

MCD TERM-PAPER: BOOK REVIEW



Title: Klaus W. Herterich, (1991), "Das Frankreichgeschäft"

Lecturer: Prof. Nicola Hale

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Student: Jan Welscheid

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Notification:

All the quotes that are given in the term paper are translated from German into the English language.

1. Introduction

The book "Das Frankreichgeschäft" was published by Mr. Klaus Walter Herterich, an expatriate manager from Germany who himself conducted business in France for more than 20 years. He wrote his book at the request of many other managers and leaders who started to do business or were already operating in France, to help them to better understand the French people in order to establish long lasting business success. His working experience helped him in defining the areas of business where most of the problems for Germans arise when working in France. In the following book report I will first start with briefly reflecting on the subjects that the author deals with in the book. Subsequently I will concentrate on some cultural differences that are mentioned in the book and that are best described by the author when using the French and German caricatures of "Marianne" and "Michel". These cultural differences mentioned and some others will be further considered when finally assessing a business field where most of the cultural differences occur in the book: leadership style and employment.

In a final conclusion I will assess the book regarding its cultural validity. Does the book give the reader a good understanding of the cultural differences? Can it provide him with some solutions for bridging cultural differences? Will he use some different cultural managing styles after having read the book?

2. Overview of the Content of the book

In the first part of the book Klaus Herterich gives the reader an introduction into the French country. He deals with geographical and socio economic issues and provides an economy-oriented historical overview. He shows the reader some of the conflicting cultural aspects between French and German people, when writing in the next section about the French personality and peoples' different lifestyles. Some more business-related topics are given emphasis in the following part, comprising French business history and painful experiences that were made by German companies when first starting their business in France.

As a carry over the next section is dedicated to the present working situation of German-led French businesses concerning issues like managing one's own employees and acquiring leadership competences.

In the next major part of the book the author explains legal aspects and problems when operating in France such as industrial and social laws, including contracting, remuneration and dismissing people; salaries, sales, representative legal issues (Vertreterrecht) with its deviation from the German system; company law with the different French association types, accounting and other constitutional issues. Towards the end of the book, Herterich gives the reader some more practical and life-related advice. This concerns how to find housing, doing shopping, spending ones spare time and others. Finally he puts together three lists with 10 rules that a German has to follow when dealing with French, on how to do business in France and a final one about leadership qualities.

3. An image of cultural differences

For developing an understanding of some fundamental differences between the French and the German culture it is useful to start with a simplified image of the French and German culture that is given by the author: the French "*sensitive Marianne*" and the German "*Michel*".¹

Klaus W. Herterich characterizes the French symbol when writing:

„La France“ is feminine. A woman wants to be treated with particular attention. She is very sensitive and thinks with wistfulness about her days when she was young. She is changeable like the weather in April, likes eloquent speeches, sometimes brittle and sulking, sensitive to justice but sacrificing when led by her heart. She likes diversity and entertainment and always wants to have the last word. Boredom would be her death.

¹ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft, pp. 44-46

These characteristics described, although sometimes perceived as a little bit over exaggerated, are well recognized by many German managers when trying to conduct their business in France.

Their impression is that "*the French seem to have a different way of doing business than we do*"². This becomes clearer when considering the German character "Michel" who is described as someone who "*only thinks about his future achievements and actions*"¹.

Cultural differences concerning Hofstede's "femininity" vs. "masculinity" approach to life³, a different usage of language as a means of communication, as well as a past vs. a future orientation⁴ can be seen in those two caricatures.

The French already characterized as feminine in the image show a more feeling-led and sensitive approach to life, whereas the Germans with their masculine, work and task-oriented attitude strive rather for a materialistic career success. That is very odd to the French who seek enjoyment and a quality of life, rather than thinking too much about future events.

Herterich states that the French identify themselves with their language like no other culture. It is expression of many of their core cultural values and has thus barely undergone any change in the past.⁵

Language is an instrument to embroider the speech. Adored is the one who expresses himself in the most skilful way. Things are often said in high context⁶, just to make them sound better and for indicating an intellectual education. Language is playful and due to the historical orientation heavy emphasis is put on formalities.⁷ This can be very confusing for a German, who uses his language mainly in a much more rational and factual way.

Another dimension that can be seen in the caricature is the past/present orientation of the French versus the present/future orientation of the Germans. The "wistfulness when thinking about the days when she was young"¹ indicates the French historical fondness that can also be observed in their usage of language. Difficulties can arise when dealing with Germans who rather think

² Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft, p. 35

³ Hofstede in Hale, 2002, Intercultural Communication: p. 67

⁴ Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, as adapted by Lane and diStefano in Adler : pp. 20-21; 31-34

⁵ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft, p. 26

⁶ Hall. E.T. in Hale, 2002, Intercultural Communication, p. 52

⁷ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft, p. 38

about their "future achievements and actions"¹ and are thus sometimes impatient with the French resistance to change.

4. Cultural differences shown affecting the working life

The differences in the cultural dimensions already mentioned and other ones come up when looking more closely at the personnel politics and leadership styles that are dealt with in the book. French and German working attitudes are strongly determined by their cultural beliefs and can cause problems when ignored.

A main issue addressed in the book concerns leadership. Cooperative leadership such as exists in Germany would not find much resonance in France. Employees would doubt the boss's qualification and ask questions like "what is that for a boss? He asks us what to do".⁸ This reflects Hofstede's dimension of a high power distance work relationship.⁹ People in France work in a very hierarchical system. "It is taken as something totally natural that the boss exerts control. He has to lead! He must have authority and stick to the given forms."¹⁰ This dimension also coincides with Trompenaars' dimension of a high uncertainty avoidance.¹¹ "We regularly see French employees shrink back from taking over responsibility".¹² When conducting business in France "it is of prime importance to give clear instructions and directives about tasks, company goals and their competences (...). The employee in France won't be insulted if one tells him what to do, on the contrary!"¹³ But attention needs to be given. When trying to correspond to the boss image required by the French people one has to bear in mind not just representing authority but also to bringing in a personal relationship that is very important to the French. "Even leading employees needs from time to time the reinforcing personal contact of

⁸ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft, p. 86

⁹ Hofstede in Hale, 2002, Intercultural Communication: p. 64

¹⁰ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft, p. 86

¹¹ Hofstede in Hale, 2002, Intercultural Communication: p. 65

¹² Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft, p. 84

¹³ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft, p. 107

their boss".¹⁴ There we can see the particularistic approach to life and other people that was described in Trompenaars models.¹⁵ "When people feel forced by a disliked boss they respond with disinclination to work".¹⁶

Another difficulty often faced by Germans can be people's reaction and excuses to mistakes. People are often using their skillful management of the language when trying to find a way out. Also "always present is the gesture of shrugging their shoulder and the open hands directed to the sky indicating that it would be not (...) [their] own fault."¹⁷ The difference in French employees behavior can be seen in a stronger ascription orientation where people believe in having low power in changing outcomes.¹⁸

The particularistic dimension already mentioned also needs to be respected when deciding on a companies hiring politics. German hiring is mainly based on people's qualifications and professional background. In France however employment also takes into account the applicants character. "The applicant has to be seen as a whole, comprising his spirit, mind and soul. "¹⁹

5. Conclusion

Klaus Herterichs book represents a very complete picture of France dealing with various matters that can influence the business between German and French enterprises. In his descriptions he shows passion to detail that makes the reader better visualize and understand the book. He also provides his reader with a useful amount of French vocabulary and expressions concerning names of institutions, acronyms, business legal statuses and others that can be helpful when conducting his own business in France. Furthermore the book shows a good structure and is interesting to read.

With a view to the cultural dimensions dealt with in the book, it can be said that it shows many. Even though Herterich focuses in a large part of his book on the evaluation of some more "practical" and tangible differences that

¹⁴ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft, p. 87

¹⁵ Trompenaars in Hale, 2002, Managing Cultural Diversity: p. 18

¹⁶ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft: p. 83

¹⁷ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft: p. 84

¹⁸ Trompenaars in Hale, 2002, Managing Cultural Diversity: p. 23

¹⁹ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft: p. 105

are present in the two countries such as law issues and other things that were mentioned in the beginning, he certainly shows a strong awareness of the cultural differences existing between the two countries. Through describing both behaviors he raises the readers awareness of his own and the foreign cultural values. The checklist that he provides to the reader at the end of the book can be seen as a first step toward bridging the differences and consequently experiencing both business and cultural success. But Herterichs recognition of culture goes even further. About the differences he writes that "one should not regret them. On the contrary! Having people from different character brings a whole lot of opportunities. Each party can learn from the other one. We can feel it every day when working with French people."²⁰ When revealing to the reader the advantages of the cultural diversity, he gives him a good background knowledge to operate his own business with a synergetic cross-cultural managing style.

Word count : 1701

²⁰ Herterich K.W. 1989, das Frankreichgeschäft: p. 47

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