

Tesla Gigafactory in Grünheide

Language Level: Intermediate / Advanced

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Abstract:

Sarah, a student from a U.S. American university is doing an internship at the Tesla Gigafactory in Grünheide near Berlin, Germany. As a German major, her task is to assist the management team with stakeholder engagement, applying her linguistic and cultural knowledge. Tesla's original plan was to start production this summer but opposition from local environmental activists and labor unions delayed the completion of the factory construction. Helping the management to better understand these stakeholders and communicating more effectively with them are the major tasks for Sarah.

Case (German):

Chancen und Herausforderungen – Sarah macht ein Praktikum

Sarah studiert im dritten Jahr und hat zwei Hauptfächer, Deutsch und Marketing. Ihr macht es Spaß Deutsch zu sprechen und verschiedene Aspekte der deutschen und deutsch-sprachigen Kultur zu lernen. Ihr Traum ist es, eines Tages in Deutschland zu arbeiten. Als sie hörte, dass Tesla eine Fabrik in Deutschland baut, hat sie sofort geschaut, ob es Praktika gibt. Sie konnte ihren Augen nicht trauen, als sie eine Praktikumszusage von Tesla in Grünheide per E-Mail bekam und ihr ein drei-monatiges Praktikum für den Sommer angeboten wurde! In der Email schrieb der Tesla-Mitarbeiter, dass sie sehr an ihren linguistischen und kulturellen Kenntnissen interessiert sind und dass sie sich darauf freuen würden, mit Hilfe ihrer Expertise die Kommunikation mit den lokalen Interessenvertretern (stakeholder) zu analysieren und zu verbessern.

Als sie in Grünheide ankam, fühlte sie sich sofort wie ein Fisch im Wasser. Natürlich fühlte sich alles anders an, alles sah ein bisschen anders aus, klang anders – aber genau das war es, was ihr so gut gefiel. Tesla gab ihr eine kleine Wohnung in der Nähe der Fabrik und sie konnte den Bus zur Arbeit nehmen. Während der ersten Tage ihres Praktikums traf sie neue Kollegen und Kolleginnen, alle waren freundlich und hießen sie willkommen. Eines Tages, während der Mittagspause, erzählte ihr ihre Kollegin von einem interessanten Gerücht (rumors): Der Vorgänger (predecessor) ihres Teamleiters soll Probleme bekommen haben, nachdem er fünf deutschen Zeitungen Interviews gegeben habe und sie auf dem Werksgelände (construction site) herumgeführt haben soll. Obwohl das nur Gerüchte waren, machten sie Sarah nachdenklich. Sie dachte über Kommunikationsstrategien nach und was sie während ihres Praktikums dazu beitragen (contribute) könnte.

Der ursprünglich (originally) geplante Produktionsstart diesen Sommer konnte nicht eingehalten werden. Der Grund waren Klagen (lawsuits), die die Umweltorganisationen Grüne Liga und NABU gegen die Waldrodung (forest clearing) und den Bau der Tesla Fabrik im vergangenen Jahr eingereicht hatten. Die Klagen stützen sich auf Verstöße (violations) gegen das Artenschutzrecht (species protection law). Seitdem haben die

Umweltorganisationen mehr als 10 Klagen gegen Tesla eingereicht. Wer sind eigentlich Grüne Liga und NABU? Warum gehen sie gegen Tesla und die Produktion von umweltfreundlichen Autos, wenn sie sich auch um die Umwelt sorgen? Und hatte Deutschland nicht erklärt, dass es bis 2045 komplett emissionsfrei sein will? Sarah konnte das Problem nicht ganz verstehen. Sie brauchte viel Zeit, bis sie die Chronologie der Klagen gegen Tesla recherchiert hatte. Ein Chaos! Wenn sie die Informationen richtig verstanden hat, dann baute Tesla die Fabrik und die Batterieanlage (battery plant) nur mit vorläufiger (temporary) Genehmigung (permission), nach Artikel 8A des Bundesemissionsschutzgesetzes (German federal emission protection law). Das heißt, dass Tesla ein großes Risiko eingeht, denn, wenn die endgültige Baugenehmigung am Ende nicht kommt, muss Tesla alles wieder abbauen. Das wäre verrückt! Man schaue sich nur mal die Tesla Gigafactory in Shanghai an, die in weniger als einem Jahr gebaut wurde! Offensichtlich ist die Situation in Deutschland ganz anders.

In allen Besprechungen (meetings) fühlte Sarah einen ganz deutlichen Zeitdruck: Jeder weitere verlorene Produktionstag bedeutet einen großen finanziellen Verlust (loss). Jede und jeder muss mithelfen, damit die Produktion so schnell wie möglich starten kann. Das heißt, dass die offizielle Baugenehmigung so schnell wie möglich erhalten werden muss. Wenn es nach Sarah ginge, gibt es nur einen Weg: weitere Klagen vermeiden. Was könnte sie konkret machen, wie könnte sie kommunizieren, damit keine Klagen mehr kommen? Wie kann Sarah ihr Sprach- und Kulturwissen kreativ einsetzen, um im Tesla-Team mitzuhelfen?

Oh, und noch eine Sache war klar für Sarah. Tesla wird auch eine effektive Kommunikation mit den Gewerkschaften (trade unions) finden müssen, besonders, wenn die Produktion anläuft (begins). Letztes Semester belegte sie den Kurs Advanced Business German, wo sie über die lange und stolze Tradition des Rechts der Mitbestimmung (right of co-determination) und der Betriebsräte (works council) in Deutschland gelernt hatte. Ihre Erinnerung war etwas verschwommen (blurry), aber sie erinnerte sich, etwas über Automobil- und Stahlindustrie gelernt zu haben und die IG Metall. War das die größte Gewerkschaft in Deutschland? Oder weltweit? Oder beides? Also zumindest wusste sie, dass Betriebsräte und Gewerkschaften sehr stark in Deutschland sind. Tesla sollte auf jeden Fall verhindern, dass es zu Streik oder anderen Auseinandersetzungen mit den IG Metall kommt, und stattdessen eine gute Arbeitsbeziehung mit den Mitarbeitern pflegen (foster).

Sarah's Aufgabe als Praktikantin war es, Vorschläge zu machen, was man mit den Interessenvertretern von Grüne Liga und IG Metall machen kann, um weitere Klagen (und damit eine weitere Verzögerung (delay) des Produktionsstarts) zu verhindern (avoid). Die Teamleitung bei Tesla möchte diese beiden Gruppen besser verstehen und sucht nach spezifischen Wegen auf eine interkulturell angemessene Art und Weise mit ihnen zu kommunizieren. Welche Schritte sollte Sarah gehen, um das gegenseitige (mutual) Verständnis zu erhöhen und zu einer effektiven Kommunikation zwischen Tesla und den Kritikern zu kommen?

Case (English):

Introduction / Opening:

Sarah is a junior and majoring in German and Marketing. She enjoys speaking the language and learning about various cultural aspects of Germany and the German-speaking countries. Her dream is to live and work in Germany. When she learned that Tesla is building a factory in Germany, she immediately looked up internship opportunities there. She couldn't believe her eyes when she received an acceptance email from the Tesla management in Grünheide, offering her a three-month internship for the summer! They were very interested in her linguistic and cultural expertise and were looking forward to working with her on analyzing and improving communication strategies with the local stakeholders.

When she arrived in Grünheide, she immediately felt like a fish in water. Of course, everything felt, looked, sounded different, but this was what she enjoyed. Tesla organized a small studio apartment close to the factory for her and she could take the local bus to work. During her first days of the internship she met her colleagues, all friendly and welcoming. One day, during lunch time, one of her colleagues told her some interesting rumors:

The predecessor of her boss got in trouble after interviewing with five German newspapers and showing them around at the construction site in Grünheide. Even though these were rumors, it made her think about communication and what she could bring to the table during her internship.

Tesla's original plan was to start production this summer but obviously that didn't happen. Sarah learned that the Grüne Liga and NABU, environmental organizations, filed a lawsuit against the forest clearing and construction of Tesla in Grünheide based on species protection law last year. Since then, the environmental organizations have filed more than 10 lawsuits which have been slowing down the construction of the factory. Who are Grüne Liga and NABU? Why are they attacking Tesla and the production of environmentally friendly cars if they are concerned about the environment? And wasn't Germany announcing its aim to be completely emission-free by 2045? Sarah couldn't understand what the problem was. It took her quite some time to reconstruct the chronology of lawsuits. What a mess! Her head was spinning. If she understood the documents correctly, Tesla is building the factory and battery plant on temporary permits that are justified by clause 8A of the German federal emission protection law. This means that Tesla is taking great risks because if the official construction permit will not come through Tesla will have to build everything back. That's crazy! Compare that to Tesla's Gigafactory in Shanghai that took less than a year to complete.

In all the work meetings, Sarah felt a very clear sense of time urgency: Every day of production delay is a loss of profit and everyone must do whatever they can to start production as soon as possible, meaning that construction permit for the Gigafactory must be obtained ASAP. In Sarah's view, there is only one way to get this done: Prevent any further lawsuits. What could be practical steps and communicative strategies to make this happen? How can her linguistic and cultural knowledge help Sarah to come up with creative ideas?

One other thing she knew for sure. Effective communication will also be needed with trade unions, certainly now but especially once the factory started production. Last semester, in her Advanced German Business course, she learned about the long and proud tradition of the right of co-determination and works council in Germany. Her memory was already a little blurry, but she remembered something with the automotive and steel industry and IG Metall. Wasn't this the largest union in Germany or worldwide or both? At least, she knew for sure that works councils and unions are very powerful. Tesla certainly wants to avoid strikes or any kind of trouble with the IG Metall and keep a good working relationship with their employees.

Background:

Recently, Elon Musk announced his plans for the [fourth factory near Berlin](#). According to the mayor of Grünheide, Tesla inspected over 100 locations from more than 300 applicants in Germany and selected the tiniest competitor, Grünheide, as home for the so-called Tesla Gigafactory. The mayor of Grünheide and leading politicians celebrated: "A jackpot!" Tesla's presence in Grünheide brings the long desired industrialization that Brandenburg was preparing for since it lost the competition as production site for [BMW to Leipzig in 2001](#).

Tesla plans to produce about 500.000 cars, Model Y and Model 3, per year and provide up to 40.000 new jobs. It is expected that Tesla will also become one of the major companies offering apprenticeships in Brandenburg. Grünheide will also be the location for a battery cell production plant. The Tesla Gigafactory stimulates the competition for emission-free automobility with German car-manufacturers and boosts the economic power of the region. The small town of Grünheide undergoes change, such as new infrastructure and housing to accommodate those working at the factory. While all this brings growth, profit, and benefits, change also always provokes opposition.

The strongest opposition comes from environmental organizations. A representative group is the Grüne Liga, a group that was founded 1989 in the former GDR and is active only in the former East German states. The first lawsuit was based on the species protection law to preserve the Sand Lizard and the Smooth Snake. The fast deforestation does not ensure the protection of these species. Furthermore, two-thirds of the area on which

Tesla's factory is built is located in the [drinking water protection area](#) and pollution of the water is what residents fear. Another problem is that the area east of Berlin belongs to the most arid places in Germany. The car and battery production is projected to consume a lot of water. One major concern voiced against Tesla is the fast work pace as it impedes thorough investigation of facts and regulations, consulting experts if necessary, that is, work processes that are required and valued in Germany.

Another potential area of conflict concerns the work culture and the tradition of labor unions. Germany has a unique law that protects the workers' right of participation in matters related to their employment, the Work Constitution Act. A letter, the largest trade union in Germany, IG Metall, sent to Tesla in Grünheide was left unanswered and CEO Elon Musk's non-appreciation of unionization concerns IG Metall. U.S. companies such as Walmart or Chrysler are examples of less successful entries into the German market. Often, intercultural differences in work ethic and lack of understanding differences in work culture are part of the difficulties.

Decision Point / Challenge / Problem Faced:

Sarah has been entrusted with offering ideas on how to engage the stakeholders to avoid further lawsuits and thereby delay of the production start. The management wants to better understand where the stakeholders, particularly Grüne Liga and IG Metall, are coming from and they are looking for specific, interculturally competent ways to communicate with them. Which steps should Sarah take to increase understanding about the stakeholders and help communicating effectively with them?

Exhibits / Additional Resources:

Tesla:

- 1) Official website of the Gigafactory: <https://www.tesla.com/gigafactory-berlin>
- 2) Grünheide and BMW: <https://www.welt.de/print-welt/article455144/Gruenheide-hofft-noch-auf-BMW-Werk.html>
- 3) Tesla's presence triggers more industrialization in Brandenburg: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-tesla-germany-brandenburg/german-carmakers-eye-brandenburg-after-tesla-expansion-push-idUSKBN1Z6107>
- 4) E-mobility in Germany: <https://www.bmwi.de/Redaktion/DE/Dossier/elektromobilitaet.html>

Environmental Concerns and Organizations:

- 1) Grüne Liga: <https://www.grueneliga-brandenburg.de/index.php?cat=9&pageID=184>
- 2) NABU: <https://brandenburg.nabu.de/umwelt-und-ressourcen/28745.html>
- 3) Between environmental opposition and support:
 - a) <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/deutschland/gigafactory-in-brandenburg-neuer-widerstand-gegen-tesla-fabrik-stoesst-auf-scharfe-kritik/27297140.html?ticket=ST-3752945-IagnGyr20BVKNOV5XyFT-ap3>
 - b) <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2021/jan/05/elon-musk-new-tesla-gigafactory-germany>
- 4) Bürgerinitiative Grünheide über Tesla: <https://www.bi-gruenheide.de/informieren/fakten-zur-geplanten-tesla-ansiedlung/>

IG Metall:

- 1) IG Metall: <https://www.igmetall.de/ueber-uns/dafuer-stehen-wir>
 - 2) IG Metall Berlin-Brandenburg-Sachsen: <https://www.igmetall-bbs.de/aktuelles/>
 - 3) IG Metall BBS about Tesla: <https://www.igmetall-ostbrandenburg.de/tesla/>
 - 4) Tesla vs. IG Metall:
 - a) <https://www.businessinsider.com/tesla-gigafactory-berlin-union-battle-ig-metall-2021-4>
 - b) <https://deutsche-wirtschafts-nachrichten.de/501938/Geplante-Tesla-Fabrik-in-Brandenburg-IG-Metall-befuerchtet-Aushebelung-von-Arbeitnehmerrechten>
 - c) https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/autobauer-tesla-sucht-fachkraefte-opfer-bringen-fuer-die.1001.de.html?dram:article_id=499877
 - 5) Union strike at Amazon: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-amazon-germany-strike/german-union-calls-four-day-strike-at-amazon-sites-ahead-of-easter-idUSKBN2BK0GU>
 - 6) Intercultural differences in work cultures: <https://www.businessinsider.com/german-work-culture-could-cause-trouble-teslas-new-berlin-factory-2019-11>
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Learning Objectives:

- Demonstrate differentiated understanding of sustainability and environment protection
 - Demonstrate comprehensive understanding of the German right of co-determination of employees
 - Identify essential factors determining a good production site
 - Develop and present written or spoken material that improve knowledge of the cultural context about involved stakeholders, using specific vocabulary
 - Formulate pro/contra arguments and express one's opinion using appropriate German phrases, particularly subordination
 - Present a strategic plan consisting of specific steps and deliverables, such as a pamphlet and a pitch, how to engage with the stakeholders, using the subjunctive
 - Reflect on own views about sustainability and the right of co-participation
 - Reflect on the learning process during the case study
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Lesson Plan:

Day	Preparation, in-class work and homework	Materials needed
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intro/Warm-up I: Students respond to images on Handout 1 and discuss the questions in partner or small group work. ▪ Discussion of students' findings integrating cultural, economic, historic aspects. ▪ Intro/Warm-up II: Students watch the video (Handout 3) and take notes on positive and negative changes due to the Tesla Gigafactory ▪ Discussion of students' notes. <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Written response: Students read Handout 2 "Why Grünheide?" and answer the questions. 	<p>Handout 1 "Warm-up"</p> <p>Handout 3 "Tagesthemen Pro Kontra" (video & vocab)</p> <p>Handout 2 "Warum Grünheide?"</p>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review: Main points of pro/contra (video). ▪ Homework: Students share their written responses in partner work. ▪ Discussion: What would you want if you were to work at Tesla in Grünheide? (subjunctive) What makes a good/bad production site? ▪ Trade unions: Workforce, employees as important factor; Slides 1-8 of Handout 8 "Arbeitskultur". ▪ Brandenburg: Discuss geo-historical, economic, political, and demographic background of Brandenburg and Grünheide. <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Written response: Students read the personal story about the Grüne Liga representative (Handout 5) and write down a brief response from Sarah. 	<p>Handout 8 "Deutsche Arbeitskultur"</p> <p>Handout 5 "Grüne Liga - persönliche Story"</p>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Homework: Students discuss the personal experiences of the Grüne Liga representative that led him to become an environmental activist; any similar experience? ▪ Project I "Communication strategy": In partner work, develop a response to the Grüne Liga representative from the perspective of Sarah with the goal to convince him of the benefits of Tesla and present it in class. ▪ Discussion: Who are the stakeholders in this case? What could be their interests? ▪ Vocab: Students work on vocabulary exercise in Handout 7 "Tesla in Grünheide". <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students read Handout 7 "Tesla in Grünheide" and complete the exercises. 	<p>Handout 7 "Fallstudie"</p>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review: Who are the stakeholders? ▪ Homework: Students discuss answers to homework in small groups. ▪ Project II "Stakeholder engagement map": In two groups students work through Handout 4 "Grüne Liga" or Handout 8 "Deutsche Arbeitskultur" and additional resources to prepare a presentation on their respective stakeholder. The goal is to provide the Tesla management team with detailed and in-depth cultural context about these groups. Students should provide historical background, specific examples, representative milestones, mission/vision, criticisms of Tesla, and a list of arguments that could convince the groups that Tesla is beneficial for them. 	<p>Handout 4 "Grüne Liga"</p> <p>Handout 8 "Deutsche Arbeitskultur"</p>

	<p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students continue with project. 	
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project II “Stakeholder engagement map”: Students continue with project. <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students complete the project. 	
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project II “Stakeholder engagement map”: Students present their project. ▪ Discussion: Deutsche Arbeitskultur - Who benefits from workers council and trade unions the most? Would you like to participate? Why? Why not? Umweltaktivismus - What is their motivation? Do you agree? Why? Why not? <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Half of the students read Handout 6a and the other half reads Handout 6b. 	<p>Handout 6a “Debatte Kontra”</p> <p>Handout 6b “Debatte Pro”</p>
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review: Verb placement using the worksheet “Redemittel”. ▪ Project III “Debate”: Students are divided into two groups (pro vs. contra) and prepare a list of arguments for their respective side. They debate in small groups using Redemittel, particularly subordination. <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students draft a strategic plan Sarah can present at the next meeting with specific suggestions on how to increase mutual understanding and effective communication with the stakeholders. 	<p>Worksheet “Redemittel”</p>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kommunikation: In small groups students discuss Tesla’s communication strategies in Handout 9 and discuss pros and cons of it. They discuss alternative communication strategies. ▪ Project IV “Strategic Plan”: In small groups students present their strategic plan drafts and discuss best practices they want to include in their group work; they must address both stakeholders. <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students work on their strategic plan. 	<p>Handout 9 “Kommunikation”</p>
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project IV “Strategic Plan”: Students work on their strategic plan. <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students complete their strategic plan. 	
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Project IV “Strategic Plan”: Students present their strategic plan in small groups. <p>Homework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Written response: Students answer reflection questions about the case study and their learning. 	<p>Handout 10 “Reflektion”</p>