

THE AMERICAN WAY

In vielen deutschen Unternehmen hat man sich im Laufe der Zeit mit Erfolg dem amerikanischen Managementstil angepasst. Doch nicht alles, was in den USA funktioniert, ist auf europäische oder deutsche Verhältnisse übertragbar, wie ROBERT GIBSON berichtet. medium

According to the 2008 *Financial Times* Global 500 ranking of the world's largest companies, five in the first ten are American: Exxon Mobil (1), General Electric (3), Microsoft (7), AT&T (8) and Procter & Gamble (10). The highest-ranking German companies are E.ON (41) and Volkswagen (61). It is not surprising, then, that many German companies are looking more and more to the US for role models.

Although German and European companies can no doubt learn a great deal from the success of their US competitors, care has to be taken to respect fundamental cultural differences between the Old and the New World. As the following interview and our case study show, the key to success is not blindly exporting styles one-to-one, but looking for combinations of styles that suit local traditions and conditions.

Business Spotlight spoke to Ulrike Reisach, author of the controversial book *Die Amerikanisierungsfalle: Kulturkampf in deutschen Unternehmen* (see box, page 40).

How do American management styles influence businesses in Germany?

For generations, Germans have looked across the Atlantic to get inspiration for their business activities. They admired the great US inventors, such as Edison, and learned from Ford how to rationalize manufacturing. Nowadays, they take the leading US companies as benchmarks for improving processes within their own companies. The huge business consultants, the McKinseys and Boston Consulting Groups of this world, contribute to that trend. Their approaches have become a standard for most German companies, as well as for books about business and the curricula of business schools throughout Europe. There is hardly a teacher or professor in business administration or economics in



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Germany who hasn't spent a good deal of time in the US in order to further his (or, very rarely, her) career. The same is also true of the new generation of top managers at huge German companies.

Why are US methods so attractive to German companies?

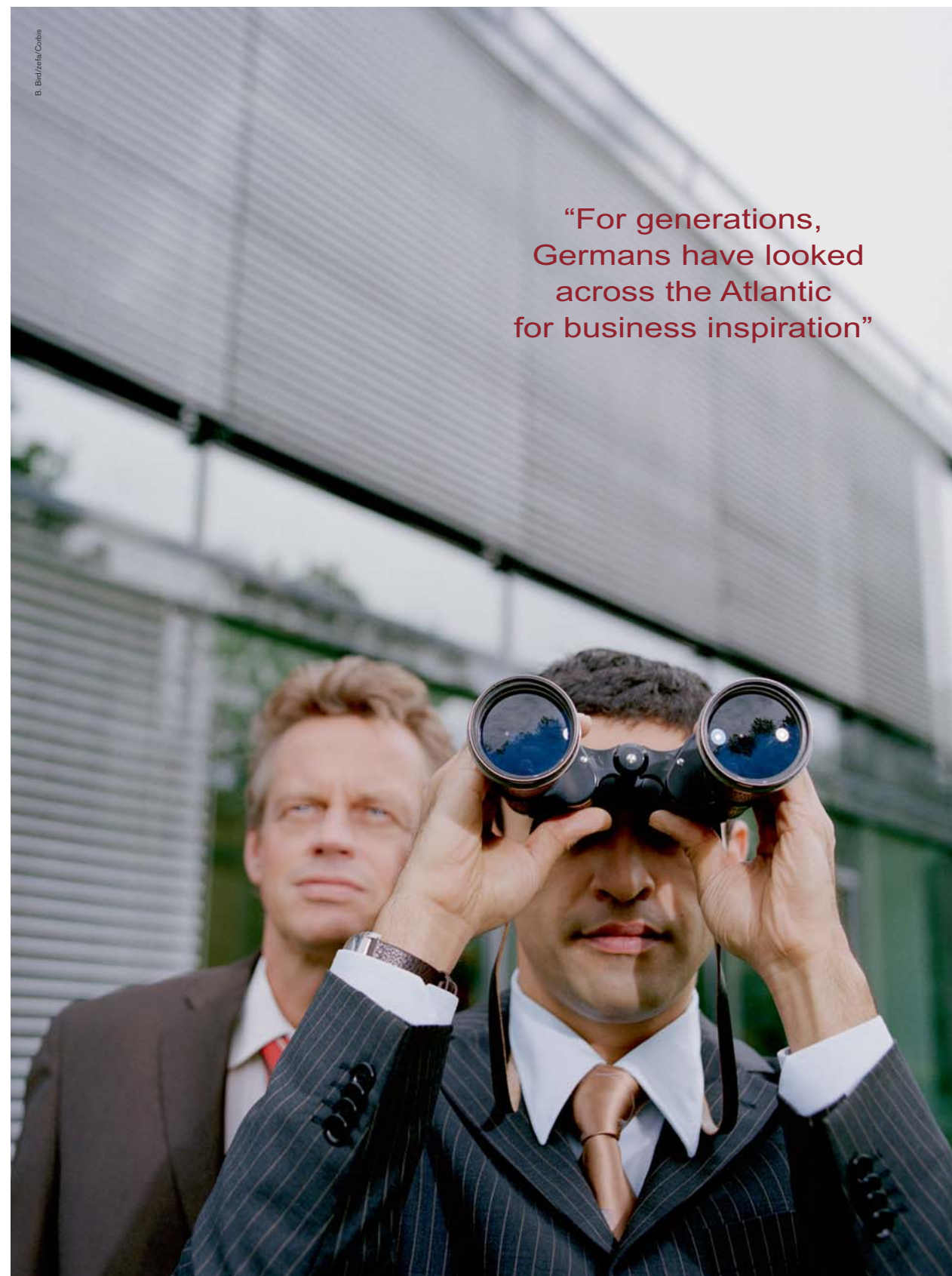
Until mid-2007, US companies topped the lists of the largest and most successful companies worldwide. They enjoyed the best ratings and success on the stock market. US companies benefited from their strong reputations and the optimism of shareholders who believed in

the strength of the US economy, based on the performance in the last couple of years. Unfortunately, that positive image is no longer as strong now as a result of the economic crisis. Some years ago, we saw how Japanese companies had a similar sort of influence. Their models (for example **Total Quality Management**) were also admired and were a fashionable trend before Japan got into economic

A CLOSER LOOK

Total Quality Management (TQM) is an organizational method that helps businesses to improve products by following established methods. It was developed in the 1950s by American William Edwards Deming (1900–93) to help Japanese export companies. His ideas were adopted by auto and electronic firms in Japan, and later spread to the US and Europe.

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| adopt sth. [ə'dɒpt] | etw. übernehmen |
| approach [ə'prəʊtʃ] | Ansatz, Herangehensweise |
| benchmark (sth. against sth.) ['bentʃmɑ:k] | Maßstab, Vergleichswert; (etw. mit etw. anderem vergleichen) |
| business administration [ˌbɪznəs əd'mɪnɪ'streɪʃ(ə)n] | Betriebswirtschaftslehre |
| business consultant [ˌbɪznəs kən'sʌltənt] | Unternehmensberater |
| business school [ˌbɪznəs sku:l] | betriebswirtschaftliche Fakultät bzw. Hochschule |
| competitor(s) [kəm'petɪtə(z)] | Konkurrent(in) |
| contribute to sth. [kən'trɪbjʊ:t] | zu einer Sache beitragen |
| curriculum (pl. curricula) [kə'rɪkjʊləm (kə'rɪkjʊlə)] | Lehr-, Studienplan |
| economics [i:ka'nɒmɪks] | Volkswirtschaftslehre |
| further sth. ['fɜ:ðə] | etw. voranbringen |
| manufacturing [ˌmænjʊ'fæktʃərɪŋ] | Produktion |
| process ['prəʊses] | Ablauf, Verfahren |
| role model ['rəʊl mɒd-əl] | Vorbild |
| shareholder ['ʃeə'həʊldə] | Aktionär(in) |
| stock market ['stɒk mɑ:kt] | Aktienmarkt |
| total quality management (TQM) ['təʊt-əl kwolətɪ mə'nɪdʒmənt] | umfassendes Qualitätsmanagement |
| University of Applied Sciences [ju:nɪvɜ:səti ɒv ə'plaid 'saɪənsɪz] | Fachhochschule |



“For generations, Germans have looked across the Atlantic for business inspiration”

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