

The silent language in overseas business by edward t. hall

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Hall tries to provide American businessmen with the frame of reference as he outlines the rules of informal unspoken languages that are “surprisingly ironbound” (p. 88). Hall gives details and includes cartoons to engage the readers’ senses, to contribute to the persuasiveness of the arguments and help readers relate to the points made.

However, some of the author’s assertions might increase modern-day reader’s resistance as Americans are no longer “relative newcomers on the international business scene” (p. 87). At the same time, unspoken language and cultural patterns of behavior are unconscious and more likely to persist in time than the languages themselves. In this view, the article under analysis may help an American manager to understand social, cultural and economic differences when he attempts to do business in Brazil.

The article presents an analysis of differences in time perception and friendship patterns that would help an American manager to avoid “faulty understanding of the silent language of foreign custom” (p. 93). Examples that bring the differences between the US and Latin American concepts on the foreground would help the American manager not only to understand aspects of Brazilian culture but also to gain knowledge of his own culture: This is so much the case that most Americans cannot help getting angry after waiting 50 minutes; one may even feel such a delay is an insult and will walk out. In Latin America, on the other hand, one learns that it does not mean anything to wait in an outer office. (p. 89)

Having read the article by Hall the American businessman would never make the mistake of judging the partners by the size and location of their offices: in Latin America space as well as personal space is small, Brazilian partners

are likely to describe crowded offices as “spacious”, business partners are likely to stand close and touch each other (p. 90).

Hall does not present convincing research on the problem of business agreement acknowledging that the information on the issue is still insufficient (for the time the article was published). Consequently, the American managers should critically evaluate the statements presenting the concept of friendship between business partners: Brazilians might still look for friendship with business partners but it might no longer be seen as a guarantee that the obligations would be fulfilled.

Hall presented convincing research that can help American businessmen to do business in Brazil. It seems, though, that the author's goal was to familiarize the readers aware of non-verbal means of communication. More than half a century has passed after the article was published, globalization has influenced both business etiquette and cultural patterns. In this view concerns raised by Hall make current research into cultural patterns of behavior in business both appropriate and important.