

Credibility in Implementation

An Interview with Uschi Schreiber,
Global Sector Leader, Government & Public Sector Center, Ernst & Young

EDITORS' NOTE *Uschi Schreiber has extensive experience in government and the public sector, and is a former Director General and Deputy Director General of large government departments. From January 2012, she has led the Government & Public Sector Center at Ernst & Young, based in Hong Kong. Schreiber joined Ernst & Young, Australia, in 2008. Between June 2010 and December 2011, she was the Deputy CEO of the Oceania firm and led its Markets organization.*



Uschi Schreiber

COMPANY BRIEF *Ernst & Young (www.ey.com) is a global leader in assurance, tax, transaction, and advisory services. Worldwide, their 152,000 people are united by their shared values and an unwavering commitment to quality. Ernst & Young refers to the global organization of member firms of Ernst & Young Global Limited, each of which is a separate legal entity.*

What are the strengths of Ernst & Young's Government & Public Sector Center and what is your outlook for growth?

We are already strong but we see significant further growth potential. What helps in achieving this is Ernst & Young's highly globalized practice. You might ask why this is relevant for our Government & Public Sector Center. It is important because governments are so much more internationally connected than ever before; we see it in the media every day. Our national economies are closely linked to each other and over the past few years, we have seen how this forces governments to work together. But globalization is now about so much more than the economy – it is about exchanging ideas and finding solutions to long-standing systemic problems.

As a global professional services firm, we bring experience and knowledge from one country to another and with governments being more connected than ever, our clients are seeking this international outlook combined with deep local knowledge about their particular challenges. The government and public sector also presents significant growth opportunities in emerging economies. A lot of our work there is about helping to build infrastructure through the right financing options, bringing together private

and public partnerships. We also provide some of the underpinning ideas about how to structure social support systems, organize efficient governance arrangements, and minimize risks.

Is it tough to differentiate?

Of course, it can be tough. But I chose to be with Ernst & Young because I wanted to be part of an organization that has credibility in implementation. Anybody can write a report about the problems a government might encounter – diagnosing

the problems is relatively easy, but it gets much harder when it comes to making change happen. At Ernst & Young, we handpick the people working with government and public sector clients to make sure they know what they are talking about and understand what it takes to implement lasting improvements. Our global structure helps us to move people around and gives clients access to the most recent knowledge and experience from elsewhere in the world. We are very diverse, which gives access to different life experiences and ways of thinking about a problem, as well as access to a multitude of cultures and languages. Again, this benefits our clients.

The other strength of Ernst & Young is its strong support for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. Over the past couple of years, we have seen that the same old solutions to address economic problems no longer work. So we bring our experiences from working with entrepreneurs to our government clients as a way of giving them access to innovative ways of thinking.

You recently relocated to Hong Kong. Do you expect that a lot of your growth will come from the Asia-Pacific region?

There is no doubt that the economic balance across the world is shifting from West to East, and you can feel it. There is a lot of opportunity and development here and the region is full of motivated people who are reinventing the way the world works.

I am based in Asia because of our firm's commitment to having our leaders in the key markets around the world and not just the traditional markets. For a firm our size, it is critical that we address the emerging markets as aggressively as the mature markets and my being here is directly related to that focus.

From a business perspective, there are significant growth opportunities in this market because we are surrounded by countries that are developing whole new cities with all the requisite infrastructure, security, health and educational systems, and so on. They are doing things in new, innovative ways, in many cases leapfrogging the experiences of the West.

So what we have here is an interesting environment and a significant opportunity for Ernst & Young to contribute to the further development of this part of the world – and we are seeing similar trends in countries such as Brazil and Mexico, and increasingly in Africa.

Ernst & Young is heavily focused on diversity and inclusion. As a senior female leader in the firm, do you see strong opportunities for women broadly and within E&Y?

I'm a great example of the Ernst & Young commitment to diversity and inclusiveness. I have been with the firm for four years, I am German/Australian, and I am a woman. I had a significant career prior to joining the firm, but I have had enormous opportunity and support since starting with Ernst & Young. I am now in a global leadership role and this illustrates how serious Ernst & Young is about this issue.

But diversity is not just about gender – it is about diversity of thought and experience. In a world that demands innovative solutions, we need to generate new ideas. We have a strong focus on making sure our teams bring together people from different backgrounds – combining professional, academic, life, and cultural experiences. In the Hong Kong office, as in our other offices around the world, I am surrounded by people who speak different languages and who come from different cultural backgrounds, and it makes for an extremely stimulating environment. This is the way of the future. This is how we will find better solutions to our societies' and clients' problems.

Being based in Hong Kong, you're coordinating with people within the firm and the job can be 24/7 with differing time zones. Is it possible to ever turn off the business?

It can be a challenge, but it also is a lot of fun to know that there is always someone working on making our business better. Personally, I've been in leadership roles for a long time now so hopefully I have learned how to manage myself. Working with teams all over the world keeps me highly motivated – it's exciting times at Ernst & Young. ●