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Poles and Germans: An international business relationship

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we aim to identify and explain how Polish managers, in the Polish affiliates of German companies, view their German partners. The theoretical background for this article comes from the field of social anthropology. The empirical data were collected during face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with executives in Poland. The findings presented here are the result of qualitative analysis. We argue that the Polish/German contrast, as perceived by Polish managers, bears a strong resemblance to other core/periphery ethnic relationships in Europe. Parallels are drawn from the British Isles. We argue that the characterizations discussed play an important role in allowing managers to understand their business roles and capabilities within an international business context. A major shortcoming in international business research is the poor understanding of these ingrained attitudes. Our study aims to fill this gap.

KEYWORDS

culture ▪ ethnic oppositions ▪ managerial perceptions ▪ Poles and Germans

The fall of the so-called 'iron curtain' created new opportunities for diverse business cooperation, through the opening of new markets in eastern and central European countries. Among these emerging markets, Poland has been widely recognized by foreign investors as a desirable location. The EU states, and Germany in particular, have been the natural sources of investors in these

countries. This international business activity between western and eastern European countries implies bringing people and corporations from these countries into direct contact. It also means that such international cooperations are amalgamations of different languages, cultures, customs, business practices and perceptions of one another.

A predominant structure within which international business scholars has dealt with cultural differences has been the work of Hofstede (1980). In this article, we propose a different approach. We explore how a framework, drawn from social anthropology, might contribute to a better understanding of the complexities of interaction that take place during a meeting of different national cultures in international business cooperations. We identify and explain the perceptions of Polish executives towards their German colleagues in an international business context, and put these in an appropriate historical and theoretical context. We show how managers create and interpret frameworks within which they can understand one another, and also explain their failures of understanding. In this article, we do not test for the effect of these perceptions or differences between them, on the success of international business ventures. We employ interview data for theory development. This theory-building exercise is conducive to further empirical testing and refinement.

'Teutons' and 'Slavs'[1]

Poland and Germany have a mixed and often difficult history of conflict and cooperation. Over the centuries, the inhabitants of these two neighbouring countries have fought one another in numerous wars, lived in the same towns and villages, and intermarried.

Looking at the history of Polish–German relations, one can generally observe that there has been an imbalance of power between the two nations, to the advantage of the Germans. The Germans have been a step ahead of the Slavs, since the beginning of Polish statehood (i.e. it was the Germans who took Christianity to the Poles, which was a formal system of rectitude, written and recorded, always being a force giving powers of definition to those that wielded it). Furthermore, popular thought in central Europe often produces images of civilization in the west (where Germany is the west), which progressively dissipates towards the east. One element of 'civilization' which has given substance to this idea, is 'modern' technology. In general, technology transfer in central and eastern Europe has been from west to east, and has often been visibly slow and difficult, to the frustration of policy-makers and observers (Landes, 1998; Wandycz, 1974).

The imbalance of power between the two nations has been strongly visible in both German and Polish popular thought of the past and present. There is no space in this article to discuss in detail the popular thought of a more distant past (for a wealth of examples see Breyer, 1955; Burleigh, 1988; Cavanna, 1979; Hagen, 1980; Hingley, 1977; Landes, 1998; Wandycz, 1974) therefore we focus here on its recent examples.

In 19th-century Poland (divided between Prussian, Russian and Austrian sectors), the stereotype of a 'German enemy' was created, and it was reflected in a popular saying: 'Jak świat światem, tak Niemiec Polakowi nie będzie bratem' ['As long as the world exists a German will never be a brother to a Pole'] (Chałasiński, 1935; Hagen, 1980; Wandycz, 1974). In Germany, a stereotype of a poor, inferior, violent and feckless Pole was present (in other words 'disorderly' and 'lawless'), and contrasted with an image of a wealthy, proud, diligent and well-looked-after by the state German (one can also say 'orderly' and 'rule governed'). These stereotypical images were used for example in the referendum leaflet from 1921 (Figure 1).

The extent to which these old and well-established ideas still exist in the world of 2004 is controversial and problematic. The problem is a sensitive one, because the ethnic characterizations of popular discourse grew, in the 20th century and in Germany, into racial and would-be scientific characterizations whose basis and intent became, for the post-war world, something like the quintessence of evil. In very sincere reparation, since 1945 Germany has made a sustained and profound attempt to renounce its Nazi past, and recreate itself as a model member of the community of nations. It is potentially controversial, therefore, to seem to argue that there is, in terms of interethnic perception, any continuity between the Germany of the 1930s, and the Germany of the early 21st century. Although the matter is complex, we can make some suggestion of continuity of opinion.

Some of the structures of opposition can be built into the very different post-war experiences of (west) Germany and Poland. (West) Germany experienced the post-war miracle, a period of spectacular economic growth, and the restoration of prosperity and civil society. Poland, by contrast, experienced 45 years of central planning, with the gradual revelation of the inherent weaknesses of this vast experiment. The Polish economy, and the entire consumer and industrial fabric grew, in many obvious respects, increasingly ramshackle over this period.

The ideas take vernacular rather than official form in the most recent period. According to Krzemiński (2002), for example, Polish/German prejudices are most visible in humour and caricature. These

Figure 1 Unconditional dichotomy of German and Polish character
Adapted from Chałasiński (1935), *Antagonizm Polsko-Niemiecki w osadzie fabrycznej 'kopalnia' na górnym ślasku*. Studium socjologiczne Skład Główny: Sp. Akc. Dom Książki Polskiej w Warszawie, pp. 61–2.

reflect long-standing symbols and patterns, with wealthy Germans contrasted with impoverished Poles, powerful Germany contrasted with weak Poland, and so on. There is a pattern of opposition of images, where the one is opposed to the other, does not share in the other, and is permanently different from the other.

In a typical German joke, a Pole often appears as weak, poor, badly organized, ill-mannered, stupid, dirty, drunken, cunning and thieving. This stereotypical Pole then, through these defects, causes damage, grief and amusement to the good-natured, diligent, well-organized, sober, orderly and honest German (Cywiński, 1997; Krzemiński, 2002). Furthermore, 'Nothing can be associated worse in Germany than words starting from the prefix '*Ost-*' (East) as it symbolizes 'backwardness, despotism, barbarity and dullness' (Cywiński, 2001). Apart from jokes about Poles, the term 'Polnische Wirtschaft' is still commonly used in Germany. It is used to express a sense that productive and rational activity was in short supply on the Polish side of the Polish/German divide (Krzemiński, 2002; Wilczyński, 1998). The phrase has been translated as follows: 'Polska gospodarka = bałagan', 'Polish economy = mess' (Krzemiński, 2002).

In Polish humour, as argued by Krzemiński (2002), a German is traditionally portrayed as an arrogant invader, an exploiter and a warmonger. Świerczyńska (1996) adds a Polish proverb which goes: 'In the house of a Pole, even a German will feed well; in the house of a German, even a dog will starve' ('Przy Polaku i Niemiec sie pożywi, a przy Niemcu ani pies'). There are also perceptions in Poland that Germans are entrepreneurial and punctual, in other words that they posses all the features that make 'German Order' ('Deutsche Ordnung') (Strojny, 1999). According to Krzemiński (2002), the Polish anti-German stereotypes seem to encompass 1000 years of Polish/German interaction.

The Pole suffers from the Germans, but also turns the tables on the German, suffering violation, but at the same time showing creativity and cunning in adversity (Krzemiński, 2002). According to Świerczyńska (1996) Poles also picture themselves as a brave, hospitable nation that displays megalomaniac tendencies, and is excessive in its love of food and drink. These images will make more sense after we have discussed a general theoretical framework for understanding ethnic oppositions of this kind. Świerczyńska (1996) also notes that the Poles not only despise their neighbours to the west, but admire them and are fascinated by them. This admiration goes along with a general Polish tendency to agree with the Germans that civilization declines as you travel to the east; but of course, for the Poles, they themselves are the west, and the inferior easterners are the Russians.

Intergroup perceptions

The starting point for our analysis is the approach adopted in Chapman (1992a). This work concerned the way in which the many differences between centre and periphery were expressed in terms of ethnic oppositions – expressed in imagery, metaphor, writing and action. The particular ethnic group on which this earlier study focused were the Celts. The Celts were shown to have grown out of the activities and perceptions first of the ancient world (the Greeks in contact with their northern barbarian neighbours, the Romans in contact with the Gauls and the Britons), and then of medieval and modern Europe (as the centralizing polities of England and France came into contact with the Celtic-speaking peoples of the modern period – the Scots, Irish, Welsh, Cornish and Bretons). In this article we pursue this idea, in relation to the Germanic/Slavonic contrast, and more specifically to the German/Polish contrast.

The academic field of international business studies draws most of its intellectual inspiration from economics. It has been increasingly recognized, however, that cultural differences play an important role in shaping how international business is conducted, and economics is not an obvious place to look for inspiration in dealing with them. As a result, international business scholars have looked outside economics, and the social science which has seemed readiest to hand, has been social psychology in its various forms. Social anthropology, by contrast, has played little part in the development of business and management studies, and has been largely ignored by international business studies as well (Buckley & Chapman, 1996; Chapman, 1996/7). This means that there is at least a possibility that social anthropology contains insights which are relevant to the fields of cross-cultural management and international business studies, but which have not been exploited as such.

In order to try to document in brief the relative nature and importance of the contributions from social psychology and social anthropology, we can perhaps go to the influential work of Haire et al. (1966: v) who said:

> We are psychologists, and we tend to approach problems and do research as psychologists do. In this case, it has meant, methodologically, the conviction that only the most precise and quantifiable knowledge possible is knowledge in the proper sense.

According to Roberts (1970: 327):

> The point of view taken here is necessarily psychological. The author's biases determine the kinds of questions covered and the methodological strategies discussed.

We can say, then, that by 1970, social psychology was closely tied to cross-cultural organizational and management studies. The subject of social anthropology, in 1970, was in many respects in high intellectual flood (Ardener, 1985), but its influence on business and management studies was slight. We have a clear illustration from the *Journal of International Business Studies*, from a special edition of 1983 concerned with cross-cultural issues. Here, citations of social psychologists are routine; citations of social anthropologists are not (see Adler, 1983; Neghandi, 1983; Sekaran, 1983). Certainly, business and management studies have moved towards greater acceptance of methodological and theoretical pluralism, but the effects of this on international business studies have not yet been great. Boyacigiller and Adler (1991), and Roberts and Boyacigiller (1984), provide interesting staging posts in the gradual development towards wider possibilities (Chapman, 1996/7).

Special mention needs to be made here of the work of Geert Hofstede, who provided a shorthand for dealing with the great variety of cultural difference in the world. When the study of international business seemed to require the study of culture, Hofstede's work was there to hand, easy to grasp, full of insight, comprehensive as to the world and seductively rich in numbers. The huge influence of Hofstede's work has contributed to maintaining social psychology as the predominant social scientific influence within cross-cultural and international business and management studies.

We would argue that social psychology has been heavily used in business studies, because both have a strong tendency to look for positivist, objectivist and scientific routes to the generation of knowledge (Buckley & Chapman, 1997a, 1997b). This philosophical congruence between social psychology and business studies has helped give to social psychology a strong voice in the field. Social anthropology is less commonly drawn upon, for the same reasons.

What does social anthropology bring that is different? We can perhaps try to summarize the differences between social psychology and social anthropology through a series of familiar oppositions:

Social psychology	Social anthropology
Quantitative	Qualitative
Individualist	Social
Objectivist	Interpretive
Behaviourist	Language and meaning-based
Observer-defined categories	Subject-defined categories
Analytic	Holistic

We acknowledge that these are caricatures rather than full characterizations. Both subjects contain a complex variety of approach. Behind

each of the oppositions is a howl of epistemological and methodological argument. It may seem strange that *social* psychology should be characterized as being intrinsically individualist, but it is true that social psychology is born out of individualist psychology, and the individual is still strong in its thinking. Giles (1979: 2) says 'social psychology is the study of an individual's behaviour in his or her social context'. This origin in individualism can be regarded as a strength, but it does mean, among other things, that social psychology is strongly marked by the positivism and objectivism characteristic of individualist psychology in North American academia. A sympathetic study of perceptions as lived and believed, in a holistic context, which is what this article is attempting, is not necessarily assisted by individualism and positivism.

The oppositions between 'objectivist' and 'interpretive' approaches, and between 'behaviourist' and 'language- and meaning-based' approaches, are also important here. Because social psychology grew out of a theory of *observation*, its interest in language and meaning was belated, and remains somewhat peripheral (Chapman, 1992c; Edwards, 1985; Giles & St Clair, 1979). This partly relates to the individualism discussed earlier – language is inescapably a *social* phenomenon, and so too are the many language-like meaning systems with which language co-exists. Analysis of social units bigger than the individual was again built into social anthropology from the start. It is also no accident that it was the interaction between linguistic and social classifications which led to the theoretical literature upon which this article is based, from Durkheim and Saussure, through Mauss and Levi-Strauss, to Oxford social anthropology in the 1970s and 1980s (Edwin Ardener was a particular inspiration, and his summary of these issues is still unsurpassed).

This article is about how two nationally defined groups perceive and interact with one another. Social psychology has clearly made the understanding of groups into a part of the psychological enterprise, and as such has had much of interest to say about issues of intergroup perception and interaction (Giles, 1977). There is undoubtedly a convergence of interest, as between anthropologists interested in language and ethnicity (Tonkin et al., 1989) and social psychologists interested in intergroup interactions (from Tajfel, 1981, through to the many publications on ethnicity and nationality in, for example, recent issues of the *Journal of Social Psychology* and the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*; e.g. McAndrew et al., 2000). Social psychology has made much of power imbalances in intergroup perception and self-perception, and literature of this kind is clearly relevant to the issues which are the concern of this article. Perhaps it would be helpful to say that social psychologists tend to take a power

imbalance, or an economic imbalance, as an objective given, and then study how individuals in groups react to these imbalances. Our approach here is somewhat different, and this difference is consistent with the overall difference in approach between social psychology and social anthropology which we have tried to sketch. Here, we look at the construction of systems of meaning and interpretation, through which two groups construct and construe a power imbalance, using both material and ideational elements.

The ideas drawn upon here come from the literature on structural, semantic and symbolic anthropology (see Ardener, 1971; Crick, 1976; Douglas, 1966; Evans-Pritchard, 1956; Leach, 1961; Levi-Strauss, 1962; Parkin, 1982). The application of these ideas to ethnic definition and self-definition is fairly well established (e.g. Ardener, 1972; Chapman, 1992b; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985; Tonkin et al., 1989).

It is helpful to review the earlier work relevant to this article. The Celts are typically recorded in history from the perspective of other people (Chapman, 1992a). All peoples have a strong tendency to characterize themselves as orderly, civilized and properly human, and to regard other, surrounding peoples as failing to achieve these virtues, often spectacularly. Any cultural differences can be used as material for the construction of differences in this domain – notable, however, are issues to do with food preparation and diet, dress, sexuality and kinship, conventions of non-verbal communication, and so on. Oppositions constructed from material of this kind have an inherent moral equality: group A thinks harsh things of group B, and group B thinks equally harsh things of group A (both, for example, in all likelihood think of the other as 'unruly', to suggest only one of the more central metaphors). In many cases, however, the historiographical record is strongly biased towards one series of accounts rather than the other. This is certainly the case with the Roman/Celtic and English/Celtic oppositions. When we inspect the record, we find a picture of the Celts constructed as the 'other' of those doing the recording (Figure 2).[2]

The 'self' that is doing the writing is the one whose picture is recorded. The picture of the 'other' constructed through this series of oppositions is almost entirely negative. Another turn in the argument is required for completeness.

With the intellectual revolution that we call romanticism, the entire system of oppositions listed in Figure 2 underwent a subtle metamorphosis. What I have called the 'centre' continued to characterize itself by the left-hand column, and the 'periphery' by the right-hand column; but the balance of virtue shifted. Where previously goodness had resided in the left margin, romanticism shifted it to the right. As it did so, new adjectives appear that,

Self	:	Other
Rule	:	Disrule (absence of rule)
Order	:	Disorder
Culture	:	Nature
Human	:	Animal
Controlled	:	Uncontrolled
Lawful	:	Lawless
Clean	:	Dirty
Reason	:	Unreason
Intellect	:	Emotion
Constant	:	Inconstant
Modern	:	Backward
Progressive	:	Regressive
Individual	:	Group
Conscientious	:	Irresponsible
Honest	:	Dishonest
Diligent	:	Lazy
Wealthy	:	Poor

Figure 2 Self/other – the basic oppositions
(Adapted from: Chapman, 1992a: 210–11.)

although expressing the same series of oppositions, also express the new moral valuation (Chapman, 1992a).

From this romantic reappraisal the earlier list (Figure 2) acquired a new series of glosses (Figure 3, the original oppositions have been placed in parenthesis).

The list in Figure 3, with glosses derived from the romantic reappraisal of primitive naturality, allows an entirely desirable picture to be drawn from the images of 'otherness', and casts an undesirable and dreary pall over the 'self'. It is from these ideas that most modern British people construct their idea of the modern Celts. It is important to note, however, that the 'other', although desirable, is still somebody else's construction; the 'self', dull or not, is still in the metaphorical driving seat.

Teutons and Slavs, Anglo-Saxons and Celts

In this article, we argue that because the model for cross-cultural perception is based upon core–periphery perceptions, it is relevant and useful in other similar situations, beyond the Anglo-Saxon/Celtic contrast. The important elements of the relationship between Germany and Poland (and between

Self	:	**Other**
Constraint (rule)	:	*Freedom (disrule, absence of rule)*
Predictable (order)	:	Unpredictable (disorder)
Artificial (human)	:	Natural (animal)
Urban (culture)	:	Rural (nature)
Reserved (controlled)	:	Impulsive (uncontrolled)
Formal (controlled)	:	Informal (uncontrolled)
Conventional (lawful)	:	Unconventional (lawless)
Sterile (clean)	:	Fertile (dirty)
Calculation (reason)	:	Imagination (unreason)
Measurement (intellect)	:	Passion (emotion)
Dull (constant)	:	Exciting (inconstant)
Alienation (individual)	:	Belonging (group)
Pedantic (conscientious)	:	Maverick (irresponsible)
Credulous (honest)	:	Smart (dishonest)
Fussy (diligent)	:	Care-free (lazy)
Overindulged (wealthy)	:	Humble (poor)

Figure 3 Self/other – the romantic reappraisal
(Adapted from: Chapman, 1992a: 212.)

Teutons and Slavs more generally) can be understood in these terms. In particular, we argue that we would expect Figures 2 and 3 to have strong resonance in the German/Polish contrast, where the 'self' (the left-hand column) is the German, and the 'other' (the right-hand column) is the Pole. We would expect Figure 2 to be applied readily by the Germans in the period before 1945, and only cautiously or apologetically since 1945. We would expect elements of Figure 3 to be applied by the Germans before 1945, and also subsequently. We would expect Figure 3 to be more appealing to Poles than Figure 2, but we would also expect Poles to be aware that a common German understanding of Poland is constructed through Figure 2. If we look back to the material presented in the first section of this article, under the heading 'Teutons and Slavs', these expectations can be generally demonstrated. The context of political sensitivity (and/or insensitivity) obviously plays an important role in what can and cannot easily be said.

Research method

The current study was conducted in 11 companies in different sectors in Poland. It was based on empirical data collected during 34 semi-structured,

face-to-face, in-depth interviews with managers in these companies. The inward investment agency of Poland, PAIZ (Polska Agencja Inwestycji Zagranicznych) collects data on inward investment, and publishes a list of major investors. These are defined as affiliates in which a foreign investment of at least one million US dollars is held. This list was taken as a universal estimate. At year end 1997, there were 134 affiliates of German parent firms in Poland. In order to render the research manageable, the population of 13 German foreign affiliates located in the western region[3] of Poland was selected and approached. Eleven firms agreed to participate in the research.

The respondents selected for the study were general managers from these foreign-affiliated Polish companies. The reason for selecting general managers was that these individuals should have the most extensive knowledge of the research topic and be comparable between firms. This choice can be supported by the biographical data collected during the interviews, according to which, all the interviewees had visited Germany at least once. Interviews were held initially with the general manager from each company, and then typically with the deputy general manager. Further respondents were identified by the first interviewees, i.e. employing a 'snowballing technique'. All of the interviewed managers were Polish.

Data were collected during face-to-face interviews with 34 general managers from companies in Poland. Although an interview guide was prepared for the interviews (Appendix), the objective of the research was to invite the managers to share their experiences of working in a company with German capital. Therefore, the specific questions varied across interviews (usually depending on the responses of the interviewees) and were asked so as to impose minimum constraints on potential topics of interest. This is in accordance with Vaara (2002). The following general themes were discussed during the interviews: motives for market entry, motives behind possible merger and acquisition activity, main advantages and main difficulties, level of competition in the industry, differences and similarities in culture, main characteristics at national and company level, exceptional events since entering the cooperation, advice to companies considering mergers and acquisitions activity. Following McCracken (1988), several techniques of constructing questions were applied in the interviews (e.g. 'grand tour', 'proactive', 'contrast' and 'category' questions). The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The study adopted a qualitative, interpretive methodological approach, and treated managerial perceptions as a focus of analysis. One of the reasons why this method was appropriate for the current study was that it was exploratory in nature. It aimed to identify Polish perceptions of German managers for which no suitable secondary data exist. Quantitative, questionnaire-based research could not be used in this case as the categories of

this study were not known. Furthermore, the qualitative, interpretive approach is argued to offer a more certain and precise understanding of the societies under investigation, from the point of view of those who are under study (D'Irbarne, 1996/7; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994).

Written up data were compared across interviews and companies, and analysed for common themes, stories and issues. This was achieved by multiple readings of the transcripts. The interviews were then colour-coded and a list of the main topics, themes and stories was developed. The texts from the interviews were then sorted according to these themes. The main themes were issues repeatedly mentioned by the interviewees, discussed by many of them or pointed out by executives as important. The attention of researchers was also directed to 'important absences', and the reasons behind them. The national and corporate qualities from this article were among the themes identified in that way. There are specialist software packages available on the market (e.g. QSR Nud*ist), but these do not support data in more than one language, which was the case in our study. Presented with this difficulty, the authors used Microsoft Word features to manage long documents to organize data. The text was grouped under the main six themes identified, and the list of sub-codes was created. This served as a basis for writing up the narratives.

There are several considerations, within this study, that might serve to reassure of its validity and reliability. First, one of the principles of data collection is using multiple sources of evidence in order to achieve triangulation (Yin, 1994); here primary data were complemented by various other sources (e.g. annual reports and company leaflets, press cuttings, Internet sources, historical sources). This approach allowed the inclusion of new facts and ideas, and increased the opportunity to check interpretations and identify patterns. Second, the interview transcripts were sample-coded by the authors and then verified by three other colleagues. The three reviewers of the interviews were instructed to work separately. The results of their coding were discussed during several meetings and through correspondence. The final themes were agreed as a result of discussion during those meetings. The coding process converged over the period of checking. It started in the region of 65 percent agreement and ended at 96 percent agreement which, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), is an acceptable level of reliability. Third, the narratives were supported by the verbatim responses of the executives under investigation, to offer the reader the opportunity to draw their own conclusions (Marschan, 1996). Fourth, the findings were cross-tabulated with the data on respondent characteristics (e.g. age, education, length of experience in the company, international exposure), types of companies (e.g. M&As, greenfield or equity JVs), and different industries. This provided

some useful insights, and helped to build the internal validity of the study (Eisenhardt, 1989). The most important outcomes of these cross-tabulations are included within the results of this research. Finally, the study's findings were compared with conflicting and similar literature, which as Eisenhardt (1989: 533) put it 'builds internal validity, raises theoretical level, and sharpens construct definitions'.

How Polish managers see the Germans

Here we discuss empirical evidence from research into managerial perceptions of Polish managers working inside situations of German–Polish business interaction. We then assess whether or not, and how, these perceptions can be related to the history and theory presented so far.

The analysis of qualitative data has shown that the Polish executives strongly emphasized their differences from their German colleagues. Polish managers believed themselves to posses a 'Polish mentality', which was distinctive from the German.[4] As the interviewees put it:

> One has to point out that there are very big differences in mentality, different law, customs and habits [. . .].
>
> (J1_PL)

> It is simply a different mentality of the nation [. . .].
>
> (G2_PL)

The interviewees talked about this issue with enthusiasm, as in their view this difference was a Polish advantage. Let us take a more detailed look at the particular characteristics attributed by the Polish managers to the Germans.

Orderliness – good and bad

The qualitative data have shown that Polish interviewees observed a 'rule for everything phenomenon' in Germany. This view corresponds with the work of Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993). They described Germans as enthusiasts for rules and regulations, and regarded this as one of the strengths of German society. Polish managers agreed that Germans were enthusiasts for rules, but took a less respectful view of this. They considered that Germans blindly follow regulations, and that this leads to their being unimaginative and uninspired. A few examples from the interviews are quoted here:

> Yes, definitely they are different, and I am saying it is an advantage of our [Polish] employees. In my opinion our employees are more open. This means that if you look at a German fellow, for example, let's call him Helmut, who is an employee, and who is to perform a task in a certain way, [you will see] that he will be doing only this task and not thinking of anything else. And if we now go back to Poles [a Pole with the same task], he will be thinking, he will be trying to make his work easier, and he will display greater vivacity and sharpness than an average German.
>
> (A2_PL)

> [. . .] They [Germans] perform their duties from A to Z [. . .].
>
> (G2_PL)

> It is quite a uniform and disciplined nation. Maybe they are a bit uninspired and without imagination. What they read in regulations is sacred for them.
>
> (G1_PL)

One of the executives used the term 'cybernetic' of his western neighbours:

> We are very different from them. [. . .] Germans are a society of a higher level of social organization, one could describe it in this way. A social and cybernetic [organization], and everyone taken out of the context of their organization, falls into oblivion of our manager, who is much more versatile. He can react much better in a crisis situation, and has much better knowledge and preparation. [. . .] A specialist [from Germany] for example from the construction business is trained very well in his subject and virtually leaves no room for discussion. However when one tries to go beyond his narrowly specialized knowledge one totally loses contact with this person, and one is not able to continue conversation.
>
> (C1_PL)

The Polish respondent here used the adjective 'cybernetyczny'. We have translated this as 'cybernetic', but we might equally use a term like 'robotic'. This implies that there is orderliness, but orderliness to the point of being machine-like, even inhuman, and lacking creativity or emotion. In the view of this respondent, the differences between the two nations were conditioned historically. Germany has a long tradition of a state of order, where the above-mentioned 'cybernetic structure' of the society functions without

interruptions, and where the basic needs of the society are fulfilled. Poland, by contrast, is a 'young democracy' where these characteristics are scarcely developed; this has forced Poles 'to manage as one can'.

However, Poles do not see 'managing as one can' as a defect. On the contrary, although they admit the need to be coached by their foreign partners, they insist on being treated as equal partners by German investors (e.g. A2_PL, E3_PL, E1_PL, G2_PL). This slight contradiction in responses may be explained by cross-tabulating the responses with the age of the respondents. The need for coaching was mainly expressed by older executives, and the demand to be treated as equal partners was presented by managers in their early thirties with relatively limited experience of managerial positions.

Polish managers saw themselves as much more dynamic, imaginative, versatile and spontaneous than the Germans. In their view, foreign capital encouraged the development of a very ambitious workforce, which was able to think economically and was very entrepreneurial (E1_PL). As pointed out several times by the interviewees, Poles were very talented and had considerable potential for development. When compared with their foreign counterparts, Polish staff were more educated, but lacked the relevant experience (D1_PL).

The Polish managers considered the inhabitants of German 'eastern lands' to be rather 'unimaginative'. They contrasted this description with the great initiative of the Poles, who achieved much more with far fewer resources than their western neighbours (G2_PL). The managers' perceptions were that, although quite light-hearted and humorous, when Poles get down to business they can do a good job, more quickly than others, and with more ideas. What is more:

> [. . .] Poles are an intelligent nation. Our bad luck was that nobody showed us 'how to do it'. I think however that managed cleverly, we are the people who are destined to succeed.
>
> (C1_PL)

They only need to be shown the right way first. . . . Polish self-perceptions pertaining to their need for authority and clearly specified rules correspond with the available literature on the subject (e.g. Hickson & Pugh, 1995; Hofstede, 2001; Nasierowski & Mikuła, 1998; Podgórecki, 1993).

German orderliness was not always considered to be a negative characteristic, however, by the Polish respondents. On the contrary, the long German tradition of law and order was admired, and contrasted with a Polish tendency towards chaos, and a Polish tendency to require order to be

imposed from outside or above (e.g. A2_PL, C1_PL, D2_PL, D3_PL). In the opinion of the interviewees, the good organization and discipline of the Germans are the main reasons for the great economic success of the country (e.g. D3_PL).

So, German orderliness is both good and bad. We can make clear sense of this by going back to Figures 2 and 3. In Figure 2, which we regard as the more basic set of metaphors, order is good, disorder is bad; order is what societies impute to themselves, disorder is what societies impute to their neighbours. This is the basic German take upon Poland; for centuries, 'disorder' on many dimensions was what Germany saw to the east. The entirety of Figure 2 can be invoked to give an idea of the many possibilities (and see also the references, given above, in the section 'Teutons and Slavs'). In Figure 3, however, which we have called 'the romantic reappraisal', a different moral spin is put upon the same metaphors. Order stops being unambiguously good, and becomes instead 'constrained', 'formal', 'sterile', 'calculating' and so on.

We can see that the Polish informants, in characterizing themselves, are using a set of metaphors that has Germany at the centre; it is the Germans who are the 'self', in the meaning of Figure 2, even when the Poles are talking. Again, this is a measure of the power of definition, within the central European space, of Germany over the centuries. We also see, however, that the Poles draw not only on Figure 2, but also, and rather more enthusiastically, on Figure 3. Figure 3, like Figure 2, puts 'order' on the German side of things, and 'disorder' on the Polish side, but Polish disorder, within Figure 3, becomes desirable, likeable, a trope for creativity, imagination and humanity. Figure 2 still underlies Figure 3, and still sticks through from time to time, but Figure 3, with the possibility for Polish self-flattery that it offers, is more in evidence. That is why we can say that German order is good, and German order is bad, and understand this apparent paradox. This is the main importance of the oppositional framework – we can make sense of apparent contradiction.

The source and prevalence of 'orderliness' can be related to two of Hofstede's well-known dimensions – power distance and uncertainty avoidance. In low power distance societies, people take responsibility for themselves, and order comes from within; in high power distance societies, there is at least the possibility that order will be seen as imposed from above, and without that imposition there will be chaos. This difference, expressed as a German/Polish difference, is strongly in evidence in historical accounts produced by both Germans and Poles, and it emerges clearly from our interview data. It was pointed out by the Poles, for example, that the Germans were responsible and diligent. This was contrasted with the Polish tendency

to evade responsibility, and to leave decision-making to others. Some respondents related this to the 'techniques of autocratic hierarchy' associated with communism, and summarized by one of the executives as follows:

> RULE 1: Your boss is always right.
> RULE 2: If your boss is not right see the above.
>
> (P_E1_PL)

These autocratic structures were blamed for the Polish tendency to evade responsibility, and to wait for decisions 'coming from the top'; and if there were no decisions coming, then of course 'it is even better' (P_E1_PL). It was also pointed out that even today people were still reluctant to say that there was something wrong happening in the company. As one of the executives put it, while talking about the need for improvement in his company:

> Nobody will tell you this in other companies, and more precisely, will be afraid to tell you, and I am admitting it openly.
>
> (P_E1_PL)

In the respondents' view these negative aspects of the 'Polish mentality' are a direct consequence of the communist system in Poland. Consider the following quotations:

> [. . .] 40 years [of communism] had caused such deep changes in many people's grey cells, that one is not able to root them out at once.
>
> (D1_PL)

> *Mentalnoś Polaków* [The mentality of Poles] was and is shaped by the 40 years of experiences in '*PRL*' [the Polish People's Republic] [. . .].
>
> (E1_PL)

The autocratic structure of Polish companies under communism has been widely discussed in literature (e.g. Hickson & Pugh, 1995, 1997; Jankowicz, 1994; Kieżun, 1991; Kostera, 1995; Kostera & Wicha, 1996), and receives support from our data.

The relationship of 'orderliness' to Hofstede's 'uncertainty avoidance' dimension is problematic, not least because the dimension itself is problematic. Does 'high uncertainty avoidance' mean that a society has a lot of rules and follows these with enthusiasm? Or does 'high uncertainty avoidance' mean that there is chaos around and everybody desires order? Or are we looking at some complex and still untheorized combination of these?

Hofstede tends towards the first of these possibilities (1980, 1994), and Hickson and Pugh (1995) go along with this: societies with high uncertainty avoidance are orderly and planned. In Hofstede's data, Germany scores 65 on uncertainty avoidance, which is comparatively high (at least as compared with, say, the UK). Nasierowski and Mikuła (1998) suggest that Poland would score higher still, at 93; this would make it near the extreme of high uncertainty avoidance.

We have seen, both from historical and literary material, and from our respondents, that Polish 'disorder' is commonly contrasted to German 'order'. We have also seen that the contrast can be made both to the credit and discredit of the Poles and the Germans. If we accept the very high uncertainty avoidance score for Poland, then we might be led to take the second interpretation of uncertainty avoidance: Poland scores high on uncertainty avoidance, because there is an apparently low level of order within it, and the high score reflects a desire for certainty in prevailing conditions of uncertainty. Greece also scores very highly on uncertainty avoidance, and there may be some similarities here to the Greek condition.

As with everything in modern Poland, decades of communism have introduced their own complications. The autocratic structure of communism and its product, central planning, was a myriad of rules, often contradictory. So although Poles would not do anything unless their managers told them, at the same time the evasion and bending of rules had become, in effect, a national past-time.

This suggests that a single measure of 'uncertainty avoidance' is probably inappropriate to Poland, whether or not it is appropriate elsewhere. Kostera and Wicha (1996) use a psychological argument to make something like the same point. They argue that the communist system favoured the emergence of a culture (within a single organization) which was split into two: 'introvert' and 'extrovert'. The 'introvert' organization pertained to the economic activity of business organizations (demonstrated by an avoidance of risk-taking, an aversion to active participation in the external environment, an 'inner life' orientation and isolation). The 'extrovert' organization pertained to the political activity of business organizations (characterized by a willingness to take political risk, a willingness to participate in the political environment, and an openness to political communication). The authors argue that such contradicting cultures, functioning within a single organization, caused distress among managers who had to cope with them on a daily basis. From an economic perspective they avoided risk and participation in the external environment, thereby displaying introvert features. From a political perspective, however, the political reality was forcing them to display totally opposite, extrovert characteristics,

which meant undertaking political risks and participating in the political environment.

German continuity of change

The interviewees under investigation quite extensively commented on what they called 'German continuity of change' (e.g. P_C1_PL), which meant that they were never satisfied however good the result. In this context, Germans were seen as setting high standards and requirements. German need for improvement was contrasted with one of the features of 'Polish mentality', that is lack of acknowledging continuity of change. Poles do not seem to acknowledge the need for continuous changes leading to improvement. The following quote is an illustration of this:

> There is something in the consciousness of a Pole that makes them [Poles] think that once something has changed that's it, finished, and then one can [sit back, and] *cut the coupons* [enjoy the dividend].
>
> (P_C1_PL)

The executives from Polish companies acquired by or cooperating with German companies talked extensively about the process of transformation and adjustment they were undergoing. They discussed these issues from two perspectives. First of all, the interviewees coming from acquired companies took pride in the fact that they were sufficiently transformed to attract the attention of foreign acquirers.

The above-mentioned companies undertook a lot of changes in order to be attractive targets for their potential partners. But the process of change did not end there. Once acquired by or working with a German multinational, they were subjected to a continuous process of adjustment and improvements (e.g. C1_PL, C2_PL, C3_PL, E1_PL, E3_PL, P_B1_PL, E2_PL). As one of the executives put it himself:

> Of course this merger brought about certain changes, which were a result of a typically market approach of a professional and large corporation to the problem of organizational structure of a construction company. [. . .] One can say that in all areas of our activity appear new technologies, and modern equipment. It is of course dictated by the level of quality expected by the investor, and also by very disciplined deadlines. In connection with this continuous progress in these areas will be a guarantor and a condition of our competitiveness on the market. As you can imagine competition does not sleep and also invests

> enormous money in their development, and treads on our heels all the time.
>
> (P_C1_PL)

Cross-tabulating this view with the type of industry has shown that it was particularly strongly expressed by interviewees from the food-processing and construction industries. One of the most crucial aspects of the process of adjustment mentioned by the executives was the mental transformation of the Poles. They are transforming themselves into 'new managers' who are 'the strongest component[s] of a company' (P_C1_PL).

Moreover, the appearance of foreign investors on the market, together with their capital, 'brought' different requirements of the employees. 'Simply they required more' than 'at previous times' (P_D1_PL). These requirements had certain influences on the psyche of the Polish management and employees themselves. They reinforced the need for Polish staff to supplement their education with business awareness and also foreign languages (P_C1_PL). The issue of the requirements set by an investor, regarding quality and meeting deadlines, was also mentioned. Another sign of change was considered to be the implementation of new management techniques by these 'new managers'. These techniques aim at quite a high degree of decentralization in organizations. The executives who discussed this issue did not see it as their parent company's contribution, but rather as their own natural development during the transformation process from 'communist' to 'capitalist' ways of thinking.

The German liking for training and continuous improvement finds support in the literature. According to Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993), not only are the Germans enthusiasts for training, but they also conduct it in a highly practical manner without admitting to any possibility of its failure. Glunk et al. (1997) have mentioned fostering vocational training as one of the 'unique' features of German-style of management.

Deeper layer of personality

Analysis of the qualitative material has shown that most of the Polish interviewees (regardless of their age and region of origin) perceived the Germans to express German superiority and reserve. This was particularly evident in their contacts in corporate situations:

> They [Germans] are a nation which does not like to admit their mistakes. According to my own observations they do not hesitate to show their intellectual superiority, it changes, however, after some time

> [after they got to know somebody]. A German person needs some time to understand that Poznan, Poland is a country of educated people, who can be easily partners even for Germans.
>
> (A2_PL)

The interviewees perceived the Germans as acting superior on first encounters, changing this attitude to a more approachable one only after they had got to know somebody.

Similarly, the Polish managers observed that Germans were very reserved, and that it took a long time to get through to them. Consider the following quote:

> [. . .] They are disciplined, presumptuous and cold, the latter meaning that it is difficult to get through to a deeper layer of their personality.
>
> (A2_PL)

These views of Polish managers correspond with one of the five orientations of culture pertaining to relationships with other people – classification of cultures into 'specific' and 'diffuse' (Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2000 from Parsons, 1951). According to these orientations, German culture can be classified as 'diffuse/high context' (as opposed to 'specific/low context' represented by American culture). This idea is based on the assumption that human personality can be represented in the form of concentric circles, containing 'life spaces' and 'personality levels'. The most personal and private spaces are placed near the centre, and the most shared and public spaces in the outer circles. German-type public spaces are very small, and the private spaces are large and diffuse. This means that people who are not from a close circle of friends and family (e.g. work colleagues) only have access to a very small part of a German's personality, a public one, and a large private personality is not easily accessible to them. One can have access to this private personality area only once one has entered this close circle of friends. This can only happen, however, after a long acquaintance, as also observed by the Polish interviewees.

If we look again at Figure 2, we can see that the left-hand column of characteristics is 'superior' to the right-hand, almost in a definitional sense. It is through Figure 2 that Germany has most commonly interacted with its Polish neighbour. Where, therefore, the diffuse/specific difference leads to Germans appearing 'reserved', apparently conscious of 'superiority', then of course the entirety of Figure 2 starts to resonate in Polish minds: 'the Germans think they are superior to us; as usual'.

It is interesting to note that the German assumption of superiority (as

perceived by the Poles) is measured in virtues (e.g. discipline, reliability) that the Poles are able to perceive as defects, to which the Poles possess the complementary virtues (e.g. improvisational skills, imagination). The Poles are prepared to use these perceived skills to get their own way, being intelligent and smart, rather than simply following the rules. The intimation that Germans are 'credulous' seems to lie in this confrontation; the Germans lay down the rules, and assume that the Poles are following them, because the Poles say they are; the Poles only respect the rules in as much as they have to, and will maintain that they are following the rules even while evading them in their own self-interest. The Germans are not able to see this, and so are 'credulous'.

Polish–German contrast and Hofstede's work

Hofstede's four dimensions (or five, if we include 'long-term orientation') have provided the predominant structure through which international business scholars have attempted to accommodate cultural difference within their theories and hypotheses. The 'dimensions of culture' tended to be treated by Hofstede, as well as by many who used his work, as final scientific truth. In the second edition of *Culture's consequences*, however, Hofstede (2001) takes a much more relaxed approach to these issues, and argues that researchers should not slavishly follow his dimensions, but should develop their own ideas and constructs from the material that is available. From this newer perspective, the 'dimensions of culture' are one model among others, useful and suggestive, but not necessarily the whole story (see also Chapman, 1996/7; Osland & Bird, 2000). It is in this spirit that we invoke Hofstede's work here.

We do not have data on central and eastern Europe from Hofstede's original data set, although this has not stopped people from guessing. We have already cited Nasierowski and Mikuła (1998), who provided the Polish figures for Hofstede's (2001) study, proposing that Poland might score 68 on power distance, and 93 on uncertainty avoidance. This suggests that Poland would be higher on both power distance and uncertainty avoidance, than Germany (which scores 35 on power distance and 65 on uncertainty avoidance). From our argument, we can make sense of Poland scoring higher on 'power distance' than Germany. In the case of 'uncertainty avoidance', our findings and arguments about 'orderliness' suggest that the issues are more complex than a single 'uncertainty avoidance' dimension can accommodate. We can make only limited sense of Poland scoring higher than Germany on 'uncertainty avoidance'.

As we have seen from the results of this study there have been some 'internal' contradictions in the perceptions of the Polish managers (e.g. Polish managers' perception of the German need for continuous change, and at the same time Polish self-perception of being more 'dynamic, imaginative and versatile' as well as 'intelligent and smart rather than simply following the rules'). These contradictions expose the shortcomings of using Hofstede's dimensions. Essentially, Hofstede's dimensions are non-commensurable with data based on mutual (bilateral) perceptions. It is mutual perceptions which, we argue, should be at the centre of the analysis. According to Hofstede's data, Germans are lower on the scale of uncertainty avoidance than Poles. But this is not, our data suggest, how the Poles perceive themselves, or how the Poles perceive the Germans. According to our data Poles perceive Germans as following rules (high in uncertainty avoidance in Hofstede's terms) to a higher degree, and themselves as following rules to a lower degree. This is, we argue, because of the historical relationship, which radically modifies the mutual perceptions when compared with Hofstede's dimension, and which has no bilateral dimension informing the interpretation of the rules and their implementation through the lens of history. This raises issues for future research.

In terms of power distance, there are also deep historical realities which attest to high power distance Poland, and low (or lower) power distance Germany. We have already given numerous quotations relevant to this, and data from the interviews and published sources of various kinds confirm this idea. We have argued that ethnic meetings, in which there is an imbalance in power and in the power to record, the less powerful is likely to emerge from local perceptions, and from the historical record, as relatively lawless, less subject to rule, and so on. The Silesian propaganda pamphlet (Figure 1) provides vivid graphic evidence of these ideas, in relation to power distance and orderliness: equality and cooperation come from Germany, and tyranny and oppression come from Poland; order and rule-government come from Germany, and disorder and disrule come from Poland. These strongly expressed ideas make sense of the suggested difference in power distance between the two countries.

We can perhaps further relate power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and the location and origin of order. In a low power distance environment, people internalize rules and take responsibility for themselves; low power distance, and personal responsibility for orderliness, can go together. In a high power distance environment, people expect rules to be externally imposed, and do not internalize rules, nor take responsibility for orderliness in the absence of external imposition. The German/Polish contrast can perhaps be understood in these terms. Again, the uncertainty avoidance dimension is too simplistic to allow coherent expression of the issues.

We relate our findings, therefore, to at least two of Hofstede's dimensions, although the conceptual structure from which our findings emerge does not owe anything directly to Hofstede's work. It is important, given the central place of Hofstede's ideas in international business academia whenever culture is discussed, that we are able to look at some of the empirical and ideological antecedents of the social phenomena to which Hofstede's dimensions relate, and also to give an idea of the lived experience of differences in these dimensions, as between Poles and Germans.

Discussion

The relationship between Germany and Poland is a big subject, even when reduced to interactions within a specifically business context. It has been our intention to show that opinions and perceptions expressed by Polish managers about Germans, referring to their mutual interaction, have a certain oppositional logic, which has strong similarities with other situations of ethnic meeting.

We can go back to the lists of oppositions presented towards the start of the article (Figures 2 and 3). Figure 2 was a generic 'self'/'other' contrast, in which 'self' was good and 'other' was bad. This was argued to have a long history of application to the German/Polish contrast, in the limited sense that the Germans had used this series of oppositions to classify themselves as 'self', and the Poles as 'other'. Figure 3 represented essentially the same series of oppositions, but through romantic (or should we say 'rose-tinted'?) lenses. In this formulation, the characteristics of 'other' were still determined by opposition to 'self', but they had been re-interpreted as virtues rather than vices and were invoked by Polish managers.

Now let us summarize the Polish characterization of the German/Polish opposition, as derived from the interviews with Polish managers (Figure 4).

We can see from the Polish characterization of themselves as contrasted with their characterization of the Germans, that there is a strong elementt of the romantic reappraisal of the self/other opposition as represented in Figure 3. The Poles, on the right-hand side of the oppositions, seem to accept their position as 'other', in spite of the fact that here we are reporting on Polish self-characterization. We argue that Figure 4, based on Figure 3, is still a structure within which ordered centrality is represented by the left-hand column of the figure, and that defining power still resides on the left. This, we think, is true of the German/Polish opposition, in the light of both political and economic events of the last 200 years, and the depth and

Germans (other)	:	**Poles (self)**
'cybernetic' society	:	imaginative
lack spontaneity and poetics	:	spontaneous
perform routine tasks	:	creative
down to earth	:	romantic
limited	:	versatile
cold and reserved	:	warm and open
uninspired	:	intelligent
credulous	:	smart
show their superiority	:	privileged to work for Germans
presumptuous	:	(modest)
responsible	:	avoid responsibility
professional	:	(unprofessional)
well organized	:	chaotic
disciplined	:	need authority
very wealthy	:	(poor)
clean and tidy	:	(dirty and untidy)
diligent	:	(lazy)

Figure 4 The German/Polish contrast, as perceived by the Poles
(N.B. Items in the above list, under the Polish characterization, which are in parentheses, were not explicitly articulated by interviewees. They are inserted into the above table, however, since they are opposites to the characteristics attributed to the Germans. The contrasts are implied.)

intensity of German scholarship directed towards central European literary, linguistic, philological, ethnic and cultural issues. Our evidence suggests that when Poles talk about themselves, they are prepared to inhabit the 'other' space of the Germanic 'self/other' opposition.

The exemplar for this argument was the Anglo-Saxon/Celtic contrast, as argued by Chapman (1992a). Norman Davis provides a nearly unwitting confirmation of the appropriateness of the comparison, when he says:

> For a newcomer from an Anglo-Saxon country there is an unmistakable scent of Ireland in a Polish atmosphere (and this is not because of a remark by certain great professor that Poland and Ireland are the only catholic countries in the world, where the inhabitants feed on potatoes and vodka). Both [these countries] are full of erratic anomalies. Most of the Poles are already 'against' by nature.
>
> (Translated from Davies, 1998, Vol. 2: 672)

Being 'against' is what you are if your characteristics are defined by opposition to somebody else, where somebody else has defined the structures within

which you make sense of yourself. In this sense, the Poles are 'against' the Germans, and it is not surprising that this might evoke comparisons with the Irish experience. It is not simply that the Poles and the Irish are 'the same', but rather that the larger definitional structures which they both inhabit are similar (there is a similarity, that is, between the Anglo-Saxon/Celtic contrast and the German/Polish contrast).

It is interesting to see, therefore, that the Poles characterize themselves as 'incurable romantics'. The right-hand columns of Figures 3 and 4 are, as noted, very similar. What about the oppositions that are represented on the left-hand column of Figure 4, but are absent from the right-hand column? Four of these are, in their left-hand column versions: professional, very wealthy, clean and tidy, diligent. It is noteworthy that the Poles tacitly declined to fill in the obvious oppositions, in their own characterization of themselves: unprofessional, poor, dirty and untidy, lazy. These characterizations are more difficult to glamorize in the romantic reappraisal (although not necessarily impossibly so). The oppositional logic of the ideas requires these adjectives, and we can argue that in non-romantic characterizations from a German perspective, such adjectives would have seemed fully appropriate. The 1921 propaganda leaflet from Upper Silesia is clear enough evidence of this. Where there was no fear of offending, and where the 'other' was not allowed self-characterization, then we might expect an unvarnished application of the oppositions from Figure 2, where poverty, dirtiness, laziness and incompetence find a natural home in the right-hand column. We have cited one or two pieces of evidence from German popular culture that suggest that the oppositions from Figure 2 still have some resonance in popular thought, although the depth and dispersal of these ideas is not demonstrated by our research.

There is certainly abundant evidence that the ideas from Figure 3 are strongly held in the Polish characterization of their own relationship with the Germans. Where ideas from Figure 3 are invoked, then Figure 2 is conceptually never far away; indeed, it is an important part of our argument that Figure 3 is only a disguised form of Figure 2.

We have not discussed in any detail a world in which the Poles were in the defining positions of power, characterizing themselves as 'self', and the Germans as 'other', in terms of Figures 2 and 3. Such a world undoubtedly existed, locally in many places, nationally for limited periods. In general, however, in the last 200 years, there is little doubt which of the two groups has played the most powerful defining role. It remains true, in the situations that we investigated, that the Germans have taken control of Polish companies, rather than the other way round. Therefore, we have argued that Polish and German experiences were not equally recorded or empowered.

The views of the Polish managers reported here are evidence towards this in ways that we have tried to discuss.

Summary and conclusions

In this article, we have attempted to show that foreign direct investment relationships can contain a great complexity of interaction between managers from each side. The emphasis in the mainstream international business literature is squarely on formal structural relationships between parent and affiliate, and on the transfer of knowledge, skills, technology and other key elements of the foreign direct investment package. We have sought to show that perceptions held by Polish managers of their German counterparts can be analysed within a social anthropological framework.

The aim of this article has not been primarily a utilitarian one. Ultimately, some help to managers could be one outcome. However, the article is confined to theory development, in which our approach suggests that cultural differences should be treated on a bilateral basis, as human beings have a tendency to characterize themselves in relation to what they are not (e.g. Saussure, 1916). This contrasts with the predominant approach employed in inter-cultural studies, associated largely with the use of the ostensibly objective dimensions of Hofstede (1980, 2001). However, some future directions in which our approach could be employed can be glimpsed.

The awareness of specific nuances of cultures is always useful when working in cross-cultural environments; people should be aware that perceptions of individuals also vary across cultures – people in different cultures perceive things differently. In particular, these findings could be useful for managers in companies planning international mergers and acquisitions, and we would recommend that the managers involved make a special effort to understand these issues. So it should not be expected that any one one-size-fits-all solution is available. The framework could be more widely applicable than in this article, to any core–periphery international business relationship. At least, we hope that the ideas presented here may help international business managers understand the hostility of others, without being wounded by it – not only in the Polish/German case, but in the many other bilateral interactions that share similar structural features. This may even be potentially useful for attracting inward foreign direct investment into Poland, in terms of the 'rebranding' of the nation (Reed, 2002).

And finally, the aim in this article was not to estimate the impact of managerial perceptions or differences between them, on the success of international business ventures (e.g. performance). It was rather to provide a

better framework for understanding. That these perceptions exist has, we hope, been demonstrated, along with our investigation of their origins. The effects that these perceptions have on the processes within the parent–affiliate relationship, and within the affiliate itself, are worthy of future research. Multinational corporations continue to expand into areas of the world that were previously 'out of bounds', even though these might be neighbouring countries. This and related oppositional frameworks may, therefore, find further applications in new international business contexts.

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Notes

1 The terms 'Teuton' and 'Slav' may attract extensive discussion. They are used here as shorthand expressions meaning 'speakers of Germanic languages' and 'speakers of Slavonic languages', within the central European context. The term 'Teuton' is preferred here to the term 'German', because this last has a national connotation which 'Teuton' avoids. The word 'Teuton' is etymologically cognate with other terms of ethnic self-description such as Deutsch and Dutch.

2 The purpose of this figure as well as Figures 3 and 4 is to present the oppositional framework, pursuant to exploring how far analysis of mutual (bilateral) cultural perceptions is an appropriate way to understand how managers from different cultures actually perceive each other.

3 The third largest recipient region of FDI in Poland at the time of the data collection.

4 One exception should be noted here. A group of executives originating from the Wielkopolska region in Poland, although acknowledging differences between the Polish and German mentalities, claimed that they possessed German-like features. This theme is, however, beyond the frame of this article.

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Appendix

Interview guide – Poland

Introduction

Note the time (beginning and end)
Confirm confidentiality
Explain the objective and relevance of the research
Biographical Data Questionnaire
Starting question: Can you tell me a few words about your company?/What has happened in the company since we last met?

Guiding questions

What is your role in the company?
Could you tell me a few words about your cooperation with a foreign partner? (motives, were other possibilities considered, previous experiences, first contact, length of cooperation, main difficulties, legal system, main competitors, exceptional events since entering cooperation, advice to other Polish companies).
Could you tell me a few words about working in a foreign-owned company in Poland? (previous experiences, differences from Polish-owned companies, main advantages, main difficulties, exceptional events, legal system, competition).
What do you associate Germany with?
Do you perceive Germans as a uniform nation? (show the picture with stereotypical images of Germans) (description of main characteristics at national and company level, comparison with Poles).

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