

# Learning to be global

"We have to learn to understand how other employees think in a global enterprise," says Delphine Termignon, Renault Trucks Competences, the person responsible for Leadership Compass, training for global managers.

by Barbro Giobbi

**SOME PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE WORKING** in a multicultural climate. Research reveals that most people feel most comfortable when they work with people who are like them. Many people can actually feel that a multicultural climate is a direct threat to their jobs.

At the same time, however, there are many advantages to working in an international environment. Greater creativity, new ways of tackling old problems and an innovative atmosphere are just some of them, according to Delphine Termignon,



Delphine Termignon

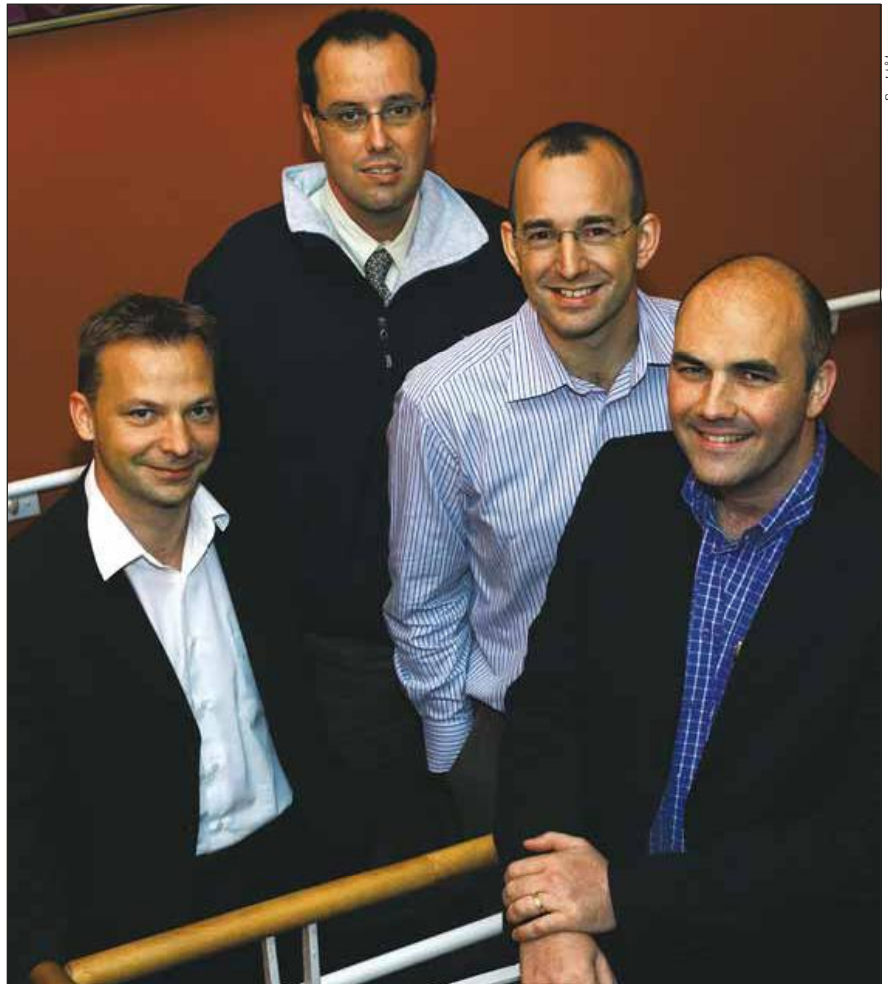
who is currently organising the third course in multicultural leadership for participants from all the Group's business areas. The course is one example of a number of courses with the same orientation in the Group. Each time, 12 managers from Volvo companies all over the world attend the course. The vision is eventually to create a common Volvo multicultural leadership style based on the corporate philosophy, *The Volvo Way*.

"**MANAGING EMPLOYEES** from different cultures is a challenge as a result of all the different values, prerequisites and ways of communicating," she adds.

"However, if you want your project to succeed, you have to try to understand other people," she continues. "You have to listen actively and give yourself the time to understand the other person. Otherwise, you risk conflicts between individuals and a general lack of clarity in communication. Taking time to communicate more effectively is an investment that will help to avoid a lack of performance and additional costs.

So what is needed to succeed as the manager of an international team and to be a global leader? Delphine Termignon has a number of tips, which she also shares with the course participants.

"Pay careful attention to your own assumptions when it comes to what other co-workers say or do. Avoid making hasty judgements. You should instead consider other



Bo Hakansson

**SEBASTIEN AUGAGNEUR**, Ricardo Carneiro, Olivier de Saint Meleuc and Philippe Volle have all benefited enormously from the training.

interpretations based on the attitudes and values of other cultures. Analyse your conclusions, preferably with a third party that is familiar with the other culture. Be aware that what is natural for you may not be natural for someone else.

"Be prepared to repeat your intentions when it appears that other people have misunderstood them.

"Find ways to enable other people to understand your behaviour, your way of communicating and so on. The overall aim is to make all the members of the team feel involved."

**TO GIVE A PICTURE** of the way people in the leading cultures meet and behave in business contexts, Delphine Termignon uses the definition of different cultures given in GlobeSmart, a web tool on Violin for

developing multicultural skills (see the data box).

"We don't want to give any general descriptions of the way people behave, but there are certain trends that are accepted and they show that we are all different. However, in a global group, we have a common mission – to work together."

## Facts

GlobeSmart is a tool that is available to all Volvo employees. It is designed to help people develop their multicultural skills. GlobeSmart provides useful information and knowledge in more than 50 continuously updated topics from 50 countries around the world.

The address to GlobeSmart is [www.globesmart.com](http://www.globesmart.com)

# leaders

## Doing business, according to GlobeSmart, in the following countries

### France

Meetings are designed for information-sharing and discussion rather than final decision-making. Interrupting is a sign that you are interested in what your colleague has to say. Conflict is rarely perceived negatively. Deadlines are open to negotiation. Only the highest individual in authority can make the final decision.

### USA

Avoid long periods of silence during negotiations. The best deal is more important than personal relationships. Direct and open conflict: "business is business, no hard feelings". Task orientation, facts and opinions. Achievements valued over status, title or age.

### Sweden

Co-operation, compromise and consensus more important than formal position or power. Appeals to reason and facts. Display of emotions is viewed as inappropriate. Direct communication is a sign of efficiency. Individual decision-making and problem-solving. Flat matrix and team oriented.

### Brazil

Expect to spend a great deal of time on reviewing details. Since this is a group culture, avoid confrontation in a meeting to save 'face'. Relationship-building is essential to doing business. Status is important. Business is hierarchical. Decisions are made by the highest-ranking person. Brazilians negotiate with people not companies.

### China

Humility and respect are shown for age, rank and group. Keeping calm and remaining patient is considered a virtue. Real decisions are made outside the meeting. The Chinese prioritise mutual trust in the long term over hurried transactions. Confrontation and loss of face (for both sides) must be avoided.

### India

Relationship-building is essential before doing business. 'Small talk' and showing hospitality are important. Openly discussing family and personal life is common practice. Indians require time to discuss every aspect of a deal. Indians never say "No". Open and direct disagreements are avoided.



Illustration: Kicki Edgren Nyborg

## Participants' comments

**RICARDO CARNEIRO,**  
Parts Business and Dealer  
Development, Volvo  
Penta, Brazil



"This training is helping me a great deal, as I don't have that much experience as yet. Having an open mind is important when it comes to multicultural contact. Other cultures have different systems for solving problems and it's easy to make mistakes."



**OLIVIER DE SAINT  
MELEUC,** area manager,  
Asia/ Pacific, Renault  
Trucks

"Multicultural contacts are a key factor in my job. With contacts of this kind, it's important to get rid of your prejudice. I know that Asians behave in a certain way, for example, but this isn't always the case. Globalisation has resulted in people being influenced by other countries. When you do business, it's important to take the time to understand one another. I have to listen very carefully and with great sensitivity. This is different with my fellow countrymen, as I already have the basic information."

**PHILIPPE VOLLE,**  
group leader at  
Volvo Powertrain



"Since 2003, I have been involved in multicultural questions. We work in global teams in Hagerstown, USA, Curitiba, Brazil, Lyon, France, and Göteborg, Sweden. In my experience, there are greater cultural differences between the companies than there are between the individual countries. To enable the teams to work together, I listen very closely to each employee in order to understand and identify the different values in each team."



**SEBASTIEN AUGAGNEUR,**  
head of Packaging Eu-  
rope, Volvo Parts

"I lead co-workers in Lyon, Göteborg and Ghent. In my experience, the most important thing when you work with people from different cultures is to set aside the time to listen to each individual and accept the differences we may have. When you lead a team of this kind, it's a good thing to create your own group culture – a mixture of the cultures in the team, based on respect for each individual. I think multicultural knowledge is going to be the basis in our organisation when it comes to increasing synergies."