

A city skyline at dusk, featuring a prominent skyscraper with a glass facade that reflects the sky. The sky is filled with soft, grey clouds, and the city lights are beginning to glow. The skyscraper is the central focus, with other buildings of varying heights and styles surrounding it. The overall atmosphere is one of a bustling urban environment during the 'blue hour'.

CultureBound
MAGAZINE

Culture in Business

How do businesses look different around the world? How is best to do business?

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...it's about how two cultures should proceed in order to collaborate rather than conflict.



Cross-Cultural Collaboration

Dr. Terry Steele, Ph. D., Dr. of Missiology

Intercultural business is developing not just in number, but in complexity. From large multinationals to small “mom and pop” storefronts, business involves navigating cultural issues in areas as diverse as international supply chains, intercultural HR needs, and legal requirements for operating offices in multiple national contexts. Cities like Chicago, Hong Kong, Paris, and Toronto are watching as international businesses have populated their office spaces. International business brings with it a set of challenges that other international organizations, like missionary agencies or schools, don’t necessarily struggle with.

At the root of any culture – whether a corporate business culture or a national culture, there are beliefs and values that guide the decisions and actions of the people involved. CultureBound calls those the “roots” of the culture, and just like in a tree, the roots of a culture will affect everything else.

One big issue in cross-cultural business is tied to those invisible values and beliefs. Read the story that follows, and see if you can identify the roots of the two national cultures that are mentioned. What are some of the values that lead Mr Li? What are some of the beliefs and values at the root of the Zurich team?

Imagine with me a multinational business that we’ll call “MehTech.” MehTech is a software company specializing in shipment tracking applications. MehTech is struggling to keep up with competitors and has targeted their Zurich office as one of their least productive branches. In order to solve the shortfall from Zurich, the central corporate office in Quebec relocates their best manager, Li Daniu, from Hubei, China, to Zurich. This directly affects Altherr Meier, the current manager in Zurich, because he has now been demoted and Mr. Li has been put in his position.

After Mr. Li’s plane lands and he is driven to the Zurich office, he immediately



gathers all the employees despite it being halfway through the lunch hour. His words are crisp; the directions very clear. He immediately fires the three employees with lowest productivity measures over the previous 2 quarters - a new mother, a recent hire who had previously been an intern with MehTech, and a 62-year-old who had been with MehTech since its founding. In his management experience, these are difficult but necessary steps for the good of the company. The staff in Zurich looks at it differently.

Mr. Li spent the next three weeks at the office, barely traveling to his new home except during the final weekend. As he diligently worked to update office policies and organizational structures to make the Zurich office more productive and efficient, he rarely walked outside his office. He kept the door shut in order to concentrate on the office's obvious managerial problems. Many of his deputy managers approached his door, but Mr. Li instructed his administrative assistant that he was not to be disturbed. He knew he could make this office productive again and would not rest until he had found the best way to do that.

While production did rise slightly, morale plummeted. Further, local customers of MehTech began to drop off. Week four was the most challenging for Mr. Li as he found his office building half-full and many of the employees taking unscheduled vacation and paid leave hours for sickness and mental health days. He felt he had no choice but to request a transfer of employees from Hubei to Zurich. Headquarters allowed three of his subordinates from Hubei to be transferred and put into positions of deputy director, demoting three more Zurich employees.

The three Chinese deputy directors reported at the end of week five that morale was not improving, in spite of Mr. Li's obvious improvements in the managerial structure at the Zurich office. During a meeting of the newly arrived management team, Altherr Meier, the highest-ranking Swiss employee in the Zurich office, strongly requested to meet with the new arrivals. Altherr started, "Mr. Li, I regret to inform you that at our present pace the Zurich office of MehTech will close in six weeks from lack of sales, early retirements, and our faithful employees finding other employment. I'm afraid the only thing that has caused this change is your arrival."

Mr. Li was offended that one of his employees would speak to him in such a disrespectful manner and question his methods. Altherr assured Mr. Li that it was out of an abundance of respect that he approached him at all. Altherr told Mr. Li that the problems began when he fired three of their most important employees.

The young mother had recently returned from maternity leave. It had been a particularly difficult pregnancy and her production was down due to frequent hospitalizations. The previous manager had assured her that she would not lose her job due to the sickness, even though her production had been down during the pregnancy. Furthermore, she was one of the favorite office employees, encouraging people throughout. In many ways she had been the heart of MehTech in Zurich. The 62-year-old was a native of Zurich and had personal relationships with all the tech companies, new and old, throughout the local area. He often spent his lunch traveling from shop to shop talking with shop owners who had become long-time friends. Most of the local sales were due to his influence in the area. The young man fired was being mentored by the 62-year-old in order to take his place as the local networker when the older man retired. Mr. Li was slightly perplexed at the idea that three employees could affect an entire office so thoroughly.

Altherr continued. "There is another thing, too. Our previous manager never closed her door. We could come to her any time we needed help or if we ran into a problem. She often walked the floor just to talk with the employees and get to know them better. Mr. Li, I'm sure you are a fine manager where you are from, but it's just not working here."

This story is an example of the challenges that come with international business. Different cultural values, leadership styles, and beliefs about what will lead to the best outcomes can confuse and frustrate employees and managers alike. Conflict grows, and collaboration falls off, along with productivity. Ultimately the question in the above scenario is not who is right and who is wrong, but how the two cultures should proceed in order to collaborate rather than conflict. What can help to align the values and beliefs of the various cultures for the good of their common business interests?

Business Customs

There are some business customs that are more common around the world like a sense of professionalism and office attire. There are many differences, however, in global business culture. Your normal workday may look completely different from someone in another country.

How do you take part in meetings? How do you prepare for a presentation? How do you greet your boss? Check out these expectations in business culture around the world.





Do you normally shake hands with your boss? Business professionals in Belgium expect three air kisses when you have an established relationship. You may lose a business deal if you don't treat the relationship with the respect of the custom.

Some business is conducted outside of the office, maybe at a restaurant or coffee shop. In Finland, it is an honor to be asked to have a meeting in a sauna. If you decline, you might lose out on your business deal.

Print media in the United States has declined in recent years, including the printing of business cards. In Japan, business cards are highly revered. You must pass and receive business cards with both hands and keep it in good condition.

Your business may or may not be strict on time, but you will definitely want to mind the clock in Australia. If you are even one minute late, you may lose a business deal due to perceived disrespect. Russians also expect Americans to be perfectly on time, but do not hold the same standard for themselves.

These cultural norms might be different than you are used to, but it is extremely important to embrace them when doing global business. You always want to respect those you are working with, and learning their cultural traditions is a great way to do so. Read more business culture at <https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/5176-unusual-international-business-customs.html>.

The Top Global Businesses

You could probably guess some of these based on the businesses you know, but have you heard of them all? Check out these statistics on the top 10 businesses in the world. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/the-biggest-companies-in-the-world-in-2021/>

1

Apple



Location:
United States

Industry:
Technology

Market Value:
\$2.1 trillion

2

Saudi
Aramco



Location:
Saudi Arabia

Industry:
Energy

Market Value:
\$1.9 trillion

3

Microsoft



Location:
United States

Industry:
Technology

Market Value:
\$1.8 trillion

4

Amazon



Location:
United States

Industry:
Consumer

Market Value:
\$1.6 trillion

5

Alphabet
(Google)



Location:
United States

Industry:
Technology

Market Value:
\$1.4 trillion

6

Facebook



Location:
United States

Industry:
Technology

Market Value:
\$839 billion

7

Tencent



Location:
China

Industry:
Technology

Market Value:
\$753 billion

8

Tesla



Location:
United States

Industry:
Consumer

Market Value:
\$641 billion

9

Alibaba



Location:
China

Industry:
Consumer

Market Value:
\$615 billion

10

Berkshire
Hathaway



Location:
United States

Industry:
Financials

Market Value:
\$588 billion

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CultureBound + YOU

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**Sign up for culture training for
your business!**

Businesses large and small have the goal of unifying their employees. Sometimes this task is difficult when many employees come from different places and have a variety of cultural expectations.

Enter CultureBound! We provide training for your business team in order to help you understand your coworkers, business partners, and potential clients better.





We have many formats available for business training. Whether you'd like a weekly lunch and learn session with your team or you prefer a one-time online meeting, we adapt to your needs. We spend dedicated time with your employees teaching them the foundations of culture and how they can apply it to a business setting. We modify our foundational CultureCourse to make it applicable to those who you interact with on a daily basis. There are many things to learn! Ultimately, you will do business better.

**For more information or to register, visit our website!
www.culturebound.org**

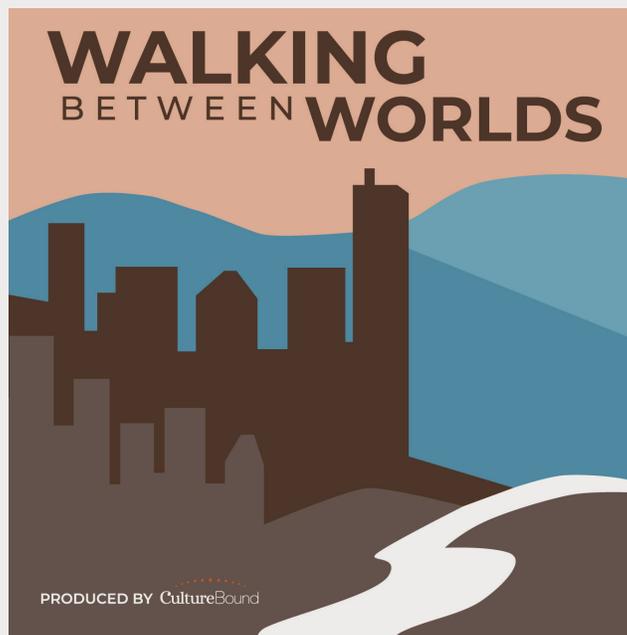
Our past business trainings have been very beneficial for those involved. Read these quotes from those who have participated. "You should be charging much more for this crucial training." "Our team is much closer after working with CultureBound. I feel like I have a new perspective on my coworkers and others I come in contact with." Improve the culture of your business today by learning about how to incorporate cultural traditions in your day-to-day.

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CultureBound

www.culturebound.org

 PO Box 16716, Portland, OR 97292 USA  503.235.3818  Info@CultureBound.org

For Donations

 PO Box 1138, Monument, CO 80132 USA  719.488.4121

 CultureBoundDonorServices@tenfoldbpo.org