

# Communicating with the Arabs

Almaney and Alwan in their insightful book, *Communicating with the Arabs* (1982), stressed that the values of particular importance for the Arabs are:

- hospitality
- pride, honor
- rivalry
- and revenge.

# Communicating with the Arabs

For the Arabs, of a great value are:

- unrestrained and spontaneous expression of emotions
- As well as taking advantage of as many sensory experiences as possible and physical contact.

# Islam and its impact on culture

Islam is of course an important cultural force in the Arab countries. Direct consequences of professing this religion are strict prohibitions on what foreigners are not allowed to do in the Arab countries.

# Saudi Arabia

- Especially in Saudi Arabia, there are clearly defined rules dictating what is and what is not publicly accepted
- It was also determined which products cannot be sent to the American soldiers stationed in Saudi Arabia - alcohol, pornography or sex-related items, any material depicting naked or half-naked people, religious materials being contrary to Islam, unauthorized political materials, as well as pork and its products ("What's OK to Send to U.S. Troops", 1990).

# Culture of Arab countries

- Arabs' expansive hospitality has its impact on promoting social interactions rather than their inhibition
- Real or imagined insult of the strongly developed sense of Arab's pride and dignity will not be met with silence, but immediate and emotional reaction
- Preoccupation of the Arabs with the issues of honor, competition and revenge means that public display of emotions is the rule rather than the exception.

# Culture of Arab countries

- Privacy is a value highly appreciated by the Japanese, while the Arabs do not seem to attach any importance to it in public places
- Pushing other people, hustling, crowding and huge noise are normal in the Arab countries. Arabs feel offended when there is no close contact during a conversation.

# Business relationships and talks

- You should expect a gentle handshake, and at the same time, looking intensely straight into your eyes
- Giving and receiving business cards are always done with the right hand (the left one is impure and is used for wiping)
- Arab partner should be addressed using the first of three parts of his name and surname, preceded by the word “Mister”, e.g. Mr. Aziz. Hence, he may also turn to you in the same way by calling you, e.g. Mr. Michael.

# Business meeting

- If there is an academic title on the business card, it is necessary to name the person with this title
- Business card should be in English; an ideal solution is to have a translation into Arabic
- Your position in the company is especially important (the higher the position, the higher the respect) and whether you have any academic titles
- In a bilingual version, the business card is given with that side which has been translated into Arabic.



# Negotiations

- It is good to have everything in writing to avoid any misunderstandings resulting from understanding a spoken foreign language
- It is wise to anticipate in the initial offer a large reserve for concessions in order to leave room for maneuver during a possible long-term negotiation process
- Every concession should be made after long-lasting pauses and only on certain conditions, e.g. if ..., then ...  
..
- For every concession in the price or other terms of the transaction, we always demand something equivalent in return.

# Features distinguishing culture

- Family as the basic and most important unit
- The biggest virtue is loyalty and a sense of responsibility towards family and friends
- It is visible in business where partners from the trusted family circle are preferred
- Avoiding uncertainty - means unwillingness to take risks, changes are not welcome and decisions are made gradually. "Other" means dangerous.

# Work style

- Working hours in Iraq are standard: 8:00-16:00
- Offices work shorter as until 13:00/14:00
- Friday is a holy day in Islam, thus some companies work from Sunday to Thursday
- In business, everyone is expected to be punctual; punctuality is definitely required and is an expression of respect

# Hierarchy

- Hierarchy is very visible in companies and it is easy to distinguish a subordinate from his/her superior. There is a large power distance
- Decisions are made by one of the most important decision-maker to whom the greatest attention should be paid. In bigger companies, decisions are made by the council, although there is certainly one authority figure in it.

# What should be done while negotiating

- While negotiating, keep patience and do not show any nervousness. Meetings can be interrupted, the Arabs like to deal with many matters at the same time or change the subject
- Show respect, respect habits - showing respect is the most important part of this culture
- Take care of building trust and informal atmosphere during meetings.

# What should not be done while negotiating

- Arabs tend to judge on the basis of the first impression, hence the right look and clothes can already help at the very beginning. They are accustomed to showing respect for older and richer people, so it is worth remembering about physical appearance
- Exerting too much pressure, subjecting the Arab negotiators to pressure will certainly have a negative effect on the outcome of talks
- Face expressions are a very important element in the Arab culture. One cannot be criticized directly in front of others. Subtle guiding hints are preferred.