

***Stine has 20 years of experience working abroad, and recently she repatriated to Denmark.***

***What does she have to say about working with international teams?***



**Why do you have an international team?**

From my experience, you have international teams for one of the following reasons:

1 – When a business/organization operates in multiple countries and needs to cooperate across geographies or implement business wide initiatives.

2 – When a business/organization wishes to have a presence in another geography and needs local expert knowledge to understand the local business environment.

3 – When you wish to cooperate internationally, e.g. between universities, governments, NGOs, et.

4 – When you need international expert knowledge or labour.

I have personal experience of 1, 3 and 4.

For most of my career, I worked in a global role where I had to ensure that globally set strategies and initiatives were implemented in the regions, and I had to work with an international team of colleagues to do this.



**What’s the biggest difference working intercultural compared to an all Danish team?**

When you work in an international team you experience culturally different ways of working and you get access to different perspectives and knowledge but there are some important barriers or challenges to international working that you have to be well aware of:

- You may never meet your team ‘in person’ or you may not be able to meet very often. This can make it harder to break down barriers, build rapport with your colleagues and understand their particular situation. You have to be very good at communicating via email, phone, video conference, etc. Virtual team building competencies definitely an advantage.
- You have to be very aware of cultural sensitivities, different customs and

ways of working as it's easy to offend and be offended.

I once wrote with one from my team I had not met yet in person and he wrote me a mail that had a harsh tone. I felt a little offended there. But then later on I met him and he was so nice! He was just used to a different way of communicating than I was.

- It can be difficult to communicate due to language differences – this can impact speed of communication and result in misunderstandings or mistakes.
- The time difference can be another barrier to communication. People have to be flexible with regard to the time of day they work or take conference calls.  
I've had to take conference calls at 2am at night. I've also worked with people where this was very difficult family wise as they always had to take calls at dinner time due to time differences. That was rough on their families as they had no family time.
- The cost of travel can be very high – both financially and on employee time and health.



### **What does it take in regard to intercultural competencies leading a culturally diverse team?**

Leadership competencies combined with fluent English and intercultural awareness and sensitivity:

- Leadership competencies such as strong verbal and non-verbal

communication skills, listening skills, social/emotional intelligence, conflict management, motivational skills.

- A genuine interest in and ideally first-hand experience of working in other cultures – knowledge of 'the world' and cultural/political sensitivities.
- Minimum English language proficiency, other languages may be required dependent on the team composition.
- Being open to other views and new ideas.
- Flexibility/ adaptability.
- Respect for diversity (gender, race, religion, nationality, etc.).



### **Have there been any challenges working with an international team?**

Yes, all of the above!

What can seem like small practical things like planning a team-dinner, meeting people for the first time etc. can be very difficult.

For instance, I had problems planning late meetings and dinners as the Americans liked to eat early whereas people from Southern Europe like to eat late.



### **What's difficult for internationals working in a Danish company?**

I don't have any experience working in a Danish company but I have worked for a year for a Danish government body after studying in the UK.

- I have worked for the same company in three different countries, UK, US and Australia. In all three countries, I would say that the organizational structure was more hierarchical than it is known to be in Denmark. I imagine working in a more flat organizational structure will be a big change for anyone coming to work in Denmark.
- Danes place a great deal of emphasis on formal qualifications and think very highly of their own universities, sometimes undervaluing what others bring to the table. A lot of highly qualified people in the UK, Australia, US might only have a Bachelor degree but can be incredibly experienced and competent.
- On the other hand, some Danes might take offence that people who come from outside are more outspoken about their capabilities, which may be seen as bragging and not well received in Denmark.
- Danes are generally not very politically correct or culturally sensitive in my opinion, and can easily offend. I forgot while being gone, but now that I'm back I notice again. Danes have a tendency to swear a lot. So the way Danes speak could be difficult for

an international to adapt to. Swearing would never occur in international teams.



### **What's great (if anything) about having an international team?**

You get different perspectives, and might learn new ways of doing things. You meet interesting people. If successfully managed, the outcomes and experience can be all the more rewarding if you work in an international team.



**THANKS SO MUCH, STINE!**