



Business News 02: Cultural Awareness at Work

Today, more than ever, business success requires intercultural awareness and effective cross cultural communication skills.

Working, meeting, dealing, entertaining, negotiating and corresponding with colleagues or clients from different cultures can be full of obstacles. One wrong movement or basic misunderstanding could ruin or delay months of work.

Understanding and appreciating intercultural differences promotes clearer communication, breaks down barriers, builds trust, strengthens relationships and opens business opportunities.

Article:

It is necessary to understand the importance of **cultural differences** in international business communication.

International business people often learn foreign languages so they can talk to colleagues from around the world. Language, of course, is very important, but it is only half the problem.

There are **hidden rules** for doing business with people of other cultures as it can be very easy to upset your foreign colleagues.

An American would not greet a European businessman by saying "Hi, great to meet you!" because, in Europe, businessmen talk to each other in a more formal way.

In **the West**, business cards are only looked at quickly, while in Hong Kong and China, they are highly regarded. They are looked at closely and then left on the table during business meetings.

In Britain, most business presentations would include a joke. In many other countries, this would **be unheard-of**.

Will you cause offence if you refuse to eat something? Your **counterpart**

may be watching your reaction when he offers you some **local delicacy**.

Small talk is also very important in some parts of the world; talking about the weather or the wine comes before business. In other places, people **get down to business** almost immediately.

As each country deals with problems in a different way, it is important to understand how each country sees certain things.

People often find differences hard to accept. Therefore, they feel **uneasy** if they do not know how to act in a different culture.

It is, however, dangerous to **stereotype** what other cultures are like. Such **narrow views** can lead you to make **predictions** about what will happen in your business dealings. If your views are too narrow, you will be surprised if people behave differently from the way you thought they would behave.

Our ideas then, have to be **flexible** and come from what we see. We should also recognise that people's behaviour and personality comes from their national, their regional and their own background, as well as their company culture.

Vocabulary

hidden rules (adjective/noun)

rules that someone would only know if they were familiar with that particular culture.

the West (noun)

North America, those countries in Europe which did not have communist governments before the 1990s, and some other parts of the world, e.g.

There has been concern in the West about the effects of this measure.

East-West relations

unheard-of (adjective)

surprising or shocking because not known about or previously experienced, e.g.

It was not all that long ago that it was almost unheard-of for an unmarried couple to live together.

counterpart (noun)

a person or thing which has the same purpose as another one in a different place or organization, e.g.

The Prime Minister is to meet his European counterparts to discuss the war against drugs.

delicacy (noun)

something especially rare or expensive that is good to eat, e.g.

In some parts of the world, sheep's eyes are considered a great delicacy.

get down to business (idiom)

start talking about the subject to be discussed, e.g.

If the introductions are over I'd like to get down to business.

uneasy (adjective)

If you are uneasy, you are slightly anxious or uncomfortable about a particular situation, e.g.

I feel a bit uneasy about asking her to do me such a big favour.

stereotype (verb)

have a fixed idea about what a particular type of person is like, especially an idea that is wrong, e.g.

The study claims that British advertising stereotypes women.

We tried not to give the children sexually stereotyped toys.

narrow (adjective)

limited to a small area of interest, activity or thought, e.g.

They are unable to see beyond the narrow world of the theatre.

It was regarded as a very narrow interpretation of the law.

predictions (noun)

when you say what will happen in the future, e.g.

Please don't ask me to make any predictions about tomorrow's meeting.

[+ that] No one believed her prediction that the world would end on November 12.

flexible (adjective)

able to change or be changed easily according to the situation, e.g.

My schedule is quite flexible; I could arrange to meet with you any day next week.