

The need to understand other business cultures

“These Germans even manage to organise their delays”

By Astrid Rechel

Practice Group Enhanced Business Opportunities is publishing the Geneva Group Intercultural Guide. Authors from all continents are contributing with their country profiles. Last opportunity to sign-up for additional contributions of countries not yet covered.

What might the words in our headline, pronounced by an Asian businessman, stand for? It might have been sharp criticism or sincere admiration, it might have been complete astonishment or final comprehension. Whatever the personal feelings of this businessman might have been, they were definitely a deeply felt expression, but on a collision course with a different business culture.

It happened in a daily situation which
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could have been at any international conference by Geneva Group International (it actually did not). The Asian conferee was hurrying to meet the scheduled start of the first workshop in the morning.

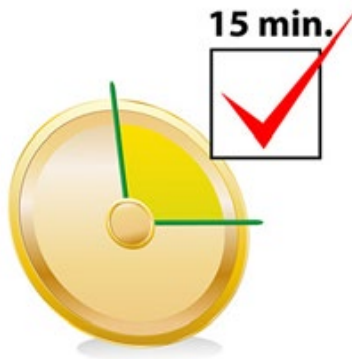
Arriving at the meeting room with a little delay, he was wondering whether his German colleague was still having his wake-up coffee outside. Asked by the Asian attendee if there had been any changes in the programme, the German, relaxingly, answered: “No, but there are still some minutes to go to meet the Academic Quarter.”

The German explained that it is the traditionally accepted tolerance in his country for a lecture to start 15 (but no more!) minutes later than the defined start (which, by the way, dates from the time when students were called by the university bells to get going on their way to the lessons). The Asian colleague, apparently impressed by the explanation, concluded with his above quotation: “These Germans even manage to organize their delays”.

This little incident is nothing spectacular, nor did it have tremendous impact on the outcome of the conference where it happened. But it is only one of hundreds of situations business people

come across when doing international business and which collectively – and sometimes also just one single incident – can be the key to successfully doing business abroad. And intercultural ignorance can even make a deal fail despite being perfectly prepared from both the technical and commercial aspect.

In many sessions of GGI Practice Group Enhanced Business Opportunities (PG EBO) such intercultural topics have been the subject of lively discussions and impressive personal experiences concluding with the words: “Had I known that before ...”



This was the spark of motivation for GGI Practice Group Enhanced Business Opportunities (PG EBO) to initiate the publication of a GGI guide on intercultural behaviour. The project and the topics of relevance have been fervently discussed in various intensive

practice group sessions.

The result is a scheme of country profiles of about eight pages per country dealing with the chapters ‘How to address someone’, ‘Getting to know each other’, ‘Enjoy your meal and drink’, ‘Appropriately dressed and well behaved in business and beyond’, ‘The art of negotiating and contracting’, ‘Respect the other sex and generation’, ‘The power

of colours' and of course 'Facts and Figures', links and further information.

PG EBO is especially proud that authors from all continents have made a commitment to cooperate in this challenging project. PG members from many countries have already handed-in their country profiles. However, some countries are still not covered yet and all GGI firms, irrespectively of whether they have already been attending PG EBO in the past or are newcomers, are invited to become an author. The EBO chairpersons, Elisabeth Heller and Astrid Rechel, ask interested members to quickly make contact with them in order to check if their country is still 'on sale'.

We have scheduled to close the collection of country profiles before the next GGI conference, the Panamerican Conference in Miami, end of June. The coordination of the project is being undertaken by Natalie Kutschera (n.kutschera@hellerconsult.com) who can be contacted to obtain the schedule, for more information about the contents of the different chapters or any questions related the project.

GGI Practice Group Enhanced Business Opportunities



GENEVA GROUP INTERNATIONAL

Intercultural Guide and Business Etiquette

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