

## THE PECULIARITIES OF GERMAN NEGOTIATING STYLE

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**Abstract:** *The paper is about how Germans think about negotiations, and how they use negotiation in promoting their goals. Of course, the German cultural traits play a crucial role in determining German behavior and German negotiating style. We try to present the importance of understanding German negotiating style both because these people are quite fascinating, and because this peculiar culture pushed Germany to the best positions in global economic environment. Their determination, aiming at a precise goal made German companies fearful competitors at global stage. But exactly these qualities are to be identified by someone who enters a negotiation with Germans. They are determined, precise, purposeful, well documented and informed; as their products are: they are durable, powerful, and useful. Both, the negotiation peculiarities and the characteristics of the products share the same German cultural roots. In the same time the precision and lack of flexibility are to be found even when there is a business negotiation, followed by a meal. Each are distinct elements of the same relationship, but they are very separated in time and space. Negotiations and meals are two very distinct social activities. There could be seen how Germans try to use their national food and drinks to create good atmosphere in a relationship, but how different they use food in comparison with Americans, and especially French. If Americans use meals as occasions for business debates (for they time is money), the French would try the best to use French cuisine to create a special mood through impressing the foreigner with their national food and drinks. Germans try to do the best with what they have in culture, and in cuisine, and they do it very well. In the same time the presentation of the Gesamtkonzept has a peculiar space in the paper. Its role in a negotiation is a crucial one, and it is presented in this light. Everything spring from it: it is the conceptual idea which moves the German before, during, and after a negotiation process.*

**Keywords:** *German behavior; German culture; German negotiation style.*

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It is easy to see that peoples are different; even if they have quite similar shape, they differ in character and personal traits. The same is true for nations: each nation has its character. It is called national character. It is hard to identify it, but its existence has so powerful influence, that it manifests itself in the identifiable forms such as types of social organizations, technical means for space control, rewarding and punishing of people for their actions, popular art, language, and religion. If technical and social aspects belong to civilization area, art, language, and religion belong to cultural area. They are inseparable elements helping man to survive in global society.

But cultural traits can be more facile connected to national character traits. People belonging to the same nation share quite similar behavior, rooted in the common

cultural base, where language, religion, and popular art and history play important roles. And even people belonging to a peculiar nation are different from religious point of view they share common language, which is the vital ingredient for smoothly functioning of social activities. One nation cultural traits are distinguishable especially when there are face to face people belonging to two different culture (they have different national character).

It's easy to see that German art, music, literature, even cuisine are thick and dense to understand that some robustness is peculiar to German national character. This is an advantage; but this can impede interaction especially with people belonging to very flexible cultures, such as Greeks or Italians, for example. But the advantage of robustness which could be identified in technical emanations which spring from German "hands" can create favorable moods in foreigners' souls for accepting those technical things. German technical products are among the best in the world, and sometimes even *the best*.

Here we can mention that German negotiating style – an emanation from German culture – has some peculiarities giving it uniqueness. It is a cultural-psychological dimension which influences behavior, and this in its turn influences negotiation process. Psychological factors are pervasive in international relations and psychological process at the individual and collective levels constitute and mediate much of the behavior of nations, as mentioned by Kelman (in Zartman and Rasmusen, eds., 2003: 192). And individuals act within organized social structures, which are influenced by a nation's geography, history, and as a consequence by its culture.

Germans think about themselves that they must have a honorable place among the nations of the world, and what Germany failed to accomplish through other means, it searches assiduously to arrive at using diplomacy and negotiations. German *Kultur* came to represent a general theory of mastery, of effort constantly renewed, of some mystical union between the German people and the elemental forces of nature (Nicolson, 1955: 146). And even the conception of negotiation by German diplomatists is a military conception. Germans find in physical unity – and as a consequence – in physical power the sense of solidarity which they lack as individuals (Nicolson, 1955: 145). And this is a deep rooted reason which is the base of the German behavior regarding the search for technical and social "products" which create for them the sense of safety. And always Germans are interested not only in which their place in the world is, but how the world sees them, the context in which they act and live having a great impact upon their actions and intentions.

Furthermore *the German negotiating style* has the same peculiarities which one could find in other areas of German activities. It is very careful prepared process, and purposeful. But here it is important to mention that the context in which they live and act, and how Germans could use it to bring benefits to them is the starting point in any action regarding a future negotiation. It is the base for *Gesamtkonzept's* construction, which is a central idea; the preparation for negotiations are headed to this comprehensive/governing concept, and this contains the roots and the fundamental aim that Germans wish to achieve during and after negotiations. It provides Germans intellectual coherence, and all detailed proposals came out from it, and express it (Smyser, 2003: 60).

In the following lines, there are presented the main peculiarities of negotiating with Germans.

As in the technical area, where the German products embrace perfection, so it is the case in preparing for negotiation. Germans prepare for negotiations very carefully, perhaps more carefully than any other nation.

But being the *Das Land der Mitte* – The Land in the middle – German geography impels Germans to always look at the world, trying to identify what there is going on, and especially what are the roots and reasons for those things. They place a crucial importance to the *context*. They were always in the middle of other states, and this geographic aspect influenced their history, and as a consequence their philosophy, and culture. They hadn't had a place to escape, because they were in the middle, and promoting their interests in such a context made negotiation a very important ingredient for their survival. Always the context has played a very important role in their actions, and negotiations. And in that context Germans want to position themselves within a consensus.

Germans note and keep detailed records regarding the views other states/companies expressed on a subject. After that, they try to identify what position could have other prospective interested parties in pending negotiations. After that they analyze very, very careful what these positions really mean. They will look for allies to rally and support the future German position, and which parties/states could block the desired result.

Even if in the past Germans wanted to shape the world, today they don't expect anymore to do it; instead they use diplomacy in order to work and develop within existing environment. That for the Germans will almost always expect to hear and see the others' position, and after that they would define their own position and the goals to be achieved in that peculiar negotiation; they look carefully to their interests and objectives, will frame the *Gesamtkonzept* and the negotiations position, trying to calculate as precise as possible the best way to advance and attain German interests in that peculiar context. If Americans start a negotiation presenting their position, at the opposite side, the Germans would expect the other part/parts position to be presented, and they would look on the context; and after that they create the *Gesamtkonzept*, and under its umbrella they establish the goals, and the best ways for achieving them. And they prepare their positions methodically and thoroughly, to the most detailed aspect, as argued by Smyser (2003), justifying each element of their position intellectually; after that, they present arguments in a logical manner, and purposeful, having in mind other part's interests, but without neglecting theirs. But always they are looking at what kind of relationship could be develop over time with their counterparts, and for that reason, nothing in German preparation for negotiations and during negotiations themselves happens by accident.

After this careful preparation, and *Gesamtkonzept* identification, there follows the proper negotiations, which commence with the *presentation*, which Germans regard as the most important part of their negotiating process (Smyser, 2003: 72).

This part is presented in a logical manner, following a methodical path, and it can take quite long time, because first Germans want to show their philosophical basis of their position – the *Gesamtkonzept* – which reflects one peculiarity of German culture, where the Idea is the most important element.

That idea constitutes the fundamental ingredient in German position's construction; it is the philosophical framework from which would spring the detailed points during

the negotiation. It includes what a German negotiator (or a German company) sees as the most important issue to be resolved through that peculiar negotiation. Because of the great importance granted to this general idea, Germans want this concept being understood by other side/s, and agreed, too; it sustains the whole structure of the German negotiating position, and even of events which could take place in the aftermath. One diplomat involved in negotiations with German counterparts once said that they “come at you like a moving wall. They give you a total and unified presentation that covers everything.”

During the negotiation process, Germans look at different elements in their position in accordance with the degree to which one element is closer to the *Gesamtkonzept* framework; and they can be flexible on some points with the aim of getting to their general objective. They speak directly relating to issues which they are interested in, but this doesn't mean that they are rude, even if they can appear in a foreigner's eyes as a little insulting.

But entering a negotiation mean that Germans wants result. They have a very well defined purpose in their mind, and they try to get to it. But they seek both: to get to agreement, and to use the negotiating process as a way to establish a new relationship or to deep an old one.

It is noteworthy to be mentioned that a peculiarity of German national character is to strengthen their connections in all directions. *They* – in contrast to French – *fear isolation*. This is rooted in their desire for a community based on good relations, and they are ready to make concessions in order to get to it; but all concessions must “push” them closer to their *Gesamtkonzept's* fulfilling. When Germans attain the governing idea they had at the beginning of negotiating process, they can regard with a relaxed view other elements.

But they do not negotiate and concede in a manner peculiar to Oriental cultures, trying to identify a compromise for its own sake; they calculate carefully each concession having the *Gesamtkonzept* in their mind.

Even it can be a painful process – it is difficult to negotiate with Germans – it is purposeful process, which can bring fruits over the long run. The coming to agreement can sometimes take place *long* after a deal should have been arrived at. Regarding the aspects which were negotiated, Germans take pride in being as good in implementing them, as they were during the negotiating process. They are truthful persons, and they carry out their agreements fully, and to the minute detail. Germans don't try to constantly reinterpret the agreements in a manner which is intended in fact to reopen the negotiations, or even to invalidate previous negotiations.

In their words as well as in their deeds, Germans are very precise and they have a very *formal* negotiating style. They discourage informality, especially in the beginning of a relationship (or a negotiation); and even after they know a man for a long time and address him on a first name basis, they keep the politeness formula *Sie* always present in their form of addressing to the other one. Furthermore, they avoid (even distaste) humor in their presentation and they do not welcome a joke in a reply!

But when entering a negotiation with a German, be patient; Germans usually work slowly, strongly avoiding rushing a negotiation, because they want to reassure themselves that they got what they intended to get, and that it is the mood of the *Gesamtkonzept*. They don't practice delay for its own sake, as others use to, and do not use time as a tactical tool in a negotiation in order to get psychological advantage

over an opponent. The reason for moving quite slowly is that they are very careful, analytical, and logical persons, and because they are thorough.

But they always will reduce the pace of a negotiation when they understand that their *Gesamtkonzept* cannot be reached through those negotiations.

Until the strong relations are developed, there is recommended not to discuss business during meals; Germans create a very clear distinction between eating and having fun, and working. And the change of behavior is so great that it can be astonishing for an unaccustomed person.

And as in other cases, Germans want to show what they have. In case a negotiation takes place in Germany, after a negotiation sequence, or after the negotiation is finished, they are very good and careful hosts. They are proud of their cuisine, and especially their beer, but they use it with smaller influence, in comparison with French (Cogan, 2003: 146).

The Germans intend to use their food and their drinks in order to create a positive atmosphere, not to impress and seduce.

The chosen place could be a traditional restaurant, where it could be eaten German sausages (*Weisswurst*) or traditional desserts (*Rote Grütze*), but especially a wine tavern (*Weinstube*), where one can delight himself drinking German white wine (Riesling or Sylvaner), and especially German beer.

But after there is a strong and old relation between a German and a foreigner, there could be discussed business during meals and entertainment, but it is recommended to do it with care.

As we can see, the negotiations with Germans can be quite long and difficult, but when a German enters a negotiation, the other part could be quite sure that if the *Gesamtkonzept* is arrived at during negotiations, the Germans can be quite flexible on details, in order to get to agreement, and to implement it scrupulously.

But the period over which there will be harvested the fruits is long, bringing mutual benefits, and a durable and trustful relation, too.

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