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Working life – Shanghai/Scandina

A pilot project in Scandinavian companies settled in Shanghai

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Foreword

In December 2011 a group of professional researchers at Roskilde University went to Shanghai. In addition to participating in an international conference and visiting two universities, we decided to carry out a minor 'study' of work culture and working life in Scandinavian companies in Shanghai. Before we came to Shanghai we contacted two Scandinavian companies, located in the Shanghai area and they kindly let us carry out interviews with managers and employees in their organizations. One company is a major retail company and the other is a manufacturing company in bio-tech.

In the retail company we made five interviews, and in the bio-tech company three persons were interviewed. One of the interviewed persons was originally from Sweden. The rest of the interviewed persons were Chinese. A summary of four of the interviews are printed in the appendix in order to give the reader an opportunity to come a little closer to our still very limited empirical material.

For us the interviews with the eight persons were an eye-opening event. Many prejudices were questioned, and we were given new insight and understanding.

We are really very thankful for the companies giving us the opportunity to contact employees and managers, and we want to thank the interviewed persons who took time to talk with us and who were very friendly and open minded to us.

Introduction

We as a research group are deeply rooted in the Scandinavian work life research, and have primarily conducted research in a Danish and Scandinavian context. In our own view, the Scandinavian work life tradition is something special: wages, working hours and working conditions are, compared to most other places, thoroughly regulated. Employees work less than in many other countries, but on the other hand, the proportion of people working is higher than in most countries. Labour market and working life is characterized by a high degree of equality - again compared to most other places. The power distance between management and employees in Danish workplaces is relatively low. Hierarchies are relatively flat. Employees in the Scandinavian countries are assigned responsibility and take responsibility. Learning, influence, involvement, participation and even democratization of working life have a stronger position in the Scandinavian countries than in most other countries.

According to the self-understanding of the Scandinavian work life tradition it is possible to reconcile equality, regulation, learning, involvement and participation with a high degree of responsibility, flexibility, and capacity for innovation. The Scandinavian work life tradition has been a cornerstone of the Scandinavian welfare community, creating a high degree of equality, security and economic growth.

For decades we in Scandinavia have regarded the American management style and work culture as the main contrast to the Scandinavian tradition. We have been mirroring ourselves in the more competitive, more management-dominated and more short-term oriented American tradition. In our self-understanding we have created an alternative to the American way, but at the same time we have learned a lot from the American development. Most of the production concepts used in the Scandinavian countries are originally coming from the U.S. but adjusted to the Scandinavian conditions.

It is however, obvious that the world is changing. The centre of the economy is moving eastward, and other players are entering the scene. That is why we now turn our attention to the east, and try to mirror ourselves in the Chinese tradition. There is an urgent need to investigate the similarities and differences and opportunities for mutual learning between the Scandinavian and Chinese tradition. Therefore we went to Scandinavian companies in China, where both Scandinavians and Chinese have personally experienced what happens when a Scandinavian and a Chinese tradition of work - or what we call 'social working life' - meet.

We visited and made interviews in two companies. One company is a large retail company, where labour costs traditionally account for a large portion of the costs. Here we interviewed highly trained staff in a finance department, asking them about their work experiences and working conditions. The other was a factory where the majority of the employees were operators and craftsmen in highly automated and technically advanced facilities. Here, we interviewed the director and two HR employees about the working conditions they offered their employees.

To the companies we described the topic of our small pilot study in the following way:

Our main interest is whether it is possible to create mutual learning between the Scandinavian

working life tradition, emphasizing participation, involvement, learning and work/life balance on the one hand, and Chinese experiences and trends on the other.

On the one hand it could be that Scandinavian experiences, concepts and methods could be of interest in China, in relation to the fast running changes in the Chinese economy.

On the other hand it could be that the long Scandinavian traditions of participation would benefit from experiences from the outside.

To add more content to this broad research agenda we seek contacts with relevant research units at university level, and we would like to carry out some interviews in Scandinavian companies established in the Shanghai area.

- *Which new developments and changes are taking place in the Chinese social working environment?*
- *What happens when Scandinavian tradition and thinking is confronted with Chinese reality?*
- *How can China benefit from Scandinavian experiences and knowledge in that area?*
- *How can Scandinavia benefit from Chinese experiences and knowledge in that area?*

What we have done here does not (yet) have the character of research. Far from it. What we have done is a pilot project, which has given us a little insight in and a sense of the relation between Scandinavian and Chinese work culture. And first and foremost, our small study has made it possible for us to ask more informed questions than we were able to before we went to Shanghai. Based on our interviews, we have raised eight themes, some of which problematize our own a priori assumptions. Our plan is that these issues and themes can form the basis for future research where the relationship between Scandinavian and Chinese work culture will be studied more thoroughly.

We also hope that this short report can give rise to reflection and thoughtfulness for others. All comments and objections are welcome!

Themes for Reflection

1. The meetings between Scandinavian and Chinese tradition are so diverse that all 'truths' must be interpreted with caution
2. Shanghai is a meeting place for a multitude of different work cultures
3. Global transfer of locally based values - is that possible?
4. 'Work/life balance' can be a competitive advantage
5. Delegation of responsibility is difficult in the Chinese tradition
6. Indecisiveness and lack of focus are weaknesses in the Scandinavian tradition
7. The Chinese have an ability to function in an alert hierarchy that creates organized flexibility
8. The Scandinavians are sometimes ignorant in the meeting with the Chinese, not seeing the possibilities

Analysis

Here we will shortly present our reflections regarding the eight themes mentioned above.

Diversity

Scandinavian companies are very different, and for that reason alone there will be great variation in the meeting between the Scandinavian and the Chinese work culture. One of the companies we visited was a retail business, and the other was a factory. For this reason alone, there were big differences. In addition there were big differences in the way the two companies utilize their company values. This variation in firms will only increase if more companies are involved, since Scandinavian companies are basically very different, and because they choose different strategies for their presence in China.

The Scandinavian work culture is ambiguous. There are large differences between individuals, between organizations and between professions. Presumably, the differences on the Chinese side, especially in Shanghai, are even bigger: the population is composed of people who come from many different places and have very different experiences.

Any generalization will therefore be problematic - especially from our two superficial case studies. None the less, these two studies allowed us to ask more interesting questions than was possible before we completed the study.

Shanghai is a meeting place for a multitude of different work cultures

The meeting between Chinese and Scandinavian work culture was the main interest of our pilot project. However, we realised that the work culture in Shanghai perhaps is less Chinese and more global in its character than we first expected. Most of the employees we interviewed in the retail company had work experience from very different business cultures: both American, Dutch, Japanese and state owned Chinese companies. They could refer to this broad experience in their reflections about the special features of the Scandinavian approach to leadership and working conditions; of advantages and disadvantages. Also the operators in the factory were enrolled in a very international labour market. The factory was located 50 km from Shanghai in an industrial area with many European-owned companies. The production company we visited competed with the other international companies in the recruitment of employees. It was not that easy to recruit skilled artisans, which the company needed as operators in the production.

Global transfer of local values

Especially the one company – the retail company – made a big effort to maintain the values the company had established in Scandinavia in the Chinese setting. The values should pervade everything: the character of the products sold in the stores, relations between management and employees, customer relations, wages and employment issues, etc. The Scandinavian roots of the values are emphasised. In the first of the subsequent interviews these values are further introduced.

Is it possible to transfer values rooted in a particular place, a special history and a special culture to another place with a completely different history and culture? This raises a fundamental theoretical question about how much we as humans are subject to the culture

and traditions from where we are raised, and how much culture is something related to a specific context. Or put in another way: to what extent is our personality formed in a stable cultural context that will create invincible differences between people coming from different cultures – for instance the Scandinavian and the Chinese culture? Or are we as humans able to act in totally different social settings with very different cultural values, and are we able to adapt to very different cultural settings? This is actually a very fundamental question, which in the discipline of psychology has made a split between the psychotherapeutic tradition and social constructionism.

Our few interviews gave most support to the social constructionist argument: The interviews convinced us that the employees had absorbed the values the companies stood for: they lived and acted in accordance with the idea of the flat hierarchy, anti-authoritarian social relations, and a high degree of involvement in the work. That was what was said, and it was also consistent with the impression we got from being there.

However, the employees we interviewed have all been selected through a careful recruitment procedure where the 'right values' of the employees is an important factor. So, perhaps the employees did not change much because of their contact with Scandinavian values. Perhaps they had the 'Scandinavian values' already before they were hired?

Here we also touch a wider issue: How will the culture of Scandinavian and other foreign companies affect the Chinese culture? And how will Chinese companies settling down in Scandinavia affect the Scandinavian culture? Two of the founding fathers of working life research Kurt Lewin and Elton Mayors argued that there can be a mutual and fruitful relationship between influence and democracy in the workplace and influence and democracy in society. Would we see something like that in China? And would Chinese companies in Scandinavia affect the decision processes in the Scandinavian societies?

'Work/life balance' can be a competitive advantage

Especially in the retail business much attention was paid to the work hours. The general policy was that a working week has 40 hours and no more. No work on the weekends. The salary was not as high as in many competing firms, and especially the opportunities for individual salary improvement and the possibilities of achieving career advancement were relatively small. But in return, it was possible for employees in the company to live a life outside of work.

Most of those we interviewed were women - and we got the impression that they were very professional and competent women. They could easily find work elsewhere for a higher salary. Most had experience of working with other international companies, eg. American, Japanese or Dutch. But they preferred the Scandinavian company to maintain a family life with the possibility of having a child. The retail company could because of its priority of 'work/life balance' recruit highly qualified employees at a relatively low price. In return, it was difficult to recruit men to the department, probably because men still are supposed to be the main 'breadwinners' of the family, and because of that they go for better pay and career opportunities.

Delegation of responsibility

In both of the companies we visited management wanted to delegate responsibility to the employees: Employees should understand their responsibilities in relation to the company as a whole and be able to do the right thing at the right time without being ordered to do that.

Several of our interviewees said that it often is difficult for the Chinese to understand and accept the delegation of responsibility. At least the employees needed a period of time to get used to the principles of delegation. The Chinese are used to receiving orders saying what to do. When the boss no longer says what to do at least some of the Chinese employees get confused. And when management simply assumes that tasks are completed without their interference, and management only notices what they are doing when something is wrong, the Chinese experience a lack of recognition of their work.

On the other hand, it was also said in both companies that the delegation of responsibility and autonomy in work was regarded as something very valuable to employees. The difficulty of this management style was very much a matter of habit. When the employees after some time had understood the whole idea of delegation of responsibility to the employees (those who had remained in the company), they saw delegation as something very valuable and worthy. It was seen as something valuable and also productive, that the perception of an employee not so much was attached to his or her position but more to his or her personality.

However, there were also managers and employees who could not assimilate to the principle of delegation, and they had to leave the company. The adjustment to the flat hierarchies and the large delegation of responsibility was not always smooth and unproblematic.

Indecision and lack of focus

In almost all the interviews we conducted we meet a statement saying that the Scandinavians are incompetent in making decisions. They arrange many and long meetings. Many people must be involved. When a decision eventually is made it is often unclear. There is a lot of talk. Each and everyone should air their own opinions; there is not much willingness to align oneself to the majority. Meetings must be booked a long time in advance. It is not possible to have a short meeting with the relevant persons and then make a decision.

It was also said that Chinese are more focused in their work than the Scandinavians, and that they work harder. There were many who expressed great surprise over the fact that in some cases it would take several weeks before a Scandinavian answer his e-mail. Equally remarkable is the fact that he or she closes his phone during holidays – which are actually outrageously long.

This relaxed attitude to work clearly irritated the Chinese interviewees. However, apparently talking about it also gave them a certain pride, seeing themselves as more hard-working and focused.

Alert Hierarchy

The one Scandinavian we interviewed and several of the Chinese believed that a major advantage in the Chinese work culture is an organized adaptability, which is much stronger than in the Scandinavian tradition. As one interviewee put it: you take a step, then review the situation, change direction, and then the next step is taken. In contrast the Scandinavians

follow fixed course. If it is unavoidable to change the direction of the organisation it takes time to make decisions to change course, and many will work against the decision. The Chinese are less individualistic, and do not as much as the Scandinavians fight for their own interests and viewpoints, and they do not play the game of blaming as much. That makes it possible to decide to change direction without creating resistance. That makes Chinese organizations very adaptive and expansive.

Blind spots among the Scandinavians?

Some of the Chinese raised a criticism of the Scandinavians sticking to their concepts and models, although there are obvious expansion possibilities if the business model is changed a bit. The Scandinavians are doing too little to understand the local context – they are not good enough in grasping where they are and exploiting the opportunities that arise.

In addition, in one of the companies a certain concern was raised, saying that there are too many Scandinavian and European managers in the Chinese part of the company. The European managers are typically in China only for few years. It takes time for them to learn to cope in the new circumstances, and rather short time after they have learned it, they leave. These managers can be an obstacle for the development of the organization. Some argue that it would be better with more Chinese executives, who have a far greater understanding of what is happening in the Chinese enterprises and the Chinese market.

Final reflections

The interaction between Chinese and Scandinavian traditions, experiences and perspectives will be intensified in the coming years. We believe that this meeting contains possibilities for mutual benefit – it can contribute to improvement of social life and an increase in productivity. To utilize these possibilities it is necessary to be aware of differences and similarities; to highlight experiences where mutual learning has occurred, and to create a public discourse of possibilities for mutual learning. We hope that this short pilot project can be a stepping stone for future research that can contribute to mutual learning.

Appendix

Summary of four interviews

Here follow summaries of four out of eight interviews. Name of the company and name of the persons are anonymous.

Interview Britt, Tapeta

Britt has been employed at Tapeta for 5 years. She works as Corporate Treasury Manager. This means she is responsible for the firm's liquidity. She has previously been 10 years in an international bank where she was Operation manager. As newly educated she was employed one year at a University. She was headhunted to Tapeta, which is a normal way to get recruited, also at the junior management level. She appreciates to work within retail. For a short while she worked in discount retail owned by an European retail group, but she left because there according to her were poor prospects in that business. As the discount concept seems a little bit earlier for the Chinese, they prefer shopping in big hypermarket.

She explains that Treasury management at Tapeta consists of 3 branches: real estate, retail and trade.

Doing over time is very common in China. Compared to her previously employments she values that Tapeta offers opportunities for work-life balance. Now she gets to spend time with her 12-year-old daughter and her parents. Her husband works in a Japanese manufactory where the workload is quite heavy. She emphasises that Tapeta's long term horizon has other advantages in terms of work life quality and security.

According to Britt psychosocial work environment and stress is not an issue at the workplace.

One of her reasons for choosing Tapeta as an employer was the focus on work-life balance. However on the first workday she was still surprised that everybody left at 6 o'clock. According to her experience there are no differences between the genders with regards to work time and pay. On the social side she has also made many friendships in Tapeta – colleagues which she also sees in her spare time. She experiences Tapeta as a kind of family, which is very unusual because she is used to seeing colleagues as competitors.

Sometimes Tapeta's long horizon when doing business and tradition for involving everybody can be frustrating. Changes demand patience and some things take longer than normally necessary. She appreciates the values and the culture of involvement. However sometimes it is just easier to have a strong management that sets clear goals and gives continuous feedback.

Workload is high at the department because TAPETA grows faster than the budgets. Being understaffed is therefore a normal condition but they manage by the use of substitutes and students for the easiest tasks.

Compared to the state owned companies Tapeta has much better working conditions, particular because work in the state owned companies is very boundaryless. Here the employees have to be very flexible and available 24/7. However work at the state owned companies is not as bad as one could think. The pay is quite good and they have comprehensive employee programs that care for the workers and their families. However this also creates high expectations to the employees' performance.

They have a very strong culture where TAPETA values live in everyday life at the workplace. New employees go through an intensive course which deals with TAPETA cultural training – they jokingly call it 'brainwash'.

Many may not adjust to this harmonious culture without competition, because Chinese workers are often very competitive and want to make quick careers, earn more money and work with strong leaders who focus on performance. Therefore, employees are either only employed for a very short time, or stay for a very long time. For some it is difficult to orient themselves because there are very few rules and formal procedures.

It's Britt's experience that Chinese employees work faster and harder than their European colleagues. Additionally, they are very responsible. She has no experience with Scandinavian colleagues, but notes that it may take very long before you get an answer to emails. Britt does not see Tapeta as a particularly Scandinavian company in terms of culture. There are especially many Englishmen employed who brings in a very Anglo-Saxon culture into the company. The English colleagues are doing well because they are good at being strategic and have the advantage of English as their first language.

Britt points out that Tapeta is not listed as a stockholder company, which allows Tapeta to work with long term horizons.

She wished that there were more local Chinese leaders because they can do some things differently and have local experience. It is frustrating that senior managers from Europe are only there for short periods of time.

Interview with Sue, managing director. TAPETA China Finance department.

On Sue's career

She graduated in 96 as an accountant from the university. Then she started with a job in the international consultancy firm, Arthur Andersen, as an external auditor. It was very hard work, 14-15 hours each day – moreover she was not able to relax in weekends. She only had one day off. So in 2000 she shifted to the Pepsi company. Starting as a senior accountant, soon was promoted as finance manager in plant, but later she was appointed internal auditor for Asia Pacific. Pepsi is an American firm which emphasizes competition and results. In the first year you have to build up your reputation and networks, so it is hard work, but in general there is not so much overtime. When she worked in plant which is 50km from Shanghai in an industrial area, there is a shuttle bus to the company that leaves in late afternoon, and you can use this as an excuse to leave the company and not sitting there all evening. And the weekends were free. The wage is however not the same as in Anderson. Here you had a salary rise every year if you performed well.

The job as an internal auditor covering east pacific implied that she had to travel a lot. She did not mind, she had no family obligations. But she suffered from shifting time zones. And she began feeling that her health were deteriorating. Then her boss shifted to TAPETA and after half a year she decided to follow. TAPETA was not the first choice according to a career logic. It was a small firm, and she asked herself: what is the attraction for me in such a small firm? But she was convinced that TAPETA would grow bigger and decided to try. Have to add that the salary is slightly lower than in PEPSI. Now she has been there for almost 8 years, and that is a very long time she thinks.

On work culture and working life in the firm

So she likes the job. The reason is both the tasks and the culture. And while the culture had a minor importance in her former jobs, it means more (30% of job satisfaction she estimates) to her in her present job in TAPETA. She came from a very result oriented company, where there were many rules and procedures. You had a regular career meeting with your boss, focusing on how you accomplish your goals and on future goal setting. And follow-ups. In TAPETA there are not so many policies; management is based on trust and consent.

When she started as manager in the company she wanted to have policies in place. But this was met by resistance, this was not the culture. So she had to review her views on this, and ended up by implemented some means of basic control; after all this is a finance department and you have to do something in order to safeguard the company.

She personally feels that 8 hours a day means a better life, and offers a good work life balance. In this firm you are also offered flexibility. The co workers may regulate their come and go time so it fits with their family obligations. So the department employs many women with family obligations, and the turnover is very low (10%)

Very many young people do not go for the family friendly working life. They want to earn a lot of money, be in a competitive environment and make a career. So it is difficult to recruit young males. Especially the men define themselves as breadwinners and have to have a good salary so that they can support their family.

Confronted with our critical question on strengths and weaknesses of Chinese and Scandinavian work culture respectively, she reflects in the following way.

She underlines that the Chinese are more productive than the Swedes. They work more diligently to solve problems and deliver things on time. In the weekends they will step in to the office if there are problems. They feel accountable and do this without being asked. They are always attentive. But the Swedes, for them private life is more important, and many of them do not react before the weekend or holiday is over.

The weakness of Chinese culture is their respect for positions. The big boss is conceived as the one who decides and they do not dare to speak up or discuss with him. They are embarrassed to go to their manager if there are problems. So in that way communication channels are much more complicated.

What is the really strength of this Scandinavian culture is the trustful environment. Chinese culture emphasizes positions. You listen to people with positions and do not pay much attention to the ones who hasn't. But the Swedes they focus (more) on the person, listen to people who have significant things to say, no matter if they do not have an important position in the organization.

People are thus encouraged to speak up, and that implies that they can work on the same goal from the heart (on thus not from a more superficial stand point).

When we ask her how she contributes to cultivate that she tells us of how they have had training course and meeting over several days. This is not done to the same extent now. Trust seems to be acquired as a feature of the organization.

Another difference that she mentions is the approach to decision-making. The Chinese place more emphasis on authority. And this is a good thing. Swedes can spend time on endless meetings. It seems difficult to come to a conclusion. People are more individualistic, they do not want to compromise, and do not accept following the majority.

Interview with Rita, TAPETA, Shanghai

Personal Background:

University studies: International Commercial law

Prior experience: Arthur Andersen – PricewaterhouseCoopers

Tapeta 2006: 5 years in finance area.

Rita loves the Tapeta culture – “it feels right for me”. It wasn’t a cultural shock to join Tapeta, coming from another international organization. Rita saw the differences between her former experience and Tapeta as a matter of consultancy – and the need to be reactive to the needs of the customers – versus industry – initiating relevant tasks always came from them rather than the departments. (Overtime is much more widespread in consultancy, too).

How do you experience TAPETA?

Rita loves the Tapeta culture – “it feels right for me”. It wasn’t a cultural shock to join Tapeta, coming from another international organization. Rita saw the differences between her former experience and Tapeta as a matter of consultancy – and the need to be reactive to the needs of the customers – versus industry – initiating relevant tasks always came from them rather than the departments. (Overtime is much more widespread in consultancy, too).

The organization of TAPETA is more flat than Chinese organizations. Focused on consensus rather than regulation through rules. This requires much more time to communicate. Chinese organizations are more structured and hierarchical, the managers make decisions. Here managers initiate a discussion, and decisions are based the feedback. Tapeta is working through teams; the managers support and coordinate. (This description is related to Finance – not the stores or plants, where Rita has not worked and hence doesn’t know that well) Generally speaking this ‘Tapeta way’ is supposed to function at all levels, and it is implemented through leader training. Rita had received her leader training in a course together with store managers.

Recruitment

Recruitment is a big issue. It is based on values as much as competences (value-based recruitment). People are recruited so that they fit in with the Tapeta values – goes for the co-workers in the stores as well. Some don’t fit in and leave, but not more often than in other companies, due to the extensive focus on recruitment.

Productivity

Is the Tapeta way productive? In the short term consensus takes more time, and hence is less productive. "From my heart" I prefer this style; more people understand the decisions and the business; they develop and understand; in the long term everybody becomes business owners, not just co-workers. It creates continuity; when a manager disappears people are able to continue.

I think in the long run it is more productive. But perhaps productivity is not the most important thing in the world.

Interview med Göran

Ask about the interviewee's background, generally and in relation to China

Göran is trained in international economics and language.

He has been working within the Finance area in Scandinavia, in various South American countries, South Korea and in China. In Tapeta he worked for a factory in North East China, Now he works in Copenhagen as a consultant (and has recently returned from China and settled down in Sweden.

Göran's experience in Korea helped him in China - there are similarities in culture. Tapeta is located in a developed second-tier city in North East China but the people are not as accustomed to foreigners from the West as in City's like Beijing and Shanghai.

Tell us about your meeting with Chinese managers and employees.

There were some management problems at the factory when he and another Swedish colleague arrived. Before they arrived the plant was 100% Chinese drive. The manager controlled the factory in the traditional Chinese way - in a very hierarchical way. The chief manager made all the decisions and no one dared challenge them. She left the company and was replaced with a temporary Scandinavian leadership.

As a foreigner a lot happens that you do not understand. A lot is going on behind your back. The reason is that you as foreigner do not understand a lot of small signals- the Chinese can say yes in different ways with different meanings. But gradually Göran became better to interpret small signals. This is not something that is easy to learn in advance. It is something you best learn on the spot. And we must also accept that a foreigner remains a foreigner.

What is the difference in Chinese and Scandinavian work culture?

Hierarchy is the biggest difference.

There is a big difference in working culture. The Chinese are not accustomed to delegation of responsibilities. Usually specific tasks are given by the manager to be solved, and it is the manager who makes the decisions.

The Swedish working culture is less hierarchical. That is confusing for the Chinese.

It may be easier for us to adapt the Chinese work culture than it is for them to adapt to ours.

In comparison with South Korea Göran finds that the Chinese work culture is more money driven. In China people are working to get money and status - many times it's what drives the work. Jobs in foreign firms are considered to be more prestigious jobs. It is expected that foreign firms are well managed and they will give the employee opportunity to improve his or

her English, which is very important for the career.

From a productivity point of view, what are the benefits of the Chinese work culture?

They work in a very focused manner.

They are hardworking.

They are adaptable.

It is accepted that things can go wrong – then they take some steps back, and try a different way. It provides dynamic.

Women have good career opportunities and are respected in China ,In South Korea it is more difficult for women to make a career.

What are the negative aspects of the productivity of the Chinese work culture?

. Internal competition to promote oneself can create cooperation problems between departments, which can become contra productive.. It was important to appear as good.

Göran and his colleague worked to create more unity and cooperation.

Do you feel that there are changes in the Chinese work culture?

Here Göran did not have so much to say.

What happens when Scandinavian and Chinese work cultures meet?

There are some clashes of responsibility, delegation and communication.

It is important to be able to empathize with it and try to understand and get a feel for it. It's about listening and building trust.

An example of meeting between cultures:

The women in the accounting section of the factory considered working with tax a high status job. To work with taxation much knowledge was needed, and those who did that were seen as clever. In the line of business this factory is active Göran saw tax as –an important requirement be met - but not as something that drives the business forward. Therefore working with taxation, although important, is not what adds too much value to this company's business, which did not seem to be so relevant to the Chinese co-workers. For Chinese operational jobs can have a high status while development projects seems to be associated with more status in the West.

Tapeta is trying to promote its values throughout the organization (but of course adapted to local conditions - there is a mix). At the factory, they have a policy on overtime, which is more restrictive than the typical Chinese factories - i.e. there are fewer opportunities to earn extra money on overtime. In addition, they make something out of listening to employees and treat them respectfully.

At the factory there were basically two groups of workers:

- Approx. 500 workers were very stable. There are many women among them.
- A group of highly mobile workers. Typically, migrants from other parts of China.

China has a system called Hukou where one's basic rights and access to government benefits are linked to a specific geographic location. The migrant workers are outside their area, which

limits their rights to public benefits.

The first group appreciated the way they were treated at the factory and were a relatively stable workforce - they stayed although they could earn a little more at another factory. Some workers - typically from the second group - would like to work longer hours (= earn more) - and move on to other factories.

How can China benefit from the Scandinavian tradition and knowledge in this area?

They can probably learn a lot. There is certainly a great admiration for Western culture. This is an opening.

How can Scandinavia benefit of Chinese traditions and knowledge in this area?

We can learn from their dynamism and willingness to try things. There is a form of organized speed. They are also willing to take risks.