



## Germans in Switzerland – Similar but different

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Main question of the research (Eser Davolio/Tov/Meyer 2012):

- How do Swiss and German employees perceive each other and what any conflicts exist between them?
- Online survey conducted in 2008
- A total of 252 participants, of which
- 54.4% German
- 105 women and 137 men
- Age mainly between 28-50 years
- Superiors overrepresented (43.0%)

## Similarity and diversity

Cultural studies show many similarities between Germans and Swiss in terms of cultural greatness and action-determining categories of thought (Levine 1998, Trompenaars 1993).

Compared to the group of Austrians, they have more common ground in terms of striving for efficiency, future orientation, strutting order and adherence to rules (see Brück 2002).

However, there may be tendencies towards demarcation at the following levels (Auernheimer 2002):

- ❖ Power dimension
- ❖ Collective experiences
- ❖ Mutual foreign images
- ❖ Cultural dimension

## Foreign managers are new for Swiss

45% of managers in CH companies are foreigners;  
56% of CEOs (see Schilling 2009).

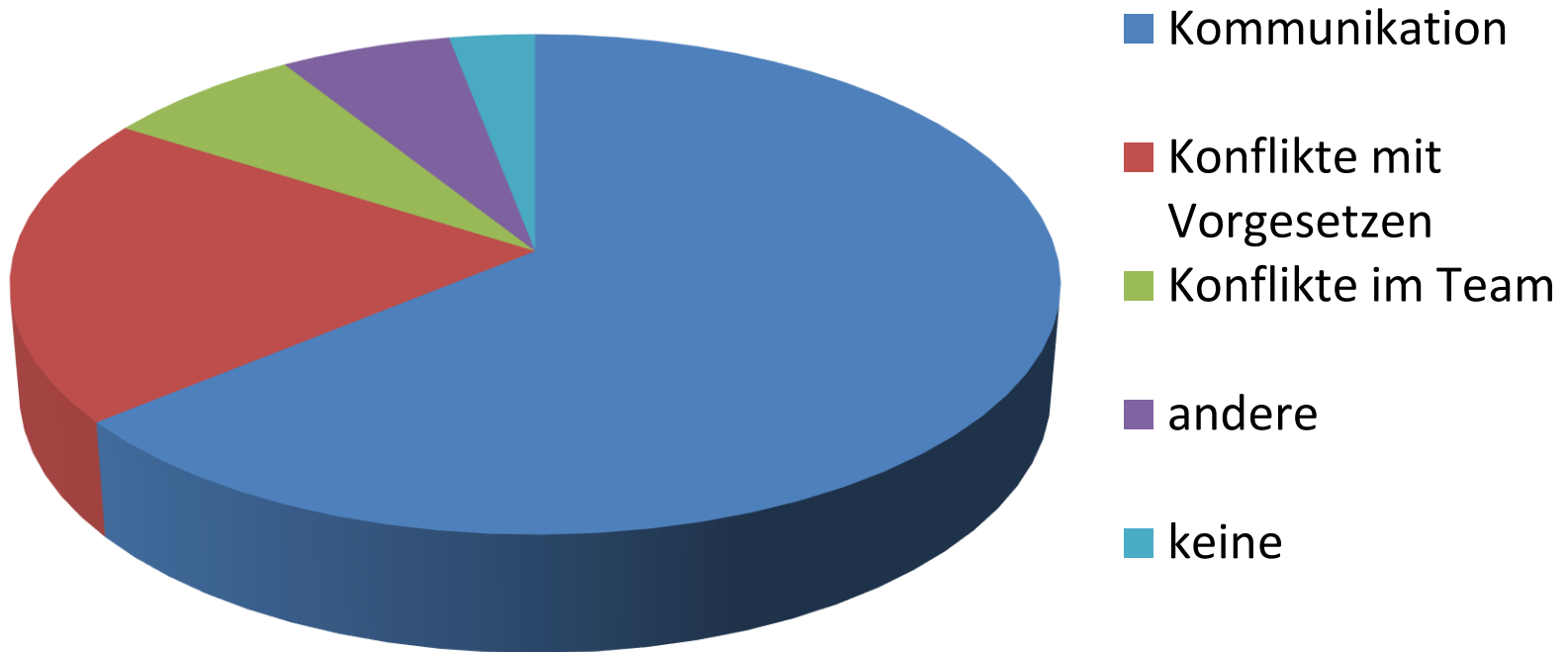
Around a third of the executives come from Germany, the second largest group from the Anglo-Saxon region. For a long time, the management level was almost exclusively occupied by Swiss (cf. De Pellegrin 2008:3). Especially at the level of the middle and upper squads, however, there have been big changes in the last 15 to 20 years.

*“There are difficulties at all levels, but above all at the level of management, because one is reluctant to be managed by a German. He doesn't understand Swiss culture or bring an added-value.” (CH, Manager, Banking)*

## Content levels of research issues

- Attitudes (self-inscriptions, prejudices)
- Emotions (fears, insults, empathy, aggression, etc.)
- Communication (directness, language, openness, etc.)
- Behaviour (integration, consideration, competition, etc.)
- Hierarchy (leadership behavior, status understanding, etc.)
- Team (cooperation, competition, collegiality, manners)
- Organization (mission, goal, heterogeneity, corporate culture)

## Levels at which conflicts arise (N=247)



## Communication difficulties arise, if...

- definitions of the situation of the communication partners do not overlap "sufficiently" (Habermas 1995:185).
- Implicit knowledge and semi-conscious expectations play a major role here, as communication is also based on contextual reference and "relationship knowledge". since the clarification of differences at the relationship level is much more difficult than substantive differences (Auernheimer 2002:184).
- The conflicts usually remain unspoken and continue to smoulder on the side of expectation or appeal, which can lead to serious communication disruptions. Not only are the expectations of the behaviour of the other person not fulfilled, but also the image they think of themselves in the opposite is negatively anticipated (cf. *ibid.*).
- Consequences: withdrawal, relationship breakdown or aggressive reactions

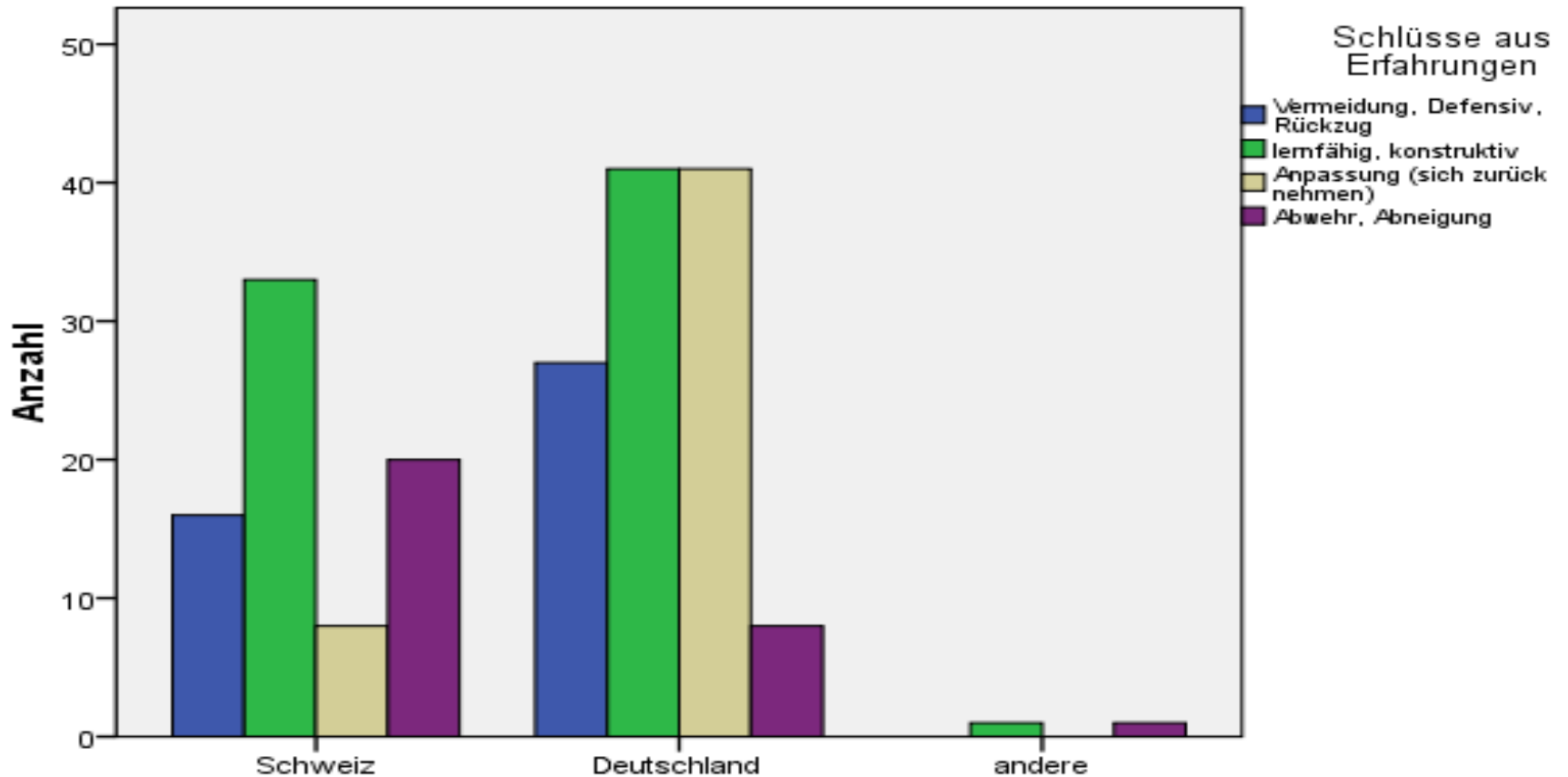
## Problematization of the communication of German participants:

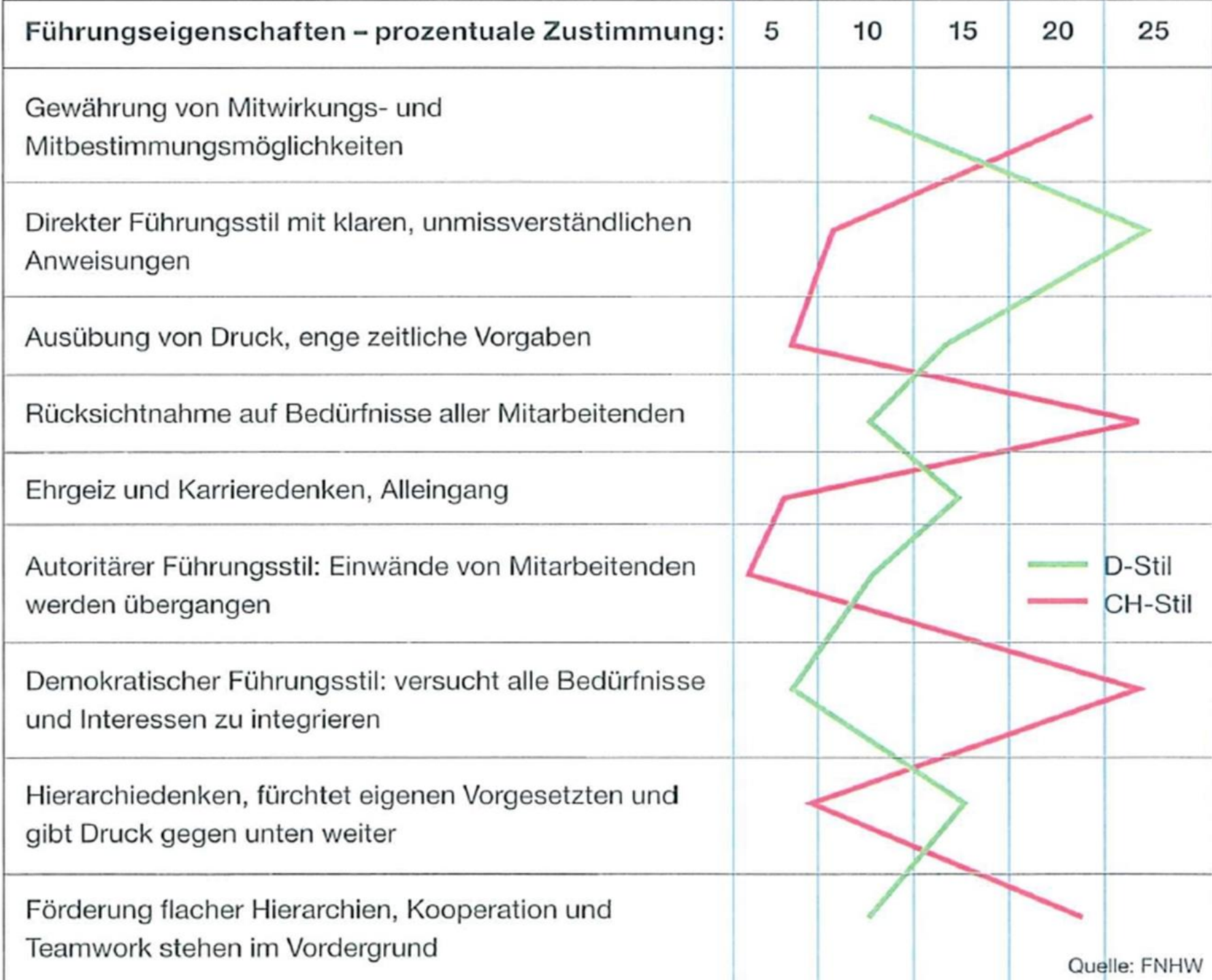
- *"I was used to always saying openly what I think. But this is only possible here with people who think the same way, so I hold back."*
- *"Criticism is not clear enough, so you don't know exactly where you are."*
- *"If you call peaceful coexistence a problem."*
- *"lack of openness, blasphemy and bullying at the back"*
- *"Decisions or mistakes are widely made and much later are repeatedly raised."*
- *"Information is withheld. Decisions are not supported or boycotted."*



## Conclusions from the experiences of the participating Swiss and Germans (N=239)

Balkendiagramm



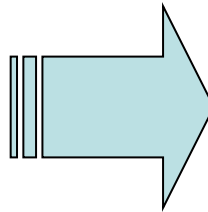


## Where Germans experience racism

Public space

Housing search

Media (Sport)



negative attention

latent rejection

open hostility

Discrimination

*„Sometimes it seems to me that you put all the Germans in a sack and then hit them with the stick; Someone will be right to hit it.“*

## Tabooing conflicts

Around half talk about the difficulties only with friends and individual work colleagues, but not with their superiors, because  
37 out of 105 Swiss and  
23 out of 130 Germans fear negative consequences

*„Any tensions are a huge taboo subject and most will be wary of cutting that taboo.“*

*"If I were to make my opinion public, I could forget any chances of promotion without!"*

## Culture shock and learning process

Astonishment - Disillusionment - Frustration - Repositioning

After this initial impotence, the individual is required to provide burdensome psychological adaptation services, while at the same time confusion about the role and the role expectations of the others (cf. Taft 1977). Recovery only occurs when an understanding of one's own cultural character and the logics of action of the new environment can be gained.

*"When new employees from Germany come to us, I think - maybe I was the same - but they don't leave out a fat cup. And then I think someone should draw someone's attention to what's going on here."*

## *Differentiation - Reflecting Together - Approach/Confidence*

*"Culturally learned." THE Germans" there are no, they are just as diverse as other nations."*

*"I'm more concerned about myself and the way I affect others."*

*"If the differences aren't so serious anymore, I don't get upset about it anymore."*

*"Addressing differences helps mutual understanding."*

*"Have developed me from general prejudices to mixed more differentiated experiences."*

*"It's a different culture in many areas that I find more pleasant and in keeping with my personal style. However, it calls for a rethink and abandonment of the social "survival strategies" learned so far in D."*



## Dealing with different value systems and behaviors in intercultural conversations

- Values, norms and behaviours
  - Different value systems and possible impacts in communication, interaction and conversation
  - Non-negotiable values and different approaches to dealing with different / conflicting value systems and behaviors
  - Use dialogical conversational guidance in dealing with different / conflicting value systems and behaviors
- *“People can share values, but the differences are in mutual norms and practices. For example, the value respect can be shown at a welcome with a nod and with the hand on the heart or with a handshake.” (Hoffman 2015, p. 147)*

## Literatur

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