

Intercultural Quiz on U.S.-German Business Relations

by Patrick Schmidt

How well do you know your German or American neighbors in terms of their cultural upbringing? In the era of the global village, how far do we let prejudices, generalizations and even Hollywood films influence our perception?

Take this quiz and measure how much you know — or don't know — about your cultural counterparts. For each statement, choose an answer (there may be more than one), and see the answer key at the end of the quiz to tally your score and rate your intercultural knowledge.

1. An American supervisor who continuously praises your work means that person:
 - a. is trying to be your friend.
 - b. has a hidden agenda.
 - c. wishes to acknowledge your good work
 - d. would like a compliment in return.

2. German managers seldom give compliments to their subordinates because:
 - a. their subordinates could take advantage of them.
 - b. the value of perfectionism is deeply embedded in the German mindset.
 - c. their subordinates are expected to do the job well without any praise.
 - d. subordinates should know who the boss is.

3. Americans are generous with flattery and positive feedback because:
 - a. it goes hand-in-hand with their need for mutual upward mobility.
 - b. criticism can cause a diminished feeling of worth.
 - c. Americans like being the center of attention.
 - d. It is the only thing that motivates them to work.

4. In American restaurants, the check (bill) is immediately presented as soon as dessert is served. A German should interpret this to mean:
 - a. the restaurant owner doesn't like customers to chat incessantly
 - b. Americans strongly believe in the value 'time is money'.
 - c. the restaurant respects your need for quick service.
 - d. the waiter has finished his/her shift and wants to go home.

5. Germans are very detailed-oriented and highly organized because:
 - a. they want you to think they're doing their job well.
 - b. they believe order and detailed analysis will bring about the best solution.
 - c. they want you to realize how hard they work.
 - d. these traits are a sign of respect for colleagues/customers

6. When working under an American supervisor, you should:
 - a. always follow his/her instructions without question.
 - b. never indicate you don't understand.
 - c. hide your mistakes until he/she discovers them.
 - d. maintain honest communication about work problems and progress.

7. Germans have difficulty with "small talk" at cocktail parties because they:
 - a. don't like to talk much.
 - b. feel a discussion should always be serious and credible.
 - c. don't know many jokes.
 - d. they do not wish to expose their private lives or opinions to strangers at parties.

8. Americans are masters of “small talk” at cocktail parties because they:
 - a. are shallow and not very serious.
 - b. are used to quick, informal conversations.
 - c. see it as a harmless way of networking with people, establishing new business contacts.
 - d. will risk talking about anything, even if they know nothing about the subject and make fools of themselves.

9. German business-people tend to discuss things thoroughly and take a long time in making decisions because:
 - a. their foreign counterparts will respect them more.
 - b. the longer the decision-making process, the better the solution.
 - c. they like to sleep on a problem before making a decision.
 - d. they follow a consensus-based process, which requires extensive research and lateral clearances.

10. Americans business-people are inclined to start a project without a thorough discussion because:
 - a. it makes them look like they know what they’re doing.
 - b. they believe nature and a higher being will help them make the right decision.
 - c. they tend to define their self-image in terms of action, not thought.
 - d. they unconsciously follow the Puritan proverb, : “Busy hands keep the devil at bay.”

11. Germans give you lengthy explanations, going back to the beginning of every matter because:
 - a. they like to hear themselves talk.
 - b. they feel most people are uninformed and need the explanation.
 - c. Germans unconsciously fear uncertainty and overcome this by seeking extensive information.
 - d. they believe quality work begins with total comprehension.

12. American communication tend to be concise and overly-simplified because:
 - a. they are raised to be pragmatic: the shortest distance between two points is a straight line.
 - b. are inclined to be lazy when it comes to thinking.
 - c. they have never admired intellectuals.
 - d. they watch too many soap-operas on TV.

13. When Germans communicate, they subconsciously want to be perceived as:
 - a. distant and formal.
 - b. brilliant.
 - c. credible and objective.
 - d. methodical perfectionists.

14. When Americans communicate, they subconsciously want to be perceived as:
 - a. playful and optimistic.
 - b. likeable and popular.
 - c. ambassadors of the greatest country in the world.
 - d. laid-back and cool.

15. Many Germans are inclined to be skeptical and pessimistic because:
 - a. their school system is harsh.
 - b. they are brought up in an authoritarian manner.
 - c. their country has gone through generation after generation of tragedies.
 - d. Germany has had the misfortune of being “*das Land der Mitte*”.

16. Most Americans are inclined to be overly optimistic about anything they undertake because:
 - a. they are brought up with everything given to them.
 - b. they are continuously told at school that anyone can become President of the US.
 - c. the nation has had a relatively positive history.
 - d. the nation has had unlimited resources at its disposal.

17. Germans business-people generally don't crack jokes at their first meeting with American colleagues because:
 - a. most Germans have no sense of humor.
 - b. Germans only tell jokes to close friends and family.
 - c. Germans want to make sure their counterparts are competent and serious before showing much personality.
 - d. joking is not part of business.

18. American business-people tend to project overconfidence because:
 - a. their country's infrastructure allows for successful completion of tasks.
 - b. they are workaholics.
 - c. they believe in the self-fulfilling prophecy of positive thinking.
 - d. they are influenced subconsciously by the Puritan proverb, : "God helps those who help themselves."

19. German persist in using family names long after Americans would use first names because Germans:
 - a. are standoffish and arrogant.
 - b. have no savoir-faire when it comes to casual or business relationships.
 - c. are not casual about friendships and shy away from familiarity
 - d. draw a line between public and private spheres.

20. In a business introduction, Americans may ask you to call them by their first names because:
 - a. some last names are hard to pronounce.
 - b. they're not really serious about doing business
 - c. Americans believe in "egalitarianism".
 - d. they want to be comfortable and move to an informal stage of discussion.

21. Most Americans who work with Germans see them as:
 - a. passionate beer-drinkers.
 - b. boring and inexpressive.
 - c. pessimistic and pedantic.
 - d. serious and overly critical.

22. Most Germans who work with Americans see them as:
 - a. carefree and overly confident.
 - b. childish and superficial.
 - c. overly emotional.
 - d. deceitful and suspicious.

23. In general, Americans are most concerned with:
 - a. upward mobility.
 - b. making lots of money.
 - c. individuality.
 - d. being liked.

24. In general, Germans are most concerned with:
 - a. being credible.
 - b. making lots of money.
 - c. social recognition.
 - d. receiving a good education.

25. Many Americans see themselves as:
- modest and shy.
 - formal and ritualistic.
 - created equal to others.
 - “pre-rich”.
26. Many Germans see themselves as:
- modest and shy.
 - reliable and formal (*Korrekt*).
 - family-oriented.
 - wealthy.
27. Foreigners who work with Americans tend to see them as:
- unstructured.
 - victimized by fast foods.
 - full of energy.
 - ignorant about other cultures.
28. Foreigners who work with Germans tend to see them as:
- obedient to authority
 - individualistic.
 - well educated.
 - precision oriented.
29. German business meetings usually start with:
- discussion of the past weekend’s soccer game.
 - a formal agenda and a list of tasks and deadlines.
 - a résumé of everyone’s professional work experience.
 - pretzels and coffee.
30. American business meetings usually start with:
- discussion of the past weekend’s football game.
 - a formal agenda and a list of tasks and deadlines.
 - a résumé of everyone’s professional work experience.
 - donuts and coffee.
31. An American tells a German co-worker, in passing, “We should get together this week.” This means the American wants to:
- invite the co-worker home for dinner.
 - be invited to the co-worker’s home for dinner.
 - have lunch with the co-worker at the office cafeteria.
 - get know the co-worker better.
32. When an American business partner talks to you on the phone, it’s normal for him to begin by asking you:
- about your family health.
 - about your financial situation.
 - when you’re planning to visit.
 - how you’re doing.
33. An American calls and asks, “How are you doing?”. You should:
- say, “OK, thanks. How are you?”.
 - explain to him how hard it is to work after the fight you had with your spouse.
 - discuss your current health problems.
 - ask him if he/she has time to listen to a long answer.

34. A German tells you that he or she has two or three friends and many acquaintances. As an American you should understand this to mean:
- the German obviously has no social skills.
 - the German is making a clear linguistic and emotional distinction between “friend” and “acquaintance”.
 - the German is trying to impress you with his/her sophisticated English.
 - the German is stuck with medieval concepts of friendship.
35. During a U.S.-German meeting, two German executives yell at each other about a fact. After the meeting, they drink a beer together in a pub. As an American you understand their behavior to mean:
- Germans have a schizophrenic relationship with co-workers.
 - Germans can't control their emotions, but make up afterward.
 - Germans purposely put on a scene to throw off the Americans.
 - Germans separate their private/emotional sphere from the public/professional sphere.
36. An American tells his colleagues their new company policy for success: “Get in there, go for the kill, and then get the hell out!” As a German you understand this as:
- Americans use unconventional methods.
 - Americans, being individualistic in nature, are not too worried about the long-term consequences of their actions.
 - Americans are willing to ‘kill’ others for success.
 - Americans like using colorful and emotional language to get their message across.
37. Americans believe that people should be “self-starters” and “pro-active” because:
- the world would come to standstill if people didn't take the initiative.
 - they think of themselves as individualists who get things done without any need for external or social pressure.
 - these attributes have made the USA the greatest nation in the world.
 - these attributes allow a person to “become” his or her true self.
38. If a German invites you home to meet the family, it means:
- the person wants to make a business deal with you.
 - the person wants to see if you're an interesting individual.
 - the person wants to signal the possibility of a real friendship.
 - the person is bored at home and hopes to be entertained.
39. The U.S. has four times more lawyers per capita than Germany because:
- the profession allows you to become rich quickly.
 - of the high number of lawsuits.
 - the 7th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution allows any citizen to present a case to a jury of 12 peers.
 - American social behavior, which originally had no tradition to fall back on, has been codified into strict rules and laws.
40. A German, or a European, says, “Americans have absolutely no culture!”, this ethnocentric statement is really articulating that:
- the USA hasn't generated exceptional artists like Mozart or Goethe.
 - American culture consists of fast food, junk TV and cowboys.
 - Americans aren't as refined in thinking, feelings, manners and tastes as Europeans are.
 - the USA is a relatively young culture.

41. When an American tells a German, “You’re welcome to visit us anytime!”, it means:
- you have an open invitation to visit them anytime.
 - this invitation is more likely a convention of conversation (small talk) than a sincere gesture.
 - you need to make sure you should really visit because it may be an exaggeration.
 - the American expects you to bring a gift of German wine or chocolates.
42. Americans are always in such a hurry because:
- they are more successful when working quickly.
 - they are subconsciously influenced by the Puritan thought, : “Time is a gift of God that shouldn’t be wasted”.
 - they follow the advice of Benjamin Franklin (18th-century American patriot, statesman, inventor) “Time is money”.
 - doing things fast has made the USA the richest country in the world.
43. Americans admired people who become wealthy and those who don’t are sometimes called “losers”. The reason for this is:
- only by encouraging a competitive spirit can a country forge ahead.
 - becoming rich goes hand-in-hand with the American Dream.
 - true “personality” emerges in competition.
 - the Puritan idea that God “predestines” those who go heaven and those condemned to hell. Material success was a sign one was heaven-bound.
44. Germans are less likely to show off their wealth than Americans because:
- they are modest people.
 - of Martin Luther’s teachings of piousness and simplicity.
 - of Germany’s many tragedies, where it was wise not to provoke envy.
 - they are not as rich as Americans.
45. Americans are happiest when achievements and success can be statistically documented, such as a lower poverty-rate, increased sales, salary bonus, more college graduates, etc., because:
- they are materialistic.
 - appearance and status are their basic driving force.
 - they have an inherent belief in being able to improve any aspect of life, ultimately leading to prosperity.
 - they are unsure of themselves.
46. The United States doesn’t have an extensive apprenticeship system like Germany because:
- the U.S. has always favored standardized, time-saving production processes (Taylorism).
 - the German system is regarded as old-fashioned and unnecessary.
 - at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, American possessed enormous natural resources and land, but few skilled workers.
 - Americans gain skills on-the-job — they “learn by doing”.
47. Generally, Americans don’t want to think in complex terms or discuss hypothetical situations because:
- their education encouraged quick solutions and not deep contemplation.
 - they want quick deals.
 - their business counterparts might think they’re wasting time.
 - business is not meant to be an intellectual exercise.

48. An American CEO once said: “The Germans have a penchant for coming to all meetings armed with tons of overhead transparencies and colored charts. It’s information overkill!”. Germans need to present so much information is because:
- they’re trying to overwhelm their business partners/adversaires.
 - they like showing off their vast knowledge.
 - they tend to think holistically, and background information gives them perspective.
 - they believe, that the more information you have, the less risk there is of making a wrong decision.
49. Americans love to overstate and exaggerate things because:
- they are generally shallow.
 - they want to entertain their audience.
 - of their infinite optimism and constant need to sell themselves.
 - they will have a better chance of “making the sale”.
50. Your American co-worker has invited you to play tennis for the second time in a month. This means:
- you are now a close friend.
 - you can talk about your personal problems.
 - you are expected to solve the technical problem he or she has at work.
 - he or she enjoys playing tennis with you.

Answers: 1. c 2. b. + c. 3. a. 4. b. 5. b. 6. d. 7. b. + d. 8. b. + c. 9. d. 10. c. + d. 11. c. 12. a. + c. 13. c. 14. b. 15. c. + d. 16. b. + c. 17. c. 18. c. + d. 19. c. + d. 20. c. + d. 21. d. 22. a. 23. a.+ b. + c. + d. 24. a. + c. + d. 25. c. + d. 26. b. 27. a. + d. 28. c. + d. 29. b. 30. a. 31. d. 32. d. 33. a. 34. b. 35. d. 36. b. + d. 37. b. + d. 38. c. 39. c. + d. 40. c. 41. B. + c. 42. b. + c. 43. d. 44. b. + c. 45. c. 46. a. + c. + d. 47. b. 48. c. + d. 49. c. 50. d.

A perfect score is 77 matching answers. If you guessed between 67 – 77 right answers, then you can congratulate yourself as being highly knowledgeable and culturally sensitive in U.S.-German business relations. A score of 57-66 means you have some catching up to do, but you are not committing too many intercultural faux-pas. A score below 57 strongly suggests that you should take part in a U.S.-German intercultural training seminar or read books on the subject to beef up your cross-cultural skills.

Most of the questions are drawn from “Understanding American and German Business Cultures” by Patrick Schmidt. The book can be purchased from the author via his website: www.agcc.de