

The Culture&Business – some examples

CHINA

Working practices in China

When doing business in China, punctuality is considered extremely important. Your Chinese counterparts will not keep you waiting; being on time is essential

It is rare that the Chinese will deal with people they don't know or trust. Establishing a proper introduction with your counterparts is vital before entering into business.

In Chinese business culture, the warm, hospitable character of your counterpart does not necessarily equal a positive outcome. Trust, based on a beneficial relationship is more important.

The collectivist way of thinking is still important in Chinese business today and will influence many negotiations.

Business practices in China

The exchanging of business cards is customary in Chinese business culture. One side should be printed in English and one in Chinese. You should present your card with both hands and with the Chinese side facing up. When accepting your colleague's card study it carefully before placing it on the table, never in the back pocket, as this is extremely disrespectful.

During negotiations, humbleness and patience is the key to success. The Chinese sense of time means that they use it knowingly and there is always enough.

In most cases, initial meetings may be more of a social opportunity as oppose to a negotiation discussion.

An important element before commencing a business meeting in China is to engage in small talk. Be prepared, as this may include quite personal questions.

Chinese business etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ⇒ DO maintain eye contact with your interlocutor, avoiding eye contact is considered untrustworthy.
- ⇒ DO address your Chinese counterparts with a title and their last name. If the person does not have a title, use 'Mr' or 'Madam'.
- ⇒ DO wait for your Chinese counterpart to initiate formal greetings. Handshakes are the most popular gesture.
- ⇒ DON'T assume that a nod is a sign of agreement. More often than not, it signifies that the person is simply listening.
- ⇒ DON'T show excessive emotion whilst conducting business, as it may seem unfriendly
- ⇒ DON'T use direct negative replies, as they are considered impolite. Instead of saying 'no', answer 'maybe' or 'I'll think about it.'

INDIA

Working practices India

Indians appreciate punctuality but may not reciprocate it. It is advisable to make appointments at least one month in advance and confirm them when arriving in India. A flexible schedule will prove useful.

Business appointments should ideally be made for late morning or early afternoon, between the hours of 11 and 4.

Making decisions is often a slow and thoughtful process in Indian culture. Deadlines should not be rushed as impatience is seen as aggressive, rude and disrespectful.

Business practices in India

Meetings in India will generally begin with friendly small talk. This may include personal questions about your family and is seen as a way of building rapport and trust before business. In India, the family unit is highly valued, therefore showing interest and respect towards your Indian counterpart's family is vital for establishing successful relationships.

In Indian culture disagreement is rarely expressed in a direct manner. The word 'no' is often avoided and is replaced by other non-verbal cues and indirect communication.

Indian business etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ⇒ DO use titles wherever possible, such as “Professor” or “Doctor”. If your Indian counterpart does not have a title, use “Mr”, “Mrs”, or “Miss”.
- ⇒ DO wait for a female business colleague to initiate the greeting. Indian men do not generally shake hands with women out of respect.
- ⇒ DO remain polite and honest at all times in order to prove that your objectives are sincere.
- ⇒ DON'T be aggressive in your business negotiations – it can show disrespect.
- ⇒ DON'T take large or expensive gifts as this may cause embarrassment. If you do take a gift make sure you present the gift with both hands.
- ⇒ DON'T refuse any food or drink offered to you during business meetings as this may cause offence. In addition, it is useful to bear in mind that traditionally, Indians are vegetarians and do not drink alcohol.

JAPAN

Working practices in Japan

Due to the strong contemporary business competition in Asia, the old concept of the ‘unhurried’ Japanese negotiation process is no longer applicable. Decisions are made swiftly and efficiently.

When arranging a business appointment, making a personal call will be more effective than sending a letter and seen as good manners.

Punctuality is essential in Japan; lateness is as sign of disrespect. Arriving 5 minutes prior to an appointment is good practice.

Business practices in Japan

Business in Japan cannot begin until the exchange of business cards or ‘meishi’ has been completed. Use both hands to present your card, which should be printed in both languages. On receiving your counterpart's business card make a show of examining it carefully before placing it on the table. It is important to deal with another's business card with care.

A significant part of former Japanese business protocol was gift giving. In contemporary Japanese business culture, although not expected, the gesture is still practiced and will be accepted with gratitude. However, be careful not to take too big a gift as it may be regarded as a bribe.

It is good business practice to engage in small talk before negotiations. Expect your Japanese counterpart to ask questions regarding your education, family and social life. More private questions are not acceptable.

In Japanese business protocol contracts are not necessarily final agreements or a sign that business is over. In Japan, looking after partners or clients even after business is very important. Aftercare and long-term relationships are positively encouraged.

Japanese business etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ⇒ DO use apologies where the intention is serious and express gratitude frequently as it is considered polite in Japan.
- ⇒ DO avoid confrontation or showing negative emotions during business negotiations. Express opinions openly but evade direct or aggressive refusals.
- ⇒ DO greet your counterparts with the proper respect and politeness. If your counterpart bows make sure you return the gesture, which is usually performed shortly and shallowly. More often than not, a handshake is sufficient.
- ⇒ DON'T give excessive praise or encouragement to a single Japanese colleague in front of others. Remember that the group is often more important than the individual.
- ⇒ DON'T address your Japanese counterpart by their first name unless invited to do so. Use the titles ‘Mr’ or ‘Mrs’ or add ‘san’ to their family name; for example, Mr Hiroshima will be “Hiroshima san”
- ⇒ DON'T use large hand gestures, unusual facial expressions or dramatic movements. The Japanese do not talk with their hands.

RUSSIA

Working practices in Russia

The Russians attitude to time means that a few minutes delay on their part is of little importance. However, they will expect you to be punctual.

Faxes and emails are the best way to communicate in Russia, as the post can often be unreliable. It is customary before making a trip to Russia to inform the prospective company of your intended business proposals and objectives.

Paperwork and putting pen to paper is an essential part of all working practices in Russia. In general, they have little faith in unsigned documents.

Business practices in Russia

Business cards are essential. If possible, ensure that one side is printed in Russian and one side in English.

Presentations should be straightforward and comprehensible.

Although many principal concerns are discussed in an informal environment final negotiations will be conducted in the office.

Generally, when beginning a meeting, the head of the organisation will open the discussion and introductions should then be made in order of importance.

Russian business etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ⇒ DO shake hands firmly when greeting and leaving your Russian partners and make direct eye contact.
- ⇒ DO partake in small talk, which normally involves talk of family and personal matters, before dealing with business.
- ⇒ DO take a gift that symbolizes the stature of your company and the importance of the impending business deal, preferably an item characteristic of your local area or one that displays the company logo.
- ⇒ DON'T be afraid to show some emotion, the Russians won't!
- ⇒ DON'T as the Russian proverb states 'hurry to reply', but 'hurry to listen'.
- ⇒ DON'T praise or reward anyone in public as it may be viewed with suspicion or cause envy and jealousy. Remember the collective rules over the individual.

FRANCE

Working practices in France

Arriving for business appointments 10-15 minutes after the scheduled time is not considered late and is therefore acceptable in France.

Generally speaking in French business culture, unless specifically stated, deadlines are open to negotiation.

Business organisations in France are highly organised and well structured. Consequently, rules and administrative practices are favoured over effectiveness or flexibility.

Business practices in France

In French business culture it is customary to only use first names when invited to do so. Sometimes the French will introduce themselves by saying their surname first, followed by their Christian name.

Lunch is the best place to forge business relationships in France. The subject of business, however, should only be brought up by the host and at a later stage in the meal.

A business meeting should begin and end with a brisk handshake accompanied by an appropriate greeting and the exchanging of business cards.

Despite the formality of French business culture, it is not uncommon practice to stray from the agenda during meetings. Initial meetings are often dedicated to information sharing and discussion, rather than reaching final decisions.

Business etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ⇒ DO maintain a constant air of formality and reserve during all business practices and at all levels within the business, using titles wherever possible.

- ⇒ DO make direct but moderate eye contact with your French business colleagues.
- ⇒ DO try to learn a few basic French phrases and use them whenever possible. Your efforts will not go unnoticed.
- ⇒ DON'T discuss your family or other personal matters during negotiations.
- ⇒ DON'T be put off by frequent differences in opinion and rigorous debate during business negotiations. The French will appreciate your ability to defend your position.
- ⇒ DON'T rush or display signs of impatience with your French counterparts. The French take their time before arriving at a decision.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Working practices in the UK

In accordance with British business protocol, punctuality is essential at any business meeting or social event.

When making business appointments it is best practice to do so several days in advance.

The British are inclined to follow established rules and practices; therefore decision-making is often a slow and systematic process.

Business practices in the UK

Business meetings in the UK are often structured but not too formal and begin and end with social conversation.

First names are used almost immediately with all colleagues. Exceptions are very senior managers. However, you should always wait to be invited to use first names before doing so yourself.

Business cards are an essential prop and are usually exchanged.

Negotiations and decisions are usually open and flexible. Your British counterparts will favour a win/win approach.

British business etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ⇒ DO respect personal space. The British value their space and keeping an acceptable distance is advised.
- ⇒ DO remember to shake hands on first meetings. It is considered polite to do so.
- ⇒ DO make direct eye-contact with your British counterpart, however remember to keep it to a minimum or it could be considered impolite or rude.
- ⇒ DON'T ask personal questions regarding your British counterpart's background, occupation or income.
- ⇒ DON'T underestimate the importance of humour in all aspects of business in the UK.
- ⇒ DON'T forget that instructions are often disguised as polite requests.

GERMAN

German working practices

Punctuality is essential. Arriving even five or ten minutes after the appointment time is considered late—and disrespectful. If running late for an appointment, it is best to notify the person.

Appointments are made for most situations, and sometimes several weeks in advance.

Decision-making is often a slow and detailed process. Do not expect significant conclusions to be reached based on spontaneous or unstructured results.

Business practices

First names are generally only used with family and close friends and colleagues. Therefore, always use last names and appropriate titles. You will often find that colleagues who have worked together for years still maintain this level of formality.

Business meetings follow a formal procedure. German managers work from precise and detailed agendas, which are usually followed rigorously; moreover, meetings always aim for decisive outcomes and results, rather than providing a forum for open and general discussion.

German business protocol requires that colleagues should be greeted with a firm, but brief, handshake on both arrival and departure.

In German business dealings, it is important to provide solid facts and examples to back up proposals, given the German preference for analytical thinking and rational explanations.

Business Etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ⇒ DO take plenty of business cards with you and ensure they include full details of your background, qualifications, and titles.
- ⇒ DO maintain direct eye-contact when addressing German colleagues, especially during initial introductions.
- ⇒ DO use the formal version of you ("Sie"), unless someone specifically invites you to use the informal "Du" form. It is usually best to let your German counterpart take the initiative of proposing the informal form of address (this implies readiness to develop a personal relationship).
- ⇒ DON'T discuss personal matters during business negotiations, as this is considered to deviate from the task at hand.
- ⇒ DON'T attempt to continue negotiations after a contract has been signed. Your German colleagues may view this with suspicion, which could lead to an unsuccessful business agreement.
- ⇒ DON'T use exaggerated or indirect communication styles during business meetings with you German counterparts. It creates an impression of insincerity and dishonesty.

SPAIN

Working practices

Working hours can vary across Spain. Generally speaking, offices open at approximately 09.00 and close mid-evening, with a two-hour break around 14.00. However, Spanish working hours have become more "Europeanised" in recent years, particularly in the northern cities.

Business appointments should always be made well in advance in Spain and confirmation via letter or fax beforehand is advised. It is best to arrange initial business meetings for mid-morning due to the relatively unusual structure of the Spanish working day.

Punctuality is expected of foreign visitors; however, you may sometimes find your Spanish counterparts arrive up to 30 minutes late.

Business practices

The decision-making process in Spain is usually unhurried and can be a gradual, detailed procedure that involves consideration from various levels within the company. In this respect, maintaining good relationships with your Spanish counterparts from all positions are vital for success.

When arriving at an appointment it is advised to present your business card to the receptionist. Wherever possible, business cards should be printed in English on one side and in Spanish on the other. You should present your card with the Spanish side facing the recipient.

An initial introduction at both business and social meetings generally include a formal handshake whilst making direct eye contact and is extended to everyone present, male and female.

Business etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ⇒ DO remain patient in all dealings with your Spanish counterparts. The Spanish are sometimes noted for their relaxed approach to business and Spanish bureaucracy can be frustrating. However, be wary of the 'mañana' stereotype as you will find that certainly in the northern regions such as Catalonia and the Basque Country that deadlines and punctuality are much more closely adhered to.
- ⇒ DO try to maintain a friendly and personal atmosphere during negotiations. In order to be effective in Spain, Spanish business culture also requires a sense of self-dignity, consideration and diplomacy.
- ⇒ DO use basic titles of courtesy, Mr, Mrs, or Miss, followed by the surname, and professional titles, such as Dr, where known. Particularly with older counterparts or those in the south of Spain. Care should also be taken in using the correct surname as Spaniards have two, their father's first surname and their mother's first surname. Normally the father's surname is used on its own.

- ⇒ DON'T expect to enter into business discussions at the start of a meeting. Your Spanish colleagues will want to establish a familiar environment on which to build new business relationships. This may include asking personal questions regarding your family life and background.
- ⇒ DON'T presume that business can be explicitly discussed over meals, it is generally considered a sociable activity and therefore you should wait until your Spanish colleagues initiate such conversation. Despite this, business lunches and dinners are a vital part of business life in Spain as a means through which to establish trust and future business relationships.
- ⇒ DON'T display signs of over assertiveness or superiority. Your Spanish counterparts will appreciate a more modest approach to business negotiations.

The USA

Working practices in the United States

In the US, punctuality is an essential part of business etiquette and as such, scheduled appointments or meetings must be attended on time. Americans perceive lateness as a sign of disrespect. Therefore, in situations where you know you will be late, a call should be made to inform your American colleagues of your delay.

Deadlines are strictly adhered to in American business culture. Americans place great emphasis on getting the best results in the quickest time. Your American counterparts may appear to be hasty in their decision-making. This, however, is due to the fact that the concept “time is money” is taken extremely seriously in the US.

Generally speaking, in the United States the working week consists of Monday to Friday, 9-5pm. However, due to the strong American work ethic the majority of Americans work long hours and overtime is common practice. It is also customary to take as few as ten days holiday per year.

Business practices in the United States

It is customary to begin and end business meetings with a brief but firm handshake. Maintaining direct eye contact during this initial greeting and whenever in conversation is also essential, as it demonstrates to your American colleagues your interest and sincerity.

The exchanging of business cards is a casual affair in the US and as such demands no clear ritual or set of rules. Americans regard business cards as a resource for future information. On the occasions when they are exchanged, it may be done either during introductions or when leaving.

During negotiations, it is important to remember that the aim of most business discussions in the US is to arrive at a signed contract. Americans consider negotiations as problem-solving situations based on mutual benefit and personal strengths. Subsequently, emphasis is placed on one's financial position and business power.

When doing business in the US, you will be expected to adhere to rules and guidelines that your US business counterparts must also follow. Company policy and business procedures such as legally binding contracts, are aspects of American business culture that require strict compliance.

American business etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ⇒ DO address your American business colleagues with a title, such as “Dr”, “Ms”, “Mr”, or “Mrs”, and their last name when meeting someone for the first time. You may find that, your American counterparts will insist on using first names almost immediately; this is not a sign of familiarity but simply reflects the casual business style of Americans and their emphasis on equality.
- ⇒ DO say “please” and “thank you” to everyone for even the smallest kindness. Politeness is highly valued in the United States and Americans will expect you to be as polite as they are.
- ⇒ DO be prepared to partake in preliminary small talk with your American counterparts at the beginning of a business meeting. This will often include topics such as sport or the weather and is seen as a way to lessen apprehension and create a comfortable environment before entering into business affairs.
- ⇒ DON'T expect all companies to be the same. Business culture in the US differs from company to company on many levels, including industry, region and business structure. It is advised to research

as much as possible about the individual business culture of your American associates before meeting with them.

- ⇒ DON'T make any other form of physical contact such as hugging when greeting your American counterpart for the first time. Americans respect their privacy and personal space.
- ⇒ DON'T be offended or surprised if your American colleagues cannot accept a gift. Gift giving is often discouraged or limited by many US companies and therefore most employees are unable to accept them.