



## MANDANTENBRIEF 02 / 2015

### **DOING BUSINESS IN GERMANY A GUIDE FOR THE CLUELESS FOREIGNER (PART 2)**

#### **COMMUNICATION STYLE**

German verbal communication patterns are one of the greatest sources of confusion to others. In brief, they can come across as being very direct, short and to the point, and can thus appear to be abrupt and demanding.

While Britons and Americans tend to value their independence and consider being asked rather than ordered to carry out a task as a sign of respect. Germans accept authority more readily and, although they may prefer to be asked, they will do something despite being ordered to. When faced with the German pattern of getting straight to the point, many non-Germans, who may be accustomed to receiving instructions put in the form of a request, feel put upon and talked down to.

The widespread use of email, particularly for international intra-corporate communication and for day-to-day communication in international projects, further exacerbates this. Email displays almost no personal context between the parties communicating. It is therefore in itself direct.

The solution is not to jump to conclusions about your German counterpart's intentions, but to recognize the directness as standard and to clarify his intentions by asking.

#### **REACTIONS IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS**

For Germans, disputes and discussions, open expressions of disagreement and a clear objection are not a declaration of war; they are not a signal of the end of cooperation, but an entirely normal process of finding a mutual understanding of the situation, and, subsequently, the best solution to the problem. If people argue with you, if they state their objections, try not to be insulted, but rather try to see in it something entirely different: namely, the German way of expressing respect, of valuing you as a person with whom one can speak plainly and to the point.

German business partners love discussions and agree that 'truth is born of argument'. One of the chief characteristics of the professional is his ability to constructively express, and gratefully accept, criticism. From the German perspective, there's no limit to perfection and improvements can always be made in everything. For this reason, if you are working with Germans and they consider you a professional, they will expect you to make critical, i.e., constructive, objective comments and remarks aimed at improving or optimizing products and services, processes and conditions. That said, your German colleagues will assume that you also, as a professional, cannot help but be interested in direct feedback, which also includes positive criticism.

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Doing business in Germany is a challenge. To be successful, thorough preparation is essential. This includes research, preparation of documentation in a manner that will appeal and learning to communicate at their level. It means accepting idiosyncratic behavior and avoiding the trap of judging their procedures and standards on the basis of your own. Above all, it requires the will to succeed, patience, and the ability to build and foster relationships.

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For further discussion about the above topic, feel free to reach out to any one of our TMC Trust Management Consultants - team.

Yours sincerely  
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