

## Lesson Plan for Business Information Studies

Topic: International Business  
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Subject: IT and ME Works  
Grade: 9  
Time: 2 hours  
Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to understand how cultural differences must be considered in working for an international business.

Standards: Students will gain an understanding of other cultures.  
Students will develop communication skills dealing with the interaction of businesses in different countries.

Setting: Classroom

Materials: Handouts

Teacher's Role: Explain and discuss what constitutes "culture." Distribute handout "What is Culture?" Students can be given a handout of "Did you know. . ." statements such as on the attached list. Ask if students know of other examples of cultural differences.

As a follow-up to this information, students can be given the attached culture quiz to find the correct answer on-line. Other quiz questions can be found under <http://www.getcustoms.com/quiz/quiz/html>.

School to Career Connection: Contact local businesses that deal with other countries and have a speaker talk about his experience with cultural differences.

Employability: Acceptance of cultural differences

## **TIPS WHEN DEALING WITH INTERNATIONAL COMPANIES**

Business lunches are more common than business dinners in Ireland.

Don't rush South Africans. Many would prefer to let a deal fall through than be rushed.

Inappropriate gifts to avoid

- A clock in Asia—clocks symbolize death

- A handkerchief in Latin America—handkerchiefs imply tears

- White carnations in Switzerland—they're associated with funerals

- A leather-bound day-planner in India—Hindus are prohibited from using products made from cattle

- Carnations in France—they symbolize bad luck

Source: Prudential Relocation

## What is Culture?

Your culture is the combination of the attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs that you learn from the people around you. These people could be your parents, your neighbors, your school, your religious group, or your nation. Learning of this kind takes place automatically; most people don't realize that they are teaching or being taught. From a very early age, you absorb culture by what other people around you do and say and by the rewards and punishments you receive for what you do.

Beliefs that are considered very important within a culture are called *cultural values*, and they determine how some people act and react to others. They also influence how some people go about their work and how they measure their own progress and that of other people. In "me first" associates, for example, individual success—making a lot of money or reaching a position of power—is a higher priority value. "Us-first" societies place a higher value on the collective welfare of the group (often the family). People are expected to think first about what is best for the group, rather than what will benefit the individual.

Other areas in which cultures differ from each other include:

- **Time.** Some cultures view time as linear—something that stretches out like a road, with a beginning and end. Every task is tightly scheduled into the days and hours, and people place a high priority on promptness and meeting deadlines. In other cultures, time is circular, like "surround sound." It is everywhere at once, and several things might be happening at the same time. In such cultures, what you do or produce and how you relate to the people around you are more important than sticking to a schedule. Being on time for an appointment isn't a high priority. And how much time it should take to complete a task is the amount of time that the task requires—not as much time as the schedule allows.
- **Space.** Cultures vary widely in how much personal space and physical contact is appropriate between people who are casual or working associates. In some, people stand close enough to feel each other's breath; in others, people need more distance. Some are "high contact" cultures, where touching and embracing are valued, even among men. In others, people expect to remain at arm's length.
- **Risk taking.** When a culture places a high value on certainty and security (knowing what to expect), it is less likely to encourage risk taking. It tends to establish firm rules and regulation, insisting that everyone abide by them. On the other hand, cultural values that promote creativity and change encourage people to take reasonable risks and bend the rules when necessary.
- **Equality.** "Horizontal" cultures value equality and the belief that all people contribute and should be a part of decision making. In "vertical cultures," rank or class is of great importance. Leaders are supposed to be revered, obeyed, and

never questioned. Some individuals who aren't leaders become strongly dependent—and are often comfortable in their dependency.

The number of cultures worldwide is immense: 6,000 in all, including nearly 5,000 that exist within tribes or subcultures of some larger society. Even this figure does not include the smaller sub-cultures that exist in specific populations, occupational groups, and individual workplaces.

Important differences also occur within individual cultures or in overlapping cultures. Most cultures try to impose different values or priorities on women and men. Religious or economic differences also may affect the values of any cultural group. (An African-American who is Catholic or Muslim, for example, may reflect elements of both the racial and the religious cultures.) Allowing for such individual differences, however, researchers have found important variations among the major-cultural groups.

### **When Cultures Clash**

No matter what cultural group we think of, its individuals will be diverse. Yet when people from different cultures work together, conflicts can develop because of opposing values. The immediate issue may be an employee who is always late to meetings or a manager who rejects new ideas or insists on rigid enforcement of company rules. However, sometimes there is an underlying problem—a problem of cultural differences. Until that is recognized and dealt with, it may be difficult to reach agreement. In fact, it may be difficult even to discuss the problem, because communication styles also vary from culture to culture. People (often men) from “me-first” achievement-oriented cultures tend to be more direct. They initiate conversations and get right to the point. Those from “us-first,” people-focused cultures (as well as women in many cultures) are more indirect. Their messages are often implied, rather than stated specifically. People with such different styles often have trouble understanding each other.

Despite the possibility of differences in values and communication styles, people from diverse cultures can resolve their conflicts if they understand and practice the basic principles of negotiation. On the simplest level, negotiation means finding a middle ground in which both sides “win.” It involves give-and-take from both parties. In negotiating, you may give up some of your less important demands in order to achieve what you want most of all. The other person does the same, and in the end you arrive at a compromise that you both can live with.

Here are the steps that good negotiators follow when they try to resolve a problem:

1. **Listen actively.** If your emotions and ego have been involved, move beyond your initial feelings and listen carefully to the other person. Try to see the situation through his or her eyes. Might there be differences in culture or communication style that you should consider?

2. **Show concern for the relationship.** Let the other person know that you want to understand his or her point of view and that you want to reach a fair compromise.
3. **Focus on common interests.** Look beyond the immediate problem as you have defined it (your “position”) to discover what you and the other person really want (your “common interest”). Find an area on which you can agree and proceed from there.
4. **Invent new options.** Is there a third or fourth option that will satisfy both of you? Invite the other person to join you in brainstorming a creative solution.
5. **Decide together on a plan of action that is fair to both sides.** Find a solution in which neither party is the “loser.” Leave the channels of communication open in case further problems arise.