

Cross-Culture Competence

How Chinese and German Professionals Think About Competence

by JANINA SCHOENEBECK

Experts working in multinational companies face intercultural challenges. What does a German expert have to expect, and what competences should this expert have in order to be successful in China? To answer this question surveys in Germany and China were conducted in order to understand the term competence and the meaning behind the word within these two cultures. There are a variety of impressions allocated in a 'semantic network' which reflects a certain national culture and its understanding of the term competence. This context dependency explains why the definition of the term and its meaning might differ throughout cultures. Furthermore, competence has been discussed in the literature for decades. Scientists from different fields analyzed competence within their own professional context, which is why there is no common definition for this term.

Western Culture Overshadows Confucian Ideals

In Chinese literature the term competence can be traced back to Confucius, who related competence to the perfect and authentic state of moral behavior and spirit. Today's focus on competence tends to neglect the Chinese cultural heritage and to cover it with a blanket of a more modern and US-American perspective. When viewing the competence survey results it becomes obvious that beneath that blanket the cultural understanding of competence is still a powerful force.

Redefining Chinese Understanding of Competence

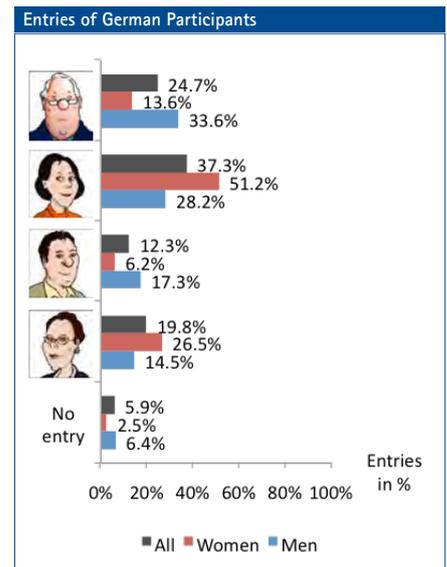
Osgood's semantic differential – a seven-point scale between opposite adjectives which is used to measure how a group of people define a term or concept – allowed us to determine how Chinese and German participants use their language to describe and give meaning to the term "competence." The explorative factor analysis revealed eight factors identified as dimensions of competence for both the Chinese and German full sample. The two factor sets display the two cultures very effectively. Germans are commonly known to put strong emphasis on ideals such as maturity (e.g. knowledge, experience), work attitude (e.g. punctuality, organization) and authenticity (e.g. trustworthiness, directness).

| Germany | China |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Ego-Strength | Nature of Individual (个性) |
| Maturity (Ability) | Honesty (诚信) |
| Power | Efficiency (实现能力) |
| Charisma | Strength of Enforcement (执行力) |
| Work Attitude (Virtues) | Communication Strength (交际能力) |
| Authenticity (Values) | Politeness (礼貌) |
| Team Spirit | Spirit of Enterprise (进取心) |
| Leadership Strength | Enthusiasm (激情) |

Chinese are known to value politeness (e.g. face value), efficiency (e.g. conscientiousness, ability to adapt) and their expectations regarding communication (cooperativeness, diplomacy).

Do You Have the Special Touch?

Participants looked at a set of four people character types and selected the one that they believe is the most competent. The character sets were designed in Germany with regard to the German cultural context. The development of the characters was the result of an avatar study that was conducted earlier. It is based on substantial findings. The aim was to analyze how different avatars



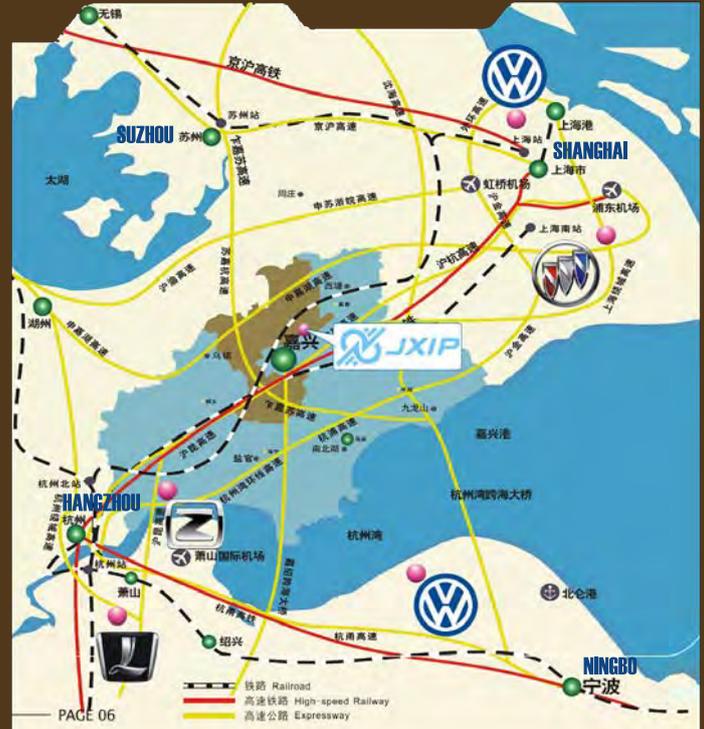
are perceived in order to design unique characters for an online service platform whose customers will be accompanied and supported by the avatar of their choice when using the online platform. Because the avatars represent certain competences, it stood to reason to ask participants of the competence survey how they perceive these avatars. The findings are strong, as the avatars and their character sets are still relevant with regard to the found German factor set.

In a previous study it was examined what personality inventory is associated with the four illustrated people above. The participants of this previous study were asked to describe these four pictures with the help of the Freiburger Personality Inventory (FPI). FPI is a psychological personality questionnaire and consists of several dimensions of characteristics. In order to develop distinct and valid characters, the FPI was validated several times. The description for the appearance of the four people was aligned until it fitted with their respective predicted personality inventory. In the "competence" questionnaire, the participants were asked to decide intuitively which of these people has the highest competence. They did not receive the previously defined personality description of the four people, but by choosing a person they have also selected their personality inventory. The results show that what competence means is understood

Jiaxing Industrial Park (JXIP)

Perfect Backyard of Shanghai, Ideal Destination for Investment

Established in 2002, JXIP covers a planning area of 35 km², of which 25 km² has been developed. More than 500 enterprises have settled business here.



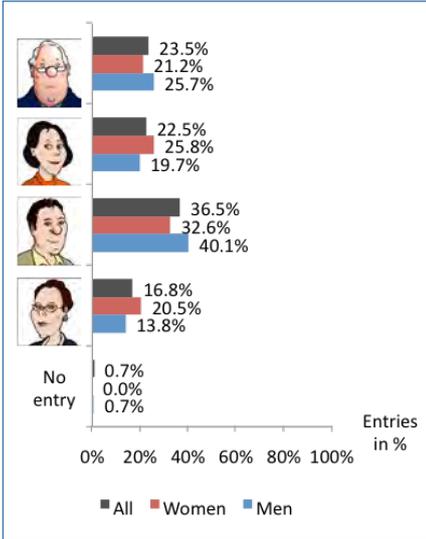
To Anting Base of SVW: 1 Hour
 To Xiaoshan Base of Yulon: 1 Hour
 To Jinqiao Base of SGM: 15 Hours
 To Xiasha Base of Zotye: 1 Hour
 To Ningbo Base of SVW: 40 Minutes
 To Nanjing Base of SAIC & Chang'an: 3 Hours



Pillar Industries: Auto Parts & Electromechanical Industry
 Communication & Electronics Industry



Entries of Chinese Participants



differently in both cultures. The perfect team in Germany is not the best choice in China!

The majority of German participants (37.3%) chose the young woman. People that believe strength of reinforcement (leadership strength) and personal judgment (authenticity) are crucial when it comes to competence select this character type. The majority of

Chinese participants (36,5%) associate the highest competence with the young man. For Germans, this character type represents very strong self-confidence, communication strength and spontaneity. These characteristics are strongly represented in the Chinese set of descriptors for competence (spirit of enterprise, enthusiasm) but not in the German factor set. Chinese (23.5%) and German (33.6%) participants chose the elderly man as the second most competent character type. He represents wisdom, maturity and extraversion (ego-strength). However, you shouldn't be frustrated if you are not an elderly man or a young woman. In the end your actual performance determines whether you are considered a competent person, and not the first glance.

Survey Facts

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Conducting Institute: | Carl Benz Academy - China |
| Survey Title: | Analysis of the term Competence in China and Germany |
| Head of Research: | Manfred Schoenebeck (Chancellor – Carl Benz Academy) |
| Aim of Survey: | Capturing the affective and connotative meaning of the term Competence |
| Survey Channel: | Online questionnaire |
| Compensation for Participants: | Individual Competence Report |
| Methodology: | Osgood's Semantic Differential and Explorative Factor Analysis |
| Sample: | Full sample |
| Survey Period: | Survey was finished by January 2014 |
| Germany | |
| Survey Supervisor: | Janina Schoenebeck (E.R.P. GmbH, js@erp-berlin.com, www.erp-berlin.com) |
| Participants: | 389 returns of 1233 survey invitations (return rate: 31,5%) |
| China | |
| Survey Supervisor: | Yang Yuxin (Carl Benz Academy, yuxin.yang@benz-academy.org) |
| Participants: | 258 returns of 760 survey invitations (return rate: 37,5%) |

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