

INSIGHTS

A truly global culture

In Europe, Huawei is often perceived as a typical Chinese company. True, the Huawei headquarters are located in Shenzhen, a modern metropolis just next door to Hong Kong. But it's also true that Huawei operates in 170 countries across all continents and that throughout its dynamic history, it has embraced advice and guidance from all corners of the world. Through its participative corporate culture, input from employees of all nationalities shapes Huawei on a daily basis!

Huawei's culture is like an onion with many layers; one layer is the British culture, another layer is Chinese, and still another is American. For instance, the US-based tech company IBM advised Huawei on its management system and has left a lasting imprint on Huawei's working structure. Huawei could not have become a leading global ICT service provider without international expansion.

Arguably, the roots of its global outlook were already in place when Ren Zhengfei established Huawei in 1987 – with a starting capital of just 21 000 Yuan, less than 4 000 euros at that time. Back then, China was a very different country from what it is now: after Deng Xiaoping's reforms, the economy was only gradually opening up. Those who took the risk to set up their own company were real pioneers - competition was fierce and success all but guaranteed. After Huawei managed to survive the first years, this pioneer spirit naturally led Ren and his team to look beyond China. Already then, openness was the basis of Huawei's survival and growth.

"Plunging into the sea" of international expansion, Huawei had a chance to gain a foothold in markets as yet undeveloped by American and European telecom companies. As it happened, in the early 1990s, Africa was a continent offering numerous opportunities. Perseverance, one of Huawei's core values, was key in setting up networks in markets that competitors avoided entering. Had the Huawei executives thought about all that could go wrong when engaging in hardship locations, they would not have come very far. It was the spirit of openness, not the fear of unpredictable outcomes, that drove investment decisions.

At the end of 1997, Huawei founder Ren Zhengfei sold his second-hand Peugeot and bought a BMW. One day, when driving his BMW on Shennan Avenue in Shenzhen, Ren spotted then IBM chairman Louis Gerstner. "Do you know where the handbrake on this BMW is?" Ren asked Gerstner. One year later, once IBM had successfully built up Huawei's modern business management system, Ren knew where the handbrake was. Beforehand, he was so focused on expansion that he did not have enough time to think about the handbrake.

With an open mind, Huawei has developed a unique culture that combines both Western and Eastern characteristics. This, together with its core values, is the secret to its rapid growth.

Invaluable experiences come from operating internationally in 170 countries. Everywhere Huawei operates, it abides by the local laws. Huawei also observes the conventions of the United Nations.

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