

A Culture-Sensitive Approach to Working with the French

Unlike many Anglo-Saxon cultures, which value achievements, France is a country based on affiliation and relationships, where information flows freely and constantly between inter-connected people.

French employees do not always need as many details and instructions as Americans when performing a task or managing a project.

Work on Vacation, President Chirac tells Ministers

President Jacques Chirac recently asked cabinet ministers to keep their summer vacations short and take work with them, an unusual request in a country where leisure time is sacred.

Giving too much information might sometimes be considered an insult or a threat to French pride and intelligence.

Always remember that French employees are very sensitive about the way they are being treated. Even the notion of job description might have a negative connotation in France and be synonymous with limitation of freedom and exploitation.

Empathize with the British in Business

U.S. Businessmen Often Face Problems With Language They Regard as Their Own

At business meetings, the British are rather formal at first, using first names only after two or three encounters. At that point, they become very informal and first names will be used and maintained from then on.

British executives try to show during meetings that they are guided by reasonableness, compromise and common sense.

One may find, however, that the British, even in the absence of disagreement, will rarely make a final decision at the first meeting. They do not like to be hurried.

American executives generally like to make on-the-spot decisions when they can, using instinct. The British, more tradition-bound, prefer using instinct to logic, but exercise more caution. With them one should suggest, "Could we have a final decision at our next meeting?"

British businessmen rarely disagree openly with proposals from the other side. They agree whenever possible, but qualify their agreement.

Preparing for the Olympics 2004

Greeks' Behavior at Meetings And Negotiations

Greeks often display great charm, but they are serious negotiators. The senior person will dominate the discussion as you find in some of the Asian and Mediterranean countries.

Greeks are shrewd, have great experience, and do not give much away. They can talk late into the night and seem to get better as they go along.

Their gestures are very similar to the Latinos, but a slight upward nod of the head means "no" and tilting the head to either side means "yes," of course. Occasionally, Greeks smile when they are very angry.

- ❑ **Tourism's contribution to the Greek economy is about 15% of the nation's gross domestic product.**
- ❑ **British and Germans account for about 38 percent of all arrivals.**
- ❑ **Most popular destinations in Greece are Athens and the islands of Crete, Rhodes, Corfu, Kos and Zante.**

Body Language

Finns and Japanese have to be good 'body watchers,' as the verbal messages in their countries are kept at a minimum

Facial expression and loudness of voice or manner are also cultural factors which might disturb you. Members of Spanish or Arab delegation may argue fiercely with each other while opponents are present, causing Americans or Japanese to think 'they are "fighting"'

Smiles, while signifying good progress when on the faces of British, Scandinavians or Germans, might mean embarrassment or anger when adopted by Japanese and often appear insincere in the features of the constantly beaming American.

Communicating With Your Overseas Partners

Different cultures do not use speech the same way, neither do they listen the same way. There are good listeners and there are bad listeners.

NEW ZEALAND: Businessmen value their egalitarian society and are very emphatic about equality among people. They respect people for who they are and have little regard for wealth and social status. Therefore, emphasize honesty and forthrightness in negotiations. Avoid hype and ostentation.

AUSTRALIAN: Australians generally do not like or trust people who constantly or too enthusiastically praise them. They suspect that they are being set up to be either humiliated or deceived. Too much praise raises expectation and puts the high achiever under heavy pressure. Australians hate being pressured.

Decision-making takes place with the consultation of the top management. This takes time.

INDONESIA: Personal contacts are the key to success. It takes time to establish the right contacts, but it is critical you do so. The country is very much a face-to-face society. If you need quick results, go and see the person involved. By the way, be patient and do not rush. The pace is very slow there.

Indonesians listen deferentially and do not interrupt. Speeches at public meetings are long and boring, but people show no dissension. In business meetings they listen carefully to visiting foreign businessmen, but do not always fully understand the content and they will not generally indicate this to you.

MALAYSIA: Punctuality is appreciated among the Malaysians. It is considered to be a sign of respect. Keeping a Malaysian company executive waiting can result in a loss of face. The majority of the businessmen are Chinese. They are very prompt and hardworking. The government officials are Malays. While they expect the foreigners to be on time, they may or may not be very prompt. This is accepted in their culture.

ECONOMIC SNAPSHOT

JAPANESE ECONOMY BACK FROM GRAVE ?

- ❑ Japan is the world's second-largest economy
- ❑ Estimated 2004 economic growth: 3.5%
- ❑ GDP per capita: \$41,000
- ❑ Japan accounts for more than 25% of total world private savings
- ❑ Average household savings: \$207,000
- ❑ Unemployment rate: 4.6%

CELL PHONES:

Intense innovation has pushed Japanese cell phones one or two generations ahead of those in America. Sony Ericsson will soon launch the first Japanese model in this country. Closed, the phone looks like a camera, but it also has a large screen for text messages, games maps, etc. and interactive functions already big in Japan.

COMMENTARY

BREAKING DOWN CULTURAL BARRIERS

Paradoxically, one of the main characteristics of Asia is its diversity. From the sleek shopping malls of Singapore to the desert nomads of western China, from the ultra-urbanized cities of Japan to the traditional fisher-folk of Hong Kong's outlying island, diversity is the key.

For marketers, the important thing is to understand the similarities that make up the entity of Asia. Some of the similarities include the concept of a collective society: most Asians will describe themselves in terms of a group rather than individuals. Family, school, job — these are some of the principal groupings, but this trend seems to be changing among younger generations.

In the West, individualism is encouraged; in Asia, individual achievement is secondary to the good of the group.

Harmony is a common unifying characteristic in Asia. Direct conflict is rare, and Asians always prefer to have harmonious relationships with other people, and with nature. It is vitally important to understand and respect this.

Traditions are also important in Asia. Ancient customs, religions and family structure act as a social adhesive, and the importance of respecting tradition cannot be overstressed.

(Source of materials used in this issue: *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, *SoCoCo Intercultural*, *BusinessWeek*, *The Economist*, *When Cultures Collide*, *Mysticism*, *Money and Madness*, *International Herald Tribune*.)

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