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# Cross-Cultural Management: How to Do Business with Germans

- A Guide -

**giz** Deutsche Gesellschaft  
für Internationale  
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## Foreword

Germany is a key player in international economic relations. As the second largest exporter of goods and the fourth biggest economy worldwide, Germany is strongly oriented towards foreign trade. Products “Made in Germany” enjoy an excellent reputation worldwide. Cars, machinery and electronics from Germany are in demand around the globe, and a great many innovative products are developed by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Around 1,500 highly specialised German SMEs are the world market leaders in their field of expertise.

There are, therefore, a great many good reasons to do business with German companies. For this to be a success, familiarity with the German business culture is utterly crucial. Only when the foreign entrepreneur knows how German companies work, how German executives negotiate, and what is expected of foreign partners can they also successfully cooperate with a German partner in the long run.

This handbook aims to give foreign executives some initial insight into German business practices and to make them aware of the peculiarities of the local business life. In short: it provides an introduction to “How to do business with Germans”, with a wealth of suggestions for the reader.

This handbook undoubtedly does not attempt to answer all questions pertaining to German business culture. On the one hand, intercultural management itself is a complex topic, which is characterised by psychological, social, economic and historic factors; on the other hand, necessity calls for generalisations at many places in this book. Generalisations are always problematic however, as the multifaceted nature of reality cannot be depicted. The considerable cultural differences within Germany are also ignored here:

- Between the protestant north and catholic south;
- Between East and West Germany, which were separated by an “Iron Curtain” for over 40 years;
- Between economically prosperous and rather underdeveloped regions;

- Between the many regional cultures differentiated between through their various dialects or regional cuisine;
- Between rural and urban areas;
- Between the different socio-economic milieu whose economic behaviour is so very different;
- And ultimately also between individuals, as no one person is like any other.

Only the differences between the different types of companies and cultures within these can be covered. The German corporate landscape is varied: while there are large companies with tens of thousands of employees around the globe, there are also medium-sized companies owned by families or already listed on the stock exchange. And then there are young and innovative companies that have been around for just a few years, companies with a century-long history, entrepreneurs, trade companies, scientific-industrial service providers, subsidiaries of foreign companies, etc. Their company cultures, management styles and personnel management concepts are accordingly diverse.

Unfortunately this book cannot cover this diversity in full – but this is also intentional. It deliberately generalises, aiming to enhance awareness of both the aspects in common with and particular to the German business world. The boundaries of cliché are therefore fluid; exceptions are intentionally excluded from this book and abstraction sacrificed. The perspective adopted is also intentional: it is a view from the outside looking *into* Germany. The author with Russian-Ukrainian roots allows herself to be guided by the question of how an outsider perceives Germany and the German business culture. In doing so, she makes use of her excellent knowledge of the German business culture. As an intercultural management specialist, she has trained native and foreign executives for many years now.

This handbook is therefore an excellent resource for participants in the Manager Training Programme of the Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (BMWi), which prepares them for their stay in Germany. Our

experience gathered over the years of running this programme has shown us that demand is high among executives from Eastern Europe and Asia. The practice-oriented intercultural literature for this target group is extremely limited however. This book in a modular format should now close this gap.

The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH has been running the BMWi Manager Training Programme since 1998 – initially as the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft and later as InWEnt – Capacity Building International. According to the motto of “Fit for Partnership with Germany”, it prepares executives from Eastern Europe and Asia for business relations with German companies.

This book was prepared on the initiative of the GIZ with funding from the German Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology (BMWi). The content reflects the author’s personal opinions.

The GIZ would like to thank Aksana Kavalchuk for her professionalism and the outstanding commitment with which she participated in this book project. We would also like to thank all those involved for their contributions to the handbook – particularly Sujata Banerjee, who contributed her scientific and editorial expertise for the English-language version of the handbook, and reviewers Anna Suchkova, Valeriy Bessarab and Michael Josy.

We wish all readers a thoroughly enjoyable, hopefully at times entertaining read! May your business activities with German companies be a resounding success.

Dr Gerd Schimansky-Geier  
Honorary Professor of SPbSPU in Saint Petersburg  
and IPA "Turan-Profi" in Astana  
*Head of the Manager Training Programme of the  
Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology*





## Preface

*This book is dedicated to my son Philipp,  
who unites Russian, Ukrainian, German and Austrian blood.  
I would like to believe that this particular mixture will make him happy!*

The processes of globalization in today's world have brought about a rapid increase in contact among representatives of different cultures. The wide variety of values, attitudes and mindsets we encounter in a global world, the diversity of approaches to solving management tasks, various leadership styles and different ways of social interaction excite, amaze and enrich everyone who "plays on the international field".

This very diversity, which we cannot always see, much less understand and interpret, places increased demands on the individual, on his/her ability to survive under the new diversity conditions. It is no great surprise that in many cases people want to simplify the increasingly complex world around them. This is where stereotypes come to our aid: "Americans are superficial", "the British are arrogant", "Germans are pedantic and boring".

Cultural differences may spur certain positive outcomes in the course of cooperation. If, however, they go unrecognized or are not sufficiently taken into account, these differences can cause difficulties and conflicts in business relations with partners from other cultures. The challenge of relations between different cultures is particularly acute in business communication: about one third of all international projects suffer to a considerable extent precisely from a lack of cultural awareness.

The more often you encounter various culturally determined approaches and styles of doing business, the more profoundly you will get to know the peculiarities of your own national culture, and the more acutely you will feel your own limitations and the wish to overcome them. Communicating with people from other cultures, especially in a business context, enables you to get a sense for the relative nature of value orientations and prevents us from asserting the absolute advantage of one or another tradition over others, for example, in issues of staff manage-

ment, communication style, negotiation strategy, etc. Expanding our horizons in this way results in a wider repertoire of competencies, management and negotiation skills, which undoubtedly will lead to greater success, not only in international cooperation, but equally in one's 'native' business environment.

**Who will benefit from this Guide?** This publication was primarily intended for participants of internships organised by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, within the framework of Russia's Presidential Programme, the Ukrainian Initiative and other management training programmes for executives from Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Mongolia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. The guide book will help our group of readers to proactively adjust to the specific nature of the "German mentality" and in this way be better prepared for their stay in Germany.

In addition, this guide may also prove to be of interest to a wider circle of readers, first and foremost to members of the business community who want to initiate, improve or expand their relationships with German companies, individuals who are employed by, or plan to go to work for/with German companies, and teachers of Comparative Management, Intercultural Communication or Conduct of Negotiations courses, as well as German language teachers.

**What will the reader find in this Guide?** This publication is based on the author's many years of experience working in Germany in international projects involving Germans, and also on observations related to internships of managers from various countries in Germany. At the core of this guide is an explanation of the behavioural standards of German business people, their self-perception and value system, as well as those interpretation patterns which Germans use to read and assess the behaviour of foreign partners. The guidebook attempts to explain the main structural characteristics of German business culture, along with the widespread stereotypical perceptions of individual aspects of the German mentality that are relevant for an economic cooperation with Germany.

For a deeper understanding of these issues, the text provides additional material, placed in separate inserts.

Readers will encounter such topics as the German concept of professionalism and specific features of German business communication. In subsequent sections, complex issues which have a paramount importance in international cooperation will be examined: these are, conducting negotiations and working on a joint project. The final chapter provides readers with information on how they can expect German partners to behave in a conflict situation.

The concept of this guide also takes into account a situation where the reader only focuses on a particular chapter in the guide – for example, if he needs to prepare for negotiations with German partners. The reader may not always have the time and the possibility to read all the chapters one by one. The efforts of the author to meet also very specific requirements of the reader inevitably lead to recapitulating some of the ideas already proposed elsewhere, applied logic providing explanations for certain phenomena, or recommendations. On the other side, such recaps can make didactic sense – or as the saying goes: "You become doubly certain!"

The book includes a list of English language sources recommended for those interested in issues of intercultural communication, and Web links to further information on Germany.

**Things to remember.** A nation as a whole is formed by different social groups who have their own particular ways of communicating. In addition, each person's behaviour has its own individual characteristics. Just like other people, whether they are of Arab, Chinese, Indian or Russian origin or anyone else, Germans are all differently different. This publication simplifies a rich and complex reality for teaching purposes and will describe the typical behaviour of a typical business person under typical conditions in and about Germany. This means that in addition to the general knowledge with which this Guide, as we hope, will provide the reader,

the reader will also be called upon to make use of his or her individual ability to observe, intuit as well as experience communication in a specific situation, or while dealing with a specific partner.

**What will you not find in this Guide?**<sup>1</sup> The reader will *not* find direct comparisons, highly scientific theories or satirical exaggerations here. The guide does not contain lists of 'dos and don'ts', since such lists create a sense that everything is under control and nothing unexpected or bad can happen any longer, which is dangerous in an international context. In this guide there won't be any advice like 'do as the Germans do and everything will be all right'. The author is not a proponent of cultural imitation, primarily because cultural 'mimicry' has never made anyone happy, or successful. Furthermore it will hardly be possible for anyone to deny their own cultural identity. However, it is useful for you to be aware of the main pitfalls, hazards and the most important factors that can present obstacles for successful business with German partners. We hope that this guide will assist the reader in achieving this goal. It was the author's intention to focus on empirical facts, concrete recommendations and advice. Advice in this context does not intend to assimilate the partner and make him/her German, but focuses on how to efficiently build a business relationship with German partners.

This guide would not have come into existence if I hadn't met certain people along my life's path. I would like to say to all of them, 'Thank you so much!'

My Family, and especially my Grandfathers, one of whom was a military interpreter who had a brilliant command of the German, English and French languages, presented me with a love of German culture and literature. The other Grandfather who was the commander of a village in

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<sup>1</sup> Although this guide is practical in nature, it relies on the cultural standards theory of Alexander Thomas, a professor of cross-cultural communication from Regensburg, on the studies of the German business-culture roots of Dr.phil. Sylvia Schroll-Machl, and on the scientific ideas of Geert Hofstede and Edward Hall.

Saxony for more than two years after the end of the war, was fascinated by a country where everything 'functions like a clockwork' and where even the language 'disciplines the brain'. My parents were delighted at my idea to do graduate work in Munich and did everything they could to support me during that most difficult time, the period of 'culture shock' at the beginning of my stay in Germany.

Due to my husband, a German psychotherapist, I have a unique opportunity to "glimpse into the German soul".

The participants of my courses have been an inexhaustible source of information on the successes, misunderstandings, curious incidents and conflicts in a cross-cultural cooperation.

Special thanks go to Silvia Schroll-Machl whose book on the roots of the German mentality was a precious information source about the formation of the German culture.

Anna Suchkova, the chief editor of this guide, who by using her experience in cross-cultural training, her economic competence and her GIZ expertise helped tweak the text and complemented it with very valuable and comprehensive comments and notes.

Dr Aksana Kavalchuk, September 2011



# 1

The German understanding  
of the professional

## 1. The German understanding of the professional

Most participants in cross-cultural trainings on German culture usually ask one question, which goes like this: “What business qualities do German partners value the most?” Or, formulated somewhat differently: “What do Germans look for in a foreign partner?” On the face of it, the answer seems easy: “Germans value professionalism”. Difficulties arise when it becomes clear that the German understanding of professionalism can differ considerably from, for example, the Indian, Arabic, Russian, or other European perceptions of the meaning of this word.

So who is a “professional” in German terms, and how does he behave? First of all, he is a specialist in his field, serious and action-oriented, completely dedicated to his work, methodical, consistent and structured in his actions, inclined to perfectionism, and loyal to his company. He lives the meaning of his words, he performs according to all agreements and promises, and he is in control of himself and his emotions.

Let us examine the individual components of the German concept of professionalism in more detail.

### 1.1 Task orientation

In any culture, there are always two aspects between two individuals in any relationship: the form and the substance of that relationship, or in the terminology of cross-cultural management, “people orientation” and “task orientation”. On the one hand, all relationships have “substance”. For example, in the case of a business partnership, this substance could be a joint venture, distribution of profit, expansion of sales markets, or entry into new markets. On the other hand, social contacts have a “form”, which refers to the feelings of the participants in the communicative act. We find it pleasant to work with one person, but another may be so unpleasant that we end the relationship even if this negatively impacts on our interests or those of our environment. Various cultures differ purely in the amount of importance they give to these two aspects of human relationships.



In cultures that emphasize interpersonal relationships, the “form”, the “human factor” takes priority over the “substance.” For representatives of these cultures, it is more important to maintain harmonious relations and functional ties, than to follow rules or accomplish practical goals.

In Germany, on the contrary, the content aspects and task orientation are the focus of attention, i.e., in the professional world the emphasis is clearly on **business** relations. Having said this, the task is understood to be the aim of activity and what is most important of all in this context, for example, finances or equipment, logistics or prices, compliance with legislation or quality issues.

Owing to the task orientation, particular importance in the German business environment is given to qualifications and the professional competency of all participants; to a profound knowledge and superior grasp of the problem, and, to aspects which sometimes seem quite narrow-minded. Diplomas<sup>2</sup>, titles and the number of years spent in penetrating to the core of a problem; on-the-job experience in the field and in the position, supported by recommendations, referrals and other proofs of success serve as documented evidence of professional qualification and expert status.

It is prestigious in Germany to be generally acknowledged as expert in any given field. This helps increase the 'weight' of the proposals and arguments made by the specialist considerably. Factors such as social competence, having contacts or 'natural authority' play more of a secondary role when you compare them to other cultures.

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<sup>2</sup> The features of the German educational system are such that specialists with higher educations take at least 25 years to enter the labor market. Until recently, 13 years of study at a *Gymnasium*, a minimum of five years' schooling at a university, usually six months to a year of foreign study, and numerous *practica* were the typical way young specialists were trained. Today, European education systems, including the German one, are undergoing considerable changes, and one result will be a substantial reduction in the length of study. However, real 25-year-old managers have not yet appeared in Germany, and Germans are astonished by young colleagues from other countries. For this reason, we recommend taking the opportunity to explain features of schooling in your country and differences between the educational systems to your German partners.

In the German understanding, such personally-professional tasks as goal-orientation, assertiveness and persistence in achieving a goal are the characteristics of a professional. When working with German partners you may encounter at every step verbal displays of the German goal-orientation concerning work, with such expressions as 'let's get down to work', 'let's get back to work', and 'don't get distracted', etc. This also means that small talk, poetic digressions and ways of strengthening contacts, p.ex by extended informal events such as long feasts are often perceived by German counterparts as a waste of time.

The existence of an informal relationship between business partners can sometimes be perceived as a factor that brings an unnecessary and obstructive subjectivity to business. It may happen that, in attempting to overcome the initial communication barrier more quickly, foreign partners throw parties, or present national beverages and souvenirs to every German partner or colleague they encounter through work, and also to those whom they consider to be important or necessary. In such situations employees of German firms are more likely to feel awkward than grateful. For them, the format of an official acquaintance and having been formally introduced to a foreign partner form quite a sufficient basis for a constructive cooperation.

Of course it is an added benefit if the potential partner is friendly such as getting you some additional chocolate sprinkles and whipped cream while ordering coffee, but it is not very important for the common interest. Of course, a kind word, a compliment, a gift or praise will delight anyone, including your German partner, but this will not make him work harder for the common interest or goal. In the German business culture you do not need to place such a high importance on building relationships: there is really no sense in it, and this may enable you to save time.

The German management style<sup>3</sup> is functional and strictly oriented towards business aspects, towards such professional questions as creating structures, determining areas of responsibility and competence, overseeing the implementation of plans and the meeting of deadlines while

complying with all of the labour law requirements, etc. In the German management system, the director's task is to oversee the successful operation of the department or the entire company, and to ensure that the employees serve as the means to achieving success.

A few important principles of German business culture follow from an understanding of the employees' role in achieving the objectives and tasks.

First of all, it is important to assign the right people to key positions.

Second, subordinates<sup>4</sup> need to be involved in the decision-making process; they need to be made stakeholders, not just made to feel like people who carry out decisions (participative leadership style); they need to be persuaded, convinced and motivated and given the freedom to act, within the framework of strictly defined authorities, instead of being at the receiving end of top-down orders. The ability to convince employees, to get them 'fired up' with the idea of a common cause, and to work skilfully with staff resistant to change these leadership qualities are highly valued in Germany. Such an attitude towards employees is also demonstrated by the motto that can be found in many German companies: 'Empowering the people involved'<sup>5</sup>.

Third, business calls for discussions, including those between supervisors and subordinates, where the subordinates are able to criticise and reject management's proposals. Such behaviour is not only acceptable but actually welcomed as evidence of responsibility, dedication to the task and the company, and of the subordinate's motivation and commitment. Fourth, the supervision and evaluation of employees' achievements are

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<sup>3</sup> The German management style is described in more detail in the section 'Project, German style' and in subsection 5.4 'The role of the Project Manager'.

<sup>4</sup> In German companies the term 'subordinate' (Untergebene), which is considered outdated and incorrect, has been replaced by the term 'employee' (Mitarbeiter).

<sup>5</sup> 'Involved' in this context means someone who is forced to be involved in projects, structural transformations and change processes. The original reads: 'Betroffene zu Beteiligten machen'.

de-personalised and formalised. The manager does not need to tread the long and often strenuous path of intensive personal supervision by being constantly present and communicating closely. There are much more effective and functional standardised systems (e.g., electronic time clocks, formalised personnel evaluation systems, control of effective use of the Internet) which make it possible to eliminate the subjective factor and personal bias since, from the German perspective, objectivity in evaluating the work product and the quality and efficiency of work is an important motivating factor.

Fifth, the motivation of German employees is connected to a considerable degree with such characteristics of German culture as task orientation and individualism.

In German culture, as in other countries with a Euro-American cultural influence, individualism and one's ability to realise one's own potential are considered very important prerequisites members of these societies, as well as strong motivational factors.

Which factors can motivate and stimulate a German employee?

Incentives may be:

- an objective evaluation of the work output with appropriate compensation;
- extending the range of tasks solved and the professional sphere;
- the possibility of career growth and accompanying increase in income;
- more varied work;
- the opportunity to influence the decision-making process;
- additional powers and responsibility;
- professional development through trainings and courses;
- personal development;
- realisation of one's own potential;
- the possibility to work by setting one's own goals, supervising one's own development being responsible for one's own output;
- an egalitarian, equal but not buddy-like relationship with managers.

Everyone needs recognition and respect. Cross-cultural differences can be seen in what the individual receives recognition for, when and how such a recognition is expressed, and in how strong disappointment and the sense of dissatisfaction are, if the person does not receive the expected reward. Clearly and openly open praise is not a widespread practice in the German business context. As the famous Swabian saying goes, *'Nicht geschimpft ist genug gelobt'* ('The absence of blaming is already praise enough'). Feedback and a modest 'thank you' are more common than praise in German companies. Wordy compliments on the other's intellectual capability, diligence, and problem-solving ability may be considered inappropriate and even a little embarrassing; often they may be perceived as a hidden criticism, ironically expressed.

If any problems arise during the course of work, representatives of the German business culture launch into the process of profound analysis, ignoring tender spots, human weaknesses and personal circumstances. They believe that such an approach serves everyone's interests, as business comes first. In this context, some German business people perceive personal feelings and a 'sensitive, vulnerable soul' as weakness and lack of professionalism.

By the foreign partners, German task orientation is sometimes perceived as excessive frugality or even as "stinginess". In almost any partnership questions about expenses, reducing costs, boosting profit, and the best possible use of time, human and, of course, financial resources invariably arise. Like any other important questions, Germans will discuss financial aspects in detail and thoroughly. It is such discussions that are the basis for the commonly held stereotype that Germans are "stingy".

The other factor that has influenced the forming of a rational relation to property and to money earned lies in the influence of Protestantism on the values of the German business society. This spiritual tradition attributes a special significance to the responsibility, owed to society and future generations, for the integrity of the property and its intelligent usage. In this context a German proverb says: "Property obliges". This proverb is

embedded in the German Constitution (Art. 14, par. 2) and demonstrates the responsibility concerning capital owed to the Society.

Another example which foreigners mistakenly perceive as an example of stinginess is the widespread practice in Germany of paying restaurant bills separately, with everyone paying for themselves. The representatives of the German culture explain that it is more convenient for all concerned: you can eat and drink as much as you want and/or as much as your finances allow, without having to worry about costing your partner too much money, and without getting irritated by the excessive appetite or rather too refined choices made by the people you invited to the venue. The comfortable feeling Germans get from going to restaurants with their colleagues has turned this pastime into a widespread method of establishing informal contacts without hitting the wallet too hard. However, it should be noted that at business meetings, especially those with foreign partners, the check will be paid by the person who has extended the invitation, in this case, the German party.

In attempting to avoid subjectivity in decision-making, or being accused of corruption, many German companies prohibit their employees from both accepting expensive gifts and other signs of attention, and from giving them to their business partners. This concerns, for example, business meals at expensive restaurants, hunting trips, invitations to the opera, and gifts valued at more than 50 euros. Each German company has its own understanding of 'transparent business', compliance procedures, its own policies and restrictions.

It is for this reason that, because they are afraid of being accused of subjectivity, but also due to their aversion to correlate the private life and business duties and/or business relations, Germans may respond 'coldly' to personal requests from partners, such as sending an invitation for family members to receive a one-year visa, or helping a wife to find a job, or a son to find an internship.

The concentration on the business aspects of relationships in a cooperation provides a fertile ground for existing stereotypes about Germans:

namely, that they are cold and unfeeling, haughty to the point of being arrogant, possibly even aggressive, boring and unpleasant, and they think only about money! In part, representatives of the German culture are perceived in this way also because their foreign business partners see only one side of the German soul: the side that is revealed at work, with all of the features described above. But there is also another, private side which, when discovered, allows us to understand that Germans also have a broad range of interests, a rich spiritual world, a variety of feelings, and an inclination to be charitable!

So what does it mean that Germans concentrate on business? What recommendations can we give those who have a business relationship with Germans?

- Get ready for a very businesslike style of communication!
- Don't waste time on extensive and detailed small talk with personal/informal information: it is quite enough to exchange a few polite phrases to create a pleasant atmosphere. Then you should immediately get down to the heart of the matter. Avoid digressions and distractions from the topic and jumping from point to point, but quickly zoom in and then concentrate, on the essentials. This is how, from the German perspective, goal-oriented, skilful professionals who know what they want and who value their own and others' time should act.
- When presenting your case, try to rely on facts, cause-and-effect relationships and interdependencies, rational arguments and figures. Be logical and serious . Attempts at convincing your counterpart with the help of emotions, charisma and subjective personal experience are not as effective as in other business cultures. What the Germans may see as excess emotionality and chaotically presented arguments may cause German business partners to doubt the seriousness and competence of their interlocutor.
- Being prepared for the conversation – having all of the necessary information (accounts, calculations, statistics, facts) in written or electronic form that you can give to the partner if necessary – makes a good

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impression on Germans. That said, Germans also don't like to read very long and detailed papers, and they see in wordy documents the author's inability to highlight the most important things, or a basic lack of skill at structuring information and concentrating on the important aspects.

- Try to anticipate all likely and even unlikely questions. Think through different eventualities and prepare for each one. It is this kind of approach that Germans find desirable, even though it is an ideal that is difficult to achieve. But anyone who wants to be regarded as a real professional should strive for this.
- Be prepared for the fact that at your German partner's company you will be warmly welcomed, taken to the meeting room and offered water or tea/coffee. But don't expect that after the first meeting you will be invited 'out for the evening', in order to talk more informally and openly, or that they will tell you details about their personal life and about the lives of their colleagues and partners. Such a turn of events is very unlikely to happen. To achieve this level, it will require patience and a dedicated effort on your part.
- There is absolutely no need, if you are hoping to obtain more beneficial transaction terms, to spend entire evenings with your potential German partner demonstrating the celebrated hospitality, oriental, caucasian or any other, with all its attributes, such as a lavish table, hand-holding 24x7, or providing entertainment to suit his/her specific interests.
- Undoubtedly, some German business people may appreciate such an approach, but the effect of such a personal contact level on the actual process of decision-making is very small.
- Don't agonise over how to properly end a telephone conversation when everything has already been said. You can immediately end the conversation with a polite phrase like 'Thank you. That's all I have to say. If you don't have any further questions, then: good bye!'



## 1.2 Seriousness and trustworthiness

From the German perspective, goodwill is created only in a joint undertaking. If successful, it will be the cornerstone for the foundation of your image as a serious and trustworthy partner. Most Germans don't understand sayings like 'The first pancake is always a dud' (meaning you never succeed on the first try). They are sincerely, and not without justification, convinced that, if you are serious about business, conscientiously fulfil your obligations, and provide for potential problems, then already the first pancake will turn out just right. This is why it is so important to pull off your first project/contract with German partners or clients spotlessly, because you may not receive a second chance. For the same reason it is important to stick to the schedule and be on time.

Much is permitted at the discussion and negotiation stage: you can change approaches and strategies, insist on schedules and contractual terms that are acceptable for you, make corrections and changes to specifications and standards. But once the agreement is signed and you have a final contract, the German side will take any changes, even the ones you consider to be minor, very badly. An agreement is an agreement and a commitment. and you have to stick to it, which means in the German context: you have to keep your word! Breaches, even if they are caused by your good intentions, such as the desire to improve something, will severely undermine your counterpart's faith in your trustworthiness.

As a rule, representatives of the German culture identify themselves very much with their profession, and treat their role, the tasks to be performed and the promises made very seriously. There is a widely held belief that if everyone acts like this, then it will be possible to rely on everyone in such a system; everyone will responsibly fulfil their own obligations and will be attentive and precise in their work.

In the initial and subsequent stages of cooperation, serious partners supply each other, even proactively, with facts, numbers, relevant information on existing framework conditions, etc., that are important for the success

of the common cause. In the German understanding, such professional openness and readiness to share your own know-how is the greatest sign of willingness to cooperate, and generates respect and gratitude from the German side.

What is interesting here is the phenomenon of the 'duty to deliver' (meaning 'to act, not wait') which is characteristic of German business culture. If something happens that keeps you from fulfilling your contractual obligations to colleagues, members of the project team, subordinates, business partners and others, then it is your absolute *duty* to promptly notify anyone who may suffer as a result of the complications. It is a question of trustworthiness, conscientiousness, honesty and follow-through which should be demonstrated by the person who is aware of the the problem. When complications arise, a dependable partner does not attempt to shift the blame on someone else, or even on circumstances. He takes responsibility himself, acknowledges mistakes made and actively gets involved in the problem-solving process. For more information see Chapter 5.3 "What to do in crisis situations and when problems arise" and Chapter 6.3 "Conflict resolution strategies".

In German business culture, trustworthiness is closely related to loyalty, devotion not to certain individuals (manager, colleagues), but to the company. This means, caring about the company's reputation, identifying one's self with the product or services, being proud of belonging to the whole (for example, being part of the Volkswagen family), and a willingness to work over many years for the company. True, in today's world it is not always possible to have a 'lifetime' connection with a company, but that does not lessen the value of such a connection.

This is why long-standing cooperation with German companies that has stood the test of time and various trials and crises acts as a guarantee of the practically unshakable status of a trustworthy and, therefore, irreplaceable partner. It is precisely for this reason that it is virtually impossible to cooperate directly with a German company if there already is a company that has received the status of exclusive distributor from the German company in your country's market.

Of course there are also other reasons why direct contacts with a German firm, without having to go through the exclusive distributor, are impossible. Decisions on distribution channels are strategic. If such decisions have already been made, then organisational structures have already been built for them, business processes have been laid out, information flows have been determined and people trained. Revising strategic decisions is a serious matter that will not be brought up just because several firms propose direct cooperation.

### **1.3 Perfectionism as thoroughness and desire for perfection**

The quality of German goods, especially of industrial products and equipment is world famous, German logistics companies have the reputation of being efficient, and German project managers, especially those in construction and on large-scale projects, are considered superior organisers who have a failure intolerance close to zero.

Germans strive for perfection in the professional sphere. In the German cultural environment, progress is understood as a constant process of improving and optimising processes, systems and products.

The invariably, and near-unfailingly high quality of German work ('deutsche Wertarbeit') is symbolic in German culture as a 'value in itself'. From the outside it seems that Germans are motivated by the content of their work, by the meaning of the task being performed. Many foreigners are surprised and even distrustful of the fact that Germans do not need much exterior supervision or personal accountability for the quality of their work in order to work well. Most Germans, in turn, do not understand how you can do anything badly, if the alternative is, to do it well. But this is exactly what professionalism consists of: doing everything perfectly. Such a conscious attitude towards work and clearly expressed work ethic of German employees is often envied by managers from other countries.

A brief historical digression will demonstrate the origins of 'Prussian virtues'.

### Prussian virtues

The formation of a unified German state under the aegis of Prussia in 1871 led to the dissemination to other German lands of the Prussian bureaucratic system, with its orientation towards formal and business aspects, rather than interpersonal relations. The distinctive features of this system are: methodical organisation of processes, impersonal, but outwardly proper relationships, the maximum eliminating of the subjective factor, and performing a duty in spite of, or beyond, personal circumstances.

With the passage of time Prussian values and behavioural attitudes spread through the country's military, industrial and financial elite, becoming a kind of moral code for a true German citizen. This code incorporated order (*Ordnung*), discipline (*Disziplin*), sense of responsibility (*Verantwortungsbewusstsein*), obedience (*Gehorsam*), sense of duty (*Pflichtbewußtsein*), diligence (*Fleiß*) and frugality (*Sparsamkeit*).

Work is the focus of this world view. Emphasis in the expression 'living to work or working to live' was placed emphatically on the first part. The significance of work for a person brought up in the German culture is perceived as the chief meaning of life, the motor of personal development, the source and basis of self-fulfilment, self-affirmation, career and respect in society, financial prosperity and, through these means, of individual independence and freedom. The profession is seen as a calling, a vocation.

Frugality (*Sparsamkeit*), modesty and moderation (*Genügsamkeit, Mäßigung*) played an important role in the Prussian system of virtues and this was also reinforced by Protestant traditions. It is inadmissible and shameful to squander what has been earned by generations of your ancestors! Here are the origins of German frugality and respect for property, even if this is only expressed in the possession of a modest house or car.

This kind of readiness, articulated by a number of Germans, including German entrepreneurs and business owners, i.e. to be satisfied with little or less, a very explicit negative attitude towards wastefulness, luxury and ostentatious, show-off prosperity is very often perceived by foreigners as an inability to enjoy life, as stinginess or greed.

Also, we should note that this is a typical feature of the Protestant world view, with a personal responsibility for one's own destiny and for one's own actions, which cannot be delegated to circumstances or others, or blamed on fate or the powers that be...

Thus, the high value of labour, zeal, effort and application, sense of responsibility, discipline and self-control, honesty and ability to keep one's word became civic virtues which are now central to the German value system.

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Everything must be faultless in order to achieve a quality product. The Germans believe that there are no little things of minor value, that everything is equally important. And if you are careless with the little things, the non-essential things, then where is the guarantee that everything will be done thoroughly in essential and important matters? It is precisely in such non-essential and secondary details that true product quality can be found, according to the traditional German understanding. It means that there are no defects, and that the product fully meets the client's requirements. This is not just a matter of conscientiously performing employment duties; it is more of a moral/ethical duty!

A condition and guarantee of quality, especially in serial production, lies in an absolute intolerance when it comes to flaws, errors and deviations from the norms that have been established. This kind of approach to quality, together with an uncompromising willingness to achieve it, form an element of the corporate philosophy of most German industrial units, especially those manufacturing high-tech products.

## Made in Germany

These "Made-in-Germany" products are not only synonymous with advanced technical standards, superior workmanship and benchmarking – quality, but are also symbols of the German nation.'  
*Zhou Jianxiang, Beijing Review, 28.09.2007*

Today the value of the 'Made in Germany' stamp is quantifiable and worth about 200 billion Euros. This is the value of the surplus profit German exporters receive on the international market, just because their products bear the 'Made in Germany' stamp.

The ability to produce quality products is not inherently German. In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century German quality, especially in high-tech products and luxury items, left something to be desired, and was inferior to English and French quality. Very soon after their victory in the Franco-Prussian War and the euphoria caused by the formation of the German State, the Germans discovered that they were, as they put it, a 'backward nation' in a world where everything, or many things, were already divided among other countries: product markets, raw material sources, and territories. It was then that systematic work was undertaken to create industrial superiority, in particular by improving the quality of products. Training German specialists abroad played no minor role in creating German quality.

At first the 'Made in Germany' stamp was placed on German goods in accordance with England's Merchandise Marks Act 1887. The law required the clear identification of all imports from Germany in order to inform consumers of the lower quality of German goods, as compared to English ones.

However, this procedure very quickly turned against the English. As early as 1896, the English publicist Williams in his book *'Made in Germany', dealing with the competition between German and English industry* wrote that 'the "Made in Germany" stamp acts as a free recommendation for German goods'. So the British fairly soon got rid of the requirement to mark German goods with that particular stamp. But by then the German manufacturers themselves had already begun to insist on marking their products.

In what ways is thoroughness manifested and demonstrated in German culture and the almost unattainable ideal of perfection reached? Here are some indications and recommendations:

- German partners place great importance on careful and thorough planning. First of all, '*Gut geplant is halb gewonnen*' ('A good planning is already half the battle won'), as the German saying goes. Secondly, it is only with the help of quality planning that mistakes can be avoided, a correct idea of the business at hand or project can be formed and, last but not least, the necessary resources can be put together to achieve it.
- In Germany, plans and concepts are developed very thoroughly, with a huge amount of detail, additional information and careful calculations. There is a great demand for being logical and systematic in German business culture.
- German specialists strive to anticipate and follow through potential obstacles, probable (occasionally only in theory) mistakes and predicted complications in advance, in order to minimise all possible eventualities and risks.
- Performing assignments quickly is not a virtue that is very highly valued in Germany. Nothing of proper quality can be accomplished if we orient ourselves *only* towards speed. In other words, according to the German logic, speed and quality are often mutually exclusive concepts in the business context. If quality suffers, then arguments such as 'we need it ASAP', 'the quicker the better' simply won't work. In Germany, you can often hear people respond like this to attempts to speed up a process: 'It takes time to make a quality product'. Another explanation why decisions are not always taken with lightning speed in Germany is connected with the fact that a large number of parties, i.e., organisational structures, are involved in management processes. The principle of participation and the desire to balance various interests (by thoroughly discussing problems and coordinating approaches

to overcoming them) may lead to quite a time-consuming decision-making process as compared to other countries.

- One of the basic principles of German culture goes like this: 'The devil lies in the details'. In other words, there are no things of a minor significance. This principle explains the attention and care taken to perform even those actions which no one will be able to see, judge or control, instead you have a constant self-control and double-checking of quality at all stages of the process. From the outside such an attitude sometimes looks like evidence of the pedantry, pettiness and fault-finding of German partners and colleagues.

#### **1.4 Reliability and Punctuality**

One of the universally held ideas about Germans is connected with their celebrated punctuality. Are Germans really never late, do they always meet deadlines and do they plan their lives to the last breath? Of course not. But there are huge differences between the German culture and other cultures in the perception of time and how it is used. These differences become a source of problems in cooperation, primarily from the perspective of German colleagues.

It is a well-known fact that different people and nations perceive time differently. Some view it as a natural element that cannot be managed. In such cultures people set their goals only roughly, setting approximate deadlines and doing several things at once, or they tend to jump from one type of activity to another, often straying from the initial goal and/or changing priorities along the way. Such cultures are usually called polychronic cultures.

On the other end of the scale of the attitude towards time, we can find the monochronic cultures. People from these cultures carefully structure isolated segments of time, develop clear plans, scale a task down to successive stages, and also concentrate sequentially on the content of each stage.



According to the opinion of several German scientists, the origins of the German monochronic concept of time lie both in the religious concept of Protestantism and in the historic past of the German people.<sup>6</sup>

### **The origins of the German concept of time (according to Schroll-Machl, 2002)**

- The concept of life intrinsic to Protestantism which emphasises *individual* responsibility before God for one's own life has led to the appearance of goal-oriented life planning.
- Living in small principalities demanded from citizens that they follow a number of temporal regulations in daily life. Such regimentation from above led to a very strict time-organisation of social processes.
- The transition from an agrarian to an industrial society (to manufacturing) called for an extension of the zone of linear time planning and its consistent use. Germans saw in the economic prosperity of Germany in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the economic recovery after the Second World War proof of the superiority of this concept of time.

Many people with a German cultural background, business people in particular, understand the phrase 'time is money' in a literal sense. Time is perceived as a phenomenon that has social value. It is for this reason that it can and should not be used fruitlessly or ineffectively, be wasted on senseless or useless actions, and, in other words, slip through one's fin-

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<sup>6</sup> There is a large number of Catholics living in Germany, especially in the South and West of the country. Possibly, when viewed from outside the difference in the attitude toward time among the part of the population that lives in primarily Catholic regions is not as noticeable. But there is a clear difference between the South and the North in the Germans' self-perception: the further South you go, the more time people spend on 'the process of enjoying life', the less punctuality dictates in the private sphere, each overdue minute is not treated as fatal, and there is a more relaxed attitude to changing plans.

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gers like sand. As Goethe wrote, in the first part of Faust, 'Use well your time, so swiftly it runs on; Be orderly, and time is won'.<sup>7</sup>

Time should be planned and time commitments must be observed in order to respect one's own time, as well as that of others. In Germany, various systems of 'time management' are used, especially those which are based on being methodical and consistent, on careful analysis and priority setting, and which are aimed at long term objectives.

Germans begin to learn and apply this skill of managing time already at school, and special seminars are offered to college students and young specialists. Foreigners could easily get the impression from this that German colleagues have every minute planned, that everyone knows perfectly well how much time it will take them to complete one or another task, how much an hour of their work costs the company, etc.

Such an approach to time is typical both for the business world and for private life. There are the proverbial examples of how a December holiday is planned in January, how people start shopping for Christmas presents in Summer, and how guests who are invited to a wedding six months prior to the ceremony may decline the invitation, because every weekend in the calendar is already booked with other commitments. Many families have calendars that give an overview of every family member's activity, first-grade students already use a personal organiser, kindergarten close their doors at 8:30 and parents who are late are obliged to wait with their children for a special 'late window' opening at 09:15 in order to avoid 'interrupting the process' with their tardiness.

Another important aspect of German culture is the 'usefulness' of time spent, even of free time.

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<sup>7</sup> Faust, part 1 ('*Gebraucht der Zeit, sie geht so schnell von hinnen, doch Ordnung lehrt Euch Zeit gewinnen*', Goethe) (English translation by Walter Kaufmann, *Goethe's Faust*. New York: Doubleday Company, Inc., 1961, p. 199).

There may be benefits ( here are a few examples):

- for the body (doing sports),
- for the mind (such as studying foreign languages while on holiday),
- for the soul (singing in the church choir),
- for the conscience (caring for elderly people or stray animals in a nursing home or shelter),
- for the wallet (working overtime, earning an extra income as a tutor during free time),
- for home and family (home repair, gardening, knitting) and, finally,
- 'investing time in building interpersonal relationships' (going to the zoo with the kids, having a candlelight dinner with a loved one, visiting a friend in the hospital, etc.).

A typical German suffers pangs of conscience and feels uneasy if he or she spends time just lying idle on a sofa.

Which features of the German approach to time management can be highlighted?

- Business interests and task orientation are a 'common thread' when planning actions. So if German partners change plans, extend deadlines or cancel meetings there is usually a change of priorities dictated by business interests behind it.
- It is typical for Germans to have a long-term time orientation, and assertiveness and persistence in achieving far-off goals. German plans typically have a long temporal horizon and attempt to provide for uncertainty.
- Once something is undertaken, it has to be followed through until its completion. Many Germans feel uneasy when work is incomplete. They suffer pangs of conscience even if they rationally understand that in the specific situation completing the task would be a waste of their own intellectual capabilities, or of their time and other resources.

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- German colleagues believe that good performance can only be achieved by concentrating fully on **one** task at a time. Therefore, being methodical and performing tasks in a specific order are determining characteristics of the German working style. Germans strive to complete one sequence of actions before moving on to the next; in other words, they most often work in a linear and sequential manner. People from other cultures perceive such an approach as Germans' dislike of spontaneity, as a reluctance to allow for deviations from actions planned in advance, as an attempt to preclude and eliminate 'unforeseen' circumstances, as an inability to do several things at once ('multitasking'), and even as a lack of creativity.
- Strict adherence to clear plans and arrangements, reliable and trustworthy fulfilment of time obligations play a major role in evaluating a business partner's ethical qualities. For example, German partners may interpret and regard lateness not only as an inability to organise oneself and to plan one's time, but also as a sign of unreliability and flakiness, often as lack of respect for a partner or lack of interest in the shared project/task, etc.
- The ability to realistically estimate the amount of time it will take to perform any task is, from the German perspective, a necessary quality of the professional. German colleagues do not understand in principle the situation described in the joke about the student whose response to the question of how much time it will take him to learn Chinese is 'When is the exam?' You need time to do something well!
- Surprises in the form of an unplanned visit or a sudden decision to 'drop in' are often received with slight annoyance. In such cases you may be told rather bluntly that the person has no time for you. And the reasons for the rejection seem insignificant to many foreigners, such as, for example, 'I have to give a presentation to management tomorrow morning and I want to rest' or 'I have two more pages of this article to read; come back in half an hour'.

- The Japanese are considered the undisputed champions of sticking to the clock, and it's no accident that Japan is the birthplace of the Kanban system or 'just in time'. The Germans specialise more in punctuality in its long-term understanding. This is why many foreigners have been disappointed when, striving to adapt to German discipline, they exhibited a punctuality that was not natural to them, with the result that their German partners were late and had to apologise.
- The results of one experiment conducted in the 1990s are interesting here: in major cities in 31 countries, researchers measured how fast pedestrians moved and the time it took postal clerks to sell a stamp. In addition, they studied the accuracy of public clocks and compared their findings with reference materials. So, the fastest country in the world turned out to be Switzerland. Ireland took second place, followed by Germany and Japan. Mexico came in last. (Robert Levine, 1998)

German sociologists have noted that modern communication technologies, primarily mobile telephones, have begun to change the attitude of German young people to time: a meeting can be cancelled if you let people know in advance; no one waits for others while resenting the one who is late. In addition, there is no longer a need to make plans for the weekend in advance or make commitments. Now, thanks to the Internet, you can quickly find out where things are happening and when, and make a spontaneous choice. So it is very interesting to see how these time-attitude trends will affect German manufacturing culture 10-15 years from now.

Some **advice** for those who have German business partners

- Very important events are planned at least six months in advance. So you should extend a timely invitation to German partners to a conference or an important meeting. German business partners are likely to be offended if you invite them just one week before the appointed date: important meetings can't be treated lightly and they must be prepared for. There is also the problem of getting a visa, or other logistics factors, which take time.

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- Approach your potential German interlocutor at least two months in advance when scheduling a meeting. Be prepared for a lengthy correspondence and telephone conference calls. German colleagues prefer to answer as many questions as possible by e-mail and telephone, and consider it more efficient from the point of view of time and money spent. Acceptance will usually come in the form of written confirmation of the arrangement from the German partners. We recommend that you do the same. Try to notify your partner as soon as possible if you have to cancel or reschedule the meeting.
- If you are running late it is better to call right away and let them know without making anyone wait for you. You can suggest rescheduling the meeting. Germans consider a delay of more than 15 minutes for an ordinary meeting unacceptable. If the meeting has participants coming from different places, using various means of transport, then of course they will be prepared to wait longer and are unlikely to reschedule. However, the discussions will most likely start without the late-comers 15 minutes after the appointed time.
- Once you have an appointment with your German counterpart you can count on his full and undivided attention. From the German perspective parallel activities (such as phone calls, giving instructions to subordinates, signing documents, talking to other people), however important they may seem to you, are a sign of disrespect for the partner and lack of interest in the topic of conversation. The German partner will count on receiving the same full attention from their counterpart. Time should be set aside exclusively for him and the subject of the meeting! If you do something else at the same time, such behaviour may be perceived by the German party as impolite and even insulting. In the best case it will be interpreted as a demonstration by the foreign partner that the matters being discussed do not have the same priority with you.
- Do not be surprised if meetings are short. If you agree to have a two-hour conversation, do not think that you will be able to continue dis-

cussing with your counterparts for five. Germans are not particularly patient if partners digress from the business at hand or avoid the key issues of the conversation, and they may well feel that they have 'lost time'. Clearly stating intentions and being prepared for the conversation will help you to be successful even during a short meeting. Often meetings and negotiations take only 15 minutes!

- The plan (agenda and time limit) is generally followed closely in Germany, especially if several people are involved and/or many issues are being discussed. We recommend including the questions/problems that you find important already in the agenda. That is the only way to ensure that the topics will really be discussed and will be perceived by your German partners as necessary and important.
- Prepare carefully for the conversation: have the necessary documentation, calculations, statistics and product samples – think about what might come in handy (even only in theory) or ask your German partners directly what information they need and in what form they need it.
- If you have questions for your German partner you should put them to him directly without much of a prelude or a long introduction. Say 'I would like to discuss this issue with you. Is it convenient now or would you prefer another time? When?'
- Keep in mind that, for your German partners, the idea of time encapsulated in such concepts as 'immediately', 'right now', 'soon', 'as quickly as possible', 'asap', and 'as quickly as you can' may differ considerably from yours. It's best to find a way of counting time that both parties understand (in three days, by 2 o'clock, in two weeks starting from today, etc.).
- If timing decisions have already been made, then the German partners will be very reluctant to revise them. For this reason, it is always better to voice your doubts, objections or thoughts about the timing during the project planning process.

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- Don't expect your German colleagues to be particularly flexible on time issues. You are likely to encounter this position: 'Don't rush, one thing after another'.
- Even outside of the office Germans stick to their tactic of clear time arrangements. For example, 'forgetful' patients may receive a no-show bill from the doctor for a consultation that didn't take place; if a show or concert has already begun, latecomers are not allowed to enter the auditorium until the first intermission. Being very late may upset friends. So, if someone is really late, the other members of the party sit down to table and place their orders without them.
- If you are told that a German employee you are looking for is 'in a meeting' (*'im Meeting'*), this standard phrase used by secretaries and assistants may be applied to anything, whether to hours-long negotiations, or working meetings, or to a conference, or even a chat with a colleague at the coffee maker. It does not necessarily suggest a higher priority than your common interest, it just signals that the person is currently not available
- Working hours are from 8:00 / 9:00 to 17:00 / 18:00. Flexible schedules and home office, or working from home are common. Some employees who work part time may work in the office only until lunch or on certain days. Lunch break is from 12:00 to 13:00. At many institutions and companies people work only until 14:00 on Fridays.
- Do not expect German employees (here we're talking primarily about wage workers, bureaucrats and government employees, although there are exceptions among these groups) to cancel their holidays, come to work on Sunday or stay until midnight if you think there is an emergency at work. Even when working on issues that are very important for the joint project or for the German company a German employee will not always stay in the office after the end of the business day. Holidays, days off and free time at the end of the business day are very important to Germans, it is practically a taboo to try to occupy this space.



- Saturdays, Sundays and holidays (see the Appendix 'Holidays in Germany') are days off and they are treated very seriously. Suggestions that someone work on these days will be rejected with indignation, especially to work on Sundays. However, German employers fairly successfully solve this problem with the help of overtime pay or higher rates on weekends and holidays. Among those who have their own business, it is common for sole proprietors and managers to work at weekends, or after the official end of the working day.

### 1.5 Separation of spheres of life

There is a clear distinction in German culture between various spheres of life that is reflected wonderfully in the proverb 'Work is work, schnapps is schnapps!'<sup>8</sup> Germans' communication style, behaviour and even appearance depend on the degrees of relationship they have with other people and to which sphere of life the contact belongs to. They believe it is very important to separate the business and private spheres, the rational and the emotional, formal and informal relationships, as well as role and personality.

There is a common phrase in Germany that people work during business hours and live during free time. What does this mean for practical purposes?

Work is the centre of attention at the workplace: the German employee is task oriented, goal oriented, emphatically reserved and rational. There should be no place at work for feelings, sentiments, or personal emotions. After all, these are the enemies of objectivity, which in practical terms means that they could get in the way of the task. People work with their colleagues and carry on joint business with partners, but they do not consider them potential friends. In other words, they do not spend their weekends or holidays with these people; they do not invite them home; they

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<sup>8</sup> Dienst ist Dienst: Schnaps ist Schnaps or, in English, You shouldn't mix business with pleasure; There is a time and place for everything.

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do not share their personal problems; and they do not expect assistance or support from them in life's difficult situations beyond the common task at hand. This is particularly true of relationships between managers and subordinates.

This general statement does not mean, however, that there is no place for friendship in business or in the workplace. It's just that it is not assumed, and that most Germans do not expect it to happen. This could mean that it could be even more of a pleasant surprise when a business relationship develops into something more over time.

In private life, family, friends, personal interests and inclinations come to the fore. This is the sphere of life that offers the room for emotions and passions that must have a release; it is a place where needs that go beyond professional interests are met. Most friendships are struck up while doing things and having fun during free time; for example, when you are playing sports together or travelling, or when you participate in civic initiatives, etc. In this sphere people are expected to have, and to openly show, qualities such as empathy, the ability to understand others, emotional sensitivity, tolerance, a willingness to help and a sense of humour.

When foreigners are given an opportunity to socialise with a German partner or colleague in an informal setting, such as, for example, during a dinner together after having participated in a themed exhibition, or over a cup of tea/glass of beer after work, many get the impression that they are dealing with two entirely different personalities.

Mr Braun was a reserved, 'straight laced', sober-minded and pedantic person at work. But at dinner this same Mr Braun turned out to be a merry fellow with romantic views who couldn't stand ties and suits. His activities included extreme rock-climbing, donating his Aunt's fortune to a shelter for animals in Spain and dreams of taking a trip around the world on his bicycle. The next morning, nothing in the behaviour or outward appearance of Mr Braun was at all related to the previous night, or the 'other' side of his soul...

The German side sees such a clearly divided treatment of business relationships and private life as correct and natural. For this reason, when criticism is delivered in Germany – usually bluntly and harshly, in the presence of colleagues – the reaction on the other side will not be that of any particular resentment or of holding a grudge, not to mention tears, the desire for revenge, or anything else that is not constructive from the German perspective.

So, what effect does this principle of the separation of life's spheres have on doing business with German partners and how can it be taken into account in contacts with Germans? Here are a few **recommendations**:

- Act on the premise that establishing a business relationship with Germans will start with very business-like relations in which the German partners do not aspire to go beyond their professional role and the formal setting (of the workplace). German employees will behave correctly and reservedly, and it is possible that you will be a little uncomfortable at first.
- Such a high degree of restraint may lead foreign partners to jump to the conclusion that the people they see before them are unfeeling, cold people who do not show any interest in other people; who only think about numbers, deadlines, profits, minimising expenses, etc. This is not the case. In their private lives Germans fall in love, raise children, are jealous and suffer, have fun at the carnival, enjoy the sunset and good food and wine, and help the underprivileged and the weak. One of the most important values in their lives is family, friendship and loyalty to friends. Because of this, it is not surprising that one of the best books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century about love and friendship was written by a German: the novel *Three Comrades* by Erich Maria Remarque.
- Don't expect to be invited home. Business partners in Germany rarely invite one another over; it only happens if absolutely necessary. As a rule, such receptions are formal.

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- Don't have illusions that mutual sympathy, which you would tend to almost call a friendship, and spending time together will prevent negative criticism or will give you a privileged position or special treatment when business decisions are made, or in terms of career advancement. They will **work** with you at work; you will be **friends** after the business day is over!
- Get used to addressing subjects that are important to you in a formal setting, for example, over the conference table, during planning meetings and working meetings. Ensure in advance that your question is placed on the agenda.
- When making decisions Germans try to draw a clear line between two approaches: on the one hand there are objective prerequisites, facts and arguments; on the other there is the emotional attitude to the problem/situation/conflict. It is the height of professionalism to find a compromise between these two poles. We'll explain this by giving an example. If a German really doesn't like his business partner or colleague, or if he vaguely senses that he will get only trouble from dealing with this person, then two outcomes are possible in such a situation. Either he will start looking for objective reasons not to cooperate or he will 'pull himself together', set aside his emotions and attempt to be as proper and courteous as possible with the person he doesn't like on a personal level. It is very difficult for a German to admit to himself that a refusal to cooperate is built on such a 'shaky' foundation as intuition and personal antipathy, and it is virtually impossible to mention such motives to others.
- There is a flip side to the requirement of paying attention only to work during the course of the working day: free time is truly **free**. It is needed for rest and relaxation as a counterbalance to the stressful working life. This is why Germans value the comforts of home so highly. A person has the **obligation**, in a moral sense, to fully recover his or her energy, in order to be fully capable of working. Mentioning that free time has been spent actively, meaningfully, as for example on socially useful

activities, is often considered an additional advantage during recruitment processes.

- We recommend to caution in personal matters, and not to infringe on personal space. It is possible that a time will come when your German colleague will open up his heart to you voluntarily.
- If you feel the need to turn your business relationship into a friendship, be prepared to wait a long time before 'cracking' the business shell of your German partner. Shared interests and free time activities, similar attitudes to life and values, common concerns and similar life experiences are all a basis on which you can build the firm foundation of friendship. Keep in mind that friendship in German culture is a very important and genuine feeling. It cannot be "devalued" by attempts to seek advantage, to solve problems, or by the motivation to make useful acquaintances, etc. In such cases Germans get the impression that they are being used and this hurts them deeply.

## 1.6 The German love of order

How do Germans manage to work comparatively little<sup>9</sup> but still produce so many quality goods and services? The secret of the German working style is being methodical, having structure and being systematic.

'*Ordnung*' (order) is a German word that is familiar to most business people around the world if they work with German colleagues. Many are also familiar with the German saying '*Ordnung ist das halbe Leben*' ('Order forms one half of Life'). So what lies behind the German love of order? Let's take a look.

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<sup>9</sup> The average working week is 38.5 - 40 hours in Germany. The annual vacation is about 30 business days (teachers have a longer vacation). This statement should not give the reader the impression that people don't work much in Germany. High productivity and effectively organised production processes multiplied by the intensity of work, furthermore the great professional education, the work capacity and motivation of employees are factors that yield competitive advantages on the international market.

Order is a very wide concept. In Germany, order does not only mean cleanliness and neatness; Germans distinguish between cleanliness ('*Sauberkeit*') and the total, absolute absence of dirt ('*Reinheit*'). Order is system, pattern and structure, it is playing by the rules of the game, a situation where everything takes its course and follows a pre-set plan. It is when each and every person does satisfactorily and responsibly precisely what they are supposed to do, and knows what needs to be done next, and how to do it. It is a state of affairs where everything is where it should be.

The desire for order is the German version of managing the chaos reigning in the world. People from many cultures resign themselves to this unavoidable chaos; they adapt to it and sometimes even enjoy the unpredictability of existence. But the Germans, even while they recognise that it is impossible to avoid chaos entirely, have not lost the hope of keeping it under control.<sup>10</sup> This desire to explain the world, to find regularities which enable us to see a system within the universe around us, i.e. to "order" the world, we see in the magnificent achievements of the German philosophers, in the outstanding contribution of German scientists to almost all of the classification sciences, such as botany, zoology, chemistry and library science.

In business, love of order has led to the appearance of the famous German quality control systems which are based on the desire to eliminate chance and error by standardising processes. Having said this, the German system of standards and norms (DIN) is credited with having played a key role in Germany's economic leap of the 1950s. Many international norms are practically identical to German standards. For this reason, according to the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research in Karlsruhe, the competitive edge of the German economy is about 16 billion euros per year (see Krämer, 2010, 79-80).

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<sup>10</sup> This is why they try to keep dandelions from growing on lawns and wash sidewalks in Swabia (the home of Mercedes and Porsche), and there are so many articles in the so-called *Ordnungssysteme* for organising clothing, shoes, tools, office supplies, kitchen utensils and household cleansers.

The German desire to structure and order the world around them, manifests itself, for example, in the will to think through all possible and, usually, negative consequences, to insure against them, to check and double-check the results of their work, to record each step, to specify the responsibilities and their ambit.

The stringent German law-abiding nature is a logical continuation of the German phenomenon of 'love of order'.

Any culture regulates relationships between isolated individuals and/or groups of people with the help of certain norms and sanctions. But in Germany, in contrast to other countries, the number of laws, rules, ordinances, regulations and instructions is exceptionally large. They are voiced in warning signs, written documents, posters displaying rules of behaviour in school, at the beach, in apartment buildings, etc. Most of the population follow these rules strictly, and the state punishes offenders quite harshly, with no regard for circumstances, social position, connections, reputation, and so forth.

Most Germans consider laws absolutely necessary for society as a whole to function smoothly, and for successful business in particular. In the perception of a German citizen, clearly written laws help minimise risks. The laws provide certainty, since each person clearly understands what is good and what is bad; everybody is aware of their rights and can demand justice without needing to worry about factors such as the benevolence of bosses, or whether the judge is in a good mood, or other non-legal aspects.

From the German perspective, defined norms, rules and systems didn't simply appear overnight; they actually sum up the experience of entire generations; they are the result of the analyses of past mistakes and actions which have led to success. Experts and specialists in their fields have worked on the rules and laws, and the results of their collective activity cannot be doubted. Often such rules are like problem-solving instructions. If some provision or order has become obsolete, then there

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are clear procedures for making amendments, revising and developing them further. These procedures are civic initiatives, the suggestion-and-complaint system, and working with parliamentarians. For this reason, there is no need to break the laws when there is a real opportunity to get them changed through official channels.

Following orders, rules and laws in German culture has the nature of a moral value and is equated to trustworthiness, decency and faithfulness. Foreigners are often amazed that the following of laws and rules is internalised in Germany. In other words, the Germans follow the laws and rules, not out of fear of being punished, or because there are supervisory authorities, but because of their conviction, because it is, simply put, not possible to do otherwise. Such behaviour would be irresponsible, unconscionable towards other people and towards society as a whole. After all, there can only be order when all members of society follow the generally accepted principles. For this reason, most Germans would never ride on public transportation without paying, would never attempt to give bribes, would always pay for newspapers lying in unsupervised boxes, weigh their pick-and-carry strawberries honestly, and calculate the amount due down to the last penny in order to put it in the tin that no one is supervising.

Are there rule breakers in Germany? Yes, there are. And many German citizens believe that these are people who are unaware of the laws and rules. For this reason, they are always prepared to help them, to let them know what should and what can't be done, as, for example, when parking rules are broken, or when people are crossing the street in spite of a red light, or when they are relaxing on the grass even if there is no sign that explicitly permits them to do so, and when they do not follow the rules of an apartment building society (e.g., playing piano during quiet times, taking a shower at midnight, having a noisy party after 23:00, etc.).

But if the rules are broken intentionally, every effort is made to put an end to this, all the way to calling the police. People from other cultures do not always understand this logic. For this reason, if for example an elder-



ly lady complains to the police about a foreign neighbour who washes his car in the courtyard, they interpret this act as a demonstration of ill-will, even hatred of foreigners. Actually, it is more likely to be a sign of a sincere concern for the environment and a desire to restore order. In the same way, an employee who has noticed a violation of the law or company rules may easily inform the management. This is regarded as a matter of responsibility and company loyalty. There are even special departments in major companies where one can blow the whistle, anonymously or openly, subject to the person's choice – if one suspects another of giving/receiving bribes, or of committing any other violations of the law.

The German love of order can also be seen in the pursuit of justice. In business this pursuit is embodied in the quest for mutual benefit and concessions on both sides to reach a compromise, which is known as the 'win-win' approach. In public life, you can see it in the equality of every citizen under the law. Attempts at tax evasion are prosecuted, regardless of the offender's fame or importance. In politics, when bureaucrats or politicians use their position for personal gain, this leads to an outrage among their constituents and to all kinds of negative consequences for the 'offender's' career.

Of course, the Germans' tendency to obey the law should not be idealised. The international community was greatly affected in 2008 and 2010 by scandals involving German companies accused of bribing officials in various countries in exchange for contracts. However, the important fact worth noting is that in Germany, as soon as it is suspected that laws have been broken, the offenders are prosecuted promptly and decisively.

Germans themselves are ambivalent about the German tendency to obey the law. On the one hand, no one disputes that the generally accepted laws should be followed, and the usefulness of such an attitude for the functioning of social systems is obvious. On the other hand, the formalisation and bureaucratisation of entire spheres of life which follow from such a love of order keep the state, companies and individual people

from spontaneously and creatively reacting to changing conditions of the environment, and contribute factors which can lead to a lack of flexibility, even to stagnation. And, finally, the unfailing faith of some Germans or German companies in the superiority of their own system, their own structures, and their own processes gives foreign partners the impression that they are excessively self-confident, infallible, even arrogant. A negative manifestation of adherence to the rules on the individual level is the constant desire to 'bring order' or to 'call to order', which is perceived by 'offenders' as authoritarianism, aggression or, at the very least, as rudeness.

### **Tolerance and variety of lifestyles**

At a first glance, life in Germany is full of restrictions and instructions. In fact, rarely in any other country of the world can an individual choose the life path and lifestyle as freely as here without having to fear sanctions from the society, or the state. The only condition is – as articulated by the German philosopher Kant in his Categorical Imperative – that you have to treat other people as you want to be treated yourself, or, freedom ends where it begins to infringe on the freedom of another person.

The individualism of German society implies that adults know best how they should live, how they should earn a living, how they should dress and how they should raise their children. That is to say, the choice of a life scenario is each person's private business. And, if this is the case, responsibility for downfalls and failures cannot be shifted onto others...

In Germany, particular importance is given to spiritual freedom and protecting the individual from state oppression and persecution. The country's tragic experience during the period when the National Socialists were in power made people highly hostile to all attempts to regulate private lives.

So there is a place for everyone in Germany in full accordance with the motto 'Live and let live': for careerists and recluses, for true believers of all faiths as well as atheists, for people with an 'environmentally correct' lifestyle, lovers of Formula 1, for large families and couples who consciously refused to have children, for conservatives and people with non-traditional orientations, political or private; for native Germans, as well as foreigners. And, so far, all of these wildly different strata, elements and social groups have been getting along fairly peacefully.

Some practical advice based on this particular feature of German culture:

- Structure in the German understanding is a manifestation of order. Structured thinking, the ability to 'bring order to chaos', the ability to clearly state the heart of the matter, and organisation: these are the marks of the true professional. These qualities can be seen in the ability to plan and draft quality documentation. So it is important for your German partners to know whether you have a plan of action and which documents they receive from you.
- Having a plan of action is a central point of order. The planning stage is extremely important both as a manifestation of the German time management style and as a means of developing a systematic, structured approach to performing any task. Set aside enough time for planning and try to account for all risks in your plans.
- Pay attention to documents, see that their structure is well thought out and logical and that the formatting is neat and meets the client's workflow standards and requirements.
- Treat German laws and German obedience of the law seriously, and the unwillingness of your German partners to 'look for ways to get around' something or legal loopholes. Keep in mind that if something is prohibited in Germany, then it really is prohibited. Parking where parking is prohibited, using a mobile phone on a plane, breaking a hotel's in-house rules and riding public transportation without paying can cost dearly in the literal sense (fines) and in the figurative sense (being put on a list of lawbreakers, being refused a Schengen visa in the future). And you are unlikely to receive any sympathy from your German colleagues in such situations (except for being caught for speeding on the *autobahn*). Don't try to influence the situation by getting networks or friends involved or offering speed money, bribes, etc., when you get into trouble with the law. For example, when caught taking free rides it is best to pay the fine without arguing.
- Take criticism not as a personal attack on you as a person, but as a sincere desire to bring order for the general good, yours included.

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- There is very little patience for noise in Germany. On public transportation, loud music that can be heard by a neighbour, whether or not the listener is using headphones, is frowned upon. It is not acceptable to talk on mobile phones in restaurants, theatres, even during intermissions, and in other public places. You should leave the room to make or receive a call. Do not bother others: that is the behavioural maxim that guides German residents in public places.

# 2

Features of the German  
business communication style

## 2. Features of the German business communication style

Foreign partners often have difficulties in understanding and accepting the German communication style. What are the features of business communication standards and principles in Germany?

A **weak context orientation**, i.e., towards various aspects that characterise the situation in which the business communication takes place, is characteristic of the German communicative style. What are the signs of a weak connection with a specific communicative situation? In any culture, extra information which is not expressed by words is needed to orient oneself in a situation. For example, who was present in the conversation, what style of language was chosen, where does the communication take place (e.g., at the conference table or over a shared dinner), what is the history of the business relationship... How much information is hidden in the context varies considerably in different cultures. In Germany, all the aspects which are not voiced and would require additional interpretation play a minor role.

In the opinion of scholars, peculiarities of Germany's historical development, such as feudal fragmentation, the coexistence of many states on German territory and the absolutist form of government have led to limited life experience and views of most of the German population. In a small state where relationships in small local communities with an agrarian way of life were stable and fairly clear, the individual could not help but notice *how* to communicate and focus attention on content alone. This is probably the source of such peculiarities of German culture as weak context orientation in communication can be found (see Schroll-Machl, 2002).

Let's look at the following situation as an example:

The CFO always sat next to the CEO at a major company's management meetings. However, when everyone gathered for the next meeting the CEO asked the sales manager to sit next to him. This event will be interpreted differently in cultures with strong and weak orientations towards context.

In high-context cultures the event could be interpreted as very significant for the company. The logic of reasoning will be something like this: the CFO no longer enjoys the support of the CEO, therefore his ideas are no longer popular. By contrast, the line pursued by the sales manager is now supported by the CEO. There could be big changes in store for the company.

The German communication style is marked by **direct, unmediated communication**<sup>11</sup>, the absence of subtext, 'undercurrent', 'diplomacy', 'double meaning', hints, etc. The German side prefers the direct style of communication in business because it makes it possible to get right down to business, to talk about substance and save time; it leads without fail to the objective and protects against misapprehensions and misunderstanding; in other words, it is from the German perspective, professional and businesslike. It is possible because the emphasis in business relations is placed primarily on the **task**, and not on the relationship between business partners (See Section 1.1 of this Guide).

Which practical implications does the direct communication style in Germany have? And which recommendations can we provide for the reader in this context?:

- What people tell you is pretty much what they think. You don't need to look for a hidden meaning/agenda in your German partner's words or read between the lines of his written communication. Germans treat the statements and requests of their partners the same way. In other words, the way you ask determines how you will be answered: namely directly, concisely, to the point and only that what has been clearly and unambiguously expressed in words.

<sup>11</sup> The striving toward truth as an ideal, toward Truth rationally and purely logically is characteristic of all of Western European culture. Such an approach which springs from antiquity was particularly clearly evident in 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Germany in the works of the German philosophers, primarily those of Emmanuel Kant. It was in Germany that European logic according to the principle of 'either or', the striving to objectify the object, having freed it from everything subjective, reducing it to abstract definitions, clear formulae and logically pure cause-and-effect categories found particularly fertile soil for development. The deductive (from the general to the particular), systematic and analytical approach in thinking also partly determined the German communicative style. (see Scroll-Machl, 2002).

- Hints are not understood in Germany: if you don't specifically ask for help, it will not be given. If you don't want to do something it is best to say so directly; if you can't complete an assignment you must say so! A direct and open 'no' is more acceptable in German eyes than a 'yes' that in many cultures serves the purpose of 'maybe', 'probably', or 'if it works out'. If this happens, communication difficulties with Germans are unavoidable, as German partners almost always understand 'yes' (sometimes said simply out of politeness, or out of habit) as signifying an agreement and a promise to perform the task and fulfil the promise.
- Communicative means such as irony, sarcasm and humour are used much less frequently in business life and official relations. From the German perspective, they obstruct our certainty in understanding, keep us from gauging the seriousness of arguments and introduce an element of unpredictability and confusion to business life.
- Embellishments, exaggerations, pretentious speeches, stilted words and excessive compliments are not appreciated in Germany. Such a communication style is perceived in the German business culture as artificial, and possibly false and, at the very least, as entirely unnecessary.

To sum up and generalise what has been said, we can single out four chief communication characteristics in German business culture:

**1. Definition:** that which is truly important is formulated in words and is expressed explicitly and clearly. Most of the information needs to be voiced and explained. It is quite easy to communicate with German partners as transparency in communication, explicitly expressed wishes and criticism, clearly formulated requirements and frankly voiced agreement or disagreement are characteristic of them.

**2. Structure:** the German discussion style implies a clear goal orientation, strict structure, and a reliance on objective, carefully prepared and verified facts in strings of arguments with practically no emotional component. Figures, statistics and expert opinions are valued particularly



highly. Conversations and discussions are to the point and their objectives are not lost sight of.

**3. Openness and straightforwardness are positive values:** opinions are expressed straightforwardly, criticism is not 'packaged' in compliments, and impartial analysis that is beneficial for the common cause is welcomed. Germans expect their partners to have the same attitude towards criticism.

**4. Written communication plays a central role:** black on white! Everything that is important must be presented in writing.

Here is some advice on situations that arise fairly frequently:

- If you haven't understood something, whether it is the meaning or just a language issue, don't hesitate to ask your German partners to repeat or word it differently. It is perfectly appropriate and acceptable in German culture to ask someone to repeat. Furthermore, by doing so you will position yourself as a responsible and serious business partner who takes an interest in the common cause.
- Say what you need, what is important or interesting to you **in words**, voice your needs, wishes, and attitudes. Do this straightforwardly and unambiguously in order to prevent misinterpretations and misunderstandings. German partners aren't good at guessing, reading information from the communication context or their counterparts' facial expressions to the same degree that may be an accepted practice in your culture. If you get the sense that you have been misunderstood, check how straightforwardly and distinctly you have actually expressed your thought. It is possible that most of what you didn't express clearly in words was not grasped by your German colleagues. The reader may very well discover among the German partners an individual who does possess 'sensitive communication antennae'. However, in order to avoid disappointment, it is best not to assume that the attention to subtle signals in people's communication is as accepted as in the culture of your origin.

- Unambiguous communication, clear definitions and straightforward statements are what is valued in Germany. Speaking metaphorically, or descriptively, or being dramatic may be appropriate for poets, artists, romantics and lovers, in other words, these stylistics are quite possible and even desirable, but only after the working day is over. They shouldn't be expressed during work or between business partners.
- If you are told that 'there isn't time for that now', then in most cases such a response should be taken as a signal that the person **really** doesn't have time now. As a rule, there isn't anything more behind this; it isn't a refusal or an excuse. Ask when the person will have time, agree on a different meeting date or time to call so you can return to your question. Be persistent and don't be afraid to emphasise the importance of the meeting/conversation for you.
- You will be told straightforwardly if something is expected from you. If it isn't mentioned, this means nothing is expected from you: for example, it will not be expected to stay after work to help your host company colleagues, to bake a pie, to help a lady get into a car, or to carry a suitcase. If you've decided to help out, first ask your counterpart if this is at all required. If you hear them say 'thank you, that's not necessary; I'll manage on my own', then don't repeat your offer of assistance. It could be perceived as pushiness. After all, they did tell you that 'it's not necessary'.
- What should you do if **you** need help? Ask for it! Always formulate your requests and problems straightforwardly and clearly. If you need more help or additional information, say so!
- If someone has suggested having lunch or a beer together, this does **not** mean that you have been **invited** to the restaurant. If you are invited to a restaurant, then the invitation will be explicitly and unambiguously voiced as an invitation: 'I am inviting you'. Otherwise each person pays for himself. For the same reason, do not expect to see a

table laden with food if you have been asked for a 'cup of coffee', 'mug of beer' or a 'glass of wine'. If you have been offered something (coffee, dinner, to join someone for the weekend or to play football), don't decline the offer if you actually want to do it. A question is asked only once in Germany. And there just won't be a second invitation once you have said 'no, thank you' out of politeness with the perspective that you, as a well-bred person, will finally gladly say 'yes', after the third invitation. In this Germans differ decidedly from people from other cultures, in particular from Oriental, Central Asian and Slavic cultures where it is an accepted practice to repeat an offer several times and, accordingly, to refuse several times before accepting the offer or assistance. For example, at a restaurant your offer to pay for everyone may be refused twice and they will wait for you to offer a third time before agreeing.



# 3

The first meeting

### 3. The first meeting

Business people who come to Germany for negotiations, to participate in trade shows or cross-cultural trainings on Germany are interested in how to act at the first meeting. How can they give the German side the impression that they are reliable, trustworthy partners? How to avoid awkward situations and unpleasantness?

Knowledge of the two standards of German business culture which we discussed in detail in the preceding sections, 'Task Orientation' (Section 1.1) and 'Separation of Spheres of Life', in other words, a clear distinction between professional and private spheres, between the rational and emotional sides, between role and personality, between formal and informal relationships (Section 1.5) will help you take up this task successfully.

#### 3.1 Greeting and rules of address

During an introduction you should address the other person formally. Such a formal stage is the norm in dealing with German business partners.<sup>12</sup> When they speak English, which does not differentiate between thee and thou, you should pay particular attention to the correct use of titles, e.g. Mr / Mrs Braun.

We note in particular that German partners react quite negatively to a so-called 'hierarchical' use of the informal address where a superior uses the informal address with those of lower rank, while they address the superior formally. Such behaviour is considered a sign of poor breeding or as arrogance. In other words, in Germany people, also those with a

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<sup>12</sup> There are situations in which the informal address is the norm in Germany: in the family (children very often call their parents, aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers by name), among students, at a fitness club, in the country, in radical left-wing circles, among members of the Social Democratic Party and among workmen in the industry or construction.

higher social position, address secretaries, interpreters, drivers and support staff formally and very politely: 'Mr Meier', 'Mrs Mueller'.

Academic titles such as professor and doctor (PhD) are a required part of a formal address in Germany and they are used very actively, especially in conservative circles. As a rule, Germans of the older generation and people from certain sectors (banking, consulting, law, and the chemical and pharmaceutical industries) place considerable importance on a correct address naming titles.

A handshake accompanied by a light and friendly smile is the generally accepted greeting in Germany among both men and women.<sup>13</sup> This also means that the partner's hand is shaken energetically (a limp handshake is perceived as a lack of business skill or as lack of self-confidence) but not too tightly. The people engaging in the greeting process exchange a direct eye contact. You shouldn't hold or shake the other person's hand too long.

If a man greets a female business partner with only a nod, she may feel insulted and think she isn't being taken seriously because he won't shake hands. Not only women, but men as well will consider such behaviour not politically correct in Germany.

Kisses and friendly hugs are accepted only among people who are well acquainted, primarily among women, and also in certain circles, for example, in Munich high society which is called *bussi-bussi* (airkiss-airkiss) society in Germany.

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<sup>13</sup> For example, German partners are often amazed by the lack of a so-called 'service' smile in Russia. It is interpreted as Russians' rudeness/gloominess, unfriendliness or an elementary lack of politeness. This fact should be taken into consideration when dealing with any Western partners. By the same token, foreigners working in Russia should keep in mind that Russians consider 'service' smiles false and insincere and, if Russians smile, that means they really are enjoying the conversation.

### 3.2 Small talk

German communicative culture is not particularly known for its art of small talk. On the one hand, it is considered a useless waste of time, an unnecessary ritual, and a form of superficiality which keeps one from talking business. The technical and engineering intelligentsia have particular problems with this.

On the other hand, it is also not acceptable to get down to business as soon as you cross the threshold. So a guest will usually be asked how the trip went, whether he has ever been to Germany or in this particular city, how they like it there, how they like the hotel, etc. The person who poses the questions is expected to give brief, polite answers so they can soon get down to the business everyone has come to discuss within five minutes.

When speaking with Germans you already know – business partners, project colleagues, co-workers – you can expand the range of subjects and talk about politics, the weather, holidays, what happened last weekend, rising gas prices, the general increase of the cost of living, cultural events, a football match, Formula 1, etc., to 'warm up'.

Topics that are considered off-limits in the business context are national, race-related and religious subjects (be careful about making jokes on those subjects and with jokes in general!), your personal financial situation and/or salary and also conversations about colleagues' and friends' salaries, and anything to do with a sexual context. Conversations that are disparaging of women or that cultivate racial or anti-Semitic prejudices are unacceptable. Subjects related to the Second World War and Germany's Nazi past are not taboo, but it is best to avoid them.

Personal topics such as family, children and health may be touched on depending on how close the business partners are, how long they have been acquainted, on their seniority and the equality of their positions.

If German partners touch on subjects that are unpleasant for you personally or off-limits in your culture, then straightforwardly but politely ex-



press your unwillingness to discuss them. It is not necessary to explain why you don't want to do so.

In educated circles, especially among engineers and managers, conversations about esoteric subjects (fortune – telling, strategies for avoiding the 'evil eye', office energy fields, even astrology and similar topics) may be seen as a sign of emotional immaturity, lack of rational thought or critical reflection, and may even give rise to doubts as to the counterpart's professionalism and seriousness.

### 3.3 Dress code

The main rule to follow while choosing clothing and how to dress appropriately is to conform to a business style, which entails responsible and appropriate clothing choices, and a generally well-groomed appearance. As mentioned above (See Section 1.6), German individualism means in part the right of each person to dress according to their own personal likings and tastes. However, following the logic of the separation of life's spheres, this right is exercised predominantly in private life. What won't cause complaints on the beach, at the weekend, at the opera or discotheque will be entirely inappropriate for a business meeting.

Clearly, in a woman's wardrobe short skirts (six inches above the knee), bare shoulders, low-cut blouses, very bright colours or very sensual attire do not fit in well with the business dress code. The same can be said about bold evening makeup, flamboyant and excessive expensive jewelry, using too much perfume, etc.

In a man's wardrobe, for example, athletic suits, t-shirts, shorts and open sandals are considered inappropriate. The other extreme may be suits that are too pretentious or elegant, what the English call being overdressed or dressed inappropriately for the occasion. I remember an incident where a member of a group of interns in a manager training programme visiting a German company wore a tuxedo. Such a choice of dress was more than strange for the German co-workers and made them feel uncomfortable.

It is a well known general fact that personal and social status can be demonstrated through articles of clothing and various accessories, such as watches, pens, a mobile phone, eyeglasses, handbags, etc. (and Germany is no exception here). But in Germany this display is understated, not daring and without a flashy need to be noticed. It is considered bad manners, vulgar and a sign of 'new' money to exhibit status symbols openly ; these qualities are not trusted. In addition, Germans believe that it is tactless towards others. As the German saying goes, 'You have money, but you do not talk about it'<sup>14</sup> and people don't demonstrate openly and intentionally that they have money. Thus, the German choice of status symbols is usually understatement, and Germans may perceive other approaches as evidence of an inferiority complex. Moderation and the conscious suppression of one's own needs which sometimes takes on the form of asceticism are welcomed.

### 3.4 Non-verbal communication

Non-verbal communication includes gestures, facial expressions, poses, visual contact, touch, and other aspects. It is difficult to overestimate the meaning of such non-verbal aspects of communication: they convey the emotional attitude (which is often unconscious and difficult to control) to the topic of conversation, to the communication situation or to the person communicating. Clothing, gestures, a person's bearing and spatial distance when communicating can all tell the other party a lot about us, our attitude to what is being said, and our relationship with the partner in communication.

Here is a typical example: by winking or making the 'quote' sign with your hands you can mean exactly the opposite of what you say.

**Looking into the eyes.** In various cultures, the 'eye to eye' contact takes up between 30% and 70% of the entire time spent talking to a person.

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<sup>14</sup> 'Geld hat man, aber darüber spricht man nicht'.

Such differences in the norm of what is considered to be normal and proper during eye contact may lead to many misunderstandings. In some countries, prolonged visual contact is perceived as act of aggression. In another cultures you are not supposed to look elders or superiors 'eye to eye'.

In Germany it is an accepted practice to look your counterpart in the eye, thereby signalling that you are fully concentrating on the person and the topic of the conversation. From infancy parents tell their children to 'Look me in the eye when I am talking to you'. If a potential business partner averts his glance, this is considered a sign of shyness, lack of self-confidence and general weakness in Germany. 'Shifty' eyes are perceived as a sign of secretiveness, insincerity or even falsity. But don't go to the other extreme of staring at your conversation partner. This is equally unacceptable in Germany.

**Body language.** Facial expression and gestures are sparingly used in German culture. Keep in mind that the same gestures have completely different meanings in different cultures, which may result in a misunderstanding at best, and at worst in all-out conflict. For example, the 'fig' gesture which in Slavic cultures means something like 'you won't get anything' is sexually connotated in some regions of Germany, and in a number of other regions it definitely carries offensive overtones.

**Posture.** You should avoid anything that resembles a bow or curtsy. German partners may perceive such a bearing during a greeting as lack of self-confidence, especially in women.

**Spatial distance in business communication.** The 'Body-Buffer-Zone' in German culture, in other words, the distance between partners, is greater than in Slavic cultures, for example. Use the distance of an extended arm as a guide. This is the distance that will be comfortable for a German communication partner.

As mentioned above, touching, hugging and other forms of physical contact are used in trust relationships with relatives and friends. In the

business context, avoid touching your German partner, even when you feel like sympathetically tapping his shoulder.

**Courtesies.** In Germany, it is totally unacceptable to consume food with a distinctive aroma (as, p.ex., onions, garlic, radish, alcohol) before an important meeting, or to come to the meeting feeling the influence of your last meal. You shouldn't change/shift around anything in the room where the meeting is taking place without asking for the others' consent; you shouldn't move a chair or objects, open or close windows, or experiment with equipment. It is not acceptable to keep your hands in your pockets, sniffle, or use a toothpick at the table.<sup>15</sup> However, people do not leave the room in order to blow their nose. Often a discrepancy between a foreign partner's status (top manager, owner of a major company, a person with an excellent education) and their behaviour at table (which may be absolutely proper in their cultural context but may greatly differ from the German rules of table etiquette) causes a kind of cognitive dissonance for the German side; in other words, they are bothered by what they perceive as discrepancy between form and content.

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In the following passage the reader can find the most typical German 'etiquette and protocol' expectations, which we **recommend** to keep in mind.

- Most people in Germany believe that it is impossible to do several things equally well at once. So during business meetings, even large ones, it is not acceptable to look at photographs taken over the weekend, send text messages, work on a notebook, or talk to a neighbour. Such behaviour is interpreted as disrespectful and demonstrating lack of interest in the task at hand.
- During a conversation, a German looks the interlocutor in the eye, giving him feedback, i.e., a reaction to what has been said. These

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<sup>12</sup> It is remarkable how the concepts of 'proper' and 'improper' may be absolutely different in different cultures. In Germany, loudly blowing one's nose in a handkerchief in front of others is completely normal, although it may not be perceived as a sign of perfect manners. Germans are always amazed when they find out how unacceptable such behavior is in other countries.

reactions may be in the form of non-verbal signals (a nod of the head as a sign of understanding, or amazement with the help of raised eyebrows). It is also entirely appropriate to express your interest and involvement in the conversation verbally, using phrases like 'Yes, that's interesting', 'Curious', 'Oh, that's how it is', etc.

- Mobile phones are turned off or set to silent mode. Business partners will tell you well ahead of time if they are expecting an important call and will excuse themselves.
- Quality notepads and pens are used to take notes in the German business environment. If the pads and pens are promotional materials, then they should only be from your own company.
- Documents and other materials are kept in briefcases, folders and business bags, not in plastic or paper bags, sacks or evening handbags.
- When there is free time before a business meeting many people, including Germans, use it to go shopping. According to German business etiquette, it is not acceptable to come to a meeting loaded down with tote or shopping bags. It is of no consequence whatsoever whether these bags come from exclusive boutiques or inexpensive shops selling electronics or food. Purchases are usually deposited in the hotel, lockers at the train station or in major department stores, to be collected after the meeting.
- There is no question of using questionable language in the business context.

### 3.5 Paraverbal communication

Paraverbal communication is a combination of the tone and pitch of the language, in other words, of intonation, speech rate, speech rhythm, pitch, height and volume, and articulation.

Paraverbal signals accompany speech, leading to it an additional layer of meaning. At the same time, they may become a source of cross-cultural misunderstandings. Intonation, tone, the use of pauses in a conversation, volume – every one of us knows intuitively where and how it is appropriate to use these in our native culture. However, paraverbal communication aspects that are acceptable in one country may be unacceptable in another.

The following features of paraverbal communication are characteristic for Germany, and we **recommend** to consider them for the contact with your German partners:

- Germans expect their counterpart to use a distinct, sufficiently audible manner of speaking.
- The speech rate is usually moderate, even slow. The tone is calm, emphasis is made by increasing the tone of voice, turning up the volume or slowing the speech rate. Pauses in speech are short.
- Speakers take turns in dialogue without a clearly marked pause (as opposed, for example, to South-Asian cultures), but without interrupting. A graphic representation of a conversation between two Germans resembles a zigzag. If he is interrupted, the German counterpart will often react to this with phrases such as 'Let me say what I was going to say', or 'I haven't finished yet'. The person who interrupts is perceived as an impolite and ill-bred person.
- In their desire to effectively use the most valuable resource: time, people with a German cultural background strive to state their thoughts as quickly as possible and then support them with appropriate arguments. The available 'speaking time budget' is used sparingly in order to have an opportunity to discuss. The features of German speech

culture are illustrated by such German sayings as 'to lay one's cards on the table' (to openly state your expectations, requirements, arguments/trumps), 'not to beat around the bush'<sup>16</sup> (to speak to the point, without avoiding the mentioning of unpleasant subjects), and 'to do the job properly' or 'to get down to brass tacks'<sup>17</sup> (to reach a decision during the discussion, the desire to avoid long conversations that result in nothing). Polarisation, counter-arguments, clear positions in discussion, the ability of not having to search for words, the logic of 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' which is inherent in Western civilisation in general, all these factors are valued.

- Germans try to speak in complete sentences, to structure strings of arguments according to the principle of inductive or deductive logic. Proof, positions and arguments should follow one from another without contradicting one another; they should contain all the necessary facts and lead as directly as possible to the objective. Associations, extra details, jokes and digressions from the topic are perceived as inappropriate.
- If a conversation partner signals understanding, in other words, that he doesn't need further arguments or justifications, then it is possible for the speaker to change. In doing so, you get the impression that the time is being used effectively and the partner 'thinks quickly'. Silence is perceived as agreement.
- The most important issue is stated at the beginning of each reply and the speaker uses the remaining time in the speech episode to support what has been said according to a decreasing degree of importance of arguments, in other words, the most important argument comes first. If we take e-mail as an example, then a German will say what is most important in the 'Subject' line. The body of the message will contain explanations and justifications. For this reason, Germans joke that sometimes you don't need to read to the end because the most important information is at the beginning of the message.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Um den heißen Brei herumreden' <sup>17</sup> 'Nägel mit Köpfen machen'

- Verbal enthusiasm, expressiveness and even some emotionality are possible and even desirable, but only as long as the rules of business communication aren't broken. If personal arguments are expressed, then only at the end of the speech episode.

### 3.6 Presentations and speeches

Starting from the central characteristic of the German culture like the task orientation (for more information see Section 1.1.), and also from the particularities of the German business communication style which are the direct communication, determination and high structure level (see Section 2), the reader himself/herself has maybe already concluded which demands the German business audience requires regarding a business presentation.

In speeches and presentations, the German audience values goal-orientation, clear logical structure, having a 'common thread' and a lively speaking style. These are qualities appreciated by the German side: presentations prepared with the intention to address the needs of an audience – containing all the important information essential for understanding the question, a sophisticated structure of the presentation, and adherence to the rules of the game.

A vigorous style of presentation is received very positively when it involves free speech, active contact with the audience and an interactive presentation mode. A speaker who reads from the text of the speech or reproduces the contents of the presentation slides word for word strikes the German audience as a person who does not know the subject or does not possess basic rhetorical or public speaking skills.

Presentations full of various visual and sound effects and complicated animation are not that important for the German listener. Neither will you particularly impress your German partner with rhetorical embellishments or the ability to 'be eloquent'.



But the ability to listen, to maintain a dialogue with the audience, involving them in the process of your presentation, authenticity, giving many examples from life or a sharing connection with your personal experience are characteristics that are appreciated by the German audience. There is also room for humour in a speech (to a reasonable extent).

German presenters often invite listeners to ask questions during the presentation. If such an offer has not been made, it is expected that the audience will wait until the end of the presentation, without interrupting the presenter, and only then will they ask their questions.

Germans believe that a person who is interested in a subject should certainly also reflect this in the questions he asks. Germans judge the interlocutor's/partner's degree of professionalism by the quality and manner of the questions asked. It is expected that a professional will speak briefly, to the point, avoiding 'lyrical digressions', long explanations and unnecessary details, and will always thank the person for the question or response shared.

A listener will make a good impression if he/she takes notes during the presentation/speech and refers to the relevant points of the speech or slides in the presentation when formulating a question at the end.



# 4

How Germans negotiate

## 4. How Germans negotiate

As mentioned in the preceding sections, the main characteristics of German culture which directly influence the negotiation process are task orientation, direct communication style, love of structure and rules, and also a monochronic attitude to time, in other words, the desire to manage time, to plan it, to complete a single series of actions before moving to another, etc. Let's try to lay down in a structured way – the German way – the features of the German negotiation style.

### 4.1 General approach

German business partners focus mainly on the substance of negotiations, so communication usually occurs only at the task level and does not touch on the relationship level. Trust in a partner is established on the basis of criteria such as successful past cooperation, reputation in the business world, recommendations of other partners, etc. Germans do not see the need to go fishing or hunting together, or to generally spend free time in order to get a feeling for their partner and then intuitively understand whether they can trust him. Why should one rely on intuition if one can rely on facts, recommendations, and conclusions?

German partners may offer a small 'trial'/pilot cooperation to verify your trustworthiness, responsibility and the quality of your work. Take advantage of such an offer because, if the trial project ends successfully, it is usually followed by further cooperation.

In negotiations, various specialists on specific issues (e.g., specialists from manufacturing, the departments, logistics, quality control, lawyers, financial specialists) may take part in negotiations on the German side. They are usually a well-organised team which, however, does not mean that they won't get involved or even disagree on certain points.

Such differences of opinion can be easily observed in facial expressions since it is not an accepted practice in Germany to have a 'straight face',

and in lively discussions between German colleagues during breaks. As has already been mentioned more than once, the interests of the cause prevail in German business culture. They are served by open communication and a demonstration of one's attitude, for example, skepticism, disagreement, doubt in the statements made by the partners in the negotiations. Having a 'poker face' in a business context will make a clear understanding of the communication process much more difficult.

Sometimes differences between German colleagues are discussed at the negotiation table although, as a rule, Germans do not interfere with the comments of their colleagues. In such a situation it should be remembered that, in the final analysis, the interests of the task will be most important for the German delegation. For this reason it is important to listen attentively to the opinion and arguments of all participants in the negotiations, not only to those of the delegation leader. He will most likely also change his position if he considers the arguments of his subordinates convincing. If this Guide had been written about how to act with partners from a 'relationship-oriented' culture, our advice would be quite different: 'Identify the most important person in the delegation, attentively follow what that person says, try to get that person's interest and convince this individual most of all'.

## 4.2 Negotiating style

The negotiation process is quite formal, particularly with major companies.

Assume that your German colleagues will come to the negotiations well prepared. They also expect serious preparation from you. If you got the impression that your partners weren't prepared at all to meet with you, this could very well mean that either the meeting itself or the topic of discussion are not sufficiently interesting to them.

When preparing for negotiations Germans often try to anticipate your arguments and prepare a carefully thought-out, calculated strategy of ob-

jection, or they may offer you a backup option which is also thought-out in advance.

German business partners believe that if they prepare carefully for the negotiations, and think through most of the aspects, their position will become more sound, logical and justified, especially if it is supported by facts and calculations. For this reason, it is difficult for them to easily reject their arguments or radically change their original position.

A German can be convinced only by strict logic, by figures, facts and expert opinions, in other words, by means of information. As we have already mentioned, information should be set out in written and/or electronic form; it should be detailed and well structured (in other words, with distinct sections, the necessary appendices, understandable tables, with dates, units of measurement, etc.). Information should be set out logically and the later sections should rely on, and evolve from the earlier ones; they should develop and explain them.

## 4

In German business culture it is an accepted practice to 'segment' arguments. In other words, each participant of the delegation speaks about their specialty. You will make a good impression if you use the same approach and structure your delegation's work according to the principle of division of labour.

In negotiations, Germans are responsive to such proposals as the search for a 'shared platform' and 'mutually beneficial concessions'. Demonstrate to them that you are prepared to compromise. Of course, if the interests of the cause require that you stick to a firm position, there is no reason to reject it. But remember that it is not worth resorting to tough negotiation methods (threats, blackmail, etc.). In the same way, there is no sense in urging Germans to raise their empathy potential by 'putting themselves in your place' or to influence them on the emotional level, for example, by painting a rosy future for your joint venture or terrific success that lies ahead. Avoid excess emotionality.

German business people follow a pragmatic and detailed approach in the negotiation process. Attempting to prevent disagreements and discrepancies, they often go back to the details, discuss all the 'small print', from the perspective of their foreign partners. Don't try to refuse to discuss such issues. For Germans, as has already been said above, 'the devil's in the details'.

However, a careful study of the subject without rushing ahead does not mean that Germans are prepared to negotiate forever and constantly deviate or dwell for a long time on discussing intentions and painting 'the big picture'.

Certain pauses and tensions may arise during the negotiations. You shouldn't attempt to 'diffuse the situation' with the help of jokes, especially if you don't know your counterparts. In Germany this is considered frivolous or tactless. Business is serious for Germans. For this reason, jokes and humour are not recommended, especially at the initial stage of cooperation, while in the process of getting acquainted. There is room for jokes after the end of the official part of the negotiations, over a cup of tea or a glass of wine.

In German business culture conditions, the negotiation process is structured according to a carefully developed plan that is agreed upon in advance. Individual agenda items are considered in order, in strict compliance with the priority or logic of the issue. If the agenda of your meeting has already been approved, you shouldn't change it during the course of the negotiations. For example, if the question of the deadline for an order is being discussed, it is not worth raising the issue of supply volume, prices, guarantees, etc., even if you came up with a good idea which would undoubtedly interest your German colleagues. Moreover, you shouldn't return to issues that were already part of the earlier agenda items and, from the German colleagues' perspective, have already been discussed. But if you do think that there is a real need to reorder the agenda, you should tell your German colleagues clearly and frankly about this and change the order of discussion together. Germans do

not like such changes very much, although if required, they themselves will modify the agenda. For this reason, the best thing is not to change the agreed order but to make your suggestions on the agenda for the negotiations while it is being drafted. Of course, your task in the negotiations is not to get your German partners to like you or to make the negotiation process as comfortable as possible for them. You have other tasks and, if your negotiation strategy consists in getting your partner off guard or 'crushing' him by sharply changing the course of the negotiations, you can give it a try. However, in most cases such a strategy doesn't work, since all of the Germans' efforts and attention will be taken up by the necessity of restoring order.

The systematic examination of individual items which makes it possible to take a decision quickly is a characteristic of the German negotiation style. Germans will attentively hear out your arguments, will carefully write down new facts, all of the comments and observations, and the next day (or at the time agreed) will present you with counter-arguments and counter-proposals. In Germany, compromise means 'meeting someone half way', which is a generally accepted and expected strategy in the negotiation process. Germans believe that a joint business process should be mutually beneficial. For this reason, in response to the German party's concessions on some positions you will be expected to take steps on other issues in response. It is not an accepted practice in Germany to haggle the way this could be done during a purchase.

Honesty, straightforwardness and sincerity in communication are widespread moral values in Germany. Concerning the German communication style, open expressions of disagreement, the absence of ambiguity ('no means no'), not being excessively civil, and frank criticism may be perceived as excessively harsh and tactless.<sup>18</sup> But, as German partners believe, such a communicative peculiarity of German business culture makes the negotiation process much easier.

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<sup>18</sup> There is a well-known aphorism that says 'If a diplomat says 'yes' it means 'maybe': if he says 'maybe' it means 'no'; if he says 'no' that means he is not a diplomat'. It is interesting to note that in most guides on negotiation technique, it is very strongly recommended not to use the word 'no'.



### 4.3 Protocol aspects

You will probably need to call German colleagues on the telephone while preparing for negotiations. In Germany, the person who picks up the phone first states the name of the company, then the Family name, (for example: 'GIZ. Hello. This is Aksana Kavalchuk. How can I help you?'), and not the specific department where you have called, as is the accepted practice in official institutions in other countries (for example, 'Accounting, I'm listening', 'Department', 'Marketing Section', etc.). If you got the wrong number or have been given the wrong connection, it is impolite to just put the receiver down. In such a situation in Germany you are expected to apologise and say a few nice words, such as 'have a good day', etc.

Do not switch to the informal address when conversing with a German partner. You must use the formula 'Mr /Mrs + last name', for example, Mr Schultz, Ms Metzdorf. If the counterpart has an academic degree or title, the address may sound like this in literal German: Mr Professor Heller, Mrs Doctor Winkler. German business partners observe a well-known hierarchy. This means, for example, that people with high status or position express themselves more often, their statements are longer than those of average members of the delegation, and they are greeted and presented first. However, in general, respect for status in Germany is demonstrated much less than in Russia, in Asia, or the Middle East.

During negotiations with Germans you should attentively listen to the speakers and take notes without cutting off or interrupting them, without consulting with the other members of your delegation, or working on your notebook computer, etc. Observe the order of speeches. Write down your questions and ask them at the end of the speech, unless the speaker himself has explicitly invited people to ask questions during the speech.

It is generally accepted that during negotiations mobile phones are switched to silent mode, which will not interfere with the negotiations. If it is really necessary to make a call you can leave the room after first excusing yourself. If your absence will suspend the negotiations, you will

need to communicate exactly how long you will be gone. Remember that in Germany there is a strict distinction between work and private life. So you shouldn't touch on personal subjects during negotiations.

You will be expected to dress appropriately for the business setting. The main criteria are appropriateness, presentability, and quality. There is more detailed information on dress code in Section 3.3.

During business meetings with partners in Germany it is not an accepted practice to set out a generous spread: alcoholic beverages are not offered. However, coffee, tea, soft drinks, cookies and/or fruit are served to participants at the negotiation table or on a side table. The Germans' inherent attention to detail means that, most likely, all possible preferences of the negotiators will be taken into account: black coffee or coffee with milk, black, green or fruit tea, carbonated or still water, and juices.

The successful completion of negotiations and contract signing is usually celebrated with a shared lunch or dinner. In Germany, according to the rules of etiquette, no one begins to eat until all the guests have been brought their order, or until the host gives the signal to start the banquet. Toasts are usually not made.<sup>19</sup> Most German businessmen will feel awkward if they need to say a toast. Don't force Germans to do it! If they do agree to say something, don't expect particular eloquence, emotion or humour.

Going out for evening entertainment is not generally a part of business contacts. At best, you may be invited to a soccer match, to a museum or the opera. If you have other preferences, you should tell your German colleagues about it ahead of time. Then your partners will have time to

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<sup>19</sup> In Germany, alcoholic beverages are considered an element to enhance the taste of the dish ordered. For this reason, their amount is limited and the order of drinks is determined by the dishes ordered. For example, strong alcoholic beverages, which do not go with appetizers, are not served at the start of the meal.

prepare a programme for you and find someone to accompany you there, which may not be an easy task. As mentioned earlier, Germans reserve evening entertainment institutions for their private life.

#### 4.4 Decision-making

Germans count on reaching an agreement on at least some questions already in the course of the negotiation process. The fact that participants from the German side are given the right to independently make decisions, regardless of whether they are chief executives in their company very much facilitates the decision-making. However, if things are not clear enough, there is a lack of information or a specialist's opinion is needed, Germans do not speed up agreements but devote the necessary attention and care, not wanting to take risks. In a number of cases, for example, the need to inform various subdivisions of the company and to coordinate actions with them could lead to delays in decision-making.

Much importance is given to keeping minutes: all questions discussed, all suggestions and positions of the parties are carefully documented. At the end of the negotiations, especially if they have occurred in stages, this information is sent out to all participants in the negotiations and to all interested/involved structural subdivisions. We recommend confirming any receipt of documents in writing.

Review the minutes when you receive them; try to clarify any open questions immediately, and express your agreement/disagreement with the documents in general or on individual points. Otherwise, when the contract goes into effect, any uncertainty or lack of clarity may considerably complicate your cooperation with the German partners.

If you are the one who is mapping out and sending the minutes and drafting agreements, your German partners should send you a written confirmation of receipt and feedback, and you have every reason to request a confirmation.

As a rule, German business people do what they have verbally agreed to do. But this is a privilege of long-standing partnership. In other cases, for example, at the beginning of the cooperation, a change of contact persons or political or economical situations may occur, what is written 'black on white' is considered more reliable: from the German perspective, there are fewer misunderstandings and incorrect interpretations, which prevents problems in the future and reduces the probability of disagreements at later stages of cooperation.

#### **4.5 The agreement**

The written agreement/contract is important in German business culture. A person's signature is more important than any letterhead or seals. A personally signed document is legally valid. You could even say that a signature replaces any seals, letterheads, etc. This, however, does not mean that you will have difficulties if you need the seal of a German company on the documents. They will be happy to provide you with one in any German company.

## **4**

During the cooperation process, the German side is not very willing to make changes to a text that has been discussed, verified and agreed upon. By revisiting decisions that have already been taken you will cast doubt on your willingness to follow the rules.

# 5

The Project, German style

## 5. The Project, German style

In order to better understand the German approach to working on a project, we will consider individual aspects of project activity.

### 5.1 The planning phase

Germans place great importance on this stage of the project cycle. Plans and budgets are developed with a high degree of accuracy and in great detail. There is a widespread opinion that the work will be easier for everyone if there is a clear plan, and the work itself will be more effective. In Germany, it is believed that goal-oriented activity is only possible with such an approach, and not constantly patching holes and reacting to problems that continually arise. Only then is it possible to work without interference, realising one's creative potential.

At this phase, all participants of the project group receive their jobs/tasks and prepare their own proposals for the project as part of that job. All proposals are then discussed at a joint meeting of the project team. All existing information is carefully compiled.

At this stage, project discussions are often long and multi-phased. The purpose of such discussions is to arrive at a complete and comprehensive understanding of the essence of the problem which has brought the new project to life, of the corresponding goals and tasks, establishing connections between tasks and sub-tasks and the parts of the project corresponding to them. Project team participants typically strive to anticipate future developments and to exclude all possible risks. The possibility of the project's complete failure is also subjected to analysis, and a plan of action is devised for such an eventuality.

Those who have worked on a project with Germans and have gone through the planning phase with them understand that the approach according to the principle of 'The most important thing is to get started, and we'll figure it out along the way' is unacceptable and can only lead to ac-

cusations of superficiality and lack of responsibility. The planning phase is considered successful and the plan a quality one if it doesn't need to be changed during the course of the project.

## 5.2 Assignment of tasks and the work process

The assignment of tasks and the identification of individual steps to perform assignments happen openly at a meeting of project team members dedicated to this issue. Project participants take on individual assignments which match their qualifications and interests. The role of project manager at this stage primarily consists in formulating assignments and evaluating the match between team member qualifications and the duties they have taken on. Disputes and discussions are possible both between specialists of the same hierarchical level and between managers and subordinates.

The certainty that success can be determined and guaranteed reigns in a German team. Each project participant usually works alone, based on their own experience and knowledge, being guided by directives that have been discussed in advance and agreed upon together. Qualities that are particularly valued in project work are independence and individual responsibility, as well as the strict fulfilment of agreements. German project colleagues are not pleased by constantly changing approaches to work, plans, or deadlines.

Such individual responsibility and independence has nothing to do with working for one's self, without paying attention to the project as a whole or the interests of the common cause. At German enterprises and organisations, if one of the team members is absent, his tasks and authorities are transferred to other members of the project group. The team spirit presupposes that the project goes forward even if some of the members go on holiday, quit, fall ill, etc. Such an organisation of the work process would be impossible if individual project participants were to only focus on their specific tasks, without knowing what their colleagues were doing, or wouldn't participate in joint discussions and consultations.

### 5.3 What to do in crisis situations and when problems arise

The quality of products and services, effective processes and optimal conditions: all of this can be only achieved, from the German perspective, if each mistake, any oversight, not to mention a major problem, is subjected to serious analysis. Such analysis is understood to mean, first of all, a careful study of the causes of the problem, determining who was responsible and only then seeking options to resolve the problem. Problems give rise to a clearly expressed need to figure out their causes, not so much with the purpose of identifying the guilty parties and punishing them, as to prevent such complications within the project for the future, in other projects and in related areas.

German colleagues do not understand the situational and empirical approach to problem-solving that prevails in many countries (according to the principle of 'wait and see' / 'let's sleep on it' / 'things will blow over') and it is equally impossible to understand a lack of desire to carefully work through the details of a project and plan its implementation. This is why such an approach is often perceived by Germans as evidence of irresponsibility, thoughtlessness, inability to anticipate and insufficient attention towards preventing such problems from occurring in the future. That is why German colleagues spend so much time on careful planning, so they can identify potential problems during the initial stage and thereby attempt to prevent them, minimise sources of error, defects, etc. The principle of '100% error reduction' in production rules in most German companies.

In the German business culture, the willingness to look for and acknowledge one's own shortcomings and mistakes is an integral part of the professional approach and responsible attitude to one's own duties. If problems have arisen in the project despite all the preliminary work in the planning phase, they are resolved depending on the degree of urgency, either immediately by calling an emergency meeting, or at the next planned meeting, where results and milestones will be discussed. There the person with the problem will have the opportunity to inform colleagues



about the difficulties they have encountered and discuss with them a strategy for actions to be taken. It is interesting that even in such situations, Germans show a pronounced tendency to depart as little as possible from the defined route. Only a limited number of changes are accepted, mainly in the details. The need to drastically change initial plans causes discomfort, doubts about the quality of the work at the planning phase and in the professionalism of those who participated in the work. The phrase 'But we agreed on this!' is often used.

In this context, improvisation may be viewed as a quality that not necessarily generates admiration but is used as a last resort, an option found in order to somehow get out of the situation that arose as result of careless planning, an inability to organise oneself and the work process, or under the influence of unforeseeable circumstances.

Thus, if we summarise the most important features of the German approach to problem solving, we get the following picture.

- German partners prefer to act comprehensively because they believe that only comprehensive and systematic decisions make it possible to prevent problems or, at least, to minimise them.
- The problem-solving algorithm is worked out in great detail; in other words, it is clearly prescribed when, by whom, how and by which means, steps should be taken, and which specific steps are expected from team participants when they solve the problem.
- An integral part of project preparation lies in the formulation of criteria for evaluating the outcome and determining milestones. There is always a carefully worked out plan and a backup plan in case the first plan doesn't work.
- Such a plan does have its weaknesses, as the process of identifying and taking a decision takes time, which in some situations may be counterproductive. There is little ability to improvise during project implementation. Carefully following the plan decreases sensitivity to signals of a changing business environment and does not always make it possible to take advantage of new opportunities.

## 5.4 The role of the Project Manager

The diversity of the economic and business 'landscape' of Germany is represented by great trusts with tens of thousands of employees working all over the world; medium-sized family-owned or shareheld enterprises, young innovative companies and enterprises with an age-long history, independent contractors, handicraft companies, various scientific and production structures, affiliated companies of foreign trusts etc. This diversity is reflected also in many organisational cultures, concepts of workforce development and by the staff management style. Nevertheless, there are some characteristics typical for most German managers.

The project manager's functions are generally to integrate and motivate. He launches the project in the initial phase, formulates assignments and moderates the process of assigning them to team members, provides impetus regularly and handles the general project coordination.

In order to understand the role of the German manager we should keep in mind that in Germany the position of chief or high-placed official does not typically come with a Lot of 'power'. Too many institutions, on the one hand, oversee managers and companies and, on the other hand, provide employees with social security and independence from the workplace (the state with its insurance functions, e.g. pensions, unemployment insurance, social assistance, trade unions, sickness funds, employment centres). For this reason, employees of German companies and organisations feel quite protected and relatively independent.

A pronounced egalitarian mindset, in other words, a mindset based on the idea of equality, is typical of German society.<sup>20</sup> For subordinates, the manager is just a representative of a hierarchical system that is structured in a specific way who performs clearly defined functions within a clearly

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<sup>20</sup> The attitude towards power and authorities changed in Germany after the Second World War and the student demonstrations of 1968. There is a tendency in society to create space that is free of hierarchies and privileges. One could say that there is a kind of strict denial of rigid hierarchy, deference to rank, the aspiration to achieve goals through one's office, i.e., those opportunities that are afforded by a position or high post.

delineated structure (for example, that of a company or institution). After work, subordinates see the boss as an equal among equals, and in most cases he sees himself the same way. This principle operates during business hours as well outside the workplace, be it at lunchtime, or in the elevator.

This phenomenon results in the desire in German management for 'flat' organisational structures and the so-called participative leadership style which presupposes and actively encourages employee involvement in the decision-making process. This tendency is particularly clear in young, innovative companies oriented towards the Anglo-Saxon management style, and also among low-level and middle managers. The participative style of management is less in demand in companies managed by their founders and owners, of which there are very many in medium-sized business. In those companies the management style can be described as more patriarchal, although there may be fewer with hierarchical levels.

The German leadership style, like the business culture in general, is task oriented. It does not have room for heart-to-heart talks with subordinates and other forms of communication beyond the work tasks. Each person does his own job: employees independently perform their tasks within strictly defined scopes of authority, and the manager leads. In other words, he solves strategic tasks, determines areas of competence, develops structures, and oversees the meeting of deadlines and targets.

Keep in mind that in a German enterprise the manager is a person who occupies a fairly high place in the hierarchy, has subordinates and solves management tasks. In societies in a phase of transition, p.ex. in the case of companies operating in the post-Soviet space, the word 'manager' can be invested with quite different meaning, managers could be either top executives, entrepreneurs, or average workers who don't have a single subordinate. A travel agency manager or sales manager in a shop are good examples of this: basically, they are salespersons.

Subordinates of a German enterprise are given a very broad field for freedom of action. Moreover, they are expected to show initiative and be

proactive within this field. The word 'proactive', which is currently popular in Germany, is used to refer to the ability to foresee events and prepare for them appropriately, rather than reacting to situations as they arise. German managers are usually not given to praise, since they assume that full and quality performance of job responsibilities is any employee's duty. For their part, subordinates do not burden management with their problems and go to them only when circumstances force them to take decisions beyond their job descriptions.

The principle of the 'duty to deliver' (Bringschuld) described in Section 1.2 relieves German managers of the responsibility of constantly supervising everyone and the entire process. They know that if serious problems arise the employees themselves will show initiative and will certainly inform them. If the manager doesn't receive such signals, it means that everything is going as planned and that there are no problems requiring management to get involved. In such a situation, excess control in German business culture will only result in loss of employee initiative and responsibility.

## 5.5 Information and communication in a project

### 5

The members of a project team communicate very actively at the initial, or planning, stage. Once tasks have been assigned, and while they are being performed, the intensity of contact between project participants tends to drop a little, since each person works independently and asks for help or advice from colleagues only if absolutely necessary. In addition, in a German project channels for sharing information among project participants are usually provided for and finetuned. For example, frequent information meetings are integrated in the process, which considerably reduces the need for spontaneous contact. Time- and money-saving communication channels that make it possible to quickly and efficiently discuss current issues are widely used, such as group e-mails or telephone and video conferences.

There are two principles peculiar to information sharing in German project teams: the 'duty to collect' and 'duty to deliver'. This means that each project employee is obligated to provide his colleagues proactively with any information relating to their duties and tasks. On the other hand, he has the right to ask for the information he needs from any colleague (regardless of hierarchical differences). And he is sure to get a response.

Activity at meetings and conferences is high and all project participants are expected to make a constructive contribution to the discussion process. Silence and passive attendance of a team meeting are seen as lack of motivation or knowledge of the subject. Project members with expert status speak longer than other meeting participants. Regardless of their status and position in the hierarchy outside of the project team, each member is entitled to openly express his or her opinion and criticism.

Germans preserve, or attempt to preserve, most of the approaches described above when working on international projects. If foreign partners come from a relationship-oriented and primarily polychronic culture, then it is very difficult to avoid misunderstandings and conflicts. The sources of these misunderstandings can be found in cross-cultural differences in organising the project process, internal communication, information sharing, the understanding of professionalism and trustworthiness, in the manager's role, in the features of communication style, and also in different strategies for resolving problem or conflict situations.

That's why it is not surprising that, to foreign partners, Germans seem too rational and inflexible since they don't want to change their plans and understand that life and business are unpredictable; they seem to ignore human relationships, don't value their foreign colleagues, don't notice their achievements and constantly criticise everything.

For their part, when interpreting the working style of foreign partners from the perspective of their own business culture, Germans can come to

even more unpleasant conclusions, for example, that their foreign partners do not follow rules or observe agreements, do not express their opinion directly and honestly, are capable of questioning decisions that have already been made, do not show enough zeal in their work and are not interested in the common cause.

Thus, ignoring intercultural differences can considerably complicate the implementation of joint projects and lead to a deterioration of relationships between participants. This is why in many German companies potential participants in an international project are sent already during the planning stage to special cross-cultural management trainings in order to prevent possible complications in the future.

# 6

How Germans behave  
in conflict situations

## 6. How Germans behave in conflict situations

At the root of many conflicts lies not only a clash of interests, but you also find differing views of objective reality held by participants in the conflict. People start learning how to behave in conflict situations from childhood. Most children's games are exercises in conflict resolution. We learn during the socialisation process in childhood and early youth how to perceive conflict, how to react to it, and which conflict resolution strategies to use according to our culture. Often we don't even suspect when we enter the international arena, that in any of the aspects mentioned above people from another culture may have learned to use entirely different approaches. For them, these cultural scenarios for behaviour in a conflict situation are just as legitimate, normal and correct, and are sometimes the only way, just as we assume that ours are the only way.

### 6.1 Perception of conflict

If we restrict ourselves to the purely business context, the following situations most often lead to conflicts when working together, from the German perspective:

- Unfulfilled promises
- Covering up mistakes and oversights
- Breaking rules and work discipline, for example, through tardiness
- Work reports not submitted
- Lack of professionalism or the necessary qualifications
- Insufficient motivation
- Having an attitude not open to others



## 6.2 Reactions in conflict situations

Let's take a look at the cultural schematics and scenarios that shape Germans' reaction to conflict. In Germany, children are taught to openly talk about what they don't like and what doesn't suit them ('No one can read your mind!'). In an achievement-oriented society you need to be able to press your case, assert yourself and defend your own beliefs and rights; in other words, be resistant to conflict. The belief that conflicts are unavoidable, as there are always conflicting interests, is peculiar to German business culture, but after full-blown conflicts and open confrontations 'it is easier to breathe, because conflicts clear the air like after a thunderstorm'.

There is a clear distinction between business aspects (position, opinion, approach) and the personal level in German culture. For this reason, after critical remarks are expressed quite harshly and plainly, in front of colleagues, you will often discover that there will be particular resentment or complaint, tears, sense of humiliation, desire for retaliation, or similar reactions which would not be considered constructive from the German perspective.

For Germans, disputes and discussions, open expressions of disagreement and a clear objection are not a declaration of war; they are not a signal of the end of cooperation, but an entirely normal process of finding a mutual understanding of the situation, and, subsequently, the best solution to the problem. If people argue with you, if they state their objections, try not to be insulted, but rather try to see in it something entirely different: namely, the German way of expressing respect, of valuing you as a person with whom one can speak plainly and to the point.

Naturally, Germans are not made of iron. And when passions flare, many find it very difficult to retain their composure as professionals who do not get personal. However, in this case also, representatives of the German culture have developed procedures which help them contain their emotions so as not to hurt the common cause. For example, in the German

army a soldier may file a complaint only the day after a clash or conflict has occurred.

German business partners love discussions and agree that 'truth is born of argument'. In addition, as mentioned earlier, an active position in discussions helps confirm and/or demonstrate one's professionalism and one's competence. Persons who agree with everyone and do not object or defend their own viewpoint will be perceived as persons who don't understand the issue or who are simply not interested in solving the problem.

One of the chief characteristics of the professional is his ability to constructively express, and gratefully accept, criticism. From the German perspective, there's no limit to perfection and improvements can always be made in everything. For this reason, if you are working with Germans and they consider you a professional, they will expect you to make critical, i.e., constructive, objective comments and remarks aimed at improving or optimising products, processes and conditions. That said, your German colleagues will assume that you also, as a professional, cannot help but be interested in direct feedback, which also includes criticism. In addition, remember that there is a widespread opinion in German business culture that if you are not being reprimanded or criticised, the very absence of this means that you are almost being praised.

Naturally, criticism is also unpleasant for Germans, but the threshold at which remarks begin to be perceived as hurting one's pride is much higher for German colleagues. Many German specialists who have not been through cross-cultural training do not know that in relationship-oriented cultures, critical remarks are usually expressed not openly and directly, but coated with a thick layer of pleasant, encouraging words. For this reason, they do not understand that their straightforwardness may be perceived by foreigners as a lack of tact. Of course, if the foreign colleagues on their part also do not understand that straightforward expression is the essence of German business culture, these peculiarities of the German approach to the conflict situation may serve as a source of conflict, especially in the international context.

Let's summarise the most common reactions in German business culture to conflicts, by listing them in an increasing order of gravity: an objection, a statement of a diametrically opposite proposal; attempts to convince; open criticism; requests to 'clarify the situation'; confrontation; ridicule, irony, cynical statements; open 'attack' (verbal) and aggression; breaking off the relationship.

### 6.3 Conflict resolution strategies

In Germany, conflict management is based on discussions, clarifying the situation together, looking for a mutually acceptable goal, sharing opinions and formulating a solution that satisfies all parties involved in the conflict. All of these methods of conflict resolution imply *intensive* communication structured around the questions: 'Why did the conflict arise?' and 'What are the contradictions in our interests?' In the case of Germany, it has been noted that, the more significant and difficult to resolve the conflict situation is, the more the communication intensifies. That said, it is characteristic for Germans to want to identify all of the reasons, including hidden ones that the conflicting parties themselves are sometimes unaware of. In general, conflict resolution strategies look like this: identifying the causes of the conflict – suggestions as to resolution – attempts to convince the conflicting parties – the search for a compromise.

It is common to involve mediators and arbitrators in order to resolve complex conflict situations which can arise both within companies and between partner companies. Metacommunication, which allows conflict participants to discuss not the subject of the dispute, but their behaviour in the conflict, and to receive evaluations and comments on that behaviour, is widely used in in-house conflicts.

Allowing for different opinions and tolerating other views of the world leads to a situation where conflicts in Germany are generally seen as a good thing. The ideal situation is one where each person openly pursues his or her own interests, voices them, attempts to convince others of their importance, and seeks a compromise if these interests differ from those

of other people. German conflict resolution strategies don't always work in practice. Often conflicts turn into case files – civil and even criminal ones. Then they will be referred to legal structures for resolution.

Finally we will provide a few recommendations on how to act with German partners when disagreements arise.

- When working together, whether on a project, performing a contract or solving isolated tasks, unforeseen problems and conflicts caused by lack of time, insufficient information, financial difficulties, and force majeure circumstances can always arise. In such a situation we recommend promptly contacting your German colleague, without waiting for the problem to resolve itself. It is always better to notify your German partners in time about impending complications (respecting also their perception of what is in time), so that together you can prevent trouble. This is particularly important if it is due to your own miscalculations, faults or lack of attention that this particular 'trouble' was caused.
- Describe the problem without rejecting your responsibility. Admitting your own mistakes will not protect you from negative emotions, but it will prevent loss of trust in you from your German partners. Be prepared for a 'ruthless', consequent analysis of the causes.
- Put the main emphasis on looking for a solution, demonstrating enthusiasm and extra motivation. This behaviour is particularly appropriate if it is your 'blunders' that were the source of the problem. When the problem has been resolved successfully with the help of your timely input, don't expect to be praised, since, from the German perspective, the person who caused the problem in the first place was in any case obligated to make every effort to eliminate the consequences.
- Don't avoid dealing with a German colleague if you have a disagreement or even a conflict with him. Answer phone calls and e-mails. German partners take lack of communication in a problem situation very badly.

- You can criticise your German partner directly and without any loss of time: once you have noticed a mistake or incorrect behaviour, you do not need to wait for an appropriate or convenient time and attempt to particularly 'package' the negative information within pleasant words. If you are used to a more delicate or indirect method of criticism, this is quite all right. However, the most important challenge here is that your colleague is able to understand the meaning of your criticism.
- Remember that, as a rule, in a conflict situation Germans sincerely desire to find a solution to the conflict that will be acceptable for all parties. And if such a solution has been found, then they will implement it energetically and persistently, regardless of the concessions they have to make along the way to the desired compromise.



# Appendix





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## The German soul reflected in proverbs and sayings

Original	Translation/English equivalent
Jeder ist seines Glückes Schmied.	Every man forges his own destiny. (Every man is the architect of his own fortune.)
Hochmut kommt vor dem Fall.	Arrogance comes before the fall. (Pride cometh before the fall.)
Wer den Pfennig nicht ehrt, ist des Talers nicht wert.	You aren't worth the Taler ( <i>ancient German currency</i> ) if you don't honour the Pfennig. (Waste not, want not.)
Ordnung ist das halbe Leben.	Order is one half of life. (Muddle causes trouble.)
Ordnung muss sein.	One ought to do things properly and follow them through.
Vorsicht ist die Mutter der Porzellankiste.	Caution is the mother of the box of porcelain. (Better safe than sorry.)
Nicht getadelt – genug gelobt.	Absence of blame is already sufficient praise.
Erst die Arbeit, dann das Vergnügen.	Business before pleasure.
Mit Verwandten sing' und lach, aber nie Geschäfte mach'.	Sing and laugh with your relatives, but don't do business with them.
Hoffen und Harren macht manchen zum Narren.	He who lives on hope dies of hunger.
Der Teufel steckt im Detail.	The devil's in the details.
Dummheit und Stolz wachsen auf einem Holz.	Ignorance is the mother of impudence, pride the never-failing vice of fools.

Original	Translation/English equivalent
Am Abend wird der Faule fleißig.	By evening the lazy man becomes hard-working. (A lazy youth will make an active old man.)
Lieber vorher schlau, als nachher klüger.	An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
Schuster! Bleib bei deinen Leisten!	A cobbler should stick to his last. (Cobbler, stick to your trade.)
Morgenstund hat Gold im Mund.	The early bird catches the worm.
Freunden in der Not gehen – Tausend auf ein Lot.	A friend in need is a friend indeed.
Ist die Katze aus dem Haus, tanzen die Mäuse auf dem Tisch.	When the cat's away, the mice will play.
Gut geplant, halb gemacht.	A good plan is half the battle.
Dienst ist Dienst; Schnaps ist Schnaps.	You shouldn't mix business with pleasure. (There is a time and place for everything.)
Geld hat man, aber darüber spricht man nicht.	You have money, but you do not talk about it.
Um den heißen Brei herumreden.	Not to beat around the bush. (To speak to the point, without avoiding the mentioning of unpleasant subjects.)
Nägel mit Köpfen machen.	To do the job properly. or To get down to brass tacks. (To reach a decision during the discussion, the desire to avoid long conversations that result in nothing.)

## German holidays

1 January	New Year's day
6 January	Epiphany
Moveable feast	Easter
1 May	Workers' Day
Moveable feast	Pentecost
3 October	German Unity Day
24-26 December	Christmas

The most important holiday is **Christmas**. In Germany they begin celebrating Christmas on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December early in the evening, at 4 p.m. (the classic celebration includes going to church, exchanging gifts and having a festive meal which usually ends by 8 p.m.). The 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of December are also days off. Christmas provides an opportunity to greet relatives, friends, colleagues and business partners, and to give gifts. It is not easy to choose the right gifts and this is a source of stress for many Germans.

**New Year's celebrations** are noisy (fireworks, firecrackers), and often held in restaurants, which organise something like New Year's balls, and outdoors. In major cities the main thoroughfares become places for people to stroll around and listen to concerts. The 2<sup>nd</sup> of January is a working day, although business is slow between the 24<sup>th</sup> of December and the 7<sup>th</sup> of January because most people go on Christmas vacation.

**Easter** (celebrated on a different day each year) is an important date in the German calendar. Coloured eggs that are almost like Christmas tree decorations are hung on the bushes in front of the house. Lamb or bunny-shaped cookies are baked, eggs are coloured, and on Easter Sunday children hunt for chocolate eggs and other figures hidden by a bunny (a fertility symbol).

Some other religious holidays are non-working days either across Germany (**Trinity**) or in various federal lands, depending on the prevailing confession.

The 8<sup>th</sup> of March is a very political date on which politicians can demonstrate their caring for women, and women who feel 'oppressed' can hold meetings to demand equal rights. Mood-wise, the 8<sup>th</sup> of March remotely resembles **Mother's Day**, which is celebrated on the first Sunday in May. But this day, by definition, is not dedicated to all women, only to mothers, grandmothers and wives if they have children. On the eve of this holiday sales of flowers, heart-shaped boxes of chocolates, perfume and jewellery go up all over Germany. And the children all make gifts by hand that their mothers will cherish.

There are two other German holidays which are known around the world. In primarily Catholic population centres along the Rhine river basin (in Cologne, Mainz, Dusseldorf, Aachen and other cities) the 'fifth season', the so-called **Fasching** – carnival or Shrovetide – falls into the last week before Lent. This week is not an official holiday but business life comes to a halt at this time in cities that celebrate carnival. Some people escape the 'madhouse' the entire city becomes, while others live 'not according to the rules' with the many tourists from Germany and around the world, having fun breaking the rules, transgressing boundaries, trying on other roles, and turning the existing order upside down.

Finally, the last week of September and the first week of October is the time of a great Bavarian success with tremendous export potential: **Oktoberfest**. It is the biggest folk festival in the world during which lovers of beer, flirting and folklore can give themselves free rein.

### For those who'd like to learn more

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## Internet resources

[www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de) and [www.gc21.de/mp](http://www.gc21.de/mp)

The official site of GIZ and its Global Campus portal for GIZ programme participants.

[www.deutschland.de](http://www.deutschland.de)

The official portal of the Federal Republic of Germany. General information on all areas.

[www.bundesregierung.de](http://www.bundesregierung.de)

The German government portal with up-to-date information on the country's political life (German, English, French).

[www.auswaertiges-amt.de](http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de)

The portal of the Foreign Service with information on German foreign policy and addresses of German diplomatic posts (German, English, French, Spanish, Arabic).

[www.invest-in-germany.de](http://www.invest-in-germany.de)

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[www.goethe.de](http://www.goethe.de)

The portal of the Goethe-Institut, in India, known as Max-Mueller-Bhawan, with information on language courses and events at 142 branches around the world and German cultural life (German, English).

[www.daad.de](http://www.daad.de)

The German academic exchange service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst - DAAD) offers information on programs, stipends and grants for students, graduate students and scholars in 22 languages.

[www.dw-world.de](http://www.dw-world.de)

Deutsche Welle (DW) radio offers a wide range of up-to-the-minute information in 30 languages. The TV channel can be received over dish television in the UAE and India.

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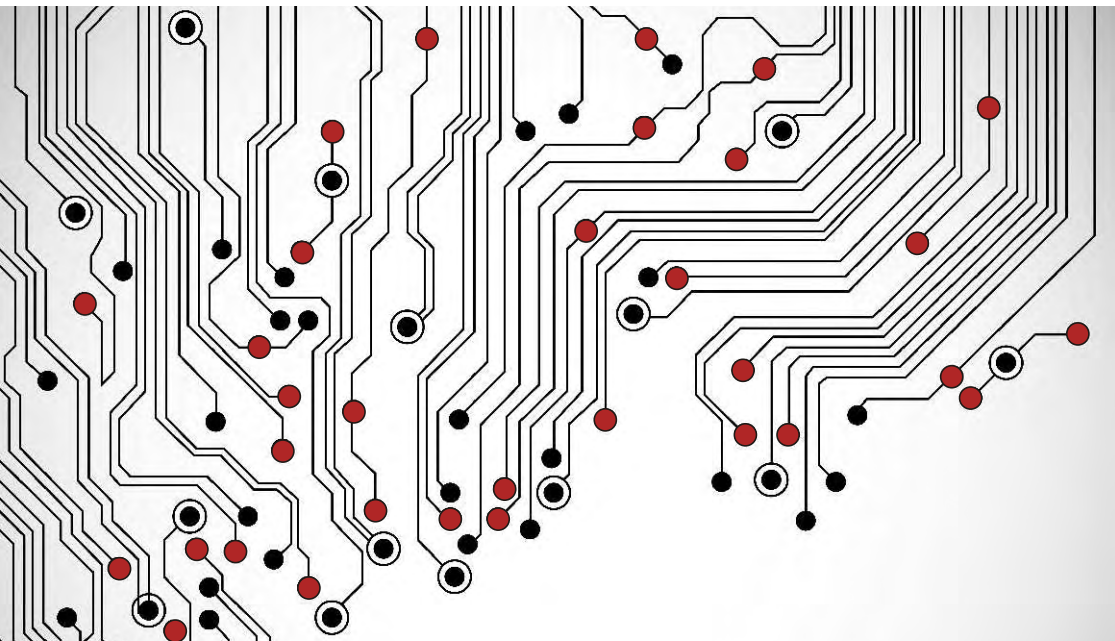
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