

Der Productive Blick: Wahrnehmung amerikanischer und japanischer Management- und Produktionmethoden durch deutsche Unternehmer, 1950–1985 [The Productive Gaze: Perceptions of American and Japanese Management and Production Methods by German Businessmen, 1950–1985]. By *Christian Kleinschmidt*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002. Index, notes, bibliography. Cloth, €64.80. ISBN 3-050-03657-5.

Reviewed by Mary Nolan

To what extent can post–World War II business history be understood in terms of Americanization, and what exactly does that polemical and imprecise term mean for business historians? Did Japan in the 1970s and 1980s come to challenge, or even supplant, America as a business model? What roles do states and businessmen play in the transfer and adoption of ideas about technology, management, and marketing? Despite information networks and multiple borrowings, did nationally distinct models persist or hybrid ones evolve? These central questions of twentieth-century business history inform Christian Kleinschmidt's *Der productive Blick*. Kleinschmidt explores West German perceptions of American, and then Japanese, management and production models from 1950 to 1985 and reconstructs the complex patterns of imitation, adaptation, and rejection of technology, human-relations practices, and marketing mechanisms in a diverse sample of large firms, including Volkswagen, Bayer, Mannesmann, and Bahlsen.

Rather than pursuing a macrolevel study of structure and process, as Volker Berghahn did in his *Americanization of German Business*, Kleinschmidt has produced a culturally informed history of the mentality of upper management and of everyday practices on the shop floor as well as in marketing strategies. Drawing on company archives, published business records, managers' reports of trips to the United States and Japan, and the records of various business associations and conferences, this rich micro history explores how America and Japan came to be seen as economic models, analyzes diverse technological and managerial practices in terms of their borrowings from, or rejections of, these models, and reconstructs the information flows about, and subjective perceptions of, business practices both among upper managers and in the public at large. Kleinschmidt's study challenges any simplistic argument about Americanization,

complicates the transatlantic story by turning attention to the German infatuation with Japan in the 1970s and 1980s, and shows how influential the mentality, networks, and practices of managers were to the evolution of technology, management, and marketing.

In the post–World War II decades, Kleinschmidt argues, German firms became “more American” without becoming “Americanized.” Germany first looked to America because that most prosperous economy could help Germany return to the world market and become competitive. For the early 1950s it is accurate to speak of Americanization, meaning U.S. efforts via the Marshall Plan to export American productivity practices and management methods and to encourage their adoption. Kleinschmidt details the many initiatives of the European Recovery Program and the U.S. Technical Assistance and Productivity Program to reeducate Germans by offering them American management training and teaching them American marketing techniques. With support from the German Productivity Board (RKW), the United States sponsored tours to U.S. firms, ran management seminars, and produced films with titles like “Shopping Is a Pleasure” to describe self-service stores. From the late 1950s on, it is more appropriate to speak of German businessmen orienting themselves voluntarily toward the American model or some aspects of it. The result was a hybrid, whose contours, far from being predetermined, were in part shaped by the perspectives and decisions of managers who could have acted differently.

Although Kleinschmidt admits that it is often difficult to delineate the national origins of particular technologies and practices in the hybrid German businesses that he studied, he attempts to do so by looking at the differential adoption of American ideas and practices in different areas. German firms were particularly receptive to imitating some elements of the American model. Due to the autarchic character of the Nazi economy, Germany suffered from a technology gap after 1945, and as Kleinschmidt details in his analysis of Volkswagen and Bahlsen, was very eager to adopt the machinery and factory organization central to American mass production. American models were even more influential in marketing and advertising, due not only to structural factors but also to energetic managers and entrepreneurs with close American contacts. As German business learned to focus on consumption and not just production, the self-service store, which sold less than 5 percent of German goods in the mid-1950s, came to dominate by

the mid-1960s. Henkel, the manufacturer of Persil, eventually marketed its detergent exactly as Procter and Gamble did theirs, and Glanzstoff, producer of the new textiles Perlon and Diolon, likewise imitated American advertising.

In other areas, American models proved less attractive. In managerial education and training, for example, Kleinschmidt found that German managers and the educated public read American managerial works, above all Peter Drucker, took seminars, and visited American firms, but German business never set up a national management training center, as Americans had recommended, and staunchly rejected the American view of German managers as authoritarian and hierarchical. American industrial relations practices were widely promoted by Americans and discussed by Germans, and certain practices, such as teamwork and Training-within-Industry programs, were adopted by some firms. Nonetheless, the American model, which assumed little or no role for the state and unions in worker–employer relations, proved incompatible with the German system of co-determination and with German managers' own traditions.

While most scholars are content to chart the vicissitudes of American influence, Kleinschmidt ambitiously explores the Japanese model as well. Although America pursued similar economic policies toward German and Japan, and although German and Japanese responses went through similar phases, German business did not view Japan as a model, or even as an equal in the first postwar decades. And while Japan enthusiastically adopted the gospel of quality control preached by Bell Labs's W. Edwards Deming, Germany—and the United States—ignored it. Only with the oil shock of 1970 did Volkswagen and parts-delivery firms pay attention to Japanese methods of quality control, group work, and just-in-time production. The Japanese model, however, never reached the broad resonance in chemicals, textiles, and baked goods of the American model.

Kleinschmidt has produced a nuanced and richly elaborated study that is both substantively important and methodologically suggestive. His attention to Japanese influences is particularly important, since the resurgent influence of an altered American model in the 1990s has tended to overshadow the extent to which German and American business looked not to one another but to Japan for much of the 1970s and 1980s.

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