

Język Angielski Biznesowy

# Business English

Magazine

## How to Avoid Culture Clashes



Dear Readers,

In this edition of BEM's business vocabulary handbook, we offer you a real treat<sup>1</sup>: an in-depth<sup>2</sup> guide<sup>3</sup> that will help you learn your way around<sup>4</sup> dealing with a foreign culture in business. It's no secret that many business deals<sup>5</sup> can be completely derailed<sup>6</sup> by someone who doesn't behave<sup>7</sup> properly in a given<sup>8</sup> context, either by saying or doing something that may offend<sup>9</sup> someone. Most often this is caused by being unprepared<sup>10</sup> to understand and adapt<sup>11</sup> to another culture. Since the business culture of the US and English-speaking countries is very Western in nature, many entrepreneurs<sup>12</sup> wrongly assume<sup>13</sup> that it's the norm, thinking that merely<sup>14</sup> learning another language will let them get by<sup>15</sup>, or even expecting<sup>16</sup> everyone to speak English and behave in some uniform<sup>17</sup> way.

That first expectation is indeed<sup>18</sup> the standard nowadays<sup>19</sup>, but what about various<sup>20</sup> cultures, habits<sup>21</sup> and traditions that are cherished<sup>22</sup> by members of other cultures? After all, if we all act the same way, we may lose what makes us so different and unique<sup>23</sup> as human beings<sup>24</sup>. So instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all<sup>25</sup> bland<sup>26</sup> Western business culture, why not learn what other cultures find proper and which traps to avoid<sup>27</sup>, learn how to embrace<sup>28</sup> modern multiculturalism<sup>29</sup> that isn't synonymous with<sup>30</sup> lack of individuality<sup>31</sup>. And besides, who knows what great new business opportunity awaits<sup>32</sup> if you simply learn about other cultures and find how to operate in them? Read on!

<sup>1</sup> **treat** tri:t miła niespodzianka

<sup>2</sup> **in-depth** 'ɪndɛpθ obszerne

<sup>3</sup> **guide** gaɪd poradnik

<sup>4</sup> **to learn one's way around doing sth** tə lɜ:n wʌnz weɪ ə'raʊnd 'du:ɪŋ 'sʌmθɪŋ nauczyć się jak się czymś zajmować/jak sobie z czymś radzić

<sup>5</sup> **deal** di:l kontrakt, umowa

<sup>6</sup> **to derail sth** tə dɪ'reɪl 'sʌmθɪŋ wykoleić, popsuć

<sup>7</sup> **to behave** tə br'heɪv zachowywać się

<sup>8</sup> **given** 'gɪvɪn dany

<sup>9</sup> **to offend sb** tu ə'fend 'sʌmbədi obrazić, urazić kogoś

<sup>10</sup> **unprepared** ,ʌnpri'peəd niegotowy

<sup>11</sup> **to adapt** tu ə'dæpt dostosować się

<sup>12</sup> **entrepreneur** ,ɒntɹəprə'nɜ:(r) przedsiębiorca

<sup>13</sup> **to assume** tu ə'sju:m założyć

<sup>14</sup> **merely** 'mɛəli zaledwie, tylko

<sup>15</sup> **to let sb get by** tə let 'sʌmbədi get baɪ pozwolić komuś (jako tako) dawać sobie radę

<sup>16</sup> **to expect sb to do sth** tu ɪk'spekt 'sʌmbədi tə də 'sʌmθɪŋ oczekiwać od kogoś, że coś zrobi

<sup>17</sup> **uniform** 'ju:nɪfɔ:m jednakowy, taki sam

<sup>18</sup> **indeed** ɪn'di:d w rzeczy samej

<sup>19</sup> **nowadays** 'nəʊdeɪz obecnie

<sup>20</sup> **various** 'veəriəs rozmaity

<sup>21</sup> **habit** 'hæbɪt zwyczaj

<sup>22</sup> **to cherish sth** tə 'tʃerɪʃ 'sʌmθɪŋ pielęgnować coś, hołubić

<sup>23</sup> **unique** ju:'ni:k unikalny

<sup>24</sup> **human being** 'hju:mən 'bi:ɪŋ istota ludzka

<sup>25</sup> **one-size-fits-all** wʌn saɪz fɪts ɔ:l uniwersalny, pasujący do wszystkiego (tylko przed rzeczownikiem)

<sup>26</sup> **bland** blænd nijaki

<sup>27</sup> **to avoid** tu ə'vɔɪd unikać

<sup>28</sup> **to embrace sth** tu ɪm'breɪs 'sʌmθɪŋ przyjąć coś, zaakceptować

<sup>29</sup> **multiculturalism** ,mʌltɪ,kʌltʃərəlɪz(ə)m wielokulturowość

<sup>30</sup> **to be synonymous with sth** tə bi st'ɪnɒnɪməs wɪð 'sʌmθɪŋ być tożsamym/równoznacznym z czymś

<sup>31</sup> **individuality** ,ɪndɪ,vɪdʒu'ælətɪ tu: czyjeś poczucie unikalności/niepowtarzalności

<sup>32</sup> **to await** tu ə'weɪt czekać (na kogoś/coś)

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## Cultural Dimensions as the Starting Point for Multiculturalism

Geert Hofstede is a social psychologist whose seminal works have both created and shaped the field of cultural dimensions – an area of study of social behaviour that transcends and encompasses psychology, sociology and anthropology. Any practical advice on how to deal with different cultures and avoid clashes should begin with at least a nod in his direction.

According to Hofstede, various cultures (and hence various countries and societies that are comprised of members of such cultures) present certain quantifiable, visible and categorisable character traits that are very different from one nation to the next. Initially, that difference would be ascribed by him to just four areas.

On his website, he states that there are “four anthropological problem areas that different national societies handle differently: ways of coping with inequality, ways of coping with uncertainty, the relationship of the individual with her or his primary group, and the emotional implications of having been born as a girl or as a boy”.

Since his initial research, others have come up with two more dimensions – one having to do with being more oriented towards one’s pleasure or more towards showing moderation, and the other connected to the way certain cultures approach goals that are closer or further away in time. These two dimensions also play a certain role in business and commerce.

Of course, Hofstede’s (and his successors) research into cultural dimensions has much wider implications than just business, but in our handy guide we will try to simply explain what each of these so-called dimensions is and what it means for doing business in another country, in a multi-national context or when dealing with foreigners of certain descent. Let’s start with Individualism versus Collectivism.

### Individualism vs. Collectivism

This aspect describes how much of an emphasis is placed on one’s own achievements, independence and autonomy in making decisions or following rules. In places where individualism is highly valued, personal opinion is very important, there is respect for smaller groups, where each person can stand up to all the others and express their opinion freely.

Societies or communities where collectivism is more valued tend to form coherent groups (e.g. larger families) where one’s own well-being is dependent on that of the group, and hence one’s own ideas, independent decision-making or personal achievements are treated as either unimportant or even detrimental to the group. Traditionally, Asian countries are regarded as more collectivist in nature. The same concerns most less developed countries, where families tend to be larger, and many Latin and African countries. By the same measure, America and Europe are often regarded as low-to-middle collectivist. However, this perception is mostly based on some rather superficial observations and may not hold entirely true.