

European & US American Cultural Issues —How we stack up in each other’s eyes

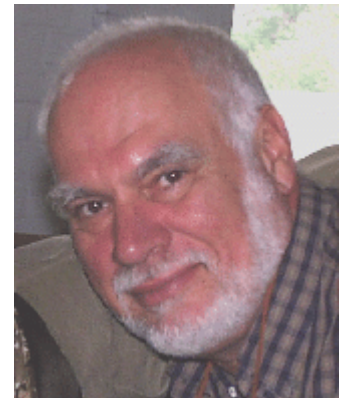
an introduction to

21 ways many **EUROPEANS** & **US AMERICANS** can misunderstand each other

BY DR. GEORGE F. SIMONS

Those whom we think are most like us are those we misjudge the easiest. We expect them not to be different so we pay little attention to cultural factors that can sabotage our common efforts. Many US American managers think of Europeans as long lost cousins with whom they can reestablish a relationship with little ado; whereas most know that they should not make assumptions about those who seem to be more “exotic” peoples, e.g., from Africa, Asia or the Caribbean whose styles of working and communicating appear so obviously different.

As a result our teamwork and collaboration, both real and virtual, can run aground without our suspecting it or knowing what to do about it. If forewarned is forearmed, then perhaps we should start examining our assumptions early in our working relationships. One way to do this is to look at and discuss some ways in which Europeans and US Americans *may interpret* each other’s behavior.



The comparison chart below has succeeded as a *discussion starter* for managers from both sides of the Atlantic. We offer it to those setting up virtual teams that span the ocean as a team building exercise to trigger dialogues that stave off later resentments between US American and European managers. This general schema does not presume to cover all possible groups either in the USA or in Europe. Many Europeans often have a much more open information flow than other many US Americans do. Northern and Southern Europeans as well as Central and Eastern can differ significantly on many of these issues. However disagreement as well as agreement about how we differ on these items will add to our mutual understanding and sensitivity.

21 ways in which many **EUROPEANS & US AMERICANS** misunderstand each other

BY DR. GEORGE F. SIMONS

U.S. AMERICAN BEHAVIORS	U.S. AMERICANS SEE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR AS	EUROPEANS SEE U.S. AMERICAN BEHAVIOR AS	EUROPEAN BEHAVIORS	EUROPEANS SEE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR AS	U.S. AMERICANS SEE EUROPEAN BEHAVIOR AS
1. TRUST MORE READILY	Constructive	Naive childishness	TRUST LESS READILY	Realism	Cynicism, nihilism
2. MAKE MANY FRIENDS	Friendly, open	Superficial, insincere	HAVE FEWER CLOSE FRIENDS	Discretion, depth	Cold, distant
3. SMOOTH OVER DIFFERENCES	Cooperative, democratic, practical	Lack conviction, depth	DISPUTE DIFFERENCES	Refining the truth through dialectic.	Argumentative, implacable, irreconcilable
4. COLLABORATE EASILY	Others will join you if it is in their interest. Common interests dominate. Conspiracies are evil.	Containing hidden agendas	COLLABORATE CAUTIOUSLY	Others will block you. Conflicting, territorial interests, conspiracies are normal.	Distrustful of each other
5. BE OPTIMISTIC & EXPRESS OPTIMISM	Life is rich.	Foolishness	BE CAUTIOUS, EXPRESS RESERVATIONS	Resources are limited.	Pessimistic, masochistic
6. SEEK OPPORTUNITY	The right time is now.	Aggressiveness	ACT OUT OF PURPOSE	The right time will show itself.	Out of touch
7. MIX BUSINESS & PLEASURE	Life is a continuum.	Never stop doing business, workaholics	SEPARATE BUSINESS AND PRIVATE LIFE	Everything has its time & place.	Compartmentalized, schizophrenic
8. THINK OUT LOUD, BRAINSTORM	The more ideas, the better the product or solution.	Scatterbrain, undisciplined	PREPARE WHAT YOU SAY	Be accountable for your words.	Cautions, guarded, lacking spontaneity
9. BEHAVE SPONTANEOUSLY	Free, creative	Irresponsible, immature	BEHAVE LOGICALLY, RATIONALLY	Mature, responsible	Staid, stilted, repressed
10. DECENTRALIZED POLITICS	People can solve their own problems.	Chaotic, unreliable	CENTRALIZED POLITICS	Controls & limits balkanization, assures everyone is cared for.	Bureaucracy & dictatorial tendencies.

U.S. AMERICAN BEHAVIORS	U.S. AMERICANS SEE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR AS	EUROPEANS SEE U.S. AMERICAN BEHAVIOR AS	EUROPEAN BEHAVIORS	EUROPEANS SEE THEIR OWN BEHAVIOR AS	U.S. AMERICANS SEE EUROPEAN BEHAVIOR AS
11. DO IT, THEORIZE LATER	We're being practical.	Rationalization, error prone	THEORY BEFORE ACTION	Do it right.	Impractical, idealists, action is often too late.
12. CREATE OPEN INFORMATION FLOW	Enables the relationship.	No substance	GUARDED INFORMATION FLOW, INDIRECTION	Enables the relationship.	Secretive
13. TAKE PRIDE IN ACCOMPLISHMENT	One becomes someone through doing things.	Petit bourgeois	TAKE PRIDE IN ONE'S SELF & ONE'S GROUP	Maintain dignity by living out one's calling.	Vanity without substance.
14. ATTACK BECAUSE OF THE RESULT	Getting things done is what counts.	Unprincipled, small-minded	ATTACK BECAUSE OF THE PROCESS	Correctness & style are paramount.	Uncommitted to results.
15. BASE AUTHORITY & HIERARCHY ON ACCOMPLISHMENT	Positions exist as long as they are practical & functional.	Poor judges of character	ACCEPT HIERARCHY AS BASED IN THE NATURE OF THINGS	Position is based on the kind of person one is. <i>Noblesse oblige.</i>	Autocratic, non-democratic
16. AVOID DIFFERENTIATING FEMALE & MALE ROLES	We are trying to be more fair & egalitarian.	Debasing both women & men	DIFFERENTIATE MALE & FEMALE ROLES	Both men's & women's roles have their own prestige.	Sexist, preserving outmoded traditions.
17. TREAT CHILDREN AS ADULTS	Making choices helps them grow up.	Children are loud & intrusive, delinquent	DISCIPLINE CHILDREN	Discipline creates character.	Severe, creates rebellion.
18. PUT FREEDOM & INITIATIVE FIRST	Respecting the individual	Socially irresponsible	PUT DUTY & OBEDIENCE FIRST	Respecting the common good	Blind obedience, prone to dictatorship.
19. FORGIVE MISTAKES	Trying is what counts — you will get there.	Over-reaching themselves, Imposters	AVOID MISTAKES	Mistakes are often irreparable.	Over cautious, miss opportunities, CYA
20. CONSUME	Being alive, moving, spirit filled	Wastefulness, quantity over quality meaninglessness	BE FRUGAL	Strive for quality, not quantity.	Smallness, meanness, obsessed with things not people.
21. CIVIL VIOLENCE	Personal or moral failure	Lawless, undisciplined culture	POLITICAL VIOLENCE	Conflict of group interests.	Innate contentiousness & hatred for others