

American Chamber of Commerce
in France

France - USA

The challenge of the difference

Oct 16, 2003



Multicultural Management

How to handle different people?

- **MBAs and factory workers**
- **Marketing and audit folks**
- **Bank and startup company**
- **American and French**
- **...**





Difficulty

Same culture:

- Anticipation of Reaction and reaction in *same* cultural field

A friendly dog
raises his tail

Different Cultures:

- Anticipation of reaction but reaction in *different* cultural fields

but a cat sees a stiffening tail
as a sign of aggression





Multicultural difficulties

- 70 % of mergers fail
- Cultural differences are a major source of trouble in a multicultural environment

=> K.O.peration





Multicultural difficulties

- **Country bound vs. Company bound**
- **Multicultural differences are a lesser problem if there is (are) no dominant culture(s) and a common goal**





Trends

- **Global, but “world culture”**
 - Global brand divisions instead of national sales organizations
 - Global advertising
- **Results:**
very different, depending on the market, if the strategy fits “by accident”

(JH opinion)





Who are we?

- **The way we see ourselves is not the way we are seen by others**
- **This difference is one reason for difficulties in cultural understanding**





How others see Austria



Source: Movie Poster

How the Austrians see themselves

Index



Source: Franz Hubmann: Café Hawelka



How the US see themselves



Source: Walt Disney: Donald Duck

How the French see the USA

Index



Source: Goscinny/Uderzo: Asterix: La Grande Traversée



How we see: the US

- **France sees the US**

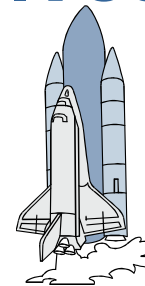
- Sky scrapers
- Statue of Liberty
- Las Vegas



Movie: "The public enemy"

- **The US see themselves**

- Silicon Valley
- Space shuttle
- White house





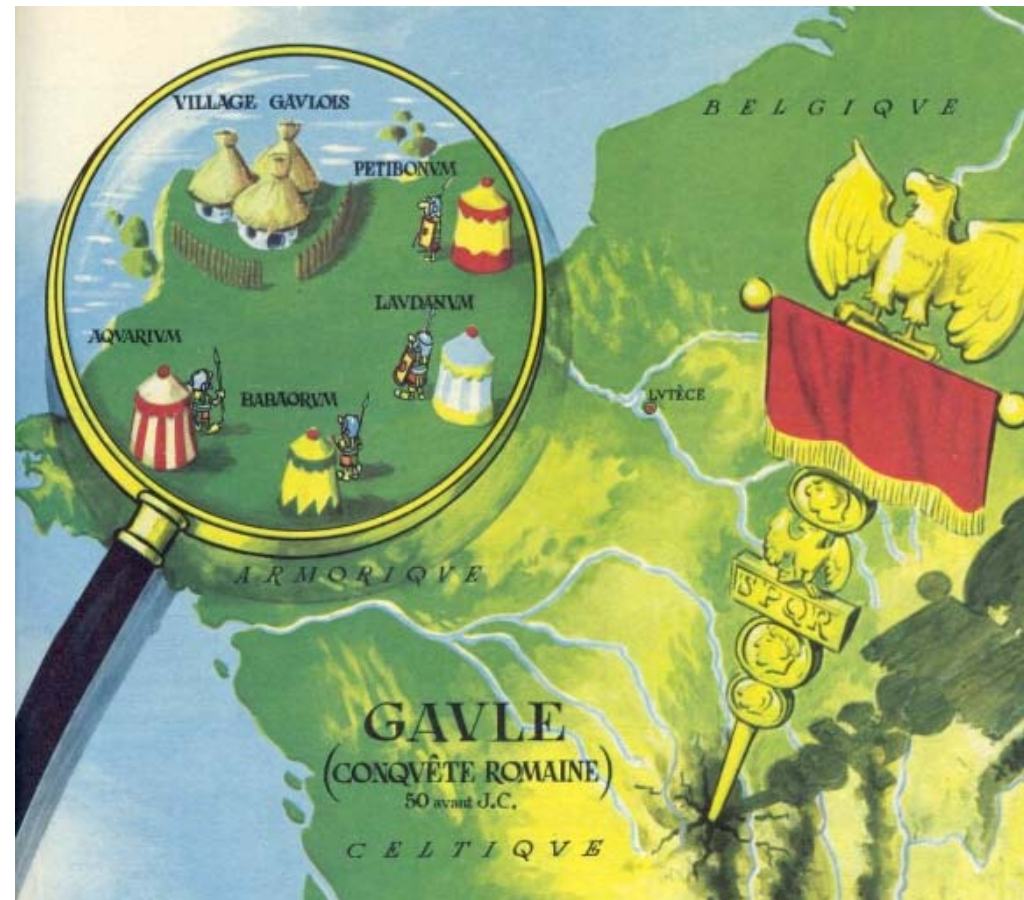
How others see France



Source: Decoration

How the French see themselves

Index



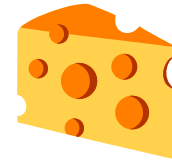
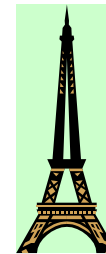
Source: Goscinny/Uderzo: Asterix: La Grande Traversée



How we see: France

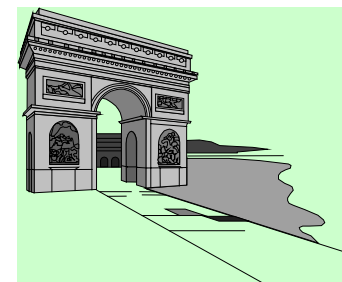
- **The US see France**

- Baguette / Cheese / red wine
- Eiffel tower
- Montmartre



- **France sees itself**

- TGV
- Arc de Triomphe
- La Défense





Got it?





How to make it?

1. Knowledge
2. Acceptance
3. Trust





How to make it?

1. Knowledge





What we need to know

- **Geography, History and Languages are elementary level classes**

**There is no long-distance
call in the Netherlands**





What we fear

A US manager

- Losing momentum
- deviation from given procedure
- being a wimp / a loser

A French manager

- monotony
- limitation to his own zone of influence
- being outsmarted
- lack of power
- losing face





What we enjoy

An American manager

- **being the boss**
- **being a hero**
- **making a lot of money**
- **being part of the winning team**
- **winning a hard but fair game**

A French manager

- **being innovative**
- **being a genius**
- **accomplishing a crazy idea**
- **finding errors in a plan / outsmarting others**
- **taking risks which are a real challenge**



Authority

- **An American challenges authority but follows the rules**
 - He will challenge the police in court, but will not speed
- **A Frenchman respects the authority but defies the rules**
 - He will not challenge the police in court, but will speed





Procedures

- **American**
 - A procedure helps a person achieving something
 - => People will try to learn about it and conform to the procedure
- **French**
 - A procedure assists you in getting someone else to do what you want
 - => People will strongly think how not to apply the procedure





Meetings

American

- Present a plan
- Discuss
- Convince
- “kick off”

=> **Decision**

French

- Exchange information
- Prepare decision

=> **no** Decision





How to make it?

1. Knowledge

2. Acceptance





Acceptance

- **Difference between US and Europe:**

Melting pot vs. Culture Heritage





Acceptance

- **Not better, not worse - just different**
- **Diversity as a plus**





Some advice to Americans on how to deal with the French

- **Use the “four eyes” principle**
 - You might save the money for the big show
 - The entrance might be through the back door
- **Never have the other party lose face**
 - Never criticize openly





Some advice (ctd.)

- **Language is tricky**
 - Oui vs. oui-oui (yes vs. yeah)
 - The essential things in French might be written between the lines
 - Say the same thing in different ways
- **It does not work? Have you had lunch together?**
- **Show the directions, not the procedure**





Some advice to the French on how to deal with Americans

- **Be frank, straight to the point and clear**
 - There is nothing “between the lines”
- **Neither overpromise nor under-deliver**
- **Quick & dirty is better than “génial” but late**
- **Do not bother Americans with details if they are not personally concerned**





Some advice (ctd.)

- You may admit errors and ask for help
- Do not translate “how are you?” too literal
 - It takes the same time as in France to build a good relationship
- Be “sport”
 - Play tough, but fair





How to make it?

1. Knowledge
2. Acceptance
3. Trust





Target

- **An organization that takes advantage of the diversity and turns it into an asset to become a major player in all cultures**





Thank you!

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