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## DIFFERENT BUSINESS CULTURES (THE USA COMPARED TO OTHER COUNTRIES)

So what exactly is culture? It is useful to define culture as a system of shared symbols, beliefs, attitudes, values, expectations, and norms for behavior. Thus all members of a culture have, and tend to act on, similar assumptions about how people should think, behave, and communicate. As we know, misunderstandings are especially likely to occur when the people who are communicating have different backgrounds

For example, take the case of the computer sales representative who was calling on a client in China. Hoping to make a good impression, the salesperson brought along a gift to break the ice, an expensive grandfather clock. Unfortunately, the Chinese client was deeply offended because, in China, giving clocks as gifts is considered bad luck for the recipient

We ignore the fact that people from other cultures differ from us in many ways: in their religion and values, their ideas of status, their decision-making habits, their attitude toward time, their use of space, their body language, and their manners.

Culture dictates the roles people play, including who communicates with whom, what they communicate, and in what way. In many countries, for example, women still do not play a very prominent role in business. As a result, female executives from American firms may find themselves sent off to eat in a separate room with the wives of Arab businessmen, while the men all eat dinner together.

Concepts of status also differ, and as a consequence, people establish their credibility in different ways. North Americans, for example, send status signals that reflect materialistic values. The big boss has the corner office on the top floor, deep carpets, an expensive desk, and handsome accessories. The most successful companies are located in the most prestigious buildings. In other countries, status is communicated in other ways. For example, the highest-ranking executives in France sit in the middle of an open area, surrounded by lower-level employees. In the Middle East, fine possessions are reserved for the home, and business is conducted in cramped and modest quarters. An American executive who assumes that these office arrangements indicate a lack of status is making a big mistake.

In North America, they try to reach decisions as quickly and efficiently as possible. The top people focus on reaching agreement on the main points and leave the details to be worked out later by others. In Greece, this approach would backfire. A Greek executive assumes that anyone who ignores the details is being evasive and untrustworthy. Spending time on every little point is considered a mark of good faith. Similarly, Latin Americans prefer to make their deals slowly, after a lengthy period of discussion. They resist an authoritarian "Here's the deal, take it or leave it" approach, preferring the more sociable method of an extended discussion.

Cultures also differ in terms of who makes the decisions. In American culture, many organizations are dominated by a single figure who says yes or no to every deal. It is the same in Pakistan, where you can get a decision quickly if you reach the highest-ranking executive. In other cultures, notably China and Japan, decision-making is a shared responsibility. No individual has the authority to commit the organization without first consulting others. In Japan, for example, the negotiating team arrives at a consensus through an elaborate, time-consuming process (agreement must be complete – there is no majority rule). If the process is not laborious enough, the Japanese feel uncomfortable.

Or let's say that a New Yorker is trying to negotiate a deal in Ethiopia. This is an important deal, and the New Yorker assumes that the Ethiopians will give the matter top priority and reach a decision quickly. Not so. In Ethiopia, important deals take a long, long time. After all, if a deal is important, it should be given much careful thought.

The classic story of a conversation between a North American and a Latin American is that the interaction may begin at one end of a hallway but end up at the other, with neither party aware of having moved. During the interaction, the Latin American instinctively moves closer to the North American, who in turn instinctively steps back, resulting in an intercultural dance across the floor. Like time, space means different things in different cultures. North Americans stand about five feet apart when conducting a business conversation. To an Arab or a Latin American, this distance is uncomfortable. In meetings with North Americans, they move a little closer. We assume they are pushy and react negatively, although we don't know exactly why.

What is polite in one country may be considered rude in another. In Arab countries, for example, it is impolite to take gifts to a man's wife but acceptable to take gifts to his children. In Germany, giving a woman a red rose is considered a romantic invitation, inappropriate if you are trying to establish a business relationship with her. In India, you might be invited to visit someone's home "any time." Being reluctant to make an unexpected visit, you might wait to get a more definite invitation. But your failure to take the Indian literally is an insult, a sign that you do not care to develop the friendship.

#### LITERATURE:

1. Harris P.R., Moran R.T. Managing Cultural Differences. - Houston: Gulf Publishing, 1987.
2. [www.executiveplanet.com](http://www.executiveplanet.com)