

Working in the UK and Germany

A.

F: From your experience of working in the UK and in Germany, could you give us some comparisons based on the differences you noticed?

M: Well, firstly, the level of language skills is different. I was very impressed at the way which most executives in the German company could not just speak English but read it and write and communicate effectively, compared with the very poor language abilities displayed by my English colleagues.

F: Did you notice any significant differences in the approach to doing business?

M: Yes, I did and it's probably the little things that are the most telling. Germany is much more formal in the way that people conduct business. For example, there is very little use of first names. It's far more common to use Herr or Frau — Mr or Mrs., — than it is these days in Britain. And handshakes. It's a custom that's almost withered away in Britain but in Germany it's quite correct to greet people in the morning with a handshake. Or if you go into a meeting you shake hand with everybody sitting round the table.

F: Did you find that people from the company socialized outside working hours?

M: There's quite a large difference in attitudes to mixing work and social life. I found my German colleagues came to work, did a good day's work and then went home at the end of the day and chose not to get involved in activities with people from the company. A very good example of this is that once a month we used have a meeting to let people know what was going on in the company. It started at four o'clock in the afternoon in the company's time, but by about half past five, six o'clock, most of my German colleagues had started looking at their watches and saying "Well, I've stayed an hour and a half now so I'm off," whereas I often thought: well, if this were taking place in Britain people would say "Let's go to the pub for a drink" or "Let's go for a meal." There was a definite cut-off point.

F: Would you say from your experience that there's a difference in attitude towards planning?

M: Yes, the Germans take a very long-term view and plan accordingly, whereas the British take a far more short-term view of things. I think it's this which has given Germany its great strength. On the other hand, it's also given it a certain conservatism, in contrast with Britain.

Questions:

1. The differences in which of the following things does the man first talk about?
2. Which of the following statements TRUE about differences in the approach to doing business between the UK and Germany?
3. What is the difference in attitudes to mixing work and social life between the two countries?
4. What is the German's attitude towards planning, in contrast with Britain?

B.

F: Would you say that there tends to be a difference as to whether the outlook is product-led rather than market-led?

M: That's interesting. I would say generally German companies tend to be product-led rather than market-led. Looking back at the way that Chirasco had been positioned in the market it was very much product-led, it was wonderful steaks and wonderful salads; premium quality. It wasn't really saying, "this steak house is appropriate for an evening out or may appeal to families ..." which is the approach, I think, that we would take here in Britain. We're becoming more market-led rather than product-led.

F: Did the company transfer UK ideas about company cars and other perks?

M: No, it didn't. There is a major difference here between the attitudes of German and UK companies. Basically, German companies pay their employees a higher salary but, in contrast, they get fewer perks. German employees pay for their own cars out of their salary whereas in the UK, of course, it's common for people in management positions to be given a company car and to receive various other extras.

F: And did you experience a difference in attitudes to length of service with the company?

M: Yes, I did. I've actually worked for four companies myself within a ten-year period and I don't think I'm too uncommon, but when I spoke with my German colleagues they were horrified at this. There's an attitude that one joins a company with the intention staying with it for a very significant period of time. In Britain one takes a different view. One says one's been picking up experience in different companies, and it's seen as beneficial, so there's quite a difference there.

F: We hear a lot about the German attitude to environmentalism. Did you notice it was significantly different from that in the UK?

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