

Cultural contrasts in business

Part 2

Presentations

	America/N. Europe	Latin America/S. and E. Europe/Middle East	Japan/China/E. Asia
Opening	Short opening. Comments are directed to everyone.	Open by appreciating hospitality. Comments are directed to senior person.	Polite, thankful opening. Comments are directed to everyone.
Audience expectations	Americans want jokes, modernity, slogans, informality and a hard sell. They may ask questions or interrupt while someone is speaking. The British like a humorous story to begin. Germans like a reliable product and no jokes. The French like a formal, logical approach mixed with imagination.	Appreciate a personal touch, rhetoric and eloquence. Appreciate a lively, loud presentation and may interrupt. Respond well when body language (especially hands) is used to emphasize points. May want a more personal 'extra' talk afterwards where you tell them the 'truth'.	Appreciate visual aids. Like facts and data rather than abstract concepts. Expect separate information for different people, by function. The Japanese appreciate a quiet, harmonious, formal presentation and ask repeated questions to check understanding.
Platform skills	Presenters have a dynamic, individual style. Eye contact is direct. Americans and Germans use a strong, confident voice.	Presenters have a forceful, animated style that is intended to project sincerity. Exceptions include the Portuguese and Chileans who are more reserved.	Presenters have a quiet, restrained style. They make use of silence to establish harmony and sense the mood of the audience.
Use of language	Direct, simple. Appeal to logic.	Elaborate, eloquent. Awareness of status and seniority.	Indirect, conservative. Development of group harmony.
Persuasion techniques	Americans indicate loss or gain of opportunity, then make an offer and establish a deadline. They expect continuous feedback and opinions from the audience.	Appeal to friendship, emotion, wider values and beliefs. Arabs often rely on religion (God's will) and friendship.	Focus on consumer need, and long-term business relationship. Little pressure on price or deadline. Few opinions from the audience as the group will discuss the information later.
Attention span	Americans: 30 minutes. Germans: one hour.	30-45 minutes.	Japanese: one hour.
Closing	Conclusion, seek agreement, set up plan for future action.	Look to future as a continuation of the past.	Review of information exchanged, expressions of group harmony.

Socializing and networking

	America/N. Europe	Latin America/S. and E. Europe/Middle East	Japan/China/E. Asia
Greeting	The British and Canadians only shake hands at the beginning of a meeting, other countries shake at the beginning and end. In America the shake is firm and accompanied by a pumping action. In Europe it is a medium grip and one or two short movements. In Germany it is a precise connect, one firm shake, and disconnect.	In Latin cultures the handshake is firm and eye contact is very important. A Latin American may give an embrace on first meeting - it is an offense to back away. In Arab cultures the grip is soft but two hands can be used. It is particularly important in Arab cultures to greet people in order of seniority.	A short, soft handshake may be given on first meeting, but a non-contact greeting is more common. The Chinese and Japanese bow from the waist. In Thailand, Cambodia and Laos the hands are held with palms together as in prayer, and the head is dipped downwards.
Business cards	Exchange of cards has little significance and serves only to record the contact.	Little attention is paid to the card. In Arab cultures it should be offered or accepted with the right hand only.	In Japan the card is studied carefully, commented on, and kept on the table as reference during the meeting.
Names and titles	In America and UK people start using first names very quickly. In Germany use 'Herr'/'Frau' or professional title. In France use 'Monsieur'/'Madame'.	In Latin countries professional titles are much used. Anyone with a college degree is referred to as 'Doctor'. Use 'Senor/Senhora' for those with no title. In Arab countries use a professional title, or 'Sayed'.	Use what is written on the person's business card.
Body language	People stand about one arm's length away when speaking. After shaking hands there is no body contact, although amongst themselves Americans use playful punches, back-slapping etc. During conversation Americans use hand and arm gestures to add emphasis, whereas N. Europeans rarely do so. Eye contact establishes directness and sincerity.	People stand just under one arm's length away. Arabs stand very near. There may be body contact during conversation. Gestures and arm movements are used to personalize opinions and persuade the other person. Eye contact is important to establish trust, and eyebrow raising is used frequently for surprise, disagreement etc.	People stand just over one arm's length away when speaking. Body contact during conversation is unacceptable. Japanese find direct eye contact rude, and look at a speaker's neck while listening and down while speaking. Sideways glances are used to check understanding and signal that a turn is finished. Smiling often masks embarrassment.

Starting the conversation	Americans are informal and friendly from the beginning. In business situations the conversation moves quickly to business.	People get down to business slowly. In the Middle East your hand can be held for some time while your host asks you about your health and the well-being of your family.	Initial social conversation is modest and conservative, focusing on safe areas like the trip to the office, the view from the window etc.
Small talk	Americans talk freely about their personal life and few subjects are off-limits. In N. Europe personal subjects such as family are discussed less often, or only very generally. Interests, hobbies and free time are safe areas.	Social talk is personal, eloquent and full of expressions of hospitality. Questions about your family help to establish your identity. People tend not to have hobbies and voluntary interests outside work.	Communication is more like an exchange of monologues, with silent reflection showing respect for the other person's comments. The individual is not so important as compared to the group and personal questions are not common.
Safe areas for small talk	In all countries the topic of culture, particularly the culture of the host's country, is one of the safest for extended small talk. Combine this with talking about the beauty of the country or city, the history of the country, and world travel. Appreciation of the national sport is also a safe topic. A general non-partisan discussion of the political and economic situation is usually acceptable.		

Restaurants

	America/N. Europe	Latin America/S. and E. Europe/Middle East	Japan/China/E. Asia
Seating arrangements	The most important guest sits on the right of the host.	The most important guest sits on the right of the host.	The most important guest sits facing the door.
Ordering	In most cultures guests will be uncomfortable ordering something that costs more than the host's choice. The best solution is for the host to strongly recommend one or two things at the more expensive end of the menu and then insist that their guests order first. It is polite to order a wine from the host's country and to ask the host for recommendations.		
Starting to eat	In America and the U.K. there is no formula for the host to signal starting eating, but 'Enjoy your meal' is often used. In France it is 'Bon appetit', in Germany 'Guten Appetit'.	Latins tend to use 'Enjoy your meal' or 'Bon appetit'.	The Japanese say 'itadakimasu' (I am receiving), but this is preceded by comments about the appearance of the food. In Japan you compliment the artistic arrangement of the food on the plate before starting.
Eating method	Americans eat differently to other nationalities. They cut food with the knife in the right hand, then put the knife down, transfer the fork from left to right and start eating.	In Arab countries one eats with the right hand as the left is reserved for 'dirty' tasks. The best cuts of meat may be offered by the host, and it is bad manners to refuse them.	Chopsticks are used in China and Japan, and westerners should practice using them before visiting these countries. Extra food should be refused twice before being accepted.
Getting the waiter's attention	In America wave the arm for a short time. In northern Europe eye contact or a raised hand are more common.	In Latin cultures a click of the finger is quite common, except in Spain where it is very rude as it is associated with bull-fighting.	
Toasting	In England everyone repeats 'Cheers', and to toast one says 'Here's to ...'. In Germany 'Proost' is used and in Sweden 'skal'. In Sweden toasting is taken particularly seriously - the guest makes the first toast to the hostess, accompanied by a short speech.	In Russia there will be much toasting with vodka, and a bottle of vodka must be finished. The host starts with a little speech, and the guest replies.	

Discussing business	At lunch business may be discussed towards the end if the host introduces it. There is no discussion of business at dinner.	It is rare for business to be discussed at lunch, even after the meal. There is no discussion of business at dinner.	Business can be discussed at lunch, at the end of the meal. There is no discussion of business at dinner.
After dinner	Swedes are great after-dinner speakers, and toasts and speeches can go on for an hour or more.		In Japan and Korea karaoke singing at the end of the meal is common. By showing you are prepared to take a risk and look slightly foolish you build trust ('in vino veritas'). You should not refuse when asked, and it is advisable to prepare one or two songs.
Paying	The host always pays for the meal. Paying for drinks in a bar is more complicated in terms of protocol. In the UK there is a strong tradition of 'rounds' - each person pays for a round of drinks and you should not miss your turn.		

Telephoning

	America/N. Europe	Latin America/S. and E. Europe/Middle East	Japan/China/E. Asia
Opening	Full name, then company, then purpose of call: 'This is Jane Smith from ABC, I'm calling about ...'.	Full name, then company. A short time is spent building rapport before mentioning the purpose of the call. Typical topics are the last meeting, last call, health and family.	Company, then department, then last name only: 'This is Sony Corporation, Sales Department, Maruyama speaking'.
Information exchange	Action and task orientation. In America there is a sense of urgency as time is money.		The call is used to gather information as any decision needs group consensus. Listening is without interruptions, and confrontation and argument are avoided.
Closing	The call ends with a confirmation of individual responsibilities and of the plan of action agreed. Americans press for answers or action.	The call ends with more social conversation, exchanging good wishes and expressing a desire to hear from you again.	There are no commitments, and the call ends with a promise to call back when group agreement has been reached.

Emails

	America/N. Europe	Latin America/S. and E. Europe/Middle East	Japan/China/E. Asia
Opening	Starts with purpose / conclusion to get attention of reader. Direct.	Starts with personal greeting and friendly comments.	Starts by thanking the reader for previous efforts, or starts with an apology.
Content and style	Short sentences. Direct and urgent. Letter builds towards a plan of action. Conclusions given early in letter, followed by factual information to support them.	Long sentences and elaborate expressions. Recognition of status of reader. Background information before moving to the main content and conclusions.	Modest. Polite and indirect. Specific questions to get information for later decision making.
Closing	Specific requests or action that the reader should take. Clear time frame given.	Personal expression of best wishes. Reference to future relationship.	Reference to future relationship. Thanking or apologizing. Harmony.
Signature	Americans and Brits may just sign with their first name.	May sign with a title to indicate status.	