

GERMAN NEGOTIATING AND COMMUNICATION STYLES, AND THEIR CULTURAL BIAS

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Abstract: *The paper is about how cultural roots influence language and behavior. The people which it is focused are Germans, which – due to their culture have logical goals and are capable in finding extremely practical solutions. In a rapidly globalizing business environment, it is a keystone to understand other people think, and as a consequence how they act. Here cultural traits play the most important role in defining peoples' behavior. But language is a part of a people's culture; it is a social coagulant, which facilitates social interaction. One could not enter a society if he/she cannot speak the language of those with which he/she interacts. Furthermore, language is a soft element of the cultural tools and traits of a people; it expresses the way the people belonging to a peculiar culture, and which speak a peculiar language see the world, their relation to the environment in which they live and act, the way they use that environment, the way they use time, space, and social relations. The research is both theoretical, and empirical, looking at the cultural traits of the Germans both from inductive and from deductive perspectives. It is a qualitative research aiming at helping understand the roots of German negotiating behavior and the way Germans communicate in negotiations, and in their normal life. Furthermore, the paper will present some examples of the reasons for German behavior and negotiating style, and how the German language expresses their most peculiar characteristics: precision, and parsimony. The role of the "idea" in German thinking is presented, too; and connected to this how they see the Gesamtkonzept of a peculiar negotiation, and how they relate to it all what they are looking in that peculiar negotiation. Of course, the roots of these peculiar traits of German language and negotiation style are to be found in Germany's history, geography, economy, and philosophy, all of them being explained in a manner which is aimed to the reader's enlightenment.*

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

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Culture and civilization, are two vague concepts and they lack precision; both belong to imprecise concepts such as democracy, progress, happiness, emancipation... Its vague character results from the very great number of culture's definition; one study found 164 definitions of culture.

What is culture depends on who defines it, but there can be accepted a broad definition which can illuminate us regarding what it is. "Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries,

or formed by individuals themselves”, as specified by Schwartz (in Schwartz et al., 1992: 324). As mentioned by Avruch (1998), culture is psychologically distributed within a population.

Culture satisfies the belonging needs which is opposed to loneliness; it has a vital function for human society (Malița, 1998: 37). Cultures are exclusivist, and they underscore differentiation; they are belief-systems (Malița, 1998: 14), and their most visible elements are language, religion, and customs. They are hardly transferable; it is quite hard at 50 years age for example, to accustom at professional level a foreign language, after you learned another language and you became accustomed with a particular world vision and self vision (from one culture), as a child. As such, language means not only words; it is much more. Any specific language has particular sounds, and when the words are spelled, they have a particular order, meaning, and precision. This depends about the history of people which share such common language, their historical root and the historical interaction with another peoples from which they “borrowed” and/or adapted peculiar words.

Related to German culture, its vision of the world is very different from French one, even they shared the same continent, being even neighbors. But in this case, geographical proximity had no created similar histories; of course, these two European peoples interacted intensively during last two millenniums, but their history is very different from one another. Language, if one is accustomed enough with one, and has the capacity to see beyond the words, is an important guide for understanding the way of thinking of a particular people.

In French language for example, civilization contains culture; all actions are acts of civilization, and inside it the culture blossoms, and which regards the creations in literature, philosophy, and art fields (Malița, 1998: 23). Whereas in Germany, there is a contrary situation: culture has a larger sphere, the thinkers and writers being the central elements, while the civilization works inside the culture, being oriented to material, technical, and economical things. Culture is, for the Germans, the big sphere which contains everything, while the civilization covers a much little sphere (Elias, 1974: 60-64). For the Germans, the civilization points to something very useful, with practical uses, but which has a secondary importance; when a German wants to define himself, when he intends to show his main achievements, and his essence, he uses the word culture. As an example of the importance Germans attach to the cultural element, a German Nobel Prize writer, analyzing the way Roman Empire achieved such a power, in comparison with the Greeks, presents the importance of idea, which is, and which is opposed to image (which could be seen, having a material form), in creating the base for building power by the Romans (Mommsen, 1987).

In order to better understand how Germans think and act, it is recommendable to compare them with the French; they have maintained a clear distinction between civilization and culture, have given them different meanings, placing them one in another, but in different ways. The values in these two cultures are very different: if Frenchman prefers finite things, Germans are inclined to infinite, the first likes forms, while the second prefers opaque deeps; the music creates divertimento for French, while in Germans, it uncovers the unconscious feelings. Furthermore, French works upon nature (a short visit to Jardin des Tuileries can be illustrating in this regard), while Germans like to let the nature as it is, and to preserve it as much as they can.

Ask someone about the peculiarities of German national character and almost all responses would mention that Germans are logic persons, being in the same time very precise. Maybe someone could respond even that they are obsessed with precision. As mentioned by Morgenthau (1973), the Germans have discipline and thoroughness, national character traits which manifest themselves in all the individual and collective activities in which they engage. And these traits are to be found in their negotiating style, too: Invariably, careful intellectual and substantive preparation has remained the hallmark of German negotiating style.

But what makes Germans to be like this, and which are main traits of German national character, and the roots of their culture?

As in all cases, multiple elements have impact upon a people's culture, in some cases some of them having a capital importance, while in others, their role being more moderate. In case of Germany, and of Germans, there are four elements which in their interaction have generated a peculiar style, which regarded as unique: geography, history, philosophy, and economics. Among all of these, German history has shaped the culture of German diplomatic policy and behavior more than any other single factor (Smyser, 2003: 13).

The German theory of policy, and therefore of diplomacy and negotiations is "heroic" or "warrior" conception, and it displays remarkable continuity (Nicolson, 1955: 144). Underneath all the solid and magnificent virtues of the German race lies a layer of nervous uncertainty, simply defined as "spiritual homelessness", because of missing any sharp geographical or historical definition or underscoring. And all this began when Augustus withdrew the Roman limes from the Elbe to the Danube, dividing Germany in two parts: one civilized, the other barbarian (Nicolson, 1955: 145). And this trait was only reemphasized by the Reformation, and the feeling that northern Germany was only a colony of the Holy Roman Empire.

There appeared the desire to look for and finally to find a real focus which impelled Germans to regard the conception of "unity" as expressed by the State, as something mystical and almost religious. It has also led them to find in physical unity, and therefore in physical power, that sense of solidarity which they lack as individuals (Nicolson, 1955: 144). Because of these peculiarities, and in order to reduce their sense of uncertainty, German Kultur came to represent a general theory of mastery, an effort constantly renewed, of some mystical union between the German people and the elemental forces of nature.

And German policy and its way in conducting negotiations have been deeply affected by these philosophical characteristics, Germany becoming a "destiny, not a way of life." And what distinguish Germans from other nations are the bounds the Germans set to the instinct of self-preservation. They look for overcome their weakness through discipline, and through the use of natural elements, thus creating instruments which make them sure, and powerful. The German products are worldwide renowned for their quality and performance in time, but they are only the expression of their lack of certitude and feeling of vulnerability and weakness.

Furthermore, lack of moderation is one fatal weakness on the German national character (Morgenthau, 1973: 135), which could be combined with the instinct of self-preservation. Both these traits create in every German a seed of a suicidal mania (Nicolson, 1955: 146).

As under the virtues of German national character there is a layer of nervous uncertainty, they try hard to overcome this negative feeling, through the elements

which belong to civilization area, especially in technical world. They create technical elements which help them to overcome the weakness which they feel to have as individuals, and the results are to be found in various technical, and even in artistic fields: let's remember Krupp canons, Solingen steel, Daimler-Benz, Audi, BMW, BASF, and others... All of them create exceptional products, which enables Germany to "conquer" the world.

Connected to this is the old thirteen-century ideals of the Teutonic Order of the German Knights, inherited by Prussia, which came to represent the ideal of German force, her yearning for political dominion (Nicolson, 1955: 145-146). The Germans want a respectable place in the world, and since the World War II, they have been looking for its attainment, using economic, technical, and financial means. The German Deutsche Mark currency had been the most stable currency since Bretton Woods Conference, which means that their most valued thing was its stability (we point here shortly that the idea of stability was the reason for this performance)!

Today Germans are remarkable players on global stage, but they are on the best position to become global leaders in the most important problem humanity faces: climate change. Because of their national character, they use with parsimony all natural resources, while preserving the environment; but these traits are core elements of policy which is intended to fight climate changes. In this area, their companies are global players, precisely the best global players. Siemens sells all over the world its wind turbines, and Germany is on the forefront of green technology worldwide. German companies have the biggest market share, representing 15,4% share of world trade in 2009 (REE/2011: 9). During 2006-2008 production of environmental goods in Germany displayed well above average growth to reach new record levels in 2008, with a volume of nearly 76 billion EUR, and nearly 2 million people employed in Germany in the environmental sector (REE/2011: 9). And these are only a few examples which prove that their character pushes them to a position of leadership; this is an innate desire of them. And they deserve that position.

But as we see these traits of German national character, emanating in their products, and the type of products they create, we can go further and check how they use language, and bring to the forefront some examples which underscore once more these national peculiarities.

Using politeness expressions only underscore this trait. As negotiations, Germans are very formal, they don't like jokes during negotiations; and they use always politeness form of dialogue. Even if after long period of time, when negotiations speak to each other on first name base, the Germans retain the polite form of addressing Sie, when they speak to the other negotiator.

As language, a basic cultural product, it is in the same time a major instrument in cognitive activities; language is a cultural output that may help elucidate how cultural elements influence social action. We must be careful regarding the labeling of common objects, and how are constructed different concepts.

The proclivity of Germans for using natural things in order to rise their power, in this way making them feel more secure, push them to express things which they see in the world based on the utility they see in using them.

For example, the being octopus is described in Anglo-Saxon and French cultures by its shape (octopus, or eight feet, or many feet); in the Chinese culture, it is called "spider with long legs", proving a way of thinking using comparison; in dialectical Arabic it means "cunning"; while the Germans put the accent on one of its functions:

it is “ink fish” (*der Tintenfisch*), or in the colloquial German, it is “the one that grasps.” Faure (in Kremenyuk et al., 2002: 396)

Furthermore, the way Germans see the world is reflected in the way people from different culture seek solution in a conflict situation; if there is a conflict between two departments in one institution, the solutions presented are strongly influenced by the culture of those which are asked for to intervene.

For example the Frenchman sees a reduced role for those directly involved in a dispute, and the solution is looked for at the highest hierarchical level of decision. The Englishman offers the solution looking for ways to improve the communication between those concerned (preferably between/among their leaders), while the Germans suggest establishing written rules defining precisely the scope and the prerogatives of each one of the departments. Faure (in Kremenyuk et al., 2002: 394). Even the European people share the same basic elements – Roman law and Greek philosophy - these quite different answers are a proof of different national characteristics of the people belonging to these three nations. But these particular traits are due to their culture, and philosophy, connected to their particular history, religion, and geography.

Frenchman sees France as a centralized state, Paris being the political center around which everything is rotating. France has a long history of centralized authority, due to Catholic religion, and state’s history. France is first and foremost an administration. It is a republic, not a democracy, and the republic is a pyramidal decision structure: the president of the republic decides. It is normal for the Frenchman to see the problem’s solving through presenting it to the highest level of decision and responsibility in the company. This solution is emulated on his historical traits, and its philosophical way of seeing the world. The Englishman with is spirit of freedom, and a distaste for state’s power over society wants to have free hand in his actions; but these action take place in a peculiar context, which could change over time, thus adaptation measures being needed. Quick changes need quick communication, based upon the same principles, which permit adaptation of details, without affecting principles. United Kingdom doesn’t have a written constitution, as other nations in Europe have, but a series of principles for governing. Even they lack the constitution, their state works smoothly, even better than other European states which have one. But they place the principle of free communication to the highest level of importance; as such, Englishman sees problem solving through communication between those involved in a dispute.

In case of Germans, they want establishing written rules defining precisely the scope and the prerogatives of each one of the parties involved in the dispute. They negotiate hard in order to find the best solution, they divide the responsibilities and spheres of action, and after that they respect with great care what there was convened. In their case it is hard and it takes (a lot of) time to find these points, but after that, they learn exactly what they must do, and respect it with the greatest precision.

Ask peoples which belong to different national cultures “*How are you?*”, and a closer look to the answer can illuminate us regarding their cultural traits. An Englishman can answer this question “*It’s all right*”, an American “*It’s OK*”, a Frenchman “*Tout va bien*”, while a German will say “*Alles in Ordnung*”, meaning that each thing is at its place, and “knows” its place, and its role there. German is a logical and a precise language.

In the German language, there is specified the even the position a thing has; for example in English we can say that he *puts* the *book* on the table, he *puts* the *bottle* on the table, he *puts* the *coat* in the wardrobe, or he *puts* the *newspaper* in the bag. While in German, there are very different words for each of these cases: er *legt das Buch* auf den Tisch (*horizontal position*), er *stellt die Flasche* auf den Tisch (*vertical position*), er *hängt den Mantel* in den Schrank (*it is hanged*), er *steckt die Zeitung* in der Tasche (*it is inside*).

There is another difference between what the words mean in different cultures; from this point of view, there are two types of cultures: the high-context culture, and the low-context culture. Context has to do with how much you have to know before effective communication can occur. Low-context cultures are adaptable and flexible, while high-context cultures are rich and subtle. (Trompenaars, 1993: 82)

The distinction between high-context and low-context cultures can be expanded to the difference between form and content, which follows the distinction between Latin and Catholic, on the one hand, and Protestant Germanic/Anglo-Saxon, on the other. Frenchman emphasizes form at the expense of content, this being in fact a Latin way of looking at things... Furthermore, a Frenchman invited to dinner will bring flowers and will take care over the presentation of the flowers, what surrounds them, that is emballage, while a German will bring also flowers for the hostess, but he will take the flowers out of the wrapping and present them straightaway to her. In French case, hostess tend to exclaim first and foremost on the beauty of the emballage, and only later on the flowers themselves. For the Latins, the appearance is important, as in women's clothing, perfumes; while for Germanic people, there is important the content. (Cogan, 2003: 127-128). "Germans never see the outside" stated Tacitus, and it seems that nothing has changed since Roman times... Even in the case of nature, Germans prefer to see things in their original state; the French style is typified by the trimmed gardens and trees of Versailles: "Nature has to be cultivated". (Cogan, 2003: 128)

There is a big difference between France and Germany cuisines; if the meatballs of the Black Forest are heavy, thick and massive like German thought, literature, and art, there is in quiche Lorraine, in the liver of Perigord, or in the bouillabaisse of Marseilles all the refined richness of France. (Rouff, 1984)

But what makes Germans different from all other European nations?

Their cultural particularities, and as a consequence, their negotiation style, are rooted in their history, geography, and as a resultant of these two elements, in their philosophy, and economy. (Smyser, 2003: 12-26)

Geography – Germany is *das Land der Mitte*; being located at the center of European continent, with only one easy defensible frontier (the Alps in the southern part), geography pushes Germany to look constantly at least in two directions: East and West, seeing dangers and looking for opportunities in both directions. Its location constrains German nation; it cannot escape on a periphery due to its size and location. It is too large to lose itself easily in the crowded Central Europe, and yet too small to dominate its neighbors altogether... These geographical traits compel Germany toward interaction with all its neighbors; and as in the past Germany used war to serve its purposes, after 1945 it uses with great skill the diplomacy and negotiations.

History – this is the most important factor which frames German policy, diplomacy, and negotiating behavior. Germany has a history characterized in its greatest part

by division. German nation created a state only after other nations realized this key-objective for their national policy. They even called themselves in late nineteenth century as the delayed nation – die verspatete Nation. Their history of division commenced when Augustus divided Germany in two parts, aspect underscored by the Reformation.

The territory which forms today Germany was composed during Middle Ages of a hundreds of jigsaw puzzle of aristocratic and ecclesiastical holdings, reunited in the Holy Roman Empire. In this hard to understand local and international context, since each prince, aristocrat, or other ruler had obligations toward others, even towards citizens, while they had obligations toward him. Due to this political and geographical context, all these entities had to protect themselves against potential enemies on all sides. They were permanently besieged. Permanent contact became the key-norm for survival, and constant negotiation, the main instrument.

Nobody could withdraw, there was no place to go to, and they had to make their points and interests known clearly in order to avoid misunderstandings. The perception of being permanently besieged, and the need to clarify their views are the main elements in which is rooted the much renowned German precision, in their general behavior, and in their way of life, and particularly in conducting negotiations, and in using words.

During the existence of the Holy Roman Empire, Germans functioned within a multitude of associations, between states and ecclesiastical realms, reuniting farmers, traders, merchants, silversmiths; every profession or any form of social activity had its association, and each such an association had bonds with others. In these circumstances, there was present another element: hierarchy, Germans becoming aware of hierarchy. Each knew where he belonged to, and in order to underscore this trait, each addressed to others on a formal basis, linking names with titles, in this manner reassuring themselves and the others where they stood, and where the others might stand. Using “Herr Doktor” formula in usual conversation (if there is the case), even by those which are close to someone, only highlights this trait.

It is easy to see that Germans lived in a jumble of contradictions; they had their personal, communal, and hierarchical associations and relations; they had been constantly caught up in the internal and external struggles of the Holy Roman Empire, and other states, whether they wanted or not...

As a consequence of these historical traits, Germans became tough. They don't surrender quickly in war or in negotiations; they are tenacious negotiators, being purposeful, determined, assertive, haughty, and unbending. They have come to believe in the prosperity of the fittest, in politics, negotiations, and economics. And this cultural trait makes their technical products highly competitive on every economic market.

Philosophy – German philosophy focused on the internal process of mind, on the logical rationalism underscored by Leibnitz. Fichte asserted that the idea was more important than the thing (elements which comes out from Mommsen explanation of history, with Roman Empire as example), and that subjective thought could lead to truth better than objective observation. But the writer which had the greatest impact upon German way of thinking, and as a consequence, on German negotiating behavior was Georg Hegel. Hegel saw the movement of Geist (Spirit) and the whole progression of history as an advance dominated by dialectic – the notion that every

idea (thesis) contains within itself the seeds of its own contradictions (antithesis), and this contradiction could be reconciled and transcended at a higher level, the synthesis, while arguing that “the real is rational.”

Hegel and German history fitted for the best; they reinforced one another. In Hegelian philosophy, and in German history, all things were both related and opposite. Even that each German belonged to some association, which in its turn belonged to a myriad of associations, all of them could remain distinct and separate individuals, while being part of a common political logic that sanctioned distinctiveness and community alike.

As a consequence, the dialectical method remains at the unconscious core of German culture. This method stress dialectical logic, not linear one (as in the case of French), placing deductive reasoning on a higher plane than inductive reasoning (peculiar to English). In this world, Germans see opposites not as contradicting, but as complementing each another. Under the influence of Hegel, German negotiating style has developed a strong attachment to logical method: nothing can be real without a concept to make it real and make it pertinent. Germans don't argue in immediate and specific terms, seizing principally on the details of any particular issue or any particular solution. Germans insist that any proposal must have a through foundation in logic and abstract reasoning.

Economy – despite its tumultuous history, Germany didn't remain an economic backwater. Always, they have encouraged and fostered a standard of high manufacturing quality that remains a peculiarity of German output to this day... They have put the concept of quality in the forefront of their economic and industrial activities, and their technical inventions only supported these; they influenced other people's communication. Even in the Romanian language – which is a Latin language – technical terms have their roots in German language.

As a conclusion, in the light of *comparative analysis* made by Jeswald Salacuse (2003):

- *The negotiation goal* is getting to a contract, but under an umbrella of *Gesamtkonzept*, which implies the construction of a relationship;
- *The negotiation attitude*: they are tough negotiators, but they look to the other side interests, too, their attitude toward negotiation *being a win-win* one;
- *Personal style* is formal;
- *Communication*: they communicate *indirectly* the *Gesamtkonzept*, but the details which spring from it, *they communicate quite directly*;
- *Sensitivity to time* is low sensitivity to time;
- *Emotionalism*: they are logic negotiators, showing *low emotionalism* (probably the lowest in the world);
- *Form of agreement*: they like detailed contracts, each thing, right and obligation being presented in the most detailed manner;
- *Building of agreement*: they build the agreement from top-down. Thinking in a deductive manner, Germans are looking for finding a *Gesamtkonzept*, and after that all things must be within the framework of that *Gesamtkonzept*, to the minute details;
- *Team organization*: they have a leader, but put a peculiar value on group consensus of their team;

- *Risk taking*: and even they are very calculated, they are risk takers.

In negotiations, as in other economic or productive activities, Germans must create *Gesamtkonzept* (a general concept), and only after they found it, they would start production, or *negotiations*. But everything they do is within the framework of this *Gesamtkonzept*, be it a product or service, or a position in a peculiar negotiation. For examples, they do not sale a Mercedes automobile for its own sake, they promote a concept instead. When you buy such a car, you drive much more than a car; you belong to a concept, and you promote it... Mercedes is a full brand, being more than a complex symbol. It has all the six elements which makes it a full brand; it has quality, it brings advantages, it shows peculiar values, is sustained by German conception (which means organization, efficiency, high quality), it promotes a peculiar personality and it is used by a peculiar user. (Kotler, 1998) As always in German actions, the idea cumulated in this brand is more important than the thing. The same is happening in a negotiation. Germans prepare their positions methodically and thoroughly, to the most detailed thing; but in preparing their logical argument, one must serve their central idea, aiming their preparation toward a comprehensive/governing concept, the *Gesamtkonzept*. It contains the roots and the fundamental aim that Germans wish to achieve during the negotiations, and thereafter. Nothing in German preparations and negotiations happens by accident; the *Gesamtkonzept* provides intellectual coherence, while detailed negotiations proposals spring from it and seek to express it (Smyser, 2003). Put shortly, due to their geography, history, philosophy, and economic traditions, Germans have a unique culture which creates a peculiar negotiating style.

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