

Cross cultural business etiquette assignment



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Introduction Knowledge of cross-cultural business etiquette practices is a very important thing for multinational companies and other companies that operate in, and do business with, other countries to have. It is important to appreciate and respect the cultural diversity that comes hand-in-hand with global business operations. By working with other countries within their codes of business manners and etiquette, it will be easier to avoid causing unintended offense. It also helps to keep lines of communication open and make sure operations run smoothly.

Displaying proper etiquette is vital, as a single mistake or impropriety can cost you money and new business relationships (French Business Etiquette, 2011). These skills should be required knowledge for all global business executives, managers, and employees. By definition, etiquette is the conventional requirements as to social behavior. They are properties of conduct as established in any class or community or for any reason. Specifically, business etiquette is the code of ethical behavior regarding professional practice or action among the members of a profession in their dealings with each other.

Etiquette is synonymous with words like manners, politeness, civility, and protocol (Etiquette). Even though we interact with different countries more than ever due to globalization, there are still major differences between countries. When business deal in, or with, multiple countries, not only do they have to follow the rules of etiquette for that particular profession but they also have to adapt to the different social codes of etiquette for those different countries. The following portion of the paper will present various

codes of business etiquette for four countries: France, Germany, Sweden, and Great Britain.

For those people interested in working with businesses internationally, these rules and guidelines can help ease some of the difficulties in working, and communicating, with those from another country and culture. Business Etiquette in France French business behavior emphasizes courtesy and formality to such an extent that Americans need to learn about what is correct behavior in dealing with French business people. Mutual trust and respect are required to get things done and this trust is earned through proper behavior (France- French Culture). To discuss French business etiquette, it is important to make sure it is set within the more general context of the French culture. One of the ways to do this is through exploring France's scores on the Hofstede Assessment. In the uncertainty avoidance category the French score very high. They feel threatened by ambiguity and strongly resist any changes to these traditional beliefs and institutions. The French also score on the high end of the individualism spectrum. When it comes to power distance, French people respect authority and are more prone to accept unequal distributions of power within organizations.

With its high power distance society, France is more centralized with hierarchical organization structures that feature a higher proportion of supervisors who give orders to those at the lower levels. France has a relatively low masculinity score and values cooperation, friendly atmosphere, group decisions making, more employee freedoms, and environmental conservation over money and material possessions ((1) Workman, 2008). Culturally, there are certain values that translate directly into the business

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world. Education is important and since it is almost free from primary school to Ph.

D. level for French citizens it is expected that people dealing in business will have a good education (Priest, 2008). Punctuality is treated a bit more casually in France than in other nations, but it is still important. It is considered rude to just “ drop in” on someone so always set an appointment beforehand or give notice of arrival (Priest, 2008). As stated previously, formality is key. Although foreigners might sometimes perceive the French people as rude, formal language and behavior are considered very important. Politeness is valued as well.

Typical gestures include holding the door open for other people to pass through first or calling those who hold a high position in the office politely by his or her title (French Business Etiquette, 2008). Other values are propriety and a respect for privacy (French Business Etiquette, 2011). First impressions are very important in the business world. Accidentally causing offense right away because of ignorance about customs can prematurely halt career progression or hinder business relationship building. To begin, when introductions are being made do not go up and make self-introductions.

Wait for the introduction to be made by someone with an already established relationship (Fawcett, 2010). People are addressed politely with Monsieur/Madame. Don't change over into informal titles and language until the invited to do so by the person (French Business Etiquette, 2008). It is also important to always shake hands when meeting someone and when leaving. French handshakes are not as firm as in the Unites States; it is brief

and accompanied by a short span of eye contact (Priest, 2008). It is also encouraged to exchange business cards after initial introductions.

Be sure to have the other side of business cards correctly translated into French. It demonstrates respect to the dominant language and attention to detail and also include any advanced academic degrees as the French highly value education (France- French Culture). When working, the French consider themselves professionals and usually act and dress the part (Fawcett, 2010). The French are very conscious of their appearance. Business dress is understated and stylish (France- French Culture). Be sure to dress conservatively, in well-tailored clothing, and avoid bright colors.

Patterned fabrics and dark colors are most acceptable (Priest, 2008). Women should wear either business suits or elegant dresses. Soft colors are considered acceptable for women's business attire (France-French Culture). Women should avoid wearing flashy or noisy jewelry and overpowering perfume (Priest, 2008) (Fawcett, 2010). Men should wear dark-colored, conservative business suits for the initial meeting. Depending on the company and situation, sometimes dress codes can be a bit more casual, but typically French businessmen generally do not loosen their ties or take off their jackets at the office (France- French Culture).

French businesspeople are more reserved in giving and receiving information than the average American is accustomed to. The way a French person communicates is often predicated by his/her social status, education level, and which part of the country they were raised. In business situations, the French often appear extremely direct because there is no fear of asking

probing questions, which can be unsettling for Americans who are unaccustomed to this. French is the official language and if there is a lack of knowledge about speaking it, apologize.

Although most individuals in business do speak English, it is always good to learn a few key phrases because it shows an interest in building a long-term relationship (France-French Culture). The French have a great appreciation for the art of conversation, but complain that Americans lecture rather than converse (Priest, 2008). It is important to be mindful of this perception by French people and take necessary steps to avoid “lecturing” when conversing with others. The American way is not the best way; listen and be sensitive to the opinions and ideas of others. Also, don’t be afraid to debate.

The French frequently interrupt each other, as argument is a form of entertainment (Priest, 2008). Higher value is placed on business partners who can make logical arguments and understand all sides of a situation (French Business Etiquette, 2011). Be sensitive to the volume of vocalizations or it can offend others in the meeting, in the restaurant, or on the street if carrying on a conversation too loudly. The same goes for talking on a cell phone. Keep conversations and voice volume low and phone conversations short in order to avoid invading other people’s privacy (Fawcett, 2010).

Another aspect of French culture that Americans tend to shy away from is eye contact, which is frequent and intense. Be sure to maintain it during discussions (Priest, 2008). The French business environment is shaped by hierarchical structures: business and private life are sharply separated. Avoid

overly friendly behavior, as the French make a clear distinction between business and personal/social lives (French Business Etiquette, 2008). Certain subjects, such as family drama, health issues, children's schooling, etc. are not considered appropriate during business hours (Fawcett, 2010).

An exception to this is that if a work superior does choose to tell all about his/her life story, including the problems of the day, listen carefully and with interest. It could end up being a career booster. Another separation between personal and professional life is office romances. The French may flirt, but it's considered bad form to have interoffice romances. If it does happen, be certain the romance happens as far away from the premises as possible and don't confide in a third party about your indiscretion (Fawcett, 2010).

Meetings and negotiations are an everyday part of doing business, whether it is here in the United States or abroad. When participating in meetings or negotiations in France, it is, yet again, very important to maintain formality and courtesy. The purpose of meetings in France is to discuss issues, not to make decisions and business is conducted slowly. Individuals at the top of the company generally make most decisions in an organization. It is also polite to wait to be told where to sit for a meeting (France-French Culture). When negotiating, be patient and avoid confrontational behavior or high-pressure sales tactics.

These discussions and debates can become very heated and intense but be sure to avoid exaggerated claims as the French see these as evidence of ignorance, which is not appreciated. Once an agreement is reached, it is not uncommon for the French businesspeople to insist the decision be formalized

in an extremely comprehensive, precisely worded contract (France- French Culture). Use precision and details when drawing up these contracts, agendas or other business documents to be used by all the parties and always obtain French translations of business documents (French Business Etiquette, 2011).

Also regarding business meeting, setting appointments is a necessity and the appointments should be made at least two weeks in advance.

Appointment dates may be set in writing or by telephone and, depending upon the level of the person you are meeting, are often handled by the secretary (France- French Culture). It is important to avoid scheduling business meetings during July and August. It is when most people take vacation time (French Business Etiquette, 2011). Although not considered to be the best, these scheduled business meetings can be conducted during any meal, but lunch is best (Priest, 2008).

Just wait until the dessert course to bring up business matters (France- French Culture). Also, refrain from waving across the room if a friend or business associate is spotted. A smile will suffice and be far less intruding upon other people's meals (Fawcett, 2010). During business meetings and gatherings be mindful of alcohol consumption. Never, under any circumstances, drink more than one glass of wine (and you may want to stick to water) in a business situation. At office parties, be careful not to get tipsy. The French may like their wine, but don't drink too much, and whatever you do, steer clear of those who do (Fawcett, 2010).

Business Etiquette in Germany German business culture and etiquette is formal, forward thinking, proper, and highly respects the act of planning. These traits describe certain ways business should be done whenever conducting business with German business professionals. Not only do these specific traits describe German business culture, but Geert Hofstede's Culture Dimensions can summarize what to expect of the general culture in German society when doing business in Germany as well. Germany has a high individualism score when it comes to private and home life, yet in contrast, they are more team oriented in business.

Individualism is the only dimension that doesn't match their business culture. Germans jointly assume responsibilities and achieve goals in groups and negotiating decisions are often referred to committees ((2)Workman, 2008). Germany's high masculinity score demonstrates that success, money, and material possessions form the dominant values in society. Germans also place greater importance on earnings, recognition, advancement, and challenge in business culture ((2)Workman, 2008). Uncertainty avoidance for Germany is described as high because Germans insist on written rules and detailed codes of conduct.

Finally, the last dimension, power distance, explains that Germany is depicted as being a decentralized society, with relatively flatter organizational structures and smaller proportion of supervisors. Workers are also highly loyal to their company ((2)Workman, 2008). With this very basic understanding of German culture, more detailed tips of business etiquette can be discussed within the context of the German culture. The first topic of detailed German etiquette is the idea of what should be done when meeting

a German business professional. German etiquette describes first meetings as formal with firm and quick handshakes being the norm.

Titles are very important and denote respect. It is also respectful to use a person's title and surname until told to no longer do so. Use Herr or Frau for the person's name and then their surname (Herr meaning " Mr. " and frau meaning " Mrs. " or " Ms. ") (Germany: First Name or Title, 2007). It is also not uncommon for long time friends to still call each other by last name.

When meetings are needed, specific rules apply as well. Be aware of the German people's high uncertainty avoidance score. Appointments for meetings are mandatory and should be set up one to two weeks in advance.

Punctuality is taken very seriously as well. If someone feels that they may be late, they need to telephone immediately and provide an explanation of why the meeting will have to be delayed (Germany). Meetings are very structured and generally very formal, so stick to strict agendas. When entering the business meeting room, the eldest always enters first, men next, then the women (this being if their age and status are equivalent) (Germany). It is customary to hold an initial meeting to get to know everyone. Germans use these first meetings to see if they feel the new client/business agent is trustworthy and worth doing business with. Germans do not normally offer breakfast meetings; however, sometimes dinner will occur right after business matters are finished. These dinner conversations typically pertain to the business on hand, but usually have bits of personal conversation mixed in (Germany: Prosperous Entertaining, 2007). While Germans may talk business during these dinners, business decisions are never made at this

time. When the bill comes at the end of dinner, or any business meal, the person who extended the meal invitation handles the bill.

The guest is never expected to, nor should they, offer to pay (Germany: Prosperous Entertaining, 2007). Another aspect of business meetings outside of the office is that Germans do not often entertain business associates in their homes. When they do, these times are offered as relationship building times, but are still quite formal and being punctual is necessary. The seat will always be chosen for the guests as well, so they should never assume their seat (Germany: Prosperous Entertaining, 2007). If negotiations come into play, there is a rigid protocol to be followed. Guests should treat the negotiation with the formality it deserves.

Germans are highly bureaucratic and the meetings are heavily regulated, giving into to their norm of high uncertainty avoidance (Germany). Germans will be interested in the guests' credentials and will engage in even the smallest amount of small talk. Germans will take their time to fully understand everything in the negotiations and are very detail oriented when making decisions. The decision making process is hierarchical and large decisions come from the top of the organization. Trying to use high-pressure tactics or confrontational behavior does not work when negotiating with Germans.

When the decision is made, it will not be changed and contracts are strictly followed (Germany). Finally, when initially meeting a German at a business meeting or dinner, gifts are a polite way to show respect. Smaller gifts are usual, especially when a deal has not been reached yet. If a substantial gift

is going to be given, the larger the gift, the more public and official the giving should be (Germany: Gift Giving, 2007). Examples of gifts could be the following: quality pens, tasteful office items with the guests company's logo, imported liquor, fine chocolates (if invited to a home), or scarves.

If unsure of the gift, certain gifts should be avoided, like the following: red roses (these are for lovers), lilies are for funerals, beer, and personal items like clothing, perfume and other toiletries (Germany: Gift Giving 2007). When dealing with German business culture and professionals, researching before going is the best bet. Understanding what type of culture the country has, if they are individuals, have masculine or feminine tendencies, have high or low uncertainty avoidance, or have high or low power distance can help in the initial stages.

These dimensions can give any business professional general ideas of how to act in a new environment. Specific etiquette should always be researched as well to ensure that meetings and greetings are conducted in the best, and most respectful, ways possible. Business Etiquette in Sweden Business etiquette in Sweden is different than the rules of business etiquette that Americans are accustomed to following in the United States. However, there are some similar practices we find present in both cultures. To better understand Swedish business etiquette, gaining general knowledge of Swedish culture is important.

We get a better idea of the Swedish culture by evaluating Sweden's scores on the Hofstede Assessment. In the power distance category the Swedish score low. This means that power is shared and well dispersed and the

Swedish people see themselves as being treated equally. The Swedish also scored high among individualism and have a high respect for privacy.

Sweden has the lowest measured value of masculinity so assertiveness, competitiveness, and money are not as important as more of the feminine, nurturing values.

The uncertainty avoidance score is also low, so Swedes are more comfortable with ambiguity (Making Sense, 2009). It is important to understand the do's and don'ts for meeting and greeting others in an unknown culture in order to avoid starting off a business relationship on the wrong foot before even getting a chance to discuss the actual business. First impressions go a long way and giving a bad one can harm a new business venture. General business practices in Sweden aren't too different than what Americans are used to in the United States.

Call at least two weeks in advance to make appointments and once these are set up, plans rarely change. Unlike the United States where vacation times vary, try to avoid certain months for important meetings because Swedish business people are often unavailable due to vacation time. These include late February through early March, June, July, and August (Doing Business with Sweden) During these months the Swedish people like take holiday in order to enjoy a love for environment and surroundings (Malinak, 2009). Agendas are clearly set for meetings with a stated purpose (Sweden, 2007).

As far as gift giving practices go, it isn't often necessary to give one. However, if there ever was a good time to give a gift to a business associate,

then it would be at the end of a business agreement (Salk, 2005). One of the most convenient things about operating in Sweden is that English is used in business, so when presenting business cards and interacting with business counterparts it is not necessary to communicate through an interpreter (Salk, 2005). It is appropriate for a handshake to take place upon meeting someone; these tend to be brief and firm (Doing Business with Sweden).

Elders see this as a sign of respect and expect to be greeted with a handshake and also given one upon departure. Whether or not it is a formal meeting or just a conversation does not matter; always start and finish with a handshake (Sweden, 2007). If handshakes are taking place between a male and female, the male should wait until the female initiates an often-lighter handshake (Doing Business with Sweden). As a common courtesy, gloves should also be removed before shaking hands in Sweden. Personal space is very important to the Swedish culture, so the only touching that takes place are these brief handshakes.

Because of this lack of comfort with touching, the Swedes also tend to stand further apart when conversing (Doing Business with Sweden). Make sure that when introducing and addressing a Swedish businessperson formality is upheld until invited to do otherwise. This means using appropriate titles and using last names (Boike, Ibarra, & Cox, 2004). This adds a great deal of formality to this level of relationship, which can often make doing business in Sweden a little harder to get used to for Americans (Boike, Ibarra, & Cox, 2004).

When taking on these international assignments, having strong relationships with business counterparts often makes life a little easier, so be polite and follow the expectations that formality will be upheld. The Swedish people have a very direct and open communication style that might cause some uneasiness in Americans (Malinak, 2009). Although it might come across as such, Swedes are not trying to come across as being abrupt (Doing Business with Sweden). Listen intently when being talked to and do not interrupt; turns are taken to offer opinions.

It is also wise to avoid talking with hands in pockets as this is considered bad etiquette. Swedes have very reserved body language, so it is important to make sure eye contact is maintained at all times during discussions (Sweden, 2007). Americans often enjoy joking around or having fun while doing business in the United States, but this type of behavior is seen as disrespectful in Sweden. Therefore, avoid any backslap or other joking gestures (Boike, Ibarra, & Cox, 2004). When doing international assignments in Sweden make sure to remain calm, cool, collected, and controlled.

Also, keep in mind not to show emotion during negotiations. Being able to ensure that all parties involved are getting the best of the experience possible makes life easier for everyone. Punctuality is very important in this culture and if delayed for any reason it is proper to call with an explanation (Sweden, 2007). Understand that the Swedes have a higher initial respect for those who come with knowledge and experience so express that appropriately (Doing Business with Sweden). Business Etiquette in Great Britain

Four countries make up the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland — England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (United Kingdom, 2011). Hofstede's dimensions give a clearer picture as to what the general culture is like for Great Britain. The British score fairly low on the power distance scale. The low ranking indicates that British society de-emphasizes the difference between citizens' power and wealth. Equality and equal opportunity for everyone is stressed. Great Britain scores very high in the individualism category with only Australia and the United States being higher.

Individuality and individual rights are paramount within the society. Great Britain also scores higher, rather than lower, on the masculinity scale. British society values more of the assertive and aggressive "masculine" traits (Geert Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture). Finally, the uncertainty avoidance score is fairly low so there is less of a concern about ambiguity and more tolerance for a diversity of options. Business activities are less structured and managers tend to take greater risks (Hofstede's Dimensions). Great Britain is overall a conservative culture and etiquette shows this.

Expect formalities and protocol to be observed in business. Affection usually is not displayed in public and touching and physical closeness are reserved to family and close friends. The British are reserved, which may cause them to appear cool and indifferent when, in fact, they are actually quite friendly and helpful to foreigners. Greetings are usually done more formally and handshakes should be exchanged with everyone present at the beginning of a meeting and at the end. This includes women, men, and even children. The handshakes are light, not aggressive or firm (United Kingdom, 2011).

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Also be sure to use last names and appropriate titles until invited to do otherwise. The British like a certain amount of personal space and eye contact is seldom kept during conversations (Priest, 2007). The exchange of business cards does take place at the beginning of an initial meeting, but when receiving a business card it is usually just glanced at and put away (Doing Business in the UK). Business attire and rules are somewhat more relaxed in Great Britain, but formal and conservative dress is still very important for both men and women (Priest, 2007).

Men should wear a suit of a dark color; usually blue, black, or grey is quite acceptable (Doing Business in the UK). Women are not as limited as men in colors and styles, but it is still important to be dressed in a suit or a conservative dress (Priest, 2007). When it comes to business situations, it is imperative to be on time for meetings. Even arriving a few minutes early is acceptable (Priest, 2007). If a delay occurs, be sure to call and notify whomever the meeting was with. When scheduling a business meeting, the host business needs to make the meeting well in advance.

Meetings usually get right to the point very shortly after the start of the meeting. The meetings usually have a direct purpose or goal, such as coming to an agreement, decision, or making a plan for future business. When it comes to making decisions, British businesspeople can be slow due to the path of formalities and protocols in place to reach business decisions (United Kingdom, 2011). It is very unwise to try to rush the British into making a decision (Priest, 2007). When a business meeting is set for entertaining purposes, it is usually for lunch at a restaurant or even a pub.

Whoever extended the invitation is the one to pay the bill (United Kingdom, 2011). There are some instances when business entertaining may occur in someone's home. In that situation, it is actually preferable to arrive 10-20 minutes after the requested time of arrival so that early visitors do not surprise the host. When sitting down to eat the meal, wait for the host of the dinner to begin eating first. One thing to be aware of is that it is considered rude to ask for a tour of a host's house, but in the United States that is very common (United Kingdom, 2011).

In a few countries it is proper etiquette to bring a gift when doing business, but when going to a business meeting or gathering with British businesspeople gifts are typically not exchanged. If choosing to bring a gift, be sure that it is something small such as a book (Doing Business in the UK).

Conclusion Maneuvering in situations involving other cultures can be daunting, but with proper preparation and education on cross-cultural differences, it can become an excellent opportunity for growth in one's professional career. Treat everyone with respect and adhere to the business etiquette and manners that are the norm for a country.

Showing others a willingness to learn and understand different cultures will do nothing but help in building and maintaining business relationships with people around the world. With globalization, those who can, and are willing to, adapt and learn, will be the business world's next greatest success stories. Bibliography Etiquette. Retrieved from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/etiquette> France: Fawcett, K. (2010). How business manners differ in France. Retrieved from <http://www.bonjourparis.com/story/how->

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