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Nordic Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic

## Swedish Challenges

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### We asked 9 Swedish managers occurring in the Czech Republic:

1. Is the existence of a distinct "Swedish management style" a myth?
2. Does the common Czech attitude towards authority and hierarchy clash with the Swedish one?
3. Can the same motivational tools be used?
4. Is personal responsibility perceived differently in Sweden than in the Czech Republic?
5. How do personal relations between managers and employees differ?
6. What's your number one communication tip for a Swedish manager in the Czech Republic?

### Answerers:

Stefan Lager – President of Nordic Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic

Inger Ultveldt - Ambassador of Sweden in the Czech Republic

Catherine von Heidenstam – Former Ambassador of Sweden in the Czech Republic

Nikki Brandt – Trade attaché of Embassy of Sweden in the Czech Republic

Staffan Erenmalm – the position will be added ASAP

Inge Juliusson – Marketing Manager for Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, IKEA

Joeri Ooms – General Manager, Atlas Copco, s.r.o.

Erica Michalek – Economic Consultant, Orico AB

### Other side view:

Slavomir Lener – Head Coach of the Czech Ice Hockey Association

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### ***“Škoda, Gambrinus and Budvar are household names in Sweden”***

Dear readers,

Some years ago, a group of sociologists presented the results of a large-scale survey called *European Values Study*. Here, inhabitants in countries stretching from Iceland to Greece were asked to explain their opinion in questions concerning religion, family, moral norms, society, work and many other value-related subjects. When the answers were sorted out, the sociologists made a surprising discovery: some countries had a predominant value-system that didn't correspond to their geographic location. The Czechs, for instance, were in reality closer to Sweden than to many of their neighbours in Central Europe.

I came to think about this sociological survey when I read the answers in the presentation which you now are holding in your hands. Here, a number of respected professionals, based on their long-time experiences in Czech-Swedish co-operation within a multitude of fields, point out certain differences in the two countries' typical management styles. Swedish managers tend to be more consensus-seeking and less autocratic than their Czech counterparts. The organizational structure in a Swedish company is usually flatter than in a Czech one, and the “power distance” between the boss and his subordinates is therefore often smaller. As a result, the average Swedish employee may find it easier and more natural to take personal responsibility and to his speak his or her mind than a Czech one.

The observations of our respondents are well founded and certainly deserve some reflections. Yet, it still strikes me how similar we are.

Both the Czechs and the Swedes are relatively small nations with amazingly vibrant industrial traditions. Historically, both societies have been relatively egalitarian, with smaller social differences than in many other European countries, and thanks to Jan Hus and Jan Amos Komenský we can also trace a spiritual link between Bohemia and protestant Sweden. Both nations are even excelling in the same sport – ice hockey – although here the Czechs have perhaps become a bit too excellent... Again and again during the ten years I have been living in the Czech Republic I have been surprised by the huge interest people display for “the Swedish model” with its welfare system and gender equality. And this personal interest definitely goes the other way too. Millions of ordinary Swedes were appalled by the Soviet invasion in Czechoslovakia in 1968, and later eagerly supported the Stockholm-based Charter 77 Foundation in its struggle for democracy in the country.

Luckily, the Velvet miracle offered our mutual relations a fresh start. And I would say that both sides have used the opportunity more than well. Last year, trade between our countries exceeded incredible CZK 51 billion, following a 70 percent growth in the previous years. Today, Škoda, Gambrinus and Budvar are household names in Sweden, and the same goes for IKEA, Volvo and Gripen in the Czech Republic. Since 1990, almost 300 Swedish companies have established in Bohemia and Moravia, and more companies are likely to follow. To

make the picture complete – as mid-sized members of the European Union our two governments have often been sharing the same standpoints in Brussels. This is by no means a negligible fact in a time of globalization and rapid political integration within the EU.

So that means we are back where we started: co-operation, also on the international level, is a question about shared values. In my view Czechs and Swedes have so much in common that our relations are simply bound to continue and intensify. I build this conviction also on my personal experiences. In the Nordic Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic we are actively supporting issues such as business transparency, corporate social responsibility and ecological considerations, or “green values”, if you like. When we started, some of our members said that these typical Scandinavian causes will not have any chance among “the skeptical Czechs”. But what is the reality? The response of our Czech partners, especially in the generation educated after the fall of communism, has been overwhelming!

As this presentation shows, there also is a thing or two we can learn from each-other. Situated in Europe’s tranquil outskirts the Swedes have had enough peace and time to develop a management style that has several proven advantages. Our experience clearly document that people do perform better when they are treated fairly, given responsibility and where their opinions are taken seriously. The Czechs, on the other hand, can definitely teach the Swedes a lesson about adaptability, creativity and determination in one of Europe’s historical crossroads. Yet, Swedes as well as Czechs should bear in mind what a wise man says in this presentation – the important thing is to judge somebody according to her or his personality, and not according to nationality.

I hope this presentation will help make the distance between our two countries even shorter!

With friendly regards,

Stefan Lager  
President of the Nordic Chamber of Commerce in the Czech Republic

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Shortly after my appointment as Swedish Ambassador to the Czech Republic on 1<sup>st</sup> September this year, I was asked if I consider the Swedish management style a myth and how it differs from the Czech one. I have to admit, I was then rather uncertain. Yes, I believe that due to the historical, cultural and political conditions a distinct Swedish management style was formed – a style, that in short, is based on reaching the consensus. On the other side, I have been in the Czech Republic for only a short time to be able to comment the Czech managers’ leadership style. However, what I know is that in recent years, the Czech Republic exports more to Sweden than Sweden to the Czech Republic. My conclusion – based on this fact - is that the Czech management style must have its strengths, too. That was one of the reasons that when the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs offered me to become ambassador in the Czech Republic I accepted immediately and of course with great pleasure. To be posted to a country with such a fascinating history and vibrant culture is an honour. The links between our two countries and peoples are warm, active and have a long history. I am convinced that I and my husband will have some very nice years to come in the Czech Republic.

The Embassy will now start our yearly process of activity planning for 2011. I expect us to be both innovative and active in supporting various areas of Swedish and Czech interests as well as different companies. There are many well established Swedish companies active here in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, IT, agro-industry, pharmaceuticals, etc. Other areas where Sweden has a lot to offer are Swedish foods, music production, health care, design, etc. I also know that the Embassy has been promoting different businesses working in the area of sustainable energy development. So there is much to build on!

Intensive period during Czech and subsequently Swedish EU presidency clearly proves our capability for excellent cooperation. First and foremost I would like to continue and enhance our very good bilateral relations in the years to come. A prime example is of course the Government to Government agreement regarding the Gripen system that both our countries are using. I also see that our two countries as middle sized member states of the European Union can join forces on many issues where we have coinciding interests – for example the development of a constructive and effective European External Action Service.

On a more personal note I very much look forward to exploring and learning more about the rich Czech culture in the widest sense - history, music, literature, arts, gastronomy and not least humour!

Inger Ultveldt

Ambassador of Sweden in the Czech Republic

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***„The Czech Republic is a very rewarding country“***

Back in Sweden from Prague after four years as Ambassador of Sweden in the Czech Republic I am pleased to ponder about my experiences. "Promoting Sweden" is today one of the main tasks for a Swedish Embassy and as Ambassador I had ample opportunities to do my best to fulfill this task. The Czech Republic is in fact a very rewarding country in this respect for an active Ambassador as all doors are open and contacts are easily established.

Promotion will include cultural exchange, information about Sweden, exchanging visits and not least promoting business relations and trade. The activities are often interrelated in a positive way - cultural events like a concert, an Ingmar Bergman film festival or not to forget the exhibition of the "Devil's bible (Codex Gigas) were sponsored by Swedish firms active in the Czech Republic, offering them opportunities to present themselves and their products as well as to invite partners and customers to memorable events in order to facilitate further contacts.

The promotion activities were certainly helped by a very good Swedish teamwork between the Embassy, the Swedish Trade Office and the Nordic Chamber of Commerce. In addition we could offer to arrange events in the beautiful Swedish Embassy at Uvoz 13 with its magnificent view of Prague, competing I dare say only with the Prague Castle itself. Most important is of course also the fact that there is in general in the Czech Republic great interest and sympathy for Sweden. Historic ties bind us together, we are both members of the EU and we share many basic values, love for the nature and support for a fair society and welfare state - although in ice hockey we of course keep fighting each other.

A significant requirement for success is of course knowledge and respect for each other. Differences are no obstacles and of course exist, no wonder. Firstly, Sweden is located in Northern Europe, the Czech Republic in Central Europe. Secondly, I only need to mention that Sweden has enjoyed peace for more than 200 years whereas meanwhile the Czech Republic has suffered both wars and a communist regime, which certainly have had an impact on our respective societies, traditions and business culture.

So for example is the existence of a distinct "Swedish management style" a myth? No, I don't think it is a myth. I believe that Swedish managers have had more time and opportunities than their Czech counterparts to understand the value of companionship and shared responsibilities - a typical trademark for Swedish companies. This also answers the question whether the common Czech attitude towards authority and hierarchy clash with Swedish attitude, including how personal relations between managers and employers

differ. I have many times been told by Czech employees in Swedish firms how much they appreciate the special open atmosphere and trustful relations with the top management.

As for the perception of personal responsibility it certainly has been found to have a positive effect on the results to have created an atmosphere of trust instead of fear so that employees dare tell about mistakes in order to have them corrected in cooperation rather than having the employee hide faults out of fear to be punished or even sacked. I have experienced cases which have proved that the former is obviously prevalent in Sweden. Most times faults are not committed on purpose and everybody would win if faults - be it in engines or in human behaviour - are corrected and not repeated.

As for motivation tools I believe that we all want to be correctly paid, protected and appreciated and are encouraged by any improvements. I think it should be noticed in this period of criticism of huge bonuses and remunerations that such do not really occur in our countries. A "soft" motivation is certainly sharing common values within the company and a positive connection to its brand and image, something which I believe nobody would oppose neither in Sweden nor in the Czech Republic.

A tip for a Swedish manager in the Czech Republic?: Swedes are mostly considered trustful and transparent, so keep up that reputation, and learn also about Czech history and culture in Central Europe. Because if asked what Swedish managers could learn from Czechs I would point at Czech people deep knowledge and pride of their country history and culture, and not least as an advanced industrial state, accepting their influence on today's life. And I would think of their remarkable ability to see the fun, and sometimes absurd, sides in life and get a good laugh.

Catherine von Heidenstam

Former Ambassador of Sweden in the Czech Republic

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### ***„Czech managers are not afraid to make a hard decision“***

Many consider Swedish managers to be very diplomatic; they are often leading via inspiration, cooperation and base most of their views on facts rather than emotions. A good manager knows how to motivate the group/individuals, to enhance the creative self in others, and how to make the team work for the common goal. Swedish managers often base their decisions on consensus within the company, and at times this process may slow down progress since a Swedish manager is interested in the opinion of his colleagues before a decision is taken. Compromising during meetings is very common in Sweden and it is preferred to reach a solution where both parties are happy, which at times might hurt the company as profit maximization is not always top priority.

From historical and cultural point of view, Swedes tend to have an egalitarian approach, while Czechs incline towards the paternalism. Going both ways, this offers a lot of space for clashes. Egalitarian style seeks agreement, consensus, and less direct leadership – in case of Czech team leader, it would be very likely to embarrass his/her Swedish subordinate by giving a set of instructions without space left for subordinate's input. Culturally given, Czechs do not always feel their opinions need to be heard and tend to follow the majority – Swedes on the other hand enjoy having the space to express, not necessarily always using it. The difference is again on the leader's part by making the decision-making process available to discussion. This can sound negative towards Czech culture, however, let's be honest and mention the time saving part of their approach. It takes a while to let everybody take part in the process. This also reflects on the interpersonal relationships at a workplace – considering Swedes, there is much less social distance and the organizational

structure is flatter when comparing to the Czech one. Due to the open and free Swedish management style Czechs can find this behavior strange and will in most cases lose the respect for his manager. Swedes prefer to be led by someone who is not distant to them – therefore, Swedish manager can easily motivate by ‘walking the talk’ and setting an example. Also, personal recognition is preferred over a public one. Such does not apply in the Czech workplace where one cannot interact with people in charge that often, so the opportunity to ‘be heard of’ by the top management at the public award giving offers the feeling of respect, too.

Motivation tools vary from more challenging tasks, to more power, responsibility, or even financial compensation – there are appreciated by both cultures, the latter is the most common in the Czech Republic, the earlier more common in Sweden.

Personal responsibility is viewed differently because the status of being a part of the company is perceived in an opposite way almost – Czechs tend to feel as workers, not team members. They tend to be given instructions, and just this aspect creates different mindset regarding responsibilities. It stands and falls on the management and Czechs do not necessarily have a chance for personal input, while in Sweden, it is worse to not make a decision than to make an incorrect one.

Due to a flatter management structure that implies interaction between management and subordinate the personal relations between management and employees are considered to be very close in Sweden. The Czech organization clearly distinguishes between top management and subordinates, therefore, interaction between the two is not considered to be common. Personal relations between the actors are often very vague due to lack of personal interaction. In an environment where your title, status and power is most important and all aspects of your work is to maintain this status and power the opportunity to create an equal relationship with your subordinates is close to impossible, because first and foremost the most important thing is to be more superior than someone below you.

Regarding communication and the tip for managers in the Czech Republic – I would like to switch it this time. What can the Swedes learn from the Czechs? Thanks to different style of management can be Swedes too slow and non formal in the correspondence. Czechs are more accurate and they can do faster decisions. Czech managers are not afraid to make a hard decision. Swedes lose very expensive time in a lot of discussions forums where “everything” must be considered to make the agreement.

Nikky Brandt

Trade attaché of Embassy of Sweden in the Czech Republic

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### **Staffan Erenmalm**

ABB s.r.o.

Head of Robotics in CZ and the CEE

Always dangerous to generalize, and when working for a global corporation we have our own internal, and distinct, management style. But overall a “Swedish Management Style” does exist.

Keywords are transparency, lack of prestige, consensus driven, cooperation and high level of ethics. The backside of this coin might sometimes be a perceived lack of clarity and a certain resistance to take necessary, but not so popular, decisions.

My experience though is that my Swedish management style is a bigger problem for my Czech peers, who might perceive it as a threat to their own positions, than it is for my own employees. But to conclude, overall "Swedish Style" is an asset, especially in young organizations though it can be more difficult to apply in older and more traditional organizations.

Approach to authorities? Yes, it is different and therefore you have to know and understand the cultural differences, too. The Czech hierarchy is easy to understand as it is built upon symbols and established behavior. The Swedish hierarchy, though not as strong, can be more difficult to understand. E.g. I have introduced "open landscape", which doesn't necessarily mean that all employees can disturb me when and how they want.

When asking about people's opinions, and for their input, the Czechs are simply quiet. This doesn't mean that they don't have any opinions, rather the other way around. But people are used to be told rather than to give their input. Also the Swedish way of talking "very quietly", and not shouting, can be misunderstood as if the message is not so important.

About using of the motivational tools: I think that the money is sometimes higher on the agenda here than it is in Sweden. But overall, the best motivation is good business result and a successful company. Everyone wants to be part of a winning team. This is universal. In addition, individual recognition and development opportunities are very important in the Czech Republic. It can be simple things like language training, or more extensive initiatives like offering the employee a position at a subsidiary abroad. Common social activities like bowling, a beer at the pub etc, are also more important here than it is in Sweden, where people normally just want to leave when done in order to join their families.

Generally speaking there is a fear of taking responsibility here. Everyone is working hard, normally harder than in Sweden I would say, but there is far too much of upward delegation. People are complaining and always trying to find something or someone to blame. But being responsible also means that you now and then will fail and you are then forced to take the consequences of your failure. This is something that people try to avoid. Historically this is seen as the task of the boss. But this is of course changing with the younger generation. And an overall management style that uses failures as a way of learning rather than a way of punishment will also speed up this transformation.

At the same time, personal relations at work are changing for the better. I think the traditional hierarchical view creates strong borders, which might be a problem for the employees as well as for the manager. It takes a lot of personal strength to cross that line. I always have to take the initiatives myself and cannot expect the employees to be fully open to me. And go to beyond my own direct reports to meet with their subordinates always creates a certain feeling of suspicion. I think it is important to break down these borders, without being perceived as provocative. But as long as you are fully transparent, and this is what makes the difference, there is no reason for fear. Generally speaking I believe the Czech employees appreciate the Swedish way to handle relations

We can learn a lot from each other, and maybe the most important thing is to first of all learn to listen. Implementing some kind of "Swedish model" will never work. It is only through blending the Czech experience with some new elements, which I as a Swede can bring to the table, that we can be successful. Czech people are working very hard, they have a "cut the nonsense" type of approach, hate unproductive meetings and evaluate people based upon their competence and what they do rather than what they say. These are all characteristics that we can learn from.

And if I might end with some advice for Swedish managers in the Czech Republic. Be humble, you don't know everything just because you are Swedish, and also try to learn Czech as quick as possible. Even if limited in vocabulary, people will suddenly take you much more seriously.

**Inge Juliussona**

**Marketing Manager for Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary**

**IKEA**

I think that the Swedish management style is not a myth. Maybe it is not typical only for Sweden but surely there are great differences between the way the Swedish manager leads his team, and the style of leadership that prevails in other countries or cultures. We consider our people as resources that will help us do things better. And we hope that we can achieve a better result because the process involves staff from the very beginning. Maybe it's a bit difficult at the beginning, but the result is definitely better and faster.

And on the hierarchy? I cannot speak for other companies than IKEA. But in our company there is no "dispute" from this reason. I think that it is very connected with the fact that IKEA is always trying to find people who share our values and corporate culture, and it is very important to us. So ultimately it is more about people than about the nationality.

Regarding motivation, it is important that people have the impression that they are decently paid, they are doing something important for themselves, important to other people and for the company they work for. They could use their skills and experience. According to me there is no difference between the Swedes and Czechs.

And on a personal responsibility, I think we perceive it the same way. What is interesting for me personally, is that I generally see in post-communist countries increase of the distance between managers and employees. I think it's because people here lived in a strictly fixed hierarchy, and were not used to a "personal relationship" between managers and employees. And perhaps they were not interested. But the main reason probably is the idea that "who is the manager, is a bit more than others." Therefore a manager wants to keep some distance. At IKEA, we have established a common way of being that results from the IKEA corporate culture. Swedish call it "Tillsammans" and Czech say "together". It means that everyone in our company have the same value and responsibility for the success of IKEA. And that no man can work alone.

And my advices to the Swedish managers are:

1. Respect others.
2. Try to understand the local culture and, "as people here do."
3. Listen to others and do not be haughty.
4. We Swedes often think we are the best. And we want to tell others. So never say "here in Sweden we do this" as if it was the only correct way in the world.
5. Do not be too "Swedish" and do not try to consolidate the myth of boring and cold Sweden. Enjoy!

**Joeri Ooms**

**General Manager**

**Atlas Copco, s.r.o.**

Being Belgian myself, I think "Swedish management style" is a myth. The management style we value in Atlas Copco is the coaching style. But I do not believe it is typical Swedish, maybe more typical Western style. If there

is 1 specific management behavior I recognize as typical Swedish, it is the 'consensus model' to take decisions but in Atlas Copco, a very international oriented company, it is not really promoted as 'the way we do things'.

There is a difference in approach to authority and hierarchy which is sometimes difficult for (some of) my Czech colleagues to handle. In Atlas Copco we have strong culture to empower our employees. It offers a lot of freedom but goes together with what we call accountability as well. It takes time for new employees to get used to it. But I feel that, although it looks sometimes difficult to manage, once they get used to it, also most Czechs really like this approach.

In general I think the same motivational tools can be used. It looks to me that people are easier motivated by short term financial benefits instead of long term career development. I strongly believe that investment in career development can bring more benefits to both the company and the employees. I saw many young talents being driven by money. This is very short sighted. There is time needed to develop competence and if people change their employers too often there is no time to discover all opportunities. Big multi-nationals, like Atlas Copco, offer a huge number of opportunities. But it takes time to recognize them. We support our employees but it they themselves have to take charge of their own professional development.

What I could also notice as being very important is working atmosphere and relationships between colleagues. I've met a lot of Atlas Copco employees and they all have something in common. They are willing to help their colleagues at all times no matter what nationality, age or sex.

It is difficult to generalize. But especially with older generation and people used to work under autocratic managers is inability to take responsibility very strong. For this group of people it is easier to criticize and be negative about changes than to look for opportunities and solutions and to take initiative to solve problems. In Atlas Copco we value in our culture very strongly that 'there is always a better way' and that 'we learn from our mistakes' (which also means you're allowed to make mistakes). This is something you can't teach your employees in a few days but fortunately times are changing and people start to realize that without an open mind attitude, flexible adaptation to changes and without capability to take responsibility a company cannot stay competitive. If they want to work for a successful company they have to actively contribute to company success.

To the personal relations between managers and employees - we have very lean organizational structure. There is very small gap between managers and employees. Sometimes it even interferes if you need to enforce some unpopular changes. It's not that easy if you have a very friendly relationship. However if the rules are clearly defined, it's possible to reach your goals faster and with better results. We believe that the person closest to the problem is also closest to the solution and it doesn't matter you are manager or an ordinary employee.

And my tip? Be open and straightforward in your communication. Czech employees might perceive it as different and difficult to handle, even close-up completely in the beginning. But it is a process you need to go through. Once their minds are opened, they will be your biggest promoters. They can appreciate honest and fair demeanour.

**Erica Michalek**

**Economic Consultant**

**Orico AB**

My experiences under twenty years of economic and organizational work for the Swedish manufacturing companies in the Czech Republic, both companies manufacturing and service companies. Therefore I generalize a bit.

After all these years I can to "Scandinavian Management Style" say one thing: who speaks of "blue-eyed Swedes" knows what he is talking about. Scandinavian style is perfect for the Scandinavian mentality, but totally unsuitable for Czech mentality. When VW bought Škoda Mlada Boleslav, the employees were less than happy with German rigour and control. The Germans knew why. Scandinavian businesses, however, devoid of this German experience, incorporated their Scandinavian mentality into corporate management practices. The awakening was occasionally rude and merciless. Everyone in the company knew what the director was meant to be doing, but nobody concerned themselves with what they should have been doing themselves. In recent years, as younger people have made their way into companies, this situation has changed somewhat, and I hope that over time the Scandinavian style, with greater powers, but also responsibility for the outcome, will be appreciated.

If I were to make a comparison, the Czech approach to authorities is quite different from the Swedish approach, which, however, has recently undergone major transformation as a new generation enters the process. The Czechs occasionally have a tendency to shirk and are less respectful than we are used to. For older Swedes, respect for authority is second nature, but the younger generation is losing this respect, in part due to lower demands in schools. These trends are likely to follow opposite paths; I assume that in Sweden there will be greater relaxation, while in the Czech Republic young people will perhaps become more respectful as they take on more responsibility.

How do I see motivation? People in workshops in the Czech Republic are motivated by pay; in Sweden this motivation is accompanied by the satisfaction of a job well done. People in offices, especially the younger generation, can also be motivated by self-fulfillment both in Sweden and the Czech Republic.

Let me ponder a little about one different aspect. If a senior employee tells a Swede to do something "like this", he will, even if it is nonsense. This way, his superior realizes he has made a mistake and will not repeat it. A Czech approaches the task differently. If he finds out that something is wrong, he will do it the way it should be done. This way, he saves his boss, but the boss will never know that he has made a mistake and will continue to assigning the task incorrectly. Finding the culprit in the Czech situation is more difficult than in the Swedish case.

As for personal relations, in my experience the Swedish approach to subordinates is not particularly suited to Czech conditions. Czechs are not accustomed to being on first-name terms with their boss and in no circumstances would I advise Swedish managers to go in with this approach. First-name terms are acceptable only after long-term, rewarding cooperation.

And my advice after 20 years: learning the language matters a lot. Although meetings are held in English, this is a foreign language for both partners and not their mother tongue. For example, economic terminology among graduates of Czech schools, translated into English, may differ considerably from how a Swedish economist views the same term (e.g. confusion regarding the content of the terms Profit and Contribution to Profit). When interpreting, it should not be forgotten that if words are translated literally this does not necessarily mean that the content has been translated properly. It is therefore essential to understand what is being translated and to assess its value as a basis for communication.

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**Other side view**

**Slavomir Lener**

## **Head Coach of the Czech Ice Hockey Association**

### ***Are there any notable differences between the approach taken by Czechs and Swedes to sport?***

I can definitely see a difference. What we went through after the revolution, the Swedes experienced long beforehand. It is a sporting nation, I experienced this when I was coach at Luleå and Linköping. I could feel this active interest in sport everywhere I went. There are plenty of sports facilities, including easy access to swimming pools, biking trails, ski tracks, ski resorts, football pitches, and tennis courts – both indoor and outdoor. Most of them are open into the night, and floodlit.

I had the opportunity to see how things compare. Having brought up three children – now adults – I can say that the conditions for sport in Sweden are much greater than in the Czech Republic. I would say, with a little exaggeration, that the keenness for sport was simply impressed on us – you see everyone around you engaging in sport at every hour of the day. The Swedish environment had a healthy impact on us, because shying from sport in Sweden is aberrant!

### ***Does the climate play an important role?***

I would say the climate is irrelevant. We did not view it as a limiting factor. Although winter in Luleå was harsher, there were rarely days when there was no opportunity for sport. And the Swedish winter we had feared so much, combined with so many hours of darkness, was not frustrating at all. The Swedes are very friendly and open, and as sports facilities of all types are floodlit you can play sports at any time day or night. It was not uncommon for us to go skiing as a family after dinner at seven in the evening.

### ***What about the differences in temperament – if any?***

There are obviously differences. I don't know if I'd call it temperament as such, but the Swedes are more responsible, calmer, unassuming. That is something you notice at step. They don't buy expensive cars or build overly ostentatious houses. They buy only what they need. They purchase items for their usefulness, not for any bragging rights.

### ***Is it true that the Czechs prefer collective sports, while the Swedes like solo sports?***

Yes, in principle, we could say that the Czechs prefer team sports such as ice-hockey, football, floorball and the like. On the other hand, I don't think I would agree that Swedes prefer individual sports in general. They do go in for solo sports, which have better support in Sweden, but in team sports such as ice-hockey, football, and handball (which is very popular), boys, girls, men and women enjoy a level playing field. This equilibrium is much more harmonious than in the Czech Republic. These are sports for the whole family. The backdrop is the motivation to enjoy shared experiences. In a typical family with a son and daughter, all family members can often be found taking part in the same sport. Swedish sports clubs promote this format because they know that parents will then come to see their children's matches as well as events involving professionals. Every visit by parents helps ensure the economic security of a club. Clubs promote sports for women and girls – football, ice-hockey – in order to keep the family together and thus economically secure the club. We, on the other hand, keep sports for boys and girls (and for men and women) strictly separate. In my opinion this is neither fair nor economical.

### ***Is there any difference in discipline – a willingness to practice and make personal sacrifices for sport?***

Definitely. I think that applies on a general scale. The Swedes are hardworking, responsible, they don't know what it means to cheat. If anything, they tend to exaggerate and do more than expected rather than take

shortcuts or cheat. When I first came to Luleå, I had a problem explaining to the players that they should also find time to relax during training.

***Is the material aspect of sport markedly better in Sweden? If so, is it at all relevant?***

Absolutely! There's a huge difference. As I mentioned earlier, the sports infrastructure is vastly different and varied. The Swedes have the opportunity to train and play at minimum cost. Sweden is economically much more advanced than we are and you can feel that. Especially among the middle class. Let me give an example. If a child wants to play hockey, 95% of Swedish families can easily afford to let their son or daughter take up the sport. We are in a totally different situation – for many families that sort of opportunity is often impossible. As money is tight, a lot of naturally talented young people are not able to play.

***Is there a typical "Swedish management style", or is that just a myth?***

I think they are better structured, meetings are more regular. In my experience, they like to plan things, they stick to the plan, and they regularly review it.

***How does the relationship between managers and employees – in your case athletes – differ?***

I don't see any big differences in manager-coach-player relationships. There is a clear professional approach to feedback. Friendly relations are a building block – the dressing room is a family where everyone is focused on a single goal – winning! Good bonds between all those involved are essential, and this is the same in the Czech Republic.

***What tips would you give to a Swedish manager/coach about to go and work in the Czech Republic?***

Assuming the reins as the main manager is sure to be very difficult. You have to get used to a daily rhythm where things can change at any moment and improvisation is the name of the game – reacting to situations as and when they arise with a large dose of flexibility is quite normal. Even I have problems with this sometimes. I think a foreign manager needs time to acclimatize.

Cover 3

**Czech Gripen programme:**

**They guard the skies and help boost Czech companies**

The ten-year lease of JAS-39 Gripen aircraft by the Czech air force under an intergovernmental lease agreement between the Czech Republic and Sweden from June 2004 entered its second half last spring.

Besides 14 brand-new fourth-generation high-end aircraft, the deal included training for pilots and ground crew and maintenance support directly from the Swedish army. An equally important part of the agreement entails an extensive programme of industrial cooperation (offsets) for Czech companies worth 130% of the contract value. Under this programme, the plan is for jobs totalling CZK 25.5 billion to filter down to Czech businesses; at least 20% of this amount is to be channelled into the Czech aerospace and defence industries.

**Czech companies benefit from offsets**

According to the recently approved 2009 Annual Report on the implementation of the industrial cooperation programme, the Gripen offset programme has reached an accumulated value of CZK 19.92 billion. This means that a little over CZK 5.5 billion is still to come in support, for example, of Czech-Swedish industrial and trade

cooperation. By the end of 2009, 46 transactions had been registered in the offset programme. Larger assignments include the assembly and manufacture of S-76 helicopters or pylons for Gripen aircraft at Aero Vodochody. Smaller jobs have also come to the fore, such as export opportunities for precision parts for the aerospace and defence industry made by the Přerov-based company Meopta Systems, s.r.o.

Companies benefiting from the Gripen offset programme are evenly distributed throughout the Czech Republic. The incentives have also been a boon in regions such as Trutnov, Most, or Ostrava.

The lease of the Swedish Gripen aircraft has provided the Czech Republic not only with a comprehensive system of top-class aircraft, the deployment of which with Czech pilots, for example, during the NATO mission over the Baltic States earned international recognition, but also an extensive system of support for domestic industry. While spectators at air shows can admire the skills of Czech pilots carrying out incredible manoeuvres in Gripen fighters, Bohemian and Moravian companies are harvesting the fruits of Czech-Swedish cooperation.