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**TO THE RECIPROCAL NATURE
OF INTERNATIONALIZATION STRATEGIES
FOR U.S. AND GERMAN COMPANIES**

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ABSTRACT

In our empirical research, we address internationalization to the U.S. and to Germany in a reciprocal setting. Analyzing data from 42 German subsidiaries in the U.S., and 40 American subsidiaries in Germany, we aim to identify patterns of behavior of successful and less successful subsidiaries in the U.S. and in Germany. The special focus is on whether ethnocentric or polycentric internationalization strategies become visible and which of these strategies increase performance in the foreign market. Independent from which strategy is communicated, it can be shown that subsidiaries from both countries are more successful when led according to ethnocentric ideas. In addition to this, the paper addresses the degree in which reciprocal strategies exist.

Keywords:

Intercultural Management, Internationalization Strategies, Cross-Cultural Management

INTRODUCTION

Expanding one's business to the U.S. and to Germany nowadays bears satisfactory economic perspectives, since the long-term stabilized and even booming American and European economies provide a promising environment for investors. Nevertheless, the existing number of bankruptcies shows that there is a failure risk. To become successful in competition is still a challenge which necessitates the combination of all possible efforts.

From previous research, it is well-known that the business environments in the United States of America and in Germany differ significantly (e.g., Hall & Hall, 1990). As the Global Performance Project research (Scholz & Stein, 1997) points out, successful companies deal with these different cultural settings by balancing the perceptions on cultural situations with specific patterns of reaction. They try to understand the local cultural driving forces and then define own behavioral strategies which allow them to anticipate cultural barriers earlier and avoid them better than their competitors.

Factors of success are defined as the elements of the vector of possible corporate actions which are positively related to corporate success. They can be studied according to the general contingency approach (e.g., Pugh & Hickson 1975): On one hand different internal and external situational factors influence the variables of organizational behavior and acting, i.e. structure, strategy, systems, and corporate culture. On the other hand, strategic choices on these behavioral variables influence performance.

In our research, we address internationalization to the U.S. and to Germany in a reciprocal setting: German subsidiaries in the U.S., and American subsidiaries in Germany. Thus, the main situational factor is the country in which the subsidiary is established. Our empirical study is based on the research tradition of configuration approach (e.g., Miller & Friesen, 1984), fit approach (e.g., Waterman, 1982; Scholz, 1987), and own empirical research related to the management of subsidiaries (e.g., Scholz, 1993). It aims to identify patterns of behavior of successful and less successful subsidiaries in the U.S. and in Germany.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Entering a foreign market force companies to find strategies and implement managerial decisions related to a new cultural setting. There, in most cases the rules of competition differ from those on the homebase market. Literature (e.g., Perlmutter, 1965) basically implies three alternatives in shaping international activities, (1) the ethnocentric approach, (2) the polycentric approach, and (3) the geocentric approach. Following the concept of strategic choice (e.g., Prahalad, 1976; Butler & Carney, 1986), there is evidence that companies chose for their subsidiaries not only the internationalization concept, but that the whole management task behind is influenced.

This study focuses on management which is observable in the U.S. and in Germany. Management can be described along three dimensions:

- the strategy, i.e. what management intends to do (Mintzberg, 1994: 23-25),
- the structure and systems, to be understood as the manifestations of acting according to the strategies, and
- the corporate culture, i.e. what the whole company perceives and interprets on what they are doing.

Following this frame, strategy covers the definition of the subsidiary's strategic orientation according to the competitive external environment. According to Porter (1980), internal rivalry, the bargaining power of suppliers, the bargaining power of buyers, the threat of

potential entrants and the threat of substitutes determine an organization's strategy. Based on these factors, generic strategies are distinguished in terms of cost leadership, differentiation and focus.

Concerning structure and systems, among others Culpan and Kucukemiroglu (1993) analyzed the U.S. management style (in contrast to the Japanese) in relation to six dimensions: supervisory style, decision making, communication pattern, control mechanism, interdepartmental relationships, and paternalistic orientation. They found out, that both management styles differ in these dimensions and that American managers emphasize supervisory style, decision making, and control mechanisms.

Examining cultural differences, researchers referred to a lot of factors showing differences between Germany and America, knowing that these national cultural patterns are as well reflected in corporate culture (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). In contrast to Germany, the U.S., as a melting pot society, shows a high geographic, social, and economic mobility (Hall & Hall, 1990: 35-84). The national USA culture is characterized by a high degree of individualism (Hofstede, 1980), and a strong future orientation (Trompenaars, 1993). The main factor of national integration, constituting the acceptance of a person as member of the American society, is the so-called Americanism: As a shared ideology it is a combination of exceptionalism, independence, egalitarianism, pragmatism, and religiousness (Wasser, 1996). These factors are strongly reflected in the socio-political system, by the emphasis on action, and an orientation towards performance. At the same time, however, a high degree of formalization and bureaucracy gives stability to the national system which allows for many degrees of freedom.

In Germany, a low power distance index (Hofstede, 1980) meets a high degree of universalism (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993) and a relatively low individualism (Hofstede, 1980). Traditionally, German business success is attributed to worker participation in economic affairs, long term employment, and loyalty towards the company (Mueller & Purcell, 1992: 25). In German psychology, one can find attributes like stubborn, persistent, often arrogant, but also prompt, precise, cleanly, and orderly. Their friendships seem to be less superficial as in the U.S. In Germany, business does not enjoy such a high status as in the U.S. and even business success partly has a negative image.

The paper assumes that managers of subsidiaries in foreign countries have to understand exactly "how the country works" to be able to reach a fit between the corporate strategies and the situational environment. Thus, it puts the question which factors of success German

subsidiaries in the U.S. and American subsidiaries in Germany develop in order to enter the foreign markets.

METHODOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

We concentrate in our research on two fields of analysis: First, we want to describe the similarities and differences in acting in their local environments between American and German subsidiaries. Second, we want to predict their success, dependent on selected behavioral variables.

Descriptive Focus.

The first set of hypotheses concentrates on the descriptive analysis. As can be observed in annual reports of German multinational corporations and in strategy statements, these corporations perceive themselves as being to a high degree globalized. This would imply that they establish decentralized international decision structures like the transnational network and the lead country concept (Barlett & Ghoshal, 1989). Additionally, Germany as a relatively smaller country with a lack of own mineral resources is extremely dependent on international cooperation and trade. Thus, it can be expected that German subsidiaries follow a polycentric proceeding for internationalization, focusing on local American market strategies and also adapting to dominant cultures like the American..

H1: German subsidiaries in the U.S. behave according to the polycentric internationalization concept, focussing on American management in respect to
(a) strategy,
(b) structure and systems,
(c) corporate culture.

In contrast to that, there is theoretical evidence that American parent companies seem to calculate as follows: The U.S. is a large country in comparison to Germany or even Europe. Being able to work within the U.S. based on one single market strategy, an ethnocentric proceeding based on the same market strategy should work for internationalization as well. The same would hold true for managerial structures and systems, so that there would at last be no need not to stick to the American corporate culture.

H2: American subsidiaries in Germany behave according to the ethnocentric internationalization concept, focussing on American management in respect to

- (a) strategy,*
- (b) structure and systems,*
- (c) corporate culture.*

For both hypotheses, focussing on American management (in contrast to the German) means (a) that there is less preference expected for market analyses (Pohl & Nawroth, 1994: 174) and advanced quality orientation in the American management system as in the German. Concerning (b), to think in short-term intervals and use short-term planning and controlling instruments (Pohl & Nawroth, 1994: 57), to work with improvization (Hammond & Morrison, 1996: 233-264), and to focus on personal improvement instead of process improvement (Hammond & Morrison, 1996: 305). Concerning (c), to be individually oriented, and to be able to bear failures and new trials instead of a "zero defects" policy.

Prescriptive Focus.

The following set of hypotheses link these specific internationalization concepts to the success. We intend to find out which subsidiaries are successful at last – those adapting to foreign management or those not adapting.

H3: German subsidiaries in the U.S., which behave according to the polycentric internationalization concept, focussing on American management in respect to

- (a) strategy,*
- (b) structure and systems,*
- (c) corporate culture,*

are more successful than those acting different.

H4: American subsidiaries in Germany, which behave according to the ethnocentric internationalization concept, focussing on American management in respect to

(a) strategy,

(b) structure and systems,

(c) corporate culture,

are more successful than those acting different.

To collect data for the study, from September to October 1994 in-depth-interviews between one and four hours length were conducted in German subsidiaries in the U.S. (in the states of New York and New Jersey) as well as in American subsidiaries in Germany (in the states of Saarland, Rhineland-Palatine, Northrhine-Westfalia, Hessen, and Baden-Wurttemberg) without any specific focus on selected industries. The unit of analysis was the subsidiary, defined as being at least 75 % owned by its parent company and having at least 20 employees. The interviewees were members of the top management level (76,5%), most of them heads of the subsidiary, or of the lower management (23,5%). They answered a standardized 18 page questionnaire which had been translated and re-translated before to ensure intercultural applicability and which had been pre-tested.

The sample consists of 82 subsidiaries of which 42 are German subsidiaries in the U.S. and 40 American subsidiaries in Germany. Table 1 gives an overview about the sample description in respect to age, foundation dates, firm size, and type of industry.

TABLE 1
Sample Description

		German subsidiaries in the U.S.			American subsidiaries in Germany		
		mean or %	std.	n	mean or %	std.	n
Age of subsidiary		26.3	23.1	40	24.9	12.8	40
Established as	Foundation	89.7%		26	57.1%		16
	M&A	10.3%		3	42.9%		12
Number of employees 1994		1082	3482	41	1157	4412	39
Type of industry	Mechanical engineering/ E-Technics	16.7%		7	30.0%		12
	Wholesale	16.7%		7	32.5%		13
	Banks	16.7%		7	12.5%		5
	Chemistry/Pharmacy	9.5%		4	7.5%		3
	Others	40.4%		17	17.5%		7

The respondents were asked to answer to a broad range of organizational items representing the external and internal environment of the organization, the structure, strategy, processes, and corporate culture. They responded on a Likert type scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very great extent), ranked items (on a scale from 1 to 8), and answered open questions.

Performance was measured by organizational effectiveness variables based on objective measures describing the actual changes of performance indicators as well as on subjective measures which focus on the personal perceptions of the interviewees (Cameron & Whetten, 1983; Scholz, 1992).

The statistical analysis of the data is supported by the SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics, means and frequencies have been computed to describe the subsidiaries in the two countries. ANOVA procedures were used to compare the subsidiaries with respect to the relevant variables. In order to get an insight into the relationships among the variables, particularly the relevance of the variables to organizational effectiveness, cross-tabulations and product-moment correlations have been calculated. The data analysis based on the questionnaire was completed by a deeper analysis of the interview transcripts; thus a triangulation of the data could be provided.

RESULTS

Descriptive Focus.

The first results concentrate on the hypotheses 1 and 2, describing the chosen management of the subsidiaries.

Strategy. The ranking of the most important competitive factors gives a picture about the chosen strategies (table 2). German subsidiaries in the U.S. first focus on advertising and communication, then on low prices, then on variety of products and services. American subsidiaries in Germany first focus on advertising and communication, then on variety of products and services, then on low prices. Obviously, there is no big difference concerning the targeted competitive factors. Moreover, all these factors seem to be closer related to individual customers (American individualism orientation) than to product features (German quality orientation). By these findings, hypotheses 1(a) and 2(a) are not supported.

TABLE 2
Competitive Factors

		German subsidiaries in the U.S.			American subsidiaries in Germany		
		mean	std.	n	mean	std.	n
What are your most important competitive factors? 1 - most appropriate 8 - least appropriate	Low prices	3.62	2.82	26	3.46	2.38	37
	Fast distribution of products and services	5.19	1.98	26	4.92	1.86	37
	Outstanding quality of products and services	6.65	1.38	26	6.68	1.40	37
	Customer support after sales and delivery	4.38	1.72	26	5.19	1.76	37
	Satisfying specific consumer-needs	5.31	2.17	26	6.11	2.01	37
	Advertising and communication	2.92	2.24	26	2.41	1.42	37
	Variety of products and services	3.81	1.55	26	3.41	1.80	37
	Ability to develop new products	4.12	2.18	26	3.84	2.05	37

Structure and Systems. An indicator for how management strategies are implemented in the subsidiary's structure and systems is the person of the managing director, and in detail the question whether she or he is planned to be automatically German or American. Looking at table 3, we do not see a statistically significant difference between both groups of subsidiaries, but a weak trend that German subsidiaries in the U.S. chose Americans (which would be the polycentric approach) and American subsidiaries in Germany chose Germans (which also would be the polycentric approach).

TABLE 3
Management Nationality

		German subsidiaries in the U.S.		American subsidiaries in Germany		F Ratio
		%	n	%	n	
Is it a standard that your company hire/ employs as managing director for your subsidiary:	American	21.4	6	2.6	1	0.61
	German	10.7	3	61.5	24	
	No standard	67.9	19	35.9	14	
		100.0	28	100.0	39	

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Taking career development, this is a structural system which could be related to the person versus process question. Table 5 shows the differences which are again not too clear-cut. In subsidiaries of a multinational corporation, it seems logical that career steps depend on experience especially in the international environment. German subsidiaries in the U.S. appreciate job experience significantly stronger, American subsidiaries in Germany prefer foreign experience.

Summing up these structure and system variables, the hypotheses 1(b) and 2(b) could not be supported.

TABLE 5
Career Development

	German subsidiaries in the U.S.			American subsidiaries in Germany			t-value
	Mean	std.	n	mean	std.	n	
When you decide about the future career development of an employee, how important are the following criteria? (1 -- to 5 ++)							
Job experience	4.69	0.48	16	4.05	1.18	38	2.80 **
Mobility	3.62	1.09	16	3.56	1.25	39	0.17
Education	3.80	1.01	15	3.64	1.01	39	0.52
Seniority	2.88	0.98	15	2.66	1.36	38	-0.84
Residence in a foreign country	2.00	1.18	14	3.21	1.26	38	-3.13 **

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Corporate Culture. Concerning the overall self-image of the subsidiaries, we asked whether the subsidiaries perceive themselves as being American or German. Table 6 shows the results: The German subsidiaries in the U.S. mainly feel German, which clearly contradicts hypothesis 1(c). The American subsidiaries in Germany, however, mainly feel American, which supports hypothesis 2(c).

TABLE 6
Cultural Self-Perception

		German subsidiaries in the U.S.		American subsidiaries in Germany		F Ratio
		%	n	%	n	
Do you perceive your company as being American or German?	American	7.7	2	57.7	15	33.38 ***
	Equal	3.8	1	19.2	5	
	German	88.5	23	23.1	6	
		100.0	26	100.0	26	

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

In a further question, we asked the interviewees to evaluate about 70 items on cultural perceptions. We aggregated those items, which resulted in 16 cultural scales. Table 7 shows the distribution. Significant differences can be only seen in respect to few cultural orientations. In the direct comparison to the American subsidiaries in Germany, the German subsidiaries in the U.S. are less concentrating on performance, cost, innovation, quality, technology, and customer orientation. These cultural orientations cannot be attributed to one

national management system alone, so that again, hypothesis 1(c) and 2(c) could not be clearly supported.

TABLE 7
Cultural Scales

Cultural orientation (1-- to 5++)	German subsidiaries in the U.S.			American subsidiaries in Germany			t-value
	Mean	std.	n	mean	std.	n	
Loyalty	3.68	0.74	41	3.82	0.51	39	-0.95
Bureacracy	2.64	0.59	40	2.49	0.48	39	1.22
Result	3.88	0.71	40	3.88	0.72	39	0.00
Performance	3.93	0.64	41	4.20	0.47	39	-2.19 *
Short-term	3.08	0.65	41	3.35	0.64	39	-1.88
Speed	3.52	0.81	40	3.5	0.54	39	0.15
Cost	3.43	0.7	40	3.87	0.62	39	-2.92 **
Innovation	3.15	0.55	40	3.51	0.5	39	-2.92 **
Quality	4.15	0.57	40	4.65	0.4	39	-4.51 ***
Technology	3.2	0.98	39	3.62	0.77	39	-2.10 *
Customer	3.84	0.65	40	4.17	0.59	39	-2.39 *
Risk	2.86	.69	40	2.88	.68	39	-0.18
Communication	3.66	0.61	40	3.74	0.61	39	-0.61
Employees	3.37	0.56	40	3.55	0.59	39	-1.33
Team	4.47	0.75	40	4.74	0.5	39	-1.88
Systems	3.96	0.76	41	4.39	0.64	38	-2.78

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Summing up the results of the descriptive focus, in the findings on strategy and structure/systems, there is no definite support or contradiction to the hypotheses 1 and 2 about both German and American subsidiaries behaving according to American management. Only from one question on cultural perception, it can be seen that hypothesis 1(c) (German subsidiaries in the U.S. behave according to the polycentric internationalization concept) is contradicted and hypothesis 2(c) (American subsidiaries in Germany behave according to the ethnocentric internationalization concept) is supported.

Prescriptive Focus.

Testing the hypotheses 3 and 4 on the success of the subsidiaries, we measure performance by an aggregated variable. It combines the answers of two questions: The interviewees first had to state to what extent their organizational targets of 1993 and 1994 have been achieved, and second, their subjective evaluation of the subsidiary's performance in comparison to competition.

Strategy. Regarding the results presented in table 8, we see that there are no special competitive factors related to success, neither for German nor for American subsidiaries. Only for German subsidiaries in the U.S., age of a subsidiary matters. However, age is

primarily not a strategy but an outcome of management. All in all, hypothesis 3(a) and 4(a) both are not supported.

Structure and Systems. Again, almost none of the observed variables in this managerial field significantly lead to success. Astonishingly, for German subsidiaries in the U.S., career development linked to seniority has a positive effect on performance. Seniority in Germany is linked with loyalty and the feeling belonging to a company and is part of the national cultural core. Thus, it seems that German subsidiaries by not giving up this principle abroad maintain and strengthen success. Hypothesis 3(b) is clearly contradicted, hypothesis 4(b) could not be supported.

Corporate Culture. For German subsidiaries in the U.S., the typical German attribute of quality orientation shows the highest significant relationship to success. Again, contrary to hypothesis 3(c), German subsidiaries in the U.S. are even more successful when following German-like management patterns.

For American subsidiaries in Germany, only the generally applicable performance orientation contributes significantly to success. The overall evidence is not too strong, but, however, hypothesis 4(c) is not supported by these findings either: American subsidiaries in Germany ethnocentrically behaving according to American management are not evidently more successful than those behaving different.

TABLE 8
Effectiveness Correlations

		German subsidiaries in the U.S. corr.	American subsidiaries in Germany corr.	All subsidiaries corr.
Age of subsidiary		.3207 *	.2017	.2899 *
Number of employees	1994	-.0318	.0422	-.0869
Competitive factors	Low prices	.0960	-.0375	.0318
	Fast distribution of products and services	-.2929	-.0986	-.1951
	Outstanding quality of products and services	.1001	.1853	.1429
	Customer support after sales and delivery	-.1366	.1053	-.0046
	Satisfying specific consumer-needs	.1089	.0485	.0811
	Advertising and communication	.0118	-.2041	-.0778
	Variety of products and services	.3006	.0083	.1314
	Ability to develop new products	-.1479	.0032	-.0728
Career development	Job experience	-.2324	.0245	.0130
	Mobility	.2943	-.1428	-.0001
	Education	.2870	.1378	.1907
	Seniority	.5490 *	-.1146	.0514
	Residence in a foreign country	.0580	-.1004	-.1124
Cultural self-perception	American → German	-.0215	-.2387	.0139
Cultural orientation	Loyalty	.3127	-.1222	.1833
	Bureacracy	.1327	.1488	.1422
	Result	.1600	.1481	.1458
	Performance	.0060	.4393 **	.1130
	Short-term	-.2776	.0416	-.1674
	Speed	-.0089	.1229	.0270
	Cost	-.1722	.0514	-.1142
	Innovation	.1635	.0694	.0941
	Quality	.4728 **	.1725	.2924 **
	Technology	.0731	.1012	.0578
	Customer	.1169	-.0592	.0304
	Risk	.1778	-.1652	.0500
	Communication	.2958	-.1233	.1236
	Employees	.1286	.1397	.1135
	Team	.1065	.0694	.0759
	Systems	.2972	.1025	.1929

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

DISCUSSION

What evolves out of these findings is that German and American multinational corporations and their subsidiaries follow completely different patterns in gaining success.

Although they communicate it, German subsidiaries in the U.S. obviously do not behave remarkably polycentrically, they do not completely adapt to American management. And it can be seen that they are even more successful when they follow German management recipes.

American subsidiaries in Germany, in comparison, behave more evidently according to their ethnocentrically transferred American management, but while they do so, they do not significantly increase their success.

This leads to the presumption that in both directions of internationalization, ethnocentric concepts are chosen. While German parent companies do not reveal that, American parent companies behave more openly. Obviously the German strategy to be polycentric only at the surface and concentrate on the home country's core competences which are brought along, might be a successful combination. However, the American strategy to pronounce their ethnocentrism and behave accordingly to it might be dangerous, because it hides that skills for a more sensitive management strategy in the subsidiary still have to be developed.

In general, in management focussing on new foreign markets, it is not enough to teach the managers that there are differences. This is a piece of knowledge every entrepreneur already knows. But, the managers have to understand the exact qualities of differences. Instead of doing comparisons of national cultural artifacts, it would be more appropriate to collect knowledge about the effects of specific management behaviors, even of specific intra-industry reactions to that sort of behaviors. Managers have to know in detail how their own business will be influenced through the local environment.

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