

Uwe Schöpe has been working for Zurich for almost five decades. “I have also played many soccer matches with people at our company,” says the Chief HR Officer in his pristine jersey from the 2006 World Cup. “And the ball came from the 2002 World Cup,” says Schöpe. He likes to watch big games with the staff after work in the Cologne office. © Porsche Consulting/Marco Prosch

# The Intermediary

04/04/2025 Priorities have changed and Human Resources is being awarded more importance than ever on the management boards of large companies. There is a strong focus on how people are treated in their working lives. It is becoming increasingly clear that modern leadership requires a special skillset.

For headhunters looking for an exceptional HR director, the hunting instinct should tingle as you read on. But sorry, dear headhunters for top personnel, the hunt would be hopeless. This person has been taken for decades: Uwe Schöpe, Chief HR Officer and Work Director of the Zurich Group Germany.

He has a refreshing outlook on his role and how he lives it. A private office? No chance! A standard, height-adjustable desk in the open-plan office will do just fine. A limousine with his own driver? “Never! For me, that would be embarrassing.” Instead of resorting to the clichés often found in a flat hierarchy, Schöpe prefers to be close to people – no need for insignias of power, just plenty of heart and humor.

"You have to like people," says Schöpe, immediately firing back with a question "How can you expect to be a good manager if you don't like people?" He takes time to be kind and friendly, across all floors and all levels. Instead of asserting his authority, Schöpe always leads with some honest small talk when he orders an espresso from the coffee bar in the staff restaurant. "You're welcome, Uwe!" says the friendly server at the counter. Here, and throughout the office, he has done away with formalities.

Later on, the executive chances upon preparations being made for a workshop in a modern meeting room a few floors up: he pauses, takes the time for the colleague to give him a brief introduction into the topic, and finally grabs a biscuit.

Informal discussions in the workplace, also known as networking, are crucial. They are spontaneous, effective, and put you in the best mood. "When your heart is into it, you can get the most out of your work," says Schöpe. "After all, the success of a company is dependent on having motivated employees." For this same reason, Schöpe instructed his recruiting teams to "not only pay attention to candidates' skillsets," but to instead prioritize "their character and the cultural fit."

## "No, we can't do it like that."

But it is not just his relaxed demeanor and approachability that shape Schöpe's approach to leadership day to day. He also has clear principles on how he deals with his dual role. "As Work Director, I see myself as an intermediary between the workforce and the Board of Management." But what does this mean in practice? Schöpe: "If I come across something that I am unhappy with in my role as Work Director, I can take this to the board meeting as Chief HR Officer and simply say to the committee: No, we can't do it like that."

The freedom to speak up like this was an important criterion when it came to accepting a position on the Board of Management. "Carsten Schildknecht, CEO of the Zurich Group Germany since 2018, puts 100 per cent of his trust in me," says Schöpe. "He knows that a good working culture is the key to long-term success. The CEO adopting this mindset is a prerequisite for positive cultural change in companies."

The way that employees are treated sits at the core of the working culture, even down to details that may at first seem small. For example, the Board of Management no longer meets on a conference floor – instead, they meet in a glazed area on the first floor where they are visible to all. In a well-run company, transparency in this most literal sense plays a large role in operational visibility. Another example of transparency is the company's strategy dialogs, where all employees are invited to participate. Three to four hundred colleagues are usually present at the individual events. The intention here is that CEO Schildknecht and Chief HR Officer Schöpe are advised by their own people across all disciplines. Depending on the topic, other department heads may also join them.

Essentially, there is one question at the heart of the discussion: "Where are we lacking and what can we do better?" The workforce presents its ideas for improvement directly to the Board of Management.

"And at the turn of the year, we take stock and report on which measures we have been able to implement and what we plan to do going forward," says Schöpe. He admits that not everything can always be put into practice. "But when this is the case, we say so and explain why. Nothing is swept under the rug." Schöpe says that the strategy dialogs are a great success: "Our people are very engaged with it, every time they come fully committed."

Active involvement of employees was also a priority when new management guidelines were being developed and adopted in 2021. "We arranged workshops in which the Works Council, the Board of Management, managers and employees jointly formulated six guidelines." The formulas for exemplary leadership behavior were deliberately kept simple: 'Trust in people,' 'Show appreciation,' and 'Facilitate performance' are three examples of this. "These values are now set in our minds and we live them every day," Schöpe explains. It is important to the Chief HR Officer that the guidelines do not only apply to managers: "This is not a one-way street. Each and every one of us must act as a role model. Everyone should have trust in their colleagues and appreciate others. That's what makes a good culture that is lived by everyone."

## Once Zurich, always Zurich

How much does the working atmosphere impact your reputation as an attractive employer when you are looking for new hires? "Salary remains the top priority, but the working atmosphere and flexibility follow closely behind," says Schöpe. And to ensure the credibility of applicants, the Board of Management once again turns to its current workforce to do some convincing: Employees who help find external applicants by recommending them to Zurich receive a bonus of 2000 euros in the event of a successful hire. It works well. "Nowadays, 40 per cent of our new hires come from employee recommendations," says Schöpe. And it seems that people who have chosen Zurich remain loyal to their employer. According to Schöpe, the staff turnover rate is just 2.5 per cent (based on voluntary turnover).

However, Schöpe also acknowledges that "the employment market has become more difficult overall. That is why I have significantly strengthened our recruitment department – both quantitatively and qualitatively." As is so often the case with financial services providers, the team searches for skilled workers with specialist skills in mathematics, tax, and dynamic pricing. Of course, IT professionals also remain in high demand. "In this sense," says Schöpe, "we knowingly accept a disadvantage: For our IT workers, we don't offer a 100 per cent work-from-home arrangement, although this is often the first question that comes up in an interview." The reason: "I don't want us to work in a virtual company. The fact that we meet face-to-face is a part of our culture," says Schöpe. He believes that "working together in the workplace is the cement we need as social beings to build solidarity." After all, the reputation of the company depends on the fact that as many employees as possible are willing to say: "I am Zurich and proud of it."

## Info

Text first published in Porsche Consulting Magazine.

## MEDIA ENQUIRIES



**Jan Boris Wintzenburg**

Director Communications and Marketing<br>Porsche Consulting GmbH
+49 (0) 152 3911 8663
jan_boris.wintzenburg@porsche-consulting.com

### Image Sublines

Path: The Intermediary/Images/img_1.jpg
Title: Uwe Schöpe, Chief HR Officer at Zurich, 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: In Zurich's ultra-modern headquarters in Cologne, a small museum on the 15th floor commemorates the beginnings of the company. The original antique furniture from the Berlin branch of what was then 'Zürich Allgemeine Unfall- u. Haftpflicht-Versicherungs-Aktiengesellschaft' (Zurich General Accident and Liability Insurance Company) can be seen. Uwe Schöpe flicks through a tariff book from 1889 at a desk. © Porsche Consulting/Marco Prosch

Path: The Intermediary/Images/img_2.jpg
Title: Uwe Schöpe, Chief HR Officer at Zurich, 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: An adjustable desk and a clean desk – that's all Uwe Schöpe asks for in the open-plan office. He handles confidential information in one of the small meeting rooms and there are soundproof booths for telephone calls. He's happy without a private office. © Porsche Consulting/Marco Prosch

Path: The Intermediary/Images/img_3.jpg
Title: Uwe Schöpe, Chief HR Officer at Zurich, 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: Uwe Schöpe keeps it relaxed. He wears cheerful jackets from the north-Italian manufacturer BOB and likes to rummage through the well-stocked office library in the hallway. Anyone can donate or take a book from here. For example, a travel guide to Verona was put there by Schöpe. Right next to it, you can find specialist literature on 'Open Source Leadership' or 'German Insurance Law.' © Porsche Consulting/Marco Prosch

Path: The Intermediary/Images/img_4.jpg
Title: Zurich headquarter, staff restaurant, Cologne, Germany, 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: For Zurich, being an attractive employer begins in the staff restaurant on the first floor: The best ingredients, healthy food, service with a smile, and a modern ambience make it a popular meeting point for employees during lunch breaks and coffee breaks. Even between breaks, employees meet here for professional discussions. © Porsche Consulting/Marco Prosch

Path: The Intermediary/Images/img_5.jpg
Title: Tanja Krupp, Porsche Consulting, Heiner von der Laden, Porsche Consulting, Uwe Schöpe, Chief HR Officer at Zurich, Isabel Neitzel, Porsche Consulting (l-r), 2025, Porsche Consulting GmbH
Subline: Chief HR Officer Uwe Schöpe always manages to create a positive atmosphere. He is pictured here during a visit from Porsche Consulting: Tanja Krupp, Heiner von der Laden, and Isabel Neitzel (from left to right). Just like the fairytale, the dwarf (pictured here is one of the seven) symbolizes the hard work of the staff when the German head office moved to the Zurich Campus in Cologne in October 2019. © Porsche AG/Marco Prosch

## Link Collection

Link to this article
https://newsroom.porsche.com/en/2025/company/porsche-consulting-the-intermediary-39095.html

Media Package
https://pmdb.porsche.de/newsroomzips/6e30985b-6054-47e7-ba95-8123e4288b8d.zip

External Links
https://www.porsche-consulting.com/

**Dr. Ing. h.c. F. Porsche Aktiengesellschaft**
Porscheplatz 1
70435 Stuttgart