Module: Langue & Communication III

Element de module: Business English

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**Read the following text and do the exercises below:**

**BOARDROOM CULTURAL CLASH**

**An Unpredictable Affair**

Try to put pressure on a Japanese in a *negotiation* and you will be met with *stony silence*. Hold an informal fact-finding meeting with a German and you can expect a battery of searching questions. Disagree with the French on even a minor point and they will take great pleasure in engaging in spirited *verbal combat*. Doing business across culture can be an *unpredictable* affair.

**Cultural Awareness**

Most of us prefer to do business with people we like. And it should come as no surprise that the people we like tend to be like us. So whilst we may dispute the *accuracy* of cultural stereotypes it is generally agreed that good business relationships are built on cultural awareness. Across national frontiers ‘nice guys’ do more business than *nasty* ones. But what constitutes nice-guy behaviour in a *boardroom* in Miami is not necessarily what they expect in Madrid.

**The US Perspective**

For instance, most Americans will insist on the hard sell. It’s not enough that you want to buy their products, you must let them sell them to you. They have to report back to superiors who will be as interested in how the deal was struck as the result. Systems and procedures matter to Americans.

**The Spaniards Trust You**

The Spanish, on the other hand, are unimpressed by the most *meticulously* prepared meeting and pay much more attention to people. In this they are more like the Arabs or the Japanese. In the Middle and Far East business is built on trust over a long period of time. Spaniards may come to a decision about whether they trust you a little sooner.

**Animated Italians**

Italians too tend to feel that the main purpose of meetings is to assess the mood of those present and *reinforce team-spirit*. There may well be a lot of animated discussion at a meeting in Italy, but the majority of decisions will be, made elsewhere and in secret.

**Scandinavians Want Results**

Strangely enough, Scandinavians are rather like Americans. They value efficiency, novelty, systems and technology. They are firmly profit-oriented. They want results yesterday.

**Succeed with the Germans**

Don’t be surprised if the Germans start a meeting with all the difficult questions. They want to be convinced you are as efficient and *quality-conscious* as they are. They will be cautious about giving you too much business until you have proved yourself. They will demand *prompt delivery* and expect you to keep your *competitive edge* in the most price- sensitive market in Europe. Succeed and you will enjoy a long-term business relationship.

**Adversarial Meetings**

The French will give you their business much more readily. But they will withdraw it just as fast if you fail to come up with the goods. Meetings in France tend to be *adversarial*. *Heated discussion* is all part of the game. Germans will be shocked to hear you question their carefully prepared arguments. The Spanish will offer no opinion unless sure of themselves, for fear of losing face. But French executives prefer to meet disagreement head on, and the British tendency *to diffuse tension* with humour doesn’t go down too well.

**Prisoners of our Culture**

Ask yourself whether meetings are opportunities to network or get results. Is it more important to stick to the agenda or generate new ideas? Is the main aim of a meeting to transmit or pool information? It all depends on where in the world you hold your meeting and whether you belong to an individualistic business culture like the French, Germans and Americans or to a collective one like the British, Japanese and Greeks. Indeed, who knows to what extent our views are our own and to what extent culturally conditioned? For in business, as in life, “all human beings are captives of their culture”.

*Exercise 1. Which of the following points support the opinions expressed in the article?*

1. In meetings the French tend to be more aggressive than the Germans. True
2. The Arabs have nothing in common with the Japanese. False
3. The French generally don’t appreciate the British sense of humour. True
4. The Spanish are rarely hesitant in cross-cultural meetings. True
5. The Americans and Scandinavians value a methodical approach. False
6. The Germans want quality at any price. True
7. The British tend to be more individualistic in business than the Germans. False
8. In business the Italians are more or less like the Spanish. True

*Exercise 2: Complete the sentences below using words from the following list. Referring back to the article will help you with some of them:*

***market, price, profit, quality, client, cost, technology***

1. We’re a firmly profit-oriented company, so the bottom-line for us is not how big our market share is but how much money we’re going to make.
2. Even at low prices inferior products won’t sell in such a ……….-conscious market.
3. The market’s far too price-sensitive to stand an increase in service charges.
4. We’re constantly forced to respond both to changing customer needs and to what our main competitors are doing in a market-driven business such as this.
5. The customer always comes first. We’re a very client-centred company.
6. In a technology.-led business, such as ours, it’s vital to plough profits back into R&D.
7. If the price of materials goes up anymore, production will no longer be cost- effective.

*Exercise 3. Obviously, in a delicate negotiation you do not always say exactly what you think! You need to be able to express yourself diplomatically, to make your point firmly but politely. Match what you think with what you say:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| WHAT YOU THINK | WHAT YOU SAY |
| 1. We are unhappy with this offer. g 2. We are dissatisfied. l 3. We can’t accept it. a 4. You said there would be a discount. j 5. Don’t forget your obligations. c 6. We want a guarantee. k 7. We won’t agree to this. e 8. We’re shocked you expect us to cover the costs. d 9. That’s wrong. b 10. We want a bigger rebate. h 11. We must finalize the deal today. f 12. You obviously don’t understand. i | 1. Unfortunately, we would be unable to accept that. 2. With respect, that’s not quite correct. 3. I’m sure we don’t need to remind you of your contractual obligations. 4. We’re rather surprised you expect us to cover the costs. 5. We would find this somewhat difficult to agree to. 6. We were rather hoping to finalize the deal today. 7. I’m sorry but we’re not very happy with this offer. 8. Actually, we were hoping for a slightly more substantial rebate. 9. I’m afraid you don’t seem to understand. 10. We understood there would be a discount. 11. We would need some sort of guarantee. 12. We’re not completely satisfied. |