durch sie in ein soziales Netz aufgenommen, hatte Zugang zu gesellschaftlichen Clubs wie dem Marina Club, dem Chinese Club und so und lernte Hongkong eigentlich so, wie sagt man, „by doing“ kennen. Wir hatten die gleichen Interessen und so begann von der ersten Woche an ein gemeinsames Exploren und das war spitzenklasse!

**IE: Das klingt nach einer wirklich tollen Erfahrung und nach einer tollen Möglichkeit, die sich da für dich ergeben hat. Hast du denn da auch ohne diese Kontaktperson persönlich irgendwelche Vorbereitungen getroffen?**

KW: Ich habe sehr, sehr viel in Online Portalen und Expat Foren gelesen und nachgeforscht, was Expats über ihr Leben in Hongkong berichteten. Wie schaut die medizinische Versorgung aus, was ist schwer zu bekommen, welche täglichen kleinen und großen Probleme treten auf, wie ist die Qualität des Trinkwassers und und und. Ich hatte auch mit einer Bekannten, die lange in HK gelebt hatte, Kontakt aufgenommen und ihre Erfahrungen mit City, Menschen, Sprache und Kultur gaben mehr Einblick und halfen bei der Vorbereitung. Die Broschüre „Life as Expat in Hongkong“ von deutschen Frauen herausgegeben war voll von nützlichen Informationen, Adressen und Tipps. Sie war die ersten Monate bei mir in fast täglichem Gebrauch. Kann ich nur empfehlen.

**IE: Das heißt du hast dich auf deine Art und Weise eingefunden, das ist schön. Gerade wenn du von den ersten Monaten sprichst, wie war für dich diese erste Zeit in Hongkong? Kannst du dich an Gefühle erinnern? Gerade wenn du an die Sprache und die neue Umgebung denkst. Oder die Realität im Gegensatz zu deinen Erwartungen. Wie ging es dir im Bezug auf die Familie in Österreich. Solche Dinge.**

KW: Da ich nicht von vornherein berufstätig war, die Wohnung nicht allzu groß war und einmal wöchentlich die chinesische Haushaltshilfe kam und ich deswegen auch nicht viel in der Wohnung war, hatte ich viel Zeit zur Verfügung. Manchmal zu viel Zeit. Die ersten Wochen waren unter diesem Aspekt fast eine Überforderung für mich, da ich noch vor kurzer Zeit voll im Beruf stand und mich um Haus und Garten kümmern musste. Auch vermisste ich meine Eltern und Söhne. In Skypecalls, die wegen der Zeitverschiebung am frühen Nachmittag angesetzt waren, konnte mein Leben mit meinen Eltern geteilt werden und oft begleiteten sie mich per WhatsApp-Video, wenn ich unterwegs in der Stadt war. Es war für mich enorm wichtig, sie an meinem Tagesablauf teilhaben zu lassen. Für sie war es die Bestätigung, dass ich sicher war und dass sie sich nicht um mich sorgen mussten. Und ich wusste so, dass es ihnen gut geht. Skype und WhatsApp brachten die Lieben trotz großer Entfernung nahe. Ungemein wichtig in der Anfangsphase in Hongkong.

Aber das alles konnte meine Begeisterung für mein neues Leben nicht trüben. Ich war stundenlange unterwegs, ließ mich treiben von Straße zu Straße, von Geschäft zu Geschäft. Ines, Hongkong war und ist für mich das ultimative Shopping Paradies. Es gibt die modernesten, teuersten, exklusivsten Malls weltweit. Und dann gibt es die Einheimischen - Märkte, die pulsieren vor Lebendigkeit und Vielfaltigkeit, wo man feilschen und handeln kann, wo es manchmal richtig laut werden kann. Immer mit Humor gepaart. Fast immer. (lacht) Die Orientierung war nicht schwer, weil unser Gebäude war nicht zu übersehen und das U-Bahn-Netz sehr einfach zu verstehen und mit der Octopus Karte fiel das Ticket kaufen weg.

Es gab kaum Sprachbarrieren, da die Mehrheit der Hongkong-Chinesen neben Cantonese auch English spricht.

Unsere Wohnung war im 34. Stockwerk eines modernen Gebäudes, mitten im geschäftigen Kowloon und mit Sicht auf den Hafen. Die meisten Expats bevorzugten es, auf der Insel zu wohnen. Aber wir fühlten uns im mehr chinesisch angehauchten Teil der Stadt sehr wohl. Hier herrschte bis kurz vor Mitternacht Leben auf den Straßen, die Geschäfte waren bis 23:00 Uhr geöffnet und die Gegend war von Restaurants und Bars übersät. Auf der nahen Nathan Road wimmelte es immer von Menschen. Wir liebten



dieses wuselige Durcheinander, auch wenn es oft sehr laut war. Abends saßen wir regelmäßig im Lulu oder auf der Terrasse des Woolloomooloo im THE ONE, unserem Lieblingsrestaurant, und genossen die Aussicht auf diese phänomenale Stadt.

Zusammengefasst kann ich sagen, dass die ersten Wochen in Hongkong von Freude und Vorfreude auf den neuen Lifestyle und das Kennenlernen der Stadt erfüllt waren. Es war alles einfach magisch.

**IE: Magisch scheint hier auch das treffendste Wort zu sein, so wie du das erzählst! Wenn ihr mehr im chinesischen Teil der Stadt wart, habt ihr euch trotzdem mit anderen Expats getroffen?**

KW: Die Expats, die man zufällig beim Ausgehen in Central oder in Stanley traf, waren alle easy going und man kam wirklich schnell ins Gespräch. Oft traf man sich danach auch wieder in den bekannten Ausgevierteln oder verabredete sich sogar zum Yoga, Joggen oder Wandern. Das waren dann die Frauen. Ich habe mich anfangs mit einer anderen Gruppe von deutschen Frauen oft zum Frühstück oder Lunch getroffen. Da die Meisten kleine Kinder hatten, waren unsere Interessen aber dann doch sehr unterschiedlich und ich verfolgte diese Treffen nicht weiter. Das war nichts mehr für mich.

Manchmal wurden wir von Bekannten kontaktiert und gefragt, ob wir neu ankommenden Expats in Hongkong zur Seite stehen könnten. Das haben wir immer sehr gerne gemacht. Zwei sehr nette, lange Freundschaften entstanden so.

**IE: Schön. Also habt ihr da wirklich das beste rausgeholt. Hattest du denn abgesehen von diesen Eindrücken auch Momente oder Situationen, die du als schwierig bezeichnen würdest, also du dich dort eingelebt hast?**

KW: Oh ja. Man muss sich an die Massen von Eindrücken, die man jeden Tag erlebt, gewöhnen. Man muss sich an den dauernden Lärm, eine Art konstantes Rauschen von Verkehr und Klimaanlage, dem Hupen und lautem Reden der Chinesen gewöhnen. Glaub mir, Chinesen in der U-Bahn beim Telefonieren sind nicht zu überhören. Obwohl ich das Klima liebte, ist die feuchte Hitze im Sommer nur schwer zu ertragen. Nach nur wenigen Minuten im Freien flüchtet man gerne in ein klimatisiertes Geschäft oder eine Mall, um erstmal abzukühlen und dann wiederum das Jäckchen aus der Tasche zu ziehen, um nicht zu frieren. Ein Schal oder eine Weste war immer mit in meiner Handtasche.

Ja, außerdem was noch. Dann waren die Essengepflogenheiten der Chinesen anders als unsere. Da gibt es eine Situation, an die ich mich so gut erinnern kann. Während ich eines Mittags im Restaurant still meine Suppe aß, schlürften und schmatzten die chinesischen

Gäste am anderen Tisch, zogen sich die Nase hoch und nicht essbare Hühnchenteile wurden neben den Teller gespuckt. Chinesen essen laut, ich habe mich auch nicht daran gewöhnt, habe mir dann aber die Restaurants besser ausgesucht.

Und das war zwar nichts in Hongkong selbst, aber das Alter, der Gesundheitszustand und die Entfernung zu meinen Eltern war die größte Sorge die ich ansonsten hatte und die mir da teilweise ein wenig die Luft rausgenommen hat.

**IE: Absolut verständlich, vor allem bei so einer Distanz und doch so wenig persönlichem Kontakt. Gab es trotzdem einen Moment oder eine Situation an die du dich erinnerst, ab dem du dich in Hongkong gefühlt hast als wärst du zuhause?**

KW: Schon aus Erfahrung von meinen anderen Auslandsaufenthalten und der Eingewöhnungsphase wusste ich, dass ich ca. 2 Jahre brauche, bis ich mich wieder zu Hause fühle. Es sind mehrere Faktoren, die bei mir dieses „Angekommen sein“ definieren. Einmal ist es, wenn das „Nest“ fertig ist, wenn das neue Heim eingerichtet, dekoriert, die eigene Handschrift erhalten hat und ich mich darin wohl fühle.

Dann spielt das soziale Netz eine Rolle. Wenn es persönliche Kontakte, Freunde gibt, zu denen man in einem Vertrauensverhältnis steht. Und ganz wichtig ist immer die Infrastruktur, speziell das Angebot an Einkaufsmöglichkeiten und Freizeitbeschäftigungen.

In Hongkong brauchte ich für dieses „Ankommen“ ca. ein Jahr. Ich kann mich noch gut an den Moment erinnern, als ich bei der Rückkehr von einem Kurzurlaub eine riesige innere Freude verspürte und richtig glücklich war, wieder zurück zu sein. Und richtig bewusst war mir, dass ich in Hongkong mein „Home“ gefunden hatte, als ich mich noch während meines Heimaturlaubes in Österreich nach dem täglichen Leben in Hongkong gesehnt hatte und mein Appartement und den Tagesablauf vermisst hatte. Den Blick vom Flugzeug auf die Stadt beim Landeanflug und diese immense Freude to be home again sind unvergesslich.

**IE: Wahnsinn KW, vielen Dank, das war wunderbar! Das heißt du hast dich verhältnismäßig zu deinen vorigen Aufenthalten doch recht schnell in Hongkong eingelebt. Wenn du an die Phase des „Ankommens“ denkst, wie du sie so schön genannt hast, glaubst du, dass es bestimmte Charaktereigenschaften gibt, die man haben sollte, wodurch diese Eingewöhnungsphase und das Ankommen in einer anderen Kultur einfacher werden?**

KW: Ja ich glaube die gibt es. Ganz wichtig ist Offenheit, Neugierde für Neues, Interesse, Flexibilität, Humor und die Fähigkeit sich an bestimmte Gegebenheiten anzupassen. Eine

neue Kultur zu akzeptieren und sich zu integrieren hat mir beim Eingewöhnungsprozess immer geholfen.

Ich habe die Gesetze, die Verpflichtungen, die Traditionen und die daraus entstandenen Besonderheiten eines Landes und einer Kultur akzeptiert und mich auch verantwortlich dafür gefühlt. Nicht immer einfach.

**IE: Kann ich mir vorstellen. Hast du denn irgendwelche Tipps für einen Expat parat, der jetzt beispielsweise neu nach Hongkong zieht?**

KW: Bezüglich Hongkongs... Die kulturelle Anpassung an das Leben in Hongkong und die kulturelle Eingewöhnungsphase war von all meinen Umzügen die leichteste. Mit Kindern findet man etwas leichter Kontakt. Schulen, Kindergärten, Spielplätze sind ganz oft Meetingpoints für Expats.

Obwohl Hongkong im Herzen von Asien liegt, empfand ich bei der Ankunft dort keinen Kulturschock. Anders als Jahre zuvor in Tokyo. Da prallte meine westliche Welt auf die japanische Welt. Die Stadt ist noch in Klammern, eine Symbiose von East meets West, ein friedliches Konglomerat westlicher und asiatischer Einflüsse, die chinesischen Tentakel allerdings schon spürbar.

Mit Expats Kontakt aufnehmen und über Erfahrungen sprechen ist in der Vorbereitungsphase ein Muss. Das kann ich einem nur ans Herz legen.

Dann. Eine Relocationagentur kontaktieren, wenn die Firma das nicht ohnehin anbietet.

Sich über alle Lebensbereiche vorab informieren. Da gibt es ja auch mittlerweile genug dazu zu finden, ob nun im Internet oder sonst wo.

Ganz wichtig finde ich zu wissen, dass das Leben in Hongkong teuer ist. Unbedingt den Rechner in die Hand nehmen und kalkulieren. Hongkong ohne Geld ist kein Spaß!

Dann. Bereits im Vorfeld über Social Media oder Bekannte Kontakte mit Expats in Hongkong knüpfen, dann hat man vor Ort schon eine Ansprechperson.

Sei vorbereitet, dass Hongkong eine Stadt voller Kontraste ist. Es sitzen Bettler am Straßenrand und nachts geben sich Lamborghinis auf der Stadtautobahn ein Rennen. Modernste High-riser erheben sich neben alten Tempelanlagen und auf Garküchen mit Plastikgeschirr und Plastikstühlen folgen Gourmetrestaurants von höchstem Niveau.

Die medizinische Versorgung und das Angebot an Privatkliniken sind exzellent. Die Ärzte haben meist eine Ausbildung in England oder Amerika und sprechen Englisch.

Also kurz gesagt: informieren, Kontakte knüpfen, sich gut vorbereiten und mit einer positiven Einstellung an die Sache gehen!

**IE: Also ich würde mich über solche Tipps sehr freuen, danke!**

**Jetzt hab ich abschließend nur noch die Frage an dich, ob du dich denn erinnern kannst wie es für dich nach Hongkong war, als es zurück nach Österreich ging. Wie war es für dich, wieder zuhause zu sein? Hast du eine Art Heimweh nach Hongkong empfunden?**

KW: Ach Ines, das muss ich dir so sagen, wie es sich in meinem Kopf anhört. I feel homesick towards Hong Kong at many times.

I miss the beauty of the city, the skyline at night, the lights reflecting in the water. I miss the bubbly busy streets, the smell from the street kitchens when strolling through the streets, I miss the sunset over the ocean while on the boat returning from Lamma Island, with the most amazing seafood in my belly. I miss hiking along the Dragon Trail and then arriving at Big Wave Bay ready for a dip in the salty water. I miss sitting on the double decker bus to Stanley, sitting on the first floor of Pickled Pelican and eating this unbelievable burger while looking onto the ocean. I miss going by ferry to Hong Kong island, enjoy the most delicious Chinese dumplings and then have a quick visit to the market along Li Yuen Street, having a laughter with some of the vendors. I miss sipping a Signature martini on the terrasse of The One or the Sevva bar surrounded by the flashing lights of HSBC. And most of all I miss chatting with my friend while sitting in Starbucks at the harbor enjoying a cup of green tea matcha.

Yes, I miss HK and can't wait to be back!

## **Expatriate-Interview Number 2**

IE: Interviewer

SV: Candidate 2

**IE: Do you want to start with saying a little bit about yourself? What are you currently working as, what were your reasons for transferring to Hong Kong, and whatever comes to your mind?**

SV: I see. OK, so my current position I would describe as kind of project manager in a family office. So, I'm kind of a nanny for the money of rich people, which I enjoy very much. My highest education, beside that I'm a very good trumpet player (laughs) is "Magister FH" and I don't know, I would that it's equivalent to a master. But I worked for it as for a PhD, but I think we can say it's like a master, yes.

**IE: Why did you have to go to Hong Kong.**

SV: Well, I did not have to go to Hong Kong, it was it was my choice. I looked at all the places which have been offered from inside our company back then to get the knowledge of foreign business and banking and prepare for new steps inside the bank. Finally, for me, what I was looking for, was the most or the farthest away destination to get to know the Chinese Market. And also, which is completely different from what we have here somehow. At the same time, I was lucky because, well, I was the first to had internally applied for that, but then a colleague came and said that he would like to go there too and let's have a game. And so, I was pretty lucky because I don't know what kind of game we were playing. But finally, I won because otherwise I would have gone to the United States and after take over that customer sector. What would be OK, but yeah, different. Absolutely not my first choice.

**IE: I completely agree. I also would have chosen Hong Kong. Definitely. So, you were the lucky winner in that scenario and you got to go to Hong Kong. What expectations did you have about the city, the lifestyle, the people and everything that was awaiting you?**

SV: Well, it's very hard to remember somehow what was the expectation. I did it specially to see accurately what expectations someone had, because I think, you know, memories are changing over time. It's hard to subtract it from all the other memories. I

mean, what did I expect? I think I expected to see some Asians (laughs) without being racist, but yes, that's what you're expecting if you go to Hong Kong. To be honest, I did not know what to expect. So no big expectations from my side there.

**IE: Absolutely fine. That's an answer too. You don't always have to expect something if you go. Just be open to going. But before you went there, did you prepare in a special kind of way for your trip? Did you have anybody explain that foreign culture or did you get other information about the country you would go to or did you have somebody to confide in at Hong Kong, at the city, and the city itself? How did you did you prepare for that or did you prepare for it at all?**

SV: What I remember is that I got a kind of a contact there. This contact showed me around a bit and it was nice to have somebody and not be completely alone. We also had a little bit of action together and yes, he showed me around and showed me everything a bit from his side. He was a much older guy though and when I met a few people in my age it was a lot more "easy going" for me. I was in my late twenties, so that's why.

Beside of that, well, I would not say that when I went there that the Internet was new, but it wasn't that much information on there, like it is on YouTube and everywhere today. So, I think today with all the social media, all these videos, with all these market niches which people have with the niche-channels and everything, you would have much more expectations what to see in Hong Kong and then. Yeah, but maybe it was the better thing anyways to just have the Hong Kong tourism homepage and it's all what you could expect to see and surprise you.

**IE: Ok, what year was it when you were there, because you said the Internet wasn't "new"?**

SV: It was 2005, so it wasn't new, of course, but you know (laughs). It was of course already in usage but there wasn't that much content uploaded at the time. Most people just got content.

**IE: So, it's a little while back but not too far away, I guess. When you went to Hong Kong you only prepared a little bit. You basically got there and you had your contacts there. But how would you describe the first time in Hong Kong, considering the language barrier, did you notice something? Did you have difficulties with your new surroundings, or was the reality different than you were**

**expecting it or something like that? Just tell me a little bit about your first impressions the first time there.**

SV: Yes, I think for me the beginning was a kind of stressful, but it's tough to say. It wasn't the stress from the city, but the stress which I brought with me, it has nothing to do with Hong Kong. And of course, if you're already kind of stressed and then you come into a city like Hong Kong, you are kind of overwhelmed. It's really a lot of information and everything. As you said, you have, at least at that time you had, barriers from language. It was my expectation actually that I said, okay, I think everyone is speaking English there or at least a little bit. And this wasn't like that because Cantonese was, of course, much more important. But some people there just spoke Cantonese, which, of course is perfectly fine. But at that moment, it's nice if the taxi driver understands where your apartment is. But the beginning was really impressive and I had great two weeks, I think, maybe a little bit stressful, but still, you know, really good.

**IE: Was it for more like vacation for you? Was it that you did miss your family at home or was it more “I'm here now and I'm going to enjoy it at its fullest”? Your thoughts?**

SV: Well, I would not say that I haven't missed my family or anyone. Maybe it was more like that I missed a convenience in the first time, a comfort zone. To say okay I know, at home it would be more cozy, where I know everything. And there it's like “I don't know anything”. But to be honest, as I said, maybe memories change over time. But it was more like a vacation and an adventure from the very first moment. I just go through that all the time that I've been there. So, yes, it was very enjoyable.

**IE: That's awesome. So, you had you had a good start there, except the stress you brought on yourself by expecting everyone to speak English.**

**Was there something you would say was really hard for you in Hong Kong? In your opinion, are there things or situations that are hard to adapt? I mean, are there cultural differences you can think of or something that really stuck in your mind or story that stuck in your mind that was really hard for you or difficult for you? Or strange even.**

SV: No, to be honest. Not really.

**IE: Were there cultural differences you noticed when you talked to people or went shopping or so?**

SV: No, really not.

**IE: Well, I guess you really had a good time then.**

SV: I had a really good time. And I have to say, I think it's a personal thing. What kind of person you are. I remember some people who had problems with the food there. But honestly, what I could understand is that maybe some people say, okay, I have problems how the food is served, maybe in a dodgy place or maybe the people there were dodgy and dirty and then I can understand that. But some people were just like "I don't like Asian food" and I mean, really, I don't know the whole range of Asian food like Cantonese and Mandarin and Indian and so on. But then, I mean, at least this expectation I had when I went down there. But what these people expected when they went, I believe some people I know went to IKEA to eat hot dogs and went to McDonald's and went to other places like that, they just had to eat Western food like Pizza Hut. Yes okay, I mean, that's a hard time then. But (laughs) for me, as I had no big expectations, I really appreciated how the people living there did everything. It's a very open city. The only thing I remember, which I think was a little bit strange for me and that felt a little bit like China maybe was, that we had one Marketing Manager from Beijing and I was a little bit surprised when I found out that too many questions about his field were not appreciated. And especially not questioning things, he said. Maybe this is a China thing. Coworkers from China didn't question anything he said at a presentation, I noticed that I think. For me situations like that are always to maybe ask some questions. And I mean, we Europeans do usually ask a lot of questions all the time. And also, colleagues from the United States asked questions as well, he just didn't like that I think. I mean, even to us Europeans the United States people, annoying because they ask stupid questions (laughs). No, but beside of that... some colleagues started to speak in Cantonese or Mandarin sometimes but it only took a few seconds for one of the other people to say "stop, please speak in English" so I could understand it as well or one of my other colleagues from the United States.

**IE: That's really polite.**

SV: Absolutely.



**IE: Ok, so there were Hong Kong people there and there were also other people from abroad there with you. With what people did you encounter the most? Who was your closest circle there? Was it very international?**

SV: I would say I had a wonderful mix of people around me from all over the world kind of, so yes, it was very international. Some of my contacts brought other contacts when we met. So yes, as I said, I had so many contacts.

**IE: What kind of nationalities were you in touch there? What other cultures where you involved with?**

SV: Through my contacts I also got in touch with a group of other people, what was really lucky for me. At the beginning I didn't get in contact with any Austrian guys, I met a few people from the UK though. So, this was my luck because in my apartment I shared, there was this South Korean who studied in London before and through him I got to meet all of these other people. He was really open and always brought in other people. Now that I think back it sounds a bit strange. (laughs) But this was great for me, because I think if I would have met with more Austrians, I might not have met all these other people and things would have gone different. At least I would have made other experiences. I think it was much better like this because then I could match up with a few Austrians later on and still had this group with already good connections, but I probably would never have such a good connection to those British people, which was very valuable. Especially because one of them is my business partner now with our Lodge-Business. But that's another story.

**IE: Interesting! So, you had international people around you almost all the time, and not Austrians, like some other people might prefer.**

SV: Absolutely. As I said, I had so many contacts down there in a short time and well, it was nice to just tag along with a few guys and not having to make a program myself. Especially when you're tired after work and just want to grab a beer with someone you haven't spent the whole day with. And they were out most of the time. Also on the weekends, and that was nice. We went to Macao, Shenzhen, and so on. Yes, I had a great time.

**IE: You've been there for a bit over a year, right?**

SV: Yeah. I think it was more or less that. Then I went back.

**IE: So, you started to know Hong Kong a little bit better day by day. Did you feel like home there at one point? Like yes, this is really cool, I feel like I know what this place, I am living here now.**

SV: Absolutely! Yes. Because it was of course all kind of special. Yes, I felt at home fast.

**IE. Can you pin down “fast” to a number of days, weeks, months? And was there a particular situation when you noticed, that you felt “home”?**

SV: Yes, I would say that I felt at home after a month I think. It was all really nice. But no, there was no situation, it just all felt good and I was comfortable.

**IE: Okay great. Do you think it's as easy for other people to adapt as fast as you did and as easily as you did, or do you think there are special characteristics needed to be able to adapt like that? I mean, you're an open-minded person. That's one thing I think was helping you a lot. But can you think of other things that might be helpful, too?**

SV: I mean, yeah, I don't know. I think it's a good question. I think if you have already contacts then it might be easier. You already have the contact and already have a bunch of activities there. Housing is not cheap and there's not a lot of space in most apartments but you might share it with somebody for half the rent. So yes, that. But other than that, I have no special advice for anyone. What I've seen is that for most people it somehow worked out. I don't know everyone of course. But I think when you meet people and go out, you'll be fine.

**IE: I understand, so in your opinion that's sometimes all you need?**

SV: Absolutely.

**IE: During our conversation, it might have freshened up your memory a little bit about the time, especially about the time you got there. Is there anything in your mind and anything that you think is important that I didn't mention yet, that I didn't ask you to share a story that burns on your tongue and you want to let go? Or do you say, well, that was that was about it?**

SV: I know there are tons of stories from my side of which you can say that they were a great experience, to do this and to do whatever. I don't even think that someone has to be open minded. I think if you're in Hong Kong, it's just like a big river and you just jump into it and then you find yourself somewhere else. Because there's no chance that you're not getting involved with the city, with all the restaurants, with all the people, with all the sightseeing, with all the dodgy places, with all that. I don't know how it is today. Of course, it's a long time. It's like 15 years ago. And we have all seen how things have changed rapidly in Hong Kong. People, young people just got themselves in this new role and in this hole of protesting. I will never forget all these videos. And it was pretty crazy. Okay, but that's something different.

**IE: That's fine. You said you cannot do anything else than to just go there and encounter with everything and be confronted with everything and just let go. Now in your opinion: do you think Hong Kong is easier to adapt to than other cities comparable to that?**

SV: Well, back then, I think yes. This is my theory at least. I think it was a big influence of the British Empire. I think that was also kind of the flair and the atmosphere which Hong Kong had. So, we had this adventure, let's say from the Asian side, that was completely different. And then you had the part you're somehow used to. Maybe some Western culture, even if it's British (laughs). So, it was easy to adapt at that time. I'm not sure how it is nowadays because it's now six years ago and I think it has somehow also adapted to China. But we should not forget that China also opened up a little bit in some aspects and also got modernized and everything and also has no interest to, jailing everyone, every tourist, and every student. I think most people will just do fine if they follow the rules and don't go to demonstrations.

**IE: Okay wonderful, thank you. I actually only have one more question left, and that's how it was for you to come back. Especially after what you've told me now, that everything was really cool, and you had a great time there, and not a hard time at all, and everything was so great. Was it hard to come back and being here again? Home?**

SV: Oh, no, not at all. I think it was a wonderful time, of course but it's the same aspect and you're just going back. Maybe it's not an adventure anymore, but it's still you had the feeling that you have changed somehow. Especially when you came home. You had the feeling that you are now much wiser (laughs). Which just lasted for a few days or

weeks until you knew that you are just the same person as before but it took some weeks. So no, it was just perfectly fine when I came back and let the adventure just go on!

**IE: Okay great, thank you so much. Do you want to have the last word in this and add something to this topic of integrating and adapting in a new culture and a new place? Is there anything else you want to state that is important to you?**

SV: Yes, definitely, something really important. If we ever go there again, I think we will eat a lot of Dum Sum because that's something I'm missing a lot. If it's around four o'clock for the half price especially. With a lot of dips. That is really something I could do every day (laughs). That's it, yes.

### **Expatriate-Interview Number 3**

IE: Interviewer

WW: Candidate 3

**IE: Ich würde mal sagen, dann fangen wir gleich an und ich darf dich darum bitten, dass du ein paar Sätze zu deiner Person sagst und auch zu dem, warum du damals nach Hongkong bist bzw. was du davor gemacht hast und was der Grund für deinen Transfer dahin war.**

WW: Also ich war bei [Unternehmensname] in Führungspositionen, Finanzführungspositionen über viele Jahre tätig. Die Position vor Hongkong, in der ich damals war, war Finanzchef für die zentraleuropäische Region. Es war eine fortschrittliche Karriere von Finanzchef einer Vertriebsorganisation und Finanzchef einer regionalen Organisation. Die Überlegung im Jahr 2010, als die Entscheidung anstanden, was sich beruflich im nächsten Schritt tun soll, war im Grunde eine Entscheidung zwischen beruflich wie auch privater Ausrichtung. Da ich schon viele Jahre in Asien gearbeitet hatte, Erfahrung gesammelt hatte, war die große Affinität zu asiatischer Kultur grundsätzlich 1. 2., 2010 war so ein Zeitpunkt in Asien, speziell in Ländern wie China, Indien, Korea genau der Zeitpunkt, wo diese Wirtschaften massiv haben begonnen zu wachsen und die Herausforderungen in so einem Job, bei der Finanzstrategie-Entwicklung mitwirken zu können, Organisationen und Teams zu bauen und zu entwickeln, waren natürlich phänomenal groß. Auf der beruflichen Seite. Hongkong war immer eine Traumstadt für mich. Ich habe vor 20 Jahren die Entscheidung gefällt, dass ich in der Stadt mal leben werde und irgendwie im Hinterkopf, ist es wahrscheinlich auch mitgeschwungen. 1995 war das genau. Tatsächlich war Hongkong Liebe auf den ersten Blick.

Privat war die Situation die, dass wir beide berufstätig waren, meine Frau und ich, und wir hatten zwei Söhne, die beide an der Uni waren. Beide sozusagen vor dem Start ins Unileben oder ins eigene Berufsleben. Und für uns als Familie, wie wir dann ein Paar waren und als Paar wieder Single, also ohne die Kinder, ging es darum ein neues persönliches Kapitel zu leben. Ohne die direkte Kinder-Verantwortung. Und beruflich war es halt die große Herausforderung etwas zu bauen und die Affinität zu Asien, glaube ich, waren so die wesentlichen ausschlaggebenden Faktoren. War sicher ein super interessanter Schritt, aber es war jetzt nicht ein Schritt, der, wenn ich hätte [Unternehmensname] -Vorstandsmitglied werden wollen, der ideale Schritt war. Von Deutschland aus Deutschland und die zentraleuropäische Region zu führen und dann

nach Asien zu gehen war eigentlich eher ein lateraler Move und es war einfach spannender aus persönlicher und beruflicher Sicht. Und das war auch schon so ein Kriterium, dem ich eigentlich immer gefolgt bin. Die ganze Karriere die Dinge zu tun, die einfach spannend sind. Sowohl persönliche als auch berufliche. Ob das mich in der Karriere dahin bringt, hat sich dann irgendwie gezeigt. Es war nicht direkt so ein konkretes Ziel nach vorne und so ging das halt auch manchmal ein wenig im Zick-Zack.

**IE: Im Großen und Ganzen klingt es doch sehr gut so, das ist ja eine Weiterentwicklung für dich selber, also ein wichtiger Step, stimmt das so?**

Ja, ich mein, es gab immer wieder Angebote. Du bist irgendwann auf einer Liste von heißen Kandidaten im Konzern und da kommen immer wieder Angebote. Ich habe auch viele Angebote abgelehnt, wenn sie nicht emotional gepasst haben. Also emotional vom Thema nicht gepasst haben für mich, weil wenn das Thema für mich emotional nicht passt, dann schaff ich's nicht. Die emotionale Verbindung zu dem, was ich tue, muss da sein. Und Asien hat gepasst. In Summe waren es dann über elf Jahre.

**IE: Als es bei dir losging nach Hongkong und die Entscheidung gefällt wurde, dass es jetzt wirklich Hongkong wird, was waren deine ersten Gedanken dahinter?**

WW: Ich war natürlich super excited, super glücklich, dass es funktioniert hat mit Hongkong. Das Timing ist wie immer so ein Thema, weil das Timing war vielleicht ein bisschen schneller wie geplant. Meine Frau war noch fast ein Jahr hier, unser Sohn war noch nicht an der Uni und wir wollten den Sohnmann nicht alleine in Deutschland zurücklassen und wir ziehen jetzt nach Hongkong um. Der Übergang nach Hongkong war so ein bisschen die Challenge. Mein erster Gedanke nach Hongkong zu kommen? Ja da war einfach nur eine riesige Freude.

**IE: Schön. Hast du dich speziell darauf vorbereitet, nach Hongkong zu gehen? Hast du irgendwelche Vorkehrungen getroffen? Hast du dich im Vorhinein stark informiert bezüglich: Was muss ich wissen, bis ich da bin? Was muss ich können?**

WW: Im Normalfall ist ja immer wenig Zeit für diese Dinge, wenn man so einen Karrierewechsel macht. Da bleibt relativ wenig Zeit. Schön wäre ja, wenn man ein paar Monate hätte und dies und das tun könnte. Aber die Zeit ist meistens nicht da. Und was dann schlussendlich passiert ist: ich hatte wenig Vorbereitung im Grunde genommen, wenig im Sinne von wenig im Detail.

Also ich habe mich beschäftigt mit den Strategien der Länder, mit den wichtigsten Ländern. Hongkong ist das regionale Office für Asia Pacific, das sind 14 Länder und ich sage mal so, dass die fünf bis sechs wichtigsten die sind, die zu der Zeit das Geschäft ausgemacht haben. Ein paar andere waren stark wachsend, dort ging es dann mehr um

die strategischen Prioritäten. Ich habe begonnen mich mit Leuten zu treffen, die dort vor Ort gearbeitet hatten, die dort aktiv waren. Es ging um Erwartungen von Vorstandsmitgliedern und Verwaltungsräten. Ich habe insgesamt vielleicht mit zehn wichtigen Leuten aus dem Konzern unterschiedlicher Funktionen zu tun gehabt, also war das der CEO oder Group CEO, Group CFO oder der Vertriebschef bzw. Markschef weltweit, der Präsident des Verwaltungsrates, sogar zwei Mitglieder aus dem Verwaltungsrat und dann auf der Konzernführungsebene drunter: den Finanzchef und den Controlling Chef des Konzerns, den Legal-Head des Konzerns, den Tax-Head. Die wichtigsten Disziplinen des Konzerns. Wie beispielsweise Steuern. Was sind die Steuerthemen, die wir dort haben in Asien. Was sind die Steuern, was sind die Herausforderungen, auch die gesellschaftsrechtlichen Herausforderungen mit dem Legal-Head, was sind die Marktherausforderungen mit dem Vertriebschef und mit der Kommunikation. Was sind die Themen im Bereich Marketing und Branding und Corporate Identity. Was sind die wichtigen Themen für die Strategie dieser Region und die Diskussion mit den funktionalen globalen Heads über was denn aus ihrer Sicht die Themen sind mit Asien. Welche Themen Sie heute haben und welche Chancen Sie für die Zukunft sehen. Und welche Erwartungen aus ihrer Sicht für die Zukunft bestehen. Ja, es gibt schlussendlich dann ein Bild über die wichtigsten Funktionen des Konzerns, über die Wertschöpfungskette, deren Assessment wo stehen wir heute aus ihrer Sicht. Also das war noch nicht die Sicht der Asiaten selber, sondern einfach mal die externe Perspektive auf die Region Asien des Konzerns. Die hab ich abgeholt und zwar auf ganz oberster Ebene, also Verwaltungsratsebene, Vorstandsebene und dann auf der Ebene drunter. Und da gab es in Summe ein relativ konsistentes Bild für mich, wie der Konzern Asien sieht, heute, im Bezug auf Stärken und Schwächen, wie der Konzern Asien einschätzt in punkto Erwartungen, was da passiert und was man tun sollte als Organisation und dann natürlich die ganzen Sorgen und Wehwehchen, die da jeder halt so hatte. (lacht) Der Tax-Chef und Legal Council Chef und der HR-Chef und da hab ich überall so ein bisschen was in den Rucksack mitgenommen und das hat später dann auch geholfen. Jetzt nicht nur super strategisch, sondern vielleicht auch operativ taktisch schon und dir dann paar Dinge auch tatsächlich in deine To-Do-Liste schreibst und die mit in deine Roadmap Planung für die verschiedenen Organisation nimmst. Da bekommst du dann halt gutes Teamwork, gutes Netzwerk, gutes Bein. Also das war so im Wesentlichen die Vorbereitung. Eigentlich das Abholen der externen Sicht. Und bei Ankunft war mein Ziel, dass ich zuhöre. Das immer so ein Ding, so ein Dilemma, wenn du selber das Gefühl hast, du kommst jetzt aus der erfolgreichsten Region des Konzerns und du hast jetzt gerade eine Region aufgesetzt und dann sagen dir auch alle noch, was die nicht gut machen und was man eigentlich besser machen sollte. Und irgendwo hast du noch das

Gefühl du müsstest wissen und weißt auch wie die Dinge besser, erfolgreicher gemacht werden sollten, könnten. Dann so anzukommen und dann halt auch mit der nötigen Bescheidenheit dort zu starten, dass man eben Asien noch nicht kennt und auch nicht die Vision des dortigen CEOs für Asia Pacific und ihn noch nicht kennt. Und dass es dort auch ein Team gibt, das die Region führt und du Teil dieses Teams werden willst. Und da muss man sich halt einfach mal ein paar Monate Zeit nehmen, zuzuhören, zu lernen und nicht zu versuchen, diese vorge setzte Meinung dort tatsächlich dann als gegeben hinzunehmen und auszudrücken. Das war also die Vorbereitung. Externe Sichten einholen. Ich hab mich selber relativ stark vernetzt mit der Konzern-Finanz- und Konzern-Strategie-Abteilung, weil ich festgestellt habe, dass viele Führungsinstrumente, die wir anwenden, im Konzern dort nicht vorhanden waren und ich brauchte einfach auch Unterstützung zu Beginn und das habe ich im Grunde vorab schon geklärt, in der wenigen Zeit, die zur Verfügung stand. Und so ist das übrigens Normal. Vielleicht bekommst du noch ein Buch in die Hand gedrückt. (lacht) Nein aber in deinem Transfer-Package bekommst du tatsächlich einen Sprachkurs für deine Frau und einen eigenen. Wobei sich da dann die Frage stellte was lernen. Japanisch konnte ich schon ein bisschen, Koreanisch, Chinesisch, Indisch, ... Indisch braucht man nicht, geht Englisch. Also was lernen? Hongkong ist Englisch.

**IE: Ja, das heißt für dich war auch in Hongkong hauptsächlich alles Englisch.**

WW: Hongkong ist Englisch. Fast jeder spricht in Hongkong vernünftiges Englisch. Vielleicht nicht jeder Taxifahrer, aber in Summe ist es weit verbreitet. Chinesisch in Hongkong ist Kantonesisch und Kantonesisch ist noch komplexer wie Mandarin. Es gibt zwei chinesische Sprachen: Mandarin, Kantonist, Kantonesisch hat acht Töne, also klingt noch melodischer wie das Chinesische, noch komplexer. Also nicht lernbar nur so nebenbei. Man braucht wahrscheinlich ein Jahr Fulltime und es ist nichtmal lernbar so.

**IE: Das heißt die Leute, mit denen du da zu tun hattest, also deine Arbeitskollegen, deine Business Partner da, haben alle auf Englisch miteinander geredet. Waren sie Landsleute wo oder war es ein internationales Team? Waren sie Locals?**

WW: Also: es war eine lokale HR-Chefin. Wir hatten im Grunde genommen ein regionales Team. Schlussendlich war es ein regionaler Kompetenz Hub mit jeweils einem Management-Team, welches geleitet wird von dem CEO und regional Vice President oder regional CEO. Ich war verantwortlich für die Finanzen und die Finanz und Strategieentwicklung. Dann gab es HR, dann gab es Logistik-Head und After-Market-Service und dann gab's noch eine Marketing-Koordination, darunter eine Marketing Funktion für Marketing und Branding. Genau. Und der Marketing-Chef waren Japaner, die



HR-Chefin war eine lokale Honkongerin, Finanzchef ein Österreicher, die Region Head waren ein Tscheche, der lange in Asien gelebt hat, allerdings keine Sprache außer Englisch und Tschechisch sprach. Es war ein ganz multikulturelles Team. Und der Logistik-Leader war Inder. Sprache war wie gesagt Englisch. Sehr multikulturell: japanische Kultur, chinesische Kultur, indische Kultur, tschechische Kultur, österreichische Kultur. Bei Österreich und Tschechien haben wir festgestellt, dass wir beide eigentlich am Ende relativ nahe waren. Hatte bis dahin keine Erfahrungen mit Tschechien, aber jetzt deutlich mehr (lacht) und habe festgestellt, dass Österreich, speziell Ostösterreich und die tschechische Kultur, viele Gemeinsamkeiten haben. Also zurück: ein multikulturelles Team, gemeinsame Sprache Englisch. Und von der Diversity sag ich jetzt mal, durch die kulturelle Diversity war es fachlich in Summe eigentlich ein super erfahrenes Team. Es war jetzt nicht ein Team mit Leuten, die gerade neu in ihren Rollen reinkamen und deswegen weniger erfahren waren, sondern es war eigentlich ein Team mit vielen Profis mit viel professioneller Erfahrung.

**IE: Cool. Das heißt, die Arbeit am Anfang in diesem Team mit allen Leuten, mit denen du zusammengearbeitet hast, hat dann doch recht viel Arbeit in Anspruch genommen wie es klingt. Wie war das für dich?**

WW: Möchtest du jetzt ein paar Insights? Also persönliche Insights? (lacht)

**IE: Sehr gerne persönliche! Und zwar möchte ich nur fragen, wie du. Wie du gerade in der ersten Zeit damit gecoped hast, hast du doch viel mit der Arbeit zu tun hattest. Ob du überhaupt Gelegenheit hattest, deinen Kopf irgendwie zu adaptieren und zu sagen „Ich bin jetzt in Hongkong“. Wie war es für dich denn klar, dass du dort bist und wie war für dich die erste Zeit in Hongkong? War es so, wie du dir das erwartet hattest? Sind deine Erwartungen aufgegangen von der Stadt selber? Vom Lifestyle? Von den Leuten?**

WW: Okay. Du kannst selbst entscheiden, ob du das mitverwendest oder nicht. Es war ja eher so eine persönliche Entscheidung und nicht so, dass man gesagt hat, wir hätten gerne ihn in Asien. Sondern man hat dort jemand rausgenommen aus der Stelle und der Vorstand hat mich nach Asien transferiert. Das lokale Team wollte mich nicht, weil sie wollten eigentlich keine Veränderung in der Funktion. Der Vorstand wollte aber diese Veränderung und da waren die ersten sechs bis neun Monate waren im Grunde von der Integration super schwierig. Super schwierig in der Hinsicht, dass das Du mit Dingen konfrontiert wirst, die nicht so sehr in die [Unternehmen]-Kultur passen. Und das hat lange gedauert und hat das Ganze natürlich noch ein bisschen komplexer gemacht. Noch schwieriger. Ich mein, was machst du? Du kommst in einer Stad an, die ist wunderbar.

Also es ist eine unglaubliche multikulturelle Stadt. Also bei Interesse an der Stadt kann ich nur jedem empfehlen, dort mal hinzugehen. Sie ist halt drum auch so fantastisch, weil es ist ein Asienzentrum für Finanzen, Wirtschaft und alles ist ein Multikulti-Platz. Es ist eng und gedrängt und es ist modern und es ist effizient und ich meine, du triffst einfach Menschen aus der ganzen Welt. Alle haben ähnliche oder gleiche Ziele. Und es hat trotzdem noch so ein bisschen das Traditionelle, die traditionelle chinesische Kultur, die da ist. Es ist super modern, hocheffizient, eine top Stadt und trotzdem hat sie diesen Charme des Chaos, des Chinesischen, und das findet man überall. Und das macht es halt so charmant von der Lebensweise her. Neben dem, dass du im Zentrum von Asien sitzt und mit einer Stunde Flugzeit überall bist. Dieses Multikulti ist halt super spannend. Das erlebst du in den ersten sechs Monaten fast nicht. Im Grunde ist die Challenge der ersten sechs bis zwölf Monate, wenn du so ein Assignment akzeptierst, einfach gucken, dass die Work-Life-Balance irgendwo auch ein bisschen Life hat und nicht nur Work. Und das ist im Grunde die große Challenge. Weil ich mein stell dir vor, es sind 14 Landesorganisationen und die Zielsetzung war, dass man für die wichtigen Großen in 12 Monaten Strategien entwickelt. Wir haben gestartet mit einer China-Strategie, mit einer Indien-Strategie, mit der Japan-Strategie, alles innerhalb von 12 Monaten. Das war damals die Idee, die Konzernneue-Strategie. Asien war mit China und Indien als die Merging-Markets repräsentiert. Die zwei wichtigsten sind China und Indien auf Basis von der Bottom-up Strategie in China und Indien hat der Konzern auf der Konzern Strategie abgeleitet, was man aus Konzern Sicht für die Merging-Markets tun muss. Dazu haben wir die Strategien entwickelt.

So, jetzt bist du in mehreren Steering-Boards von Strategie-Entwicklungsteams, also bist du einmal im Monat in Shanghai, einmal im Monat in Neu-Delhi nebst vielleicht alle drei Monate mal nach Tokyo und dann alle sechs Monate mal nach Sydney. Und du musst ja. Ich mein, Asia-Pacific sind 14 Länder. Wenn du dich mit einem Geschäftsführer aus Neuseeland oder Australien unterhältst über seine Strategie und du nicht einfach nur Verwaltung oder Administration sein willst, sondern tatsächlich Einfluss nehmen willst, dann muss du auch was verstehen. Und verstehen tust du nur, wenn du Zeit vor Ort verbringen. Also ich glaube, die Challenge in jedem dieser Assignments, und ich hab ja mehrere gemacht, war immer irgendwo nicht in der eigenen Ambition, in kürzester Zeit alles verstehen zu wollen, alles verändern zu wollen und zu vergessen, dass man eigentlich auch Sport treiben sollte, Abends ausgehen sollte.

\_\_kurze Unterbrechung\_\_

WW: Es war schwierig für mich am Anfang, weil du kommst an einen Ort und merkst, die wollen dich eigentlich nicht haben und geben dir das auch zu spüren. Alle waren glücklich

mit ihr, die wollten sie nicht gehen lassen. Und dann kam dazu dass ich natürlich viel näher dran war an dem CFO, dem Vorstand, als das ganze Team da vor Ort. Dann war ich natürlich suspekt, weil ich oft telefoniert hab mir Liechtenstein und die fragten sich alle, was macht er jetzt tatsächlich da? Und dann gabs nix. Es gab keine Führungsinstrumente, es gab keine Transparenz wenn ich wissen wollte, woran arbeiten die Australier jetzt grad? Ich hatte keine Kennzahlen. Ich hatte keine Reporting Systeme, es gab keine Roadmaps, woran die arbeiten und was die nächsten Meilensteine sind. Es gab nichts. Es gab keinen geordneten Führungs-Prozess, sondern es war alles pragmatisch und nicht systematisch. Es gab ja auch einen Grund warum sie mich dort haben wollten. Sie wollten ein bisschen mehr Systematik in den Führungs-Prozess bringen. In den Strategieentwicklungs- und in den operativen Forschungs-Prozess in Asien. Und das wollten die da nicht. Führung hat mit Kultur zu tun, mit Menschen, und wenn du das nicht willst, dann ja. Darum gab es dann auch gesundheitliche Probleme, die im Grunde nur psychologischer Stress waren. Ich glaube, es wäre schwierig gewesen, wenn das Wirtschaftliche alles rund gelaufen wäre. Wenn die in ihrer Business Performance top gewesen wären, dann hätte man mit dem, was ich eigentlich tun hätte müssen viel schwerer getan. Was passiert ist war, 2011 war wirtschaftlichen ein super schwieriges Jahr für Asien und da gab es richtig harte Meetings mit der Konzernführung. Ich hab mir dann vorgenommen, auf dem wichtigen Thema um Profitabilität in Asien zu treiben, mit den wichtigsten und größten Organisationen - das waren China, Indien, Australien, Japan und Korea. Mit diesen fünf hatte ich ein Projekt über fünf Monate und das Projekt war super erfolgreich und hat Kohle gebracht. Und dann haben die gesehen: ja, der kann ja eigentlich auch was. Nach ca. eineinhalb Jahren war die Akzeptanz da. So lange hats gedauert. Die ersten fünf Monate waren nicht gut. Die nächsten waren dann ok. Und dann, dann wurde es gut.

**IE: Gibt's für dich irgendwo den Moment, wo du selber gemerkt hast: Jetzt habe ich es geschafft. Jetzt passt es, jetzt bin ich angekommen. Hast du das noch im Kopf?**

Weißt du, leben in Hongkong war mein Traum. Ja, da war eigentlich nur der Moment und die Frage, wann können wir tatsächlich den Traum gemeinsam leben? Und nicht alleine. Deshalb der Moment, hier privat vielleicht, als meine Frau umzieht. Der war für mich ein sehr wichtiger, als sie endlich auch kam. Und beruflich wars ein Meeting. Wir hatten ihm März gestartet, glaube ich. Dann war dieses super extrem hartes Meeting mit unserem Vorstand. Ich meine, das war im Februar des Folgejahres und von da weg gings. Und die persönliche Situation war dann im Sommer dieses Folgejahres, also Mai / Juni. Beruflich war es also ein echtes Event, wo wir zusammen als Team einen gemeinsamen Plan gemacht haben und da gibt es noch ein Meeting dazu. Da hatte ich drei Geschäftsführer,

den chinesischen Geschäftsführer, den indischen Geschäftsführer und den japanischen Geschäftsführer bei mir. Und dann ging es genau um dieses Thema bzgl. Preiserhöhungen in Asien um. Ein wichtiger Hebel für die Profitabilität. Und keiner wusste, wie es geht. Auch das Vertrauen aus dem Konzern war: die wissen nicht wie es geht, zeige ihnen, wie das geht. Ich kann mich noch gut erinnern an das Meeting in Hongkong mit den drei Geschäftsführern und dem Regional CEO. Ich hab mir die Pläne mal zeigen lassen von diesen drei Ländern. Dann habe ich mit jedem einzelnen nacheinander eine Diskussion gehalten, wie man die Dinge machen könnte oder was man tun kann. Und ich kann mich nur gut erinnern. Ich habe mich in den Meetings einfach super kompetent gefühlt und dann habe ich gemerkt, wie meine Peers und mein Chef alle ganz ruhig waren und es war ein Dialog zwischen mir und diesen drei Geschäftsführern. Bis halt die Details geklärt sind, wo sie fachlich einfach nicht sind. Ich glaube die Fach- und Businesskompetenz wurde da zum ersten Mal öffentlich anerkannt (lacht). Neun Monate hats gebraucht. Und bis dahin haben sie glaube ich gemeint, W. ist einer, der jetzt hier Systeme und Papier und Führungs-Prozesse will, das bringt ja alles nix. Zum Business Thema: wir hatten dann in dem Jahr 5% Preiserhöhung. Jetzt kannst du dir vorstellen, bei einer Milliarde Umsatz 5% sind 50 Millionen Profit und das war das Projekt. Aber es war damals eine ganz so viel. Es waren irgendwo glaube ich 30 Millionen Profit-Potenzial. Und da waren sie dann schon interessiert. Das war so ein Schlüsselmoment. Genau. Ich hab im März gestartet und dann hat es begonnen. Wir hatten dann die Planungs-Meetings, die waren so im Oktober/November, da kamen dann die Diskussionen, die kamen dann mit Plänen und die waren einfach nicht akzeptabel. Und jetzt kommt das Kulturelle. Du hast einen chinesischen Geschäftsführer, einen japanischen Geschäftsführer, einen indischen Geschäftsführer, also drei völlig unterschiedliche Kulturen. Und nebenan sitzt noch der regional CEO und dann ein österreichischer CFO. Und jetzt diskutier man mit einem japanischen Geschäftsführer über eine Preis-Strategie. Ohne dass er sein Gesicht verliert oder einen Chinesen, der sowieso weiß, wie es geht und keinen Rat braucht. (lacht) Oder einen Inder, der so schnell spricht, dass du checken muss, dass du tatsächlich folgen kannst. Also es waren völlig unterschiedliche Kulturen und die Erfahrung, die du dort mitbringst, wie man mit unterschiedlichen Kulturen umgeht und über Fragen führt. Versus „machen wir das“, „lass uns dieses tun“. Sondern über Fragen. Wissen, was man eigentlich will und dann jemanden dahin begleiten, dass er halt auch versteht, wohin man will.

**IE: Wo hast du gelernt, so mit verschiedenen Kulturen umzugehen?**

WW: Ja das ging halt über viele Jahre, war ja nicht das erste Mal im Ausland. Ich glaube einfach, es hat so ein bisschen mit deiner eigenen Einstellung zu tun. Du kannst natürlich

nach USA reisen und dann und dann zurückreisen und dann hast du das Gefühl, du hast die Kultur verstanden. Oder ganz dasselbe tun mit Japan oder Österreich.

Es mag jetzt komisch klingen, aber ich hatte ein intrinsischer Bedürfnis, etwas zu verstehen. Wie Menschen funktionieren und ich bin der tiefen Überzeugung, dass du im Grunde als Führungskraft effektiv nur im Ausland sein, wenn du das tust. Und nur so kannst du Menschen gewinnen. Eine Kultur, verstehst du dann, wenn du dich mit Politik beschäftigst, mit der Geschichte des Landes beschäftigst. Normalerweise würde ich anraten, die Sprache zu lernen, sich in die Geschichte des Landes einzulesen, sich mit der Politik, mit der aktuellen Politik des Landes zu beschäftigen und dann mit der Geschäfts-Kultur. Mein erster Auslandsaufenthalt war bei Japan und ich war lange da und ich habe mich unglaublich interessiert und beschäftigt mit der Kultur und glaube, ich hab ein gutes Verständnis entwickelt über die japanische Kultur. Das hilft halt ein bisschen. Ich glaube du kriegst halt nur eine Facette mit. Wenn du Sprache lernst ist das schonmal ein großer Vorteil. Du kannst kommunizieren. Aber wenn du nicht weißt, wie die Geschichte des Landes sich aufbaut, dann ist es auch schwer zu verstehen, warum die Menschen so sind, oder? Oder wenn du nicht verstehst, wie die Politik funktioniert, dann ja. Also ich glaube, man muss halt. Das Schöne ist, wenn man Zeit vor Ort verbringt. Dann hast du ja alle Möglichkeiten das zu tun. Es liegt dann an dir selber, ob du interessiert bist, ob du das Wissen willst, oder halt Comic-Books liest.

**IE: Da sind wir wieder bei der individuellen Seite des Ganzen. Gibt's für dich, gerade wenn wir sagen individuell und du an eine Person denkst, die ins Ausland zieht, besondere Eigenschaften? Also was muss diese Person deiner Meinung nach für Eigenschaften mitbringen um sich gut einfinden zu können? Um genau diese Faktoren abzuarbeiten, die du erwähnt hast?**

WW: Ich glaube Empathie. Ich sag, das Thema ist immer ein empathisches Verhalten. Sich auf ein Gegenüber, auf eine Kultur einlassen zu können, zu beobachten, zu verstehen. Es ist ja die Reaktion, die du siehst, ist eine Reaktion so wie du sie empfindest nach deinem Erfahrungs-Raster, heißt aber vielleicht ganz was anderes. Einfach ein gutes Gefühl zu haben, zuhören zu wollen, Fragen zu stellen. Also Empathie ist für mich etwas, was hilft. Empathie kann man auch entwickeln, dann kann man auch arbeiten dran. Es gibt Menschen, die haben viel, die kriegen Schwingungen mit, die wissen wie oder was gesagt ist, das ist das Eine und was mit dem Gesagten mitschwingt ist für mich halt die Empathie, das zu erfassen und die Gefühle rundum. Und ja, das hilft. Eine Einstellung, die einfach mal dein eigenes Ego in den Hintergrund stellt und nicht alles wissen zu wollen oder zu realisieren, dass man nicht alles weiß, sondern, dass man erfahren will, lernen will. Also auch die Lernwilligkeit, die Neugierigkeit, Offenheit diesen

Themen gegenüber. Also grundlegende Empathie, Offenheit, lernen zu wollen. Anderes wichtiges Thema. Und Sprache natürlich. Unser erster Besuch in Japan zum Beispiel. Wir haben zwei Jahre Japanisch gelernt und was da hilft, einfach nur die Grundkenntnisse der Sprache zu haben, ist enorm. Das ist oft die große Challenge, dass du irgendwo hinkommst und du kannst die Sprache nicht. Also wenn du mich nach Regrets fragst, dann ist es, dass ich die spanische Sprache nicht gelernt habe in Südamerika. Das war einfach eine verpasste Chance. Du gehst in einen Job und dann hast du, wie ich zu Beginn beschrieben habe, super wenig Zeit und du musst den Letzten abschließen, Übergabe machen und der nächste hätte eigentlich schon gestartet sein sollen. Da ist relativ wenig Zeit und im Grunde hätte ich vielleicht nicht viel gebraucht und drei Wochen von dem Kurs hätten gereicht in Spanisch, mit den Vorkenntnissen, die ich hatte. Das hätte gereicht um in zwei, drei Jahren auf ein Niveau zu kommen, dass das vielleicht sogar Business Niveau ist. Soviel zur Sprache. Also ich würde jedem empfehlen, Sprachen zu lernen, es hilft enorm.

**IE: Danke. Also wir wissen jetzt: die Leute, mit denen du zu tun hattest, waren alle sehr international, mit verschiedenen Kulturen, komplett verschiedenen Auffassungen, verschieden tiefe Kontexte beim Reden; wie fasse ich Sachen auf, wie nicht, ... Hattest du irgendwann da das Bedürfnis nach Österreichern? Hattest du das Bedürfnis nach deiner eigenen Kultur, als du vor allem in der Anfangszeit unten warst?**

WW: Nein.

Also wir haben uns immer schon bewusst, beispielsweise bei unserem ersten Assignment in Tokio ein Wohngebiet gesucht, das keine Deutschen hat. Österreicher gabs sowieso nicht viele in Tokio, aber wichtig waren keine Deutschen. Es gibt so typisch deutsche Wohnviertel. Ich liebe Österreich, aber ich komme nach Österreich zurück, um es zu finden und zu erleben, aber will das nicht in Hongkong. Was man tut, Ines, ist, man geht zum Nationalfeiertag an die österreichische Botschaft und singt die Nationalhymne.

**IE: Wirklich?**

WW: Na ja, klar. Zum Nationalfeiertag am 26. Oktober trifft man sich an der österreichischen Botschaft in Hongkong und hört dem Botschafter zu wie er die Nationalhymne anstimmt. Die sind vielleicht gute Politiker, aber nicht alle sind gute Sänger. (lacht) Und dann gibt's meistens einen Empfang.

Es gibt immer wieder Auslandsösterreicher. Und es gibt auch ein Paar, das wir im Ausland kennengelernt haben, aber sonst nicht viele. Der Großteil der Kontakte, die sich aufgebaut haben sind nicht österreichisch. Und das passt so.

**IE: Weil du gesagt hast, du kommst immer gerne zurück. Also wenn du nach Österreich willst, dann kommst du her. Wie war das für dich dann zurückzukommen? Also es geht ja nicht immer nur darum, wegzugehen, sondern wie ist es für dich gewesen, wieder ganz zurückzukommen?**

WW: Es ist eine Integration, wie wegzugehen. Es ist genau dasselbe schlussendlich, weil man hat ganz unterschiedliche Entwicklungen, und unterschiedliche Geschwindigkeiten in der Entwicklung, wie man sich selber entwickelt oder wie sich das Umfeld entwickelt, wo du herkommst. Selber hat man das Gefühl es ist eher langsamer, weil halt stärker traditionell ist und selber hat man das Gefühl, man hat dieses Jetset Life genossen und das ist wiederum eine Integration und braucht halt auch Zeit. Ich glaube, man darf die Bodenständigkeit nicht verlieren. Versuchen, nicht abzuheben und die Dinge zu schätzen, die man hier hat. mich war Hongkong sensationell. Ich habe es aufgezählt, die wunderbaren Gründe, in Hongkong zu leben. Aber Hongkong ist schlussendlich auch anstrengend. Es ist schon auch ein Stressfaktor dabei. Du hast immer Geschwindigkeit, es sind immer Millionen Leute auf der Straße. Es ist immer ein Kampf um etwas. Immer es immer Action. Es ist nie Ruhe, es immer Lärm. Die Stadt ist auch immer laut. 24 Stunden. 24/7 ist die Stadt laut und man gewöhnt sich dran. Ich glaube der Biorhythmus gewöhnt sich auch dran an das Thema und dann kommst du wieder retour und bist da in der Ruhe. Es ist eine totale Veränderung hinzugehen und es ist wieder eine totale Neuintegration herzukommen. Halt das zu schätzen was es hier gibt. Nicht das zu vermissen, was Hongkong hat. Es ist natürlich immer so ein Spagat. Also das Zurückkommen ist genauso. Es macht es einfacher, wenn du schon Familie hast, also wenn du dorthin zurückkommst, wo deine Großfamilie situiert ist, ist es viel einfacher, weil du hast eine Familie, die dich auffängt. Sich in die Familie zu integrieren ist viel einfacher, wie wenn du irgendwo zurückkommst und du musst halt wieder neue soziale Kontakte suchen. Und vor allem das Thema, dass du dich entschleunigen musst oder dein Lebensstil ist ein anderer und da muss man sich anpassen.

**IE: Schön gesagt, danke!**

Das war im Großen und Ganzen eh ein schöner Kreis, den du da jetzt gezogen hast. Gibt's zum Schluss noch irgendetwas, das du noch gerne erwähnen würdest, dass noch nicht gesagt wurde?

Der Prozentsatz der Bevölkerung, die sowas macht, ist ja relativ gering. Und was mir mittlerweile gefällt ist, dass in meiner Generation waren es ganz wenige und der Anteil, die Offenheit jetzt auch der jungen Generation, der jungen Menschen sowas machen zu wollen, der Wille ist viel größer wie früher. Früher hat man eher die Risiken gesehen und

weniger die Chancen im Ausland zu leben und zu arbeiten. Ich bewundere die junge Generation für genau diese Haltung und ich finde sie super kreativ. Ich gehe mal zwei Monate, oder über sechs Monate oder geh vielleicht längere Zeit ins Ausland. Ich kanns nur jedem empfehlen. Ich glaub die Welt wird - klingt fast pathetisch - Welt wird besser, weil wir ein besseres Verständnis haben, wie Kulturen funktionieren, wie Menschen funktionieren. Und es ist immer ein Risiko, dass etwas schiefgehen kann. Aber die Chancen und das, was man kriegt, sind viel größer.



## **Expatriate-Interview Number 4**

Written Interview Questions

HK: Candidate 4

### **Questions:**

**There is a hot spot called Hong Kong and you got to move there: What were your first thoughts when you learned about your upcoming transfer? Can you describe the situation?**

I was very much looking forward to move back to Asia, as we had previously lived in Japan

**What expectations did you have about the city, the lifestyle, the people, your new life there, ...?**

From my previous stays in Tokyo, London, etc.. I learned that the best way to adapt is not to have any predefined expectation

### **Preparation for your trip:**

**→ If you were sent there by your company, did they offer any help?**

Yes

**→ Did you have anybody explain the foreign culture or other information about the country to you?**

No, as HK is not exactly a place of foreign culture

**→ Did you have somebody in HK you could confide in and who helped you out?**

No.

**→ Did you do any other kind of personal preparation?**

No.

### **Regarding the adaptation process:**

**→ How would you describe your first few weeks or months in Hong Kong? How did you feel? (Consider the language barrier, the new surroundings, the reality versus your previous expectations, missing friends and family, ...)**

The first few weeks were quite challenging. We had to settle our daughters in their new school. Our youngest daughter started school, which was fine. The older daughter had to

catch up one year of French to transition into the appropriate grade. Language barrier was not an issue, but just finding your way around and getting the household organised took a while. It took me a year to really call this city my new home.

**Did you meet with other Expatriates or join an Expatriate-Network?**

**→ If yes, what made you want to meet other Expats?**

Purpose was to get to know new people and characters, including parents from school etc

**What factors would you describe as difficult or hard while trying to adapt?**

**In which areas do you remember struggling and not feeling too well?**

Kids adjusting to school, setting up our household, finding your way around

**Do you remember the point at which it all felt like home and as if you (finally) arrived in Hong Kong completely? Was there a distinct moment when you realized it? Or a Situation / Story you might want to share?**

Like I said before, it took us about a year to feel at home. We shipped more personal items to Hong Kong to make it our home. By that time we bought new furniture, had rentals before, etc.. It all depended on my husband being comfortable in his job.

**Any other thoughts about the integration process you might want to share?**

**Something I didn't ask but you deem as important? It can be a general impression of you as well:**

Always be positive and open for new challenges.

**What personality traits do you think a person should have in order to make acculturation in another culture easier?**

**Do you think there are preconditions one should fulfill in order to be successful in adapting faster?**

Possess curiosity. Be flexible. Adventurous. Adaptable to new environments and cultures

**What useful tools, tips or advise do you have for an Expat, freshly moving to another country, especially Hong Kong?**

Embrace it, and focus on the positive.

**To conclude:**

**Can you remember how it was to come back after being in HK? How was it to be home again? Did you experience any kind of "homesickness" towards HK? You can freely talk about the experience of *coming back* here.**

Always keen to come back after a longer trip to home country or elsewhere.

## **Expatriate-Interview Number 5**

Written Interview Questions

RH: Candidate 5

**Questions:**

**There is a hot spot called Hong Kong and you got to move there: What were your first thoughts when you learned about your upcoming transfer? Can you describe the situation?**

Excitement. Move based on my own initiative.

**What expectations did you have about the city, the lifestyle, the people, your new life there, ...?**

Cosmopolitan city. Buzzing environment. Gateway to China. International audience. Perfect infrastructure.

**Preparation for your trip:**

**→ If you were sent there by your company, did they offer any help?**

Initially delegated on an expat contract and package.

**→ Did you have anybody explain the foreign culture or other information about the country to you?**

No need for that. Had lived in Japan previously and familiar with Asia.

**→ Did you have somebody in HK you could confide in and who helped you out?**

No, apart from a colleague I knew from London.

**→ Did you do any other kind of personal preparation?**

No.

**Regarding the adaptation process:**

**→ How would you describe your first few weeks or months in Hong Kong? How did you feel? (Consider the language barrier, the new surroundings, the reality versus your previous expectations, missing friends and family, ...)**

Quick adaptation process. Convenient residential location. No language barrier as English is official language. Reality as expected.

**If you went for work:**

**→ Was your team at that time local or international?**

Both local and international.

**→ How would you describe the mood in the office due to your arrival?**

Modest, as we were in the midst of the financial crisis.

**→ To what extent did your business relationships change during your acclimatization-process?**

No acclimatization process but helped rebuild parts of company's Asian operations quickly which helped the internal and external business relationships.

**→ What differences did you notice, if you compare the first few times at the office with e.g., a year later?**

As business evolved, so did the corporate and team spirit.

**→ Do you think those differences had anything to do with your non-local background or was it just because you were *new*?**

No relation with me being non-local, but new blood was needed within the business.

**Did you meet with other Expatriates or join an Expatriate-Network?**

**→ If yes, what made you want to meet other Expats?**

Didn't join any formalized networks, but exposure to expats is natural due to the internationality of the place.

**→ If no, what was the reason for you not to?**

HK has no particular need for expat networks.

**What factors would you describe as difficult or hard while trying to adapt?**

**In which areas do you remember struggling and not feeling too well?**

No struggle apart from normal adaptation process, such as issues with schools etc.

**Do you remember the point at which it all felt like home and as if you (finally) arrived in Hong Kong completely? Was there a distinct moment when you realized it? Or a Situation / Story you might want to share?**

Probably about a year after arrival.

**What personality traits do you think a person should have in order to make acculturation in another culture easier?**

**Do you think there are preconditions one should fulfill in order to be successful in adapting faster?**

People who move overseas for extended periods of time should certainly possess the trait of being cosmopolitan and interested in different cultures and locations. A curious mind is almost a precondition.

**What useful tools, tips or advice do you have for an Expat, freshly moving to another country, especially Hong Kong?**

Live it and love it.

**To conclude, can you remember how it was to come back after being in HK? How was it to be home again? Did you experience any kind of “homesickness” towards HK? You can freely talk about the experience of *coming back* here.**

We are still based in HK and consider it our home for now. After holiday stays in Europe or elsewhere it is always a great feeling to come back.

## **Flexpatriate-Manager-Interview**

IE: Interviewer

GS: Candidate 6

**IE: Du hast ja ein relativ großes Team unter dir, welches aus einer doch recht großen Vielfalt an Nationalitäten besteht. Wie viele Mitarbeiter sind es gesamt und welche Nationen sind in deinen Teams vertreten?**

GS: Ja das ist richtig. Bei mir sind es in Summe, also im gesamten Bereich der Windenergie den ich unter mir habe weltweit 61, nein jetzt 62 Mitarbeiter. Die Niederlassungen sind in USA, China, Indien, Dänemark und in Deutschland.

**IE: Und in den Niederlassungen sind verschiedene Nationalitäten vertreten oder hast du Mitarbeiter aus der dortigen Region?**

GS: Es sind Mitarbeiter aus den jeweiligen Ländern, da es sich um strategische Themen und um den Vertrieb unserer Produkte dort handelt. Zu Beginn hatten wir in den USA einen Teamleiter aus Österreich, das war aber nur zum Aufbau.

**IE: Wie lange leitest du denn diese Teams schon beziehungsweise wie lange leitest du generell schon ein internationales Team?**

GS: Das hat alles 1995 angefangen. Damals wurde mir die Leitung der Truppe in Deutschland zugetragen, wo wir ordentlich aufgebaut hatten. Kurz darauf kam Dänemark und 2008 kamen dann USA, Indien und China dazu. Und damit hatte ich dann erstmal alle Hände voll zu tun.

**IE: Das klingt auf alle Fälle nach viel Arbeit, ja. Da du diesen Mehraufwand dann hattest: hast du dich denn irgendwie speziell auf die Leitung mehrerer kultureller Hintergründe vorbereitet? Also vorab?**

GS: Ich glaube ohne die Vorbereitung wäre ich erstmal ordentlich schwimmen gegangen. Trotz der Vorbereitungen, die ich getroffen hatte, kam doch vieles anders als „gelernt“ und vor allem im Umgang mit anderen Kulturen braucht es einfach ein gewisses Maß an Verständnis und auch Erfahrung, welche ich mir erst aneignen musste. Dennoch habe ich mich mit anderen Unternehmen ausgetauscht, die ebenfalls Niederlassungen in den relevanten Locations haben, das war schonmal ein guter Start. Das hat mich darauf vorbereitet, dass es doch ein wenig kniffliger werden könnte, als ich erst angenommen habe. Vor allem weil es gleich drei Länder mit komplett verschiedenen Verhaltensweisen und Kulturen waren, an die ich mich da langsam antasten musste - nein lass mich sagen durfte - und nicht nur eins.

**IE: Also wir reden jetzt hauptsächlich von Indien, China und den USA, richtig?**

GS: Ja genau. Deutschland und Dänemark sind uns in der Umgangsweise sehr ähnlich und dort hatte ich quasi keine Anfangsschwierigkeiten. Zumal damals sowieso alles noch kleiner war. Ja, nein, gut, es gab schon Probleme, aber die waren eher Disziplinär bedingt und das lag an vereinzelt Mitarbeitern. Aber das hat sich dann auch schnell erledigt.

**IE: Alles klar, danke. Du warst bei der Vorbereitung für die drei Länder, die du übernehmen durftest.**

GS: Genau. Übernehmen ist mitunter das falsche Wort, wir haben die Niederlassungen teilweise erst gegründet, weshalb auch da noch viel zu tun war. Neue Teams, ganz frische Mitarbeiter und niemand wirklich vor Ort. Das waren viele Trips, das sag ich dir. Aber zurück zur Vorbereitung. Ich habe online sehr viel recherchiert und mir auch länderspezifische Literatur bestellt, vor allem über China, da ich dort die größte Herausforderung für mich sah. Kann dir gar nicht genau sagen warum, es war einfach so ein Gefühl. Vielleicht aufgrund der Gespräche mit den anderen Unternehmen oder weil wir dort einige Startschwierigkeiten hatten. Da lag das Hauptproblem allerdings an unserer Unternehmensberatung. Aber das ist eine Geschichte für ein anderes Treffen. Was hab ich denn noch... genau, neben den erwähnten Sachen, also Literatur, Recherche und Gespräche mit anderen Unternehmen, hab ich mich nach stattfindenden Seminaren erkundigt und dann an mehreren davon teilgenommen. Gerade wenn es um die Länder, die Kulturen, die Verhaltensweisen aber vor allem auch um die Geschäftskulturen dort ging. Ist das genug so?

**IE: Ja klar, das ist wunderbar, danke. Das klingt alles sehr aufregend! Warst du denn aufgeregt? Bzw. kannst du dich daran erinnern, wie du dich vor der Übernahme oder besser gesagt während der Vorbereitung gefühlt hast?**

GS: Eigentlich ging es mir sehr gut dabei. Ich empfand eine gewisse Vorfreude. Ja, es war ein großes Ungewisses vor mir, aber dahinter steckt wiederum die Herausforderung und der Spaß am Job. Es war aber auch ein gewisser Druck dabei, da viel vom Erfolg dieser Standorte abhing.

**IE: Was waren für dich zu Beginn die größten Herausforderungen?**

GS: Das waren dann tatsächlich einige. Aber lass mich die wichtigsten und die wahrscheinlich einflussreichsten aufzählen: Zum einen war es für mich tatsächlich schwierig, von einem Gespräch - gerade, wenn es sich um Telefonate handelte - mein Verhalten umzustellen, wenn ich vom Gespräch mit einer Kultur zum Gespräch mit einer anderen Kultur gewechselt habe. Das mussten keine großen Unterschiede sein, wie China und USA, es hat schon gereicht, wenn ich mit beispielsweise Indien gesprochen

habe und dann direkt darauf ein Gespräch mit Dänemark hatte. Oder mit Feldkirch. Also eben auch dann, wenn ein Gespräch in einer, wie soll ich sagen, in einer sogenannten Kommunikationskultur daraufhin geführt wurde, die mir durchaus vertraut war. Ohne kurze Pause dazwischen ging da wenig, das hab ich schnell gemerkt. Es braucht einfach enorm viel Energie, da man sich richtig hineinversetzen muss in das Ganze. In sein Gegenüber. Immerhin soll ja das meiste aus dem Gespräch herausgeholt werden und das geht nunmal nur so, das ist zumindest meine Ansicht. Ich möchte ja verstehen, was meine Mitarbeiter sagen, also auch zwischen den Zeilen. Und sie sollen natürlich genauso auch kapieren was ich von ihnen will. Und das ist nicht immer so einfach. Das braucht Geduld. Vor allem, weil man deren Anschauungen auch verstehen muss. Viel Geduld.

**IE: Ich höre raus, dass deine Geduldsgrenze hier auch gelegentlich herausgefordert wurde oder immer noch wird?**

GS: (lacht) ja das kann man so ausdrücken. Immer noch teilweise, aber wir haben uns alle schon gut aufeinander eingespielt. Es sind halt die länderspezifischen Unterschiede, an die ich mich gewöhnen musste und bei denen ich dann vor allem zu Beginn härter durchgreifen musste. Meine Mitarbeiter wissen mittlerweile, dass ich ein gewisses Maß an Commitment von ihnen verlange und auch erwarte, dass dies eingehalten wird. Am Anfang war mir nicht klar, dass in Indien eine Vereinbarung mehr als Absichtserklärung angesehen wird und nicht als Zusage. Du kannst dir meine Freude vorstellen, als mir diese Tatsache während eins recht zeitdrängenden Projekts bewusst wurde und die vereinbarten - das kannst du unter Anführungszeichen setzen - Präsentationsdaten nicht vorhanden waren.

**IE: Ja das stell ich mir recht unangenehm und vor allem schwierig vor. Ich nehme aber mal an du hast die Situation gut gemeistert. Fällt dir sonst noch was zu den anfänglichen Schwierigkeiten ein das für dich wichtig ist zu erwähnen?**

GS: Die Situation wurde entschärft, das schon, aber da wurde mir bewusst, dass ich bezüglich der Arbeitsmethodik und der Strukturierung der unterschiedlichen Länder genauere Regeln und ein klares Arbeitsverhältnis schaffen musste. Ich musste lernen Vertrauen zu schaffen und dieses Vertrauen wiederum auch zu geben, was auch für mich nicht leicht war. Grad im Bezug auf die Arbeitsweise und die Vereinbarungen, die wir untereinander trafen.

**IE: Das fällt dir jetzt alles leichter?**

GS: Um ein Vielfaches. Die einzelnen Teams haben sich mittlerweile bewiesen und wissen, wo der Hase langläuft wie man so schön sagt. Es kommt mir zumindest so vor.



**IE: Wenn du gerade auch von den einzelnen Teams sprichst, wie würdest du die anfängliche Teamdynamik hinsichtlich der unterschiedlichen kulturellen Backgrounds beschreiben?**

GS: Abwartend und skeptisch. Also vor allem gegenüber den anderen Ländern, ich glaube das ist es, was du meinst?

**IE: Ja, genau.**

GS: Ja, genau. Also skeptisch eben. Und man hat gemerkt, dass sie alle anfänglich - vor allem eben länderübergreifend - eine sehr abwartende und verschlossene Haltung eingenommen haben. Mit einzelnen Ausnahmen, da man immer wieder das Glück hat sehr extrovertierte und offene Mitarbeiter zu erwischen.

**IE: Hast du diese extrovertierten Mitarbeiter speziell herausgepickt und sie als Unterstützung für die länderübergreifende Kommunikation genutzt?**

GS: Nicht gleich von Anfang an. Es wurde irgendwie vor allem ihnen gegenüber von der anderen Seite aus Vorsicht gezeigt und hm es schien einfach alles, wie soll ich sagen, etwas gedämpft. Was bei Vertriebspersönlichkeiten ehrlich gesagt nicht der Fall sein sollte. Du solltest das ja auch wissen. Stell dir mal dein Team so vor dass keiner mit den Kollegen aus USA zu tun haben will weil die Skepsis zu groß ist. Das funktioniert nicht. Und das habe ich auch so kommuniziert. Aber das war ein hartes Stück Arbeit. Aber ja. Einen Punkt hatte ich aber noch zu deiner Frage zur Teamdynamik. Moment. Ja, genau, China. USA. Also China und USA. Das ist nicht nur so daher gesagt, die verstecken ihr Misstrauen nicht. Auch bei mir im Team nicht. Jetzt ist es was anderes, die kennen sich alle, haben schon miteinander ein Bier getrunken - auch wenn nur ein virtuelles, aber darauf habe ich Wert gelegt. Es muss zusammengearbeitet werden.

**IE: Das klingt als hättest du die Situation mittlerweile wirklich im Griff und es klingt auch sehr danach, als hättest du Methoden eingeführt, dass alle gut miteinander auskommen bzw. als hättest du Verhaltensregeln eingeführt. Kannst du dazu was erklären?**

GS: Ja, ja stimmt in gewisser Weise. Es ist aber sehr unterschiedlich in den einzelnen Teams. China ist zum Beispiel sehr stark hierarchisch. In Dänemark sind alle sehr open-minded. In USA zum Beispiel herrscht eine Mischung. Aber abgesehen davon jetzt, ja, meine Mitarbeiter wissen, wie sie sich gegenüber einander zu verhalten haben. Und zwar respektvoll, mit Achtung voreinander. Ich wünsche mir von ihnen Offenheit, gerade im Bezug zu Kritik, Sachkritik, die muss angebracht werden dürfen ohne es falsch zu verstehen. Das ist nicht bei allen gleich einfach. Aber das ist es ja nie. Wenn irgendwo ein Konflikt auftaucht, wissen meine Mitarbeiter, dass ich jederzeit ein offenes Ohr dafür habe sie mit mir reden können und wir dann gemeinsam versuchen, den Konflikt zu lösen.

Lösen im Sinne von einzeln oder gemeinsam mit dem Team. Je nach Situation und Konflikt. Je nach dem wie schwerwiegend er ist. Und so fahren wir eigentlich recht gut soweit.

**IE: Klingt gut und es ist auch für deine Mitarbeiter bestimmt schön zu wissen, dass sie auf dich zukommen können. Hast du diesbezüglich gerade im Verhalten deiner Mitarbeiter Situationen im Kopf, wo du besonders gemerkt hast, dass es kulturelle Unterschiede gibt? Unterschiede im Verhalten also?**

GS: Solche Unterschiede gibt es viele. Dänemark hat sonst eher nicht so viele Unterschiede uns gegenüber, aber was mir da jetzt spontan einfällt ist gerade der Umgang mit Kunden zum Beispiel. Das wird alles sehr locker angegangen und mit Humor. Oder zumindest wurde das in der Vergangenheit so angegangen. Von den Kunden wurde das nämlich nicht immer ganz verstanden und es war auch meiner Meinung nach nicht immer angebracht. Das haben wir dann mit den einzelnen Mitarbeitern und auch im Team geklärt. Da mussten wir uns einfach absprechen, denn da geht es um die Repräsentation von [Unternehmen] und um die Beziehung, die wir zu unseren Kunden haben wollen. Und das soll weltweit gleich sein oder zumindest in etwa gleich. Also sozusagen einem Verhaltenskodex nach. Und diesen Verhaltenskodex haben wir dann eingeführt. Daran soll man sich halten.

**IE: Dann hast du ja recht viel eingeführt und durchgeboxt in deinen Teams! Wie würdest du denn deinen Lernprozess hier beschreiben? Hast du dich über verschiedene Verhaltensweisen und Regeln anderer Länder dann noch weiter informiert? Oder wie bist du danach an die Sache rangegangen?**

GS: Hm, ja. Das ist ein laufender Prozess. Und ich glaube, das wird auch so bleiben. Wenn es Seminare gibt und ich die Zeit dafür aufbringen kann, dann nehme ich teil. Auch jetzt noch und fortlaufend. Es gibt interne Arbeitsgruppen dazu, wo speziell auf diese Thematik eingegangen wird um auch Verständnis zu erzeugen. Von allen Seiten. Und die Mitarbeitergespräche sind hier enorm wichtig. Da hole ich mir Informationen, wenn es Unklarheiten gibt. Also aus erster Hand.

**IE: Hat sich dein Verhalten gegenüber dem Team und den einzelnen Mitarbeitern im Laufe der Zeit verändert oder angepasst? Gerade wenn du laufend dazulernst. Fallen dir dazu Situationen ein, die du jetzt beispielsweise anders angehst, als du es zu Beginn getan hättest?**

GS: (lacht) dazu gibt es viele Beispiele, wie gesagt, ich lerne immer noch dazu und es gibt immer noch Stolpersteine auf dem Weg, das muss ich mir, also ja wirklich, das muss auch ich mir einfach eingestehen. Klar, mein Verständnis für Unterschiede hat sich entwickelt und dadurch hat sich glaub ich stark auch mein Verhalten geändert. Gerade die

Unterschiede in den Kulturen muss man wirklich kennen und erkennen. Und wenn sich dann mal eine Situation ergibt, in der man solche Unterschiede wirklich merkt, dann muss man unbedingt daraus lernen. Und sich dann bei der nächsten Gelegenheit halt gleich auch anpassen. In Indien hole ich mir jetzt nach Absprachen und Zugeständnissen immer eine nochmalige Bestätigung ein. Immer noch. Und dazu erwarte ich von den Mitarbeitern laufende Updates bzw. werden laufend Reviews gemacht. Ich glaube, so schlafen alle besser. Oder zumindest ich (lacht).

Bezüglich meines Teams in China habe ich gelernt, mehr Verantwortung in das lokale Team abzugeben und weniger aus Feldkirch heraus zu machen. Die dortigen Mitarbeiter schätzen die Abgabe der Verantwortung. Wir haben wöchentliche Reviews und auch Leistungsfeedbacks. Das ist das Vertrauen, das ich ihnen entgegenbringe und auch sie haben gelernt mir als Vorgesetzten zu vertrauen.

**IE: Und wie wir wissen, ist dieses gegenseitige Vertrauen unumgänglich. Gerade wenn es um internationale Geschäfte geht. Was müssen denn die Teammitglieder deiner Meinung nach für Charakterzüge mitbringen, um auch untereinander und vor allem miteinander gut funktionieren zu können?**

GS: Ja absolut. Man muss sich vertrauen können. Aber auch dieses Vertrauen entsteht nicht von heute auf morgen, speziell nicht, wenn man sich nicht regelmäßig sieht. Aber ja, da hast du recht. Was war das Nächste? Ah ja, genau, Eigenschaften. Charakterzüge. Da erwarte ich keine Sonderkategorien von meinen Mitarbeitern, aber die wichtigsten müssen sie einfach aufweisen. Sonst funktioniert das untereinander nicht. Und wie du schon gesagt hast, es geht um internationale Geschäfte und das Zusammenspiel des Teams ist auch da echt wichtig. Auch wenn man nicht täglich miteinander zu tun hat und eine gewisse Distanz zwischen den Personen ist. Ich erwarte, dass meine Leute Kritikfähig sind. Sowohl beim Annehmen als auch beim Austeilen von Kritik. Dann ist mir der Drive wichtig. Also dass sie Leistungsbereitschaft auch wirklich zeigen, also halt stark leistungsorientiert sind. Das fördert auch untereinander den gesunden Wettbewerb, wie ich immer gerne dazu sage. Was noch. Teamfähig müssen sie sein. Respektvoll gegenüber einander und den Kunden und dann darf klarerweise das Bewusstsein für Verantwortung nicht fehlen. Auch Eigenverantwortung.

**IE: Das sind ja schonmal ein paar interessante Eigenschaften von deinen Mitarbeitern. Was sind denn so Charaktereigenschaften, die du als Teamleiter aufweisen solltest, um diese Interkulturalität deines Teams erfolgreich managen zu können?**

GS: Hab ich mir gedacht, dass da auch noch eine Charakterfrage zu mir kommt. Aber da antworte ich sehr gerne darauf. Man muss als aller erstes zuhören können.

Entscheidungen treffen können. Konflikte aufdecken und klären und das auch manchmal mit einem siebten Sinn, denn auch wenn man den Mitarbeitern sagt, dass sie immer auf einen zukommen können, tun sie's nicht immer. Also muss man auch kommunikativ sein. Und empathisch. Sehr empathisch. Was noch. Ja sagen wir noch dazu, dass auch in meiner Position die Lernbereitschaft nie ausbleiben darf. Vor allem wenn es um andere Kulturen geht und die, wie sagt man, die Bedeutung von anderem Verhalten bei anderen Kulturen.

**IE: Danke für den Einblick. Jetzt aber noch zu was anderem. Du bist ja außerhalb dieser aktuellen Sonderumstände während der Pandemie recht viel unterwegs, sowohl national als auch international. Also vor allem zu Kundenterminen, Messen und Mitarbeitergesprächen. Kumuliert nehme ich an. Was hat COVID-19 für dich, als sogenannten Flexpatriate, für Auswirkungen? Was kannst du über die Unterschiede zur Teamleitung, etc. sagen?**

GS: Ja, aktuell ist das alles ganz anders. Ich muss auch ehrlich sagen, dass es mir schon fehlt, wie es davor war. Aber gut, das ist jammern auf hohem Niveau, es geht hier um andere Dinge. Also. Die Unterschiede. Ich merke verstärkt, dass ich Kontakte meist nur zu den direkten Mitarbeitern habe und halt nicht mehr zu den gesamten Standorten mit allen Mitarbeitern wie sonst, wenn ich persönlich dort bin. Also die Kontakte im Allgemeinen sind sehr eingeschränkt. Man sieht sich halt nur digital, wobei es da anfangs auch nicht immer einfach war. Niemand wollte die Kamera einschalten. Wir haben das dann im gesamten Unternehmen eingeführt. Und da gab es dann die nächsten Themen. Es mussten neue Verhaltensregeln eingeführt werden, weil man ja auch online respektvoll miteinander umgehen muss und dazu gehört das Verhalten während eines Meetings, also dass man pünktlich da ist, aufmerksam ist, antwortet und mitarbeitet und so weiter, also genau wie im echten Leben eigentlich, echtes Leben auch hier wieder schön unter Führungszeichen, nur dass man das scheinbar im Homeoffice extra nochmal dazusagen muss, dass man sich jetzt 10 Minuten nach Beginn eines Meetings keinen Kaffee holen geht sondern bis zur Pause oder bis zum Ende wartet. Es ist schon ein bisschen als hätten Leute am Anfang verlernt, wie man sich bei Besprechungen verhält. Und gerade beim Thema Verhalten ist es bei Online Meetings meiner Meinung nach einfach auch schwerer, den emotionalen Faktor zu erkennen. Das kommt es wiederum auf eine gute und offene Kommunikation drauf an, das muss passen. Man braucht aber generell auch einfach mehr Zeit für Gespräche jetzt, das ist mir auch aufgefallen. Dann hab ich nur noch ein etwas leidiges Thema. Durch das sitzen am Computer im Homeoffice bin ich auch wenn ich in Besprechungen bin immer am Computer. Das scheint für meine Mitarbeiter und auch andere Mitarbeiter des Unternehmens teilweise zu

bedeuten, dass ich immer Verfügbar bin. Meine Verfügbarkeit wird also als größer angesehen, weil ich eh immer online bin. Auch wenn das komplette Gegenteil der Fall ist und ich eben nicht permanent für alle verfügbar sein kann. Umso wichtiger ist es aktuell einfach, dass man sich arrangiert. Dass man Termine ausmacht. Also man muss das einfach koordinieren, sonst geht das nicht.

**IE: Wunderbar, du erklärst das so verständlich und detailliert, ich bin richtig begeistert (lacht), danke! Ich persönlich finde ja durch unser Gespräch schon, dass du im Umgang mit anderen Kulturen recht kompetent bist. Was bedeutet es denn für dich, „interkulturell kompetent“ zu sein und was glaubst du ist notwendig um darin als erfolgreich zu gelten?**

GS: Ja wenn du das so denkst ist ja alles gut (lacht) Nein, danke dir, aber ich glaube, dass es im Zuge meiner Erfahrung soweit gekommen ist und mit allem was ich erleben durfte zusammenhängt. Ohne ein gewisses Interesse daran und einer gewissen Offenheit wäre das nie möglich gewesen und dann hätte ich auch nicht so viel dabei lernen können. Ich glaube man muss einfach authentisch handeln und dabei so respektvoll sein wie nur möglich und dann natürlich immer auch im Kopf behalten, dass das Gegenüber mitunter gerade etwas ganz anders versteht. Da sind wir wieder bei der offenen Kommunikation. Dem Miteinander. Dem Austausch. Grundsätzlich sage ich man soll Strukturen beibehalten bei unterschiedlichen Regionen und Kulturen. Und dann gewisse Anpassungen machen an lokale, regionale Verhaltensregeln oder Muster, sofern diese in die Strukturen passen. Ja.

**IE: Spitze! Da du ja mittlerweile so erfahren bist, was würdest du denn einem neuen Teamleiter, einer neuen Teamleiterin für Tipps geben, wenn er oder sie erstmals die Leitung eines multikulturellen Teams übernimmt?**

GS: Ich glaube, da müssen wir separat nochmals einen Termin machen oder schick die Person gleich direkt zu mir, das dauert eine Weile (lacht wieder). Nein, aber im Ernst, ich glaube das Wichtigste ist die gute und intensive Vorbereitung. Die Tools hab ich dir schon genannt, dazu gehören der Erfahrungsaustausch mit anderen Unternehmen und Teamleitern und das Recherchieren in Literatur. Ah und ja, Seminare. Abgesehen davon sag ich: „Just do it!“ loslegen und Erfahrungen sammeln. Ja, nicht nur sammeln. Sammeln, bewerten und handeln. Und daraus lernt man. Schlussendlich muss jeder seinen eigenen Weg finden.

**IE: Gibt es noch eine Geschichte, eine Situation oder irgendetwas das dir einfällt und du abschließend noch hinzufügen möchtest?**

GS: Ich glaube es gäbe unzählige Geschichten, die ich dir noch erzählen könnte, vielleicht

holen wir das bei einem Kaffee mal nach. Ich muss jetzt aber weiter zum nächsten Termin.

**IE: Na dann sag ich vielmals Danke für deine Zeit und deine Offenheit! Viel Erfolg weiterhin und wer weiß, vielleicht komm ich auf den Kaffee mit den Geschichten ja tatsächlich noch zurück. Alles Gute!**