

## Interview: Consultation and negotiation

Interviewer: Svein Tore Andersen

Interviewee: Ingelin Killengreen

### Consultation and negotiation

How do you succeed with consultations and negotiations? In this text, Director General of the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi) Ingelin Killengreen tells about her experiences from consultations and negotiations with employee representatives. She gives advice on how to give and take to achieve results for the benefit of the enterprise.

### About Ingelin Killengreen

Ingelin Killengreen is educated as a lawyer. She has been Director General and Secretary General in the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, Chief of Police in Oslo, Director General of Police, Secretary General in the Ministry of Government Administration, Reform and Church Affairs and Director General of the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi).

### Podcast conversation translated from Norwegian to English:

**Interviewer:** Welcome to this podcast about consultations and negotiations. Today we are speaking with Ingelin Killengreen, Director General of the Agency for Public Management and eGovernment (Difi). Killengreen, what do you think about the constantly recurring question of should this be a consultation or a negotiation?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** Firstly, I am very concerned that we should always distinguish between what is subject to consultation, to be discussed, and what is subject to negotiation, to be negotiated. In addition, I always make sure to provide information in advance, that we have information meetings as well as informal contact along the way. However, I am of the very strong opinion that information meetings are something else altogether, and that you should not, and cannot, be bound by something said at an information meeting during later consultations and negotiations. I'm also very clear on what rights you have during consultation meetings and negotiation meetings, and then you have to deal with it. There's a big difference between those meetings. Negotiation meetings are for negotiations, formal negotiations, where the parties either come to agreement or not. Consultation meetings are consultations, as the name implies. However, it is also the case that the manager must make the final decision. They are of a different nature. It can be a challenge that not everyone understands these differences. I've been in some situations with employee representatives where that has been challenging. We provided good information at the start, we had a good dialogue, we had constructive discussions during the consultation meeting, and then I, as the manager, made a decision. Then the employee representatives were upset over my decision

because they had a different view. I can certainly understand that they can get upset, but a consultation does not mean you have to allow yourself to be consulted away from a decision you have to take. That is important to keep in mind. I need to respect the employee representative's role, and I have to help them do their best. On the other hand, they must respect the fact that a manager actually has both the right and the obligation to govern and decide. Sometimes it is uncomfortable, but it's part of the rules of the game.

**Interviewer:** So during consultations, you have already made up your mind? Then the result is a given, isn't it?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** That's not the way I do it.

**Interviewer:** You don't?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** No

**Interviewer:** You listen?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** I listen.

**Interviewer:** Do you have an example of a time that you listened and then changed your position. Does it ever happen?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** I've changed my position, quite drastically in fact. I've also changed my mind after seeing that my arguments weren't good enough. Mostly, however, employee representatives have presented me with information that made me realise that what I thought was the best solution was actually not the way to go. In other words, the map and the terrain did not quite match up, and so I changed my mind. I don't think it's so difficult. You need to keep in mind that with consultations and discussions – and not least with negotiations – it is a question of give and take. You don't get the best solution, but you must arrive at a solution. It's much better than just picking at each other.

**Interviewer:** And then you have to talk to the company, the organisation afterwards and stand for the results. Is that a challenge? For both sides?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** Yes, and it is particularly challenging when you go into negotiations with a clear idea of what you expect to achieve, and then you have to go out again and say that "this was what we arrived at". This can happen in two ways. You can make it very clear that negotiations are a matter of give and take for both parties. "This is how far we got." Then be very clear on your victories. "This was the most important issue for us." "We won on this point." "Some things we hoped to achieve didn't get through, but they were not so important after all, and if we want to move forward, the counterparty also needs to get something out of this." It's a balancing act. You can't go back to the organisation and say, "we wanted this, but the others were so unyielding that we had to give in". In other words, part of your leadership role is to be clear that "yes, our optimal outcome was this and here is the result". Of course, you do not always achieve your optimal outcome, but you have to

argue that “here is what I achieved and I think it was a good result and we can live with it”. You have to stand for what you have achieved. That is true for both parties.

**Interviewer:** So what would you say to the employee representatives, whether they have been at this for a while or are just considering whether or not to be part of these daunting tasks? What you would say to them in relation to that?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** Firstly, I would say that they have a very important role to play. Secondly, that it is important that employee representatives take on that role, and that they also understand what role they have. They are not in management. They are not the ones who will be left with the responsibilities and decisions of management, but they will have a unique opportunity to influence the outcome for the benefit of their members. I would also like to mention that information and dialogue are not dangerous. On the contrary, have an “open line” to management. It is something you will benefit from. And be open to your members with respect to what you can realistically expect to achieve and what you cannot realistically expect to achieve. The employee representatives that I have had the most respect for as a management executive, and who held their position the longest, have in fact been those who dared to say to their members: “I’m sorry but that is not something we will address. That is not worth talking further about.” But who, in other contexts, fought like wolves for their members. I think the reason they have been successful, has something to do with my own experience. I’ve had this ongoing dialogue with employee representatives for many years. It has taught me that we can make adjustments and we can keep each other informed, but when they say “no, I cannot agree to that”, well, then I step back, and I think: “Now it’s serious. Now I need to think differently.” Those are the best kind of employee representatives. They stop you when necessary, but they are also willing to give.

**Interviewer:** Do you remember the first time you were in a negotiation meeting?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** Yes, I do.

**Interviewer:** How did it go?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** Yes, it was one of those hideous meetings where the other party threw a book on the floor, said something he definitely should not have and walked out slamming the door. I must admit, I was quite alarmed at the time. It was not long before I assumed a leadership position myself and was in charge of the meetings. My starting point was not the easiest, but you do learn eventually. At least, I learned very quickly that those kinds of tactics do not produce constructive results.

**Interviewer:** And maintaining a good atmosphere, how important has that been all these years?

**Ingelin Killengreen:** Yes, we have managed to keep our spirits up. There have been many long nights, sometimes several nights in a row, and we’ve still managed to share a laugh. We have managed to distinguish between the issue and the person. I don’t know how many will believe me, but I actually believe this cooperation with the employee representatives and all those difficult issues and all those conflicts we have faced over the years – although from the

outside it may have looked bad – is part of what has been the most exciting and challenging part of being in a leadership position.