



Foreign Languages and Cultural Awareness

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INTRODUCTION

There is a broad range of meanings, however it can be understood that culture regulates our opinion in the routine. It includes of the shared principles, understandings, expectations, and objectives we still passing within generation, from older to younger. Our culture is established of several environmental factors, such as climate, legal systems, religion and languages. This shapes general values, norms and beliefs, therefore influences attitudes and individual behaviour.

For example, cultures in very cold climates tend to be more egalitarian than hierarchical. That it comes from past ages, where if you were not willing to work all together despite ages, gender or class you would not survive the cold temperatures of the winter.

Therefore is vital to understand the different culture among us, of our employees or customers. By learning about other cultures, we are more likely to develop cultural sensitivity, or an ability to understand different perspectives and care about another person's culture.

"We must become the change we want to see in the world" (Gandhi, 1951)

In my professional life I found myself experiencing situations of all kinds but what I understood is that "doing hospitality" is not something mechanical but it is socializing, establishing relationships of esteem and friendship.

Knowing the culture of the counterparty is a fundamental step for the success in our industry. More than 50% of our relationship with guests can have misunderstanding due to the lack of knowledge of cultural peculiarities.

THE TIME

The concept varies with latitudes. In the West time is seen in a linear way, each step follows the other directed towards a goal. In India and China, the concept of time is greatly expanded.

According to Indian culture punctuality is a relative and flexible value. Making decisions is often a slow process and nothing should be conducted under pressure from deadlines as impatience is seen as an aggressive, rude and disrespectful attitude for Indians. In China time is perceived in a circular way, according to a line that moves from the past to the future. Nothing is lost, gained or surpassed but it is always repeated. The present comes from the past and the future derives from the present. In the Chinese language there are not many distinctions to express the past and the future. (Bucknall, 2002) The three dimensions of time are always present and can be distinguished only through the context: an incomprehensible conception in the eyes of Westerners.

The concept of time in the USA is completely different. The "time is money" philosophy is vital in the American business world. You have to think and make decisions quickly and get to the conclusion of in a short time. The details will come later.

THE GREETING

Japanese bend their heads, Indians bend their heads and join hands saying "Namaste". Latin Americans embrace, Europeans simply shake hands while Americans distrust too

warm greetings that involve hugs and too close physical contact. It is important to know the most appropriate form of greeting to avoid incorrect behaviour on the first impression.

LANGUAGES

there are more than 3,000 languages and 10,000 dialects in the world. This represents a great barrier between people. Great attention must be paid to translations with the use of terms that have a different or negative meaning in another language and therefore create some misunderstanding during a conversation. Some examples coming from product export:

- "Pocari Sweet" is a Japanese energy drink usually drunk after playing sports. The producers decided to export this product to the United States but the problem arose from the use of "Sweet": while in Japanese this word is associated with well-being and energy, in the USA this is a word that has a negative meaning . To sell in this market, producers had to eliminate the word "Sweet". (Walker, 2002)
- "Pasta". In Brazil it is the catalogue translation. In Italy, pasta is food. (Minervini, 1996)

It is not possible to know all the languages but it is essential to know the peculiarities of how people communicate.

COLORS

- White: in the West it represents purity but in many Eastern countries it means death.
- Green: it is the favourite colour of many Islamic countries but in Malaysia it is associated with the disease.
- Yellow: in the East it is the colour of greatness. In Japan, red combined with white is used to celebrate a party. In China, the combination of yellow or white with blue or black is linked to the idea of death.

It is essential to know it because 70% of the messages come through body language. In India, to say "yes", you move your head horizontally but for us Europeans it means "no" and this, initially, can create some confusion. (Adler, 1989)

The Arabs look intently at the interlocutor as if they wanted to establish a contact of immediate trust. In Latin America it is important to establish physical contact first. There are frequent hugs, pats on the shoulders as if physical closeness created a relationship of cordiality and informality. Americans tend to laugh and enjoy talking to people who have a strong sense of irony. In China, when you meet someone for the first time, looking directly at them is rude. In our culture, looking someone in the eye means opening up to others. So, we perceive the indirect gaze of the Chinese as ambiguous and they, on the other hand, perceive our way of doing so direct, aggressive.

The way you handle laughter is also different. In China it does not only express joy and happiness, but it is also a way to hide moments of embarrassment or uncertainty or to communicate unpleasant news.

"We don't see things as they are...we see things as we are" (Anais Nin)

THE GIFTS

Indians never give leather objects because cows for the Hindu religion are sacred as well as never give precious objects because they are embarrassing. In China, avoid giving away watches or tissues that are associated with funerals and never give gifts to multiples of four because four is the death number. Valuable gifts are liqueurs and pens but not "made in China".

In the United States, bringing a gift is a gentle gesture but it is not mandatory.

NOT ALWAYS RELATED TO GUEST...

In this part of the report, I would like to see a different side of the culture awareness is requested within our hospitality company. Not always is the guest who we need to handle a conversation, it could be an investor or a business partner overseas. Therefore, it is important also how to handle negotiation or meeting in other country with different cultures from ours.

Now let us take a trip around the world visiting some countries to trace the profile of the local culture. In *EUROPE* there is no typical European guest profile due to the different cultural roots. We can say that if there are some points in common, they are those of a reserved style and the pride of one's traditions. In Southern Europe there is a tendency towards greater creativity, to be less rigid than the rules, to a wider cultural dimension (we must not forget the Roman, Greek and Arab influence) which leads to lengthening the negotiation times. In Northern Europe where Anglo-Saxon culture prevails, it is preferable to get straight to the heart of the matter.

In *AMERICA* there are many worlds that coexist and there is a profound difference between Canadians and Americans. The former has a style more like the Europeans. In the United States, a foreign language is hardly spoken. Respect for privacy is very important, sacred punctuality, frankness and honesty are appreciated qualities. The United States is the home of "fast food" and it is normal to talk about business during lunch, we can easily have many American businessmen on a meal. It is also common to "do business" by playing golf, a sport very popular with managers. (Guerini, 2002)

In *LATIN AMERICA* there is a great diversity between the various countries. The language is Spanish, with the exception of Brazil where Portuguese is spoken and some Caribbean countries where French, English and Dutch are spoken. What is immediately perceived is the amiability and cordiality in relationships. Punctuality is not rigid and they love places with an informal atmosphere. For education it is difficult to say "NO" during their stay.

With the exception of Israel, which is a world apart because it is strongly influenced by western culture and has Judaism as its main religion, the *MIDDLE EAST* characterized by a hospitable and welcoming spirit towards the other, is united by a series of aspects. Meanwhile, the Islamic religion that pervades all individual, social and cultural values and also the way to approach others. The Arabs do not separate professional life from private life and commercial relations are based on mutual trust. The first meeting serves to get to know

each other and it takes a long time to negotiate. First of all, it is important to create friendly relationships. Dealing is the norm: do not quote the lowest price immediately because otherwise there is no margin for negotiation. As for women, in the Middle East, their role is not yet well defined and it is difficult to meet them during commercial negotiations. As far as I'm concerned, it only happened in Jordan.

The *EAST* is an area where millenary cultures such as India, China and Japan are found with great differences between them and where half of humanity lives. In India, for example, the sense of belonging to the family is very strong. Personal conflicts must be avoided as a sign of non-respect. Protocol, label, status are important aspects. The hierarchy is as important as the style which is as significant as the substance. Negotiations usually begin with an informal and friendly conversation which can include personal matters and this is seen as a way of building relationships of trust before doing business. Decisions are made only at high levels and if during the negotiation there is no company owner or a senior manager, the chances of concluding the deal are minimal.

In China, relations are formal and respect for age and hierarchical position is fundamental. It takes a lot, a lot of patience to conclude a negotiation. The handshake is not common. It is sufficient to tilt the head slightly forward. The Chinese always negotiate in groups: if possible, do not travel alone and bring a considerable reserve of business cards. Not many speak English and it is necessary to bring catalogues and materials translated into Chinese. Be patient with questions even if they are repetitive (they will never say they do not understand). The arguments for a good conversation are culture and traditions. If I can give virtual advice: study local history and traditions. (Chen, 2003)

TO DO AND DO NOT TIPS, AT THE TABLE OR NOT

Country	Do	Do not	Why?
China		Play or drop chopsticks	
China	Burp at the end of the meal		It is a sign of appreciation
China		Refuse offers from others	
China	Leave the best part for the rest of the group		
China		Consume the whole meal	It is a sign of too much hunger and not enough food
China	Noise during the meal		It is a sign of appreciation

China		Turn the fish in your plate	Sign that the next boat you will be will overturn
China	If you invite for an event, you will decide and pay		
India		Use the left hand to eat	Left hand is a sign of impurity
India	Accept more food, after being offered 3 times		
India		Look straight and continuously in the eyes	It is a sign of challenge
India	Always use Mr, Ms or Miss		
India		Leave food at the end of the meal	
India		Offer food from your own plate	
Middle East Countries	Serve Halal meat		Respect of their religion
Middle East Countries		Look women while eating	
Middle East Countries	Ask for permission to drink alcohol at the table		Respect of their religion
Middle East Countries		Offer alcohol or pork	Respect of their religion
Middle East Countries	Greet women with your right hand on the heart		
Middle East Countries		Greeting, offering your hand to a woman	
Georgia		Cheers with beers	It is sign of unluck
Italy	Keep phones in your pockets during meal or meetings		
Italy		Elbows on the tables	
Japan		Cut noodles	The length of noodle is symbol of longevity
Portugal		Ask for salt during meal	Means you do not like the food
South Korea	Always accept offers to drink		
South Korea		Leave others to pour your drink	

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