

Book Review

by Lothar Katz

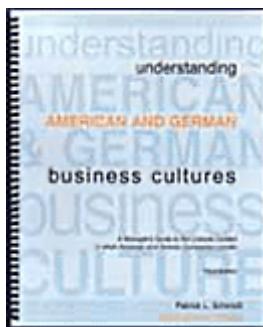
Patrick Schmidt

UNDERSTANDING AMERICAN & GERMAN BUSINESS CULTURES



Just so you can't say nobody warned you: culturally, this book is more 'German' than 'American.' This is to say that with lots of detailed information and lengthy explanations, it is not exactly casual reading. Some readers may find its style a bit dry and stilted. Nevertheless, *Understanding American and German Business Cultures*, also available in German as "Die amerikanische und die deutsche Wirtschaftskultur im Vergleich", is a useful publication for those about to cross the boundaries between these cultures. Its author, Patrick Schmidt, is an American-born cultural business consultant who has lived in Germany for several decades. He has also worked in or with people from several other cultures.

After briefly summarizing important findings from intercultural researchers such as Geert Hofstede and Edward Hall, the author presents "psychological characteristics of Germans and Americans." He bases them on precise and astute observations, contrasting orderliness with self-confidence, formal politeness with casual attitudes towards etiquette, effectiveness with efficiency, risk adversity with risk happiness. Other aspects covered in this chapter include different expectations of friendship, contrarian views of the role of time,



and an analysis of how both sides define achievement orientation quite differently.

Most of the other chapters of *Understanding American and German Business Cultures* are dedicated to specific business subjects, from management styles and worker attitudes to business meetings, language and communication styles, legal and ethical considerations, and more. Each of them concludes with a summary contrasting key practices of the two cultures against each other.

Last updated and augmented with a new epilogue in 2003, this slim booklet of only a little more than 100 pages is nevertheless a valuable reference guide. It allows profound insights into the two countries' business styles and cultural practices. Many specific examples and short stories, as well as an appendix analyzing several "cross-cultural case studies" serve to illustrate the concepts presented by the book and further enhance the learning experience.

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Lothar Katz is the founder of Leadership Crossroads. He has a wealth of experience in achieving productive cooperation across cultures and driving business success on a global scale.

A seasoned former executive of a Fortune 500 company, he regularly interacted with employees, customers, outsourcing partners, and third parties in more than 25 countries around the world. These included many parts of Asia, e.g., China, India, and Japan. Originally from Germany, he has lived and worked both in the United States and in Europe.

