

Like most companies in an increasingly globalised world, our firm does business with other firms abroad. Company cultures vary worldwide, and it is important for delegates from our company to recognise how company culture overseas might be different from our own. This document will give you a brief guide to company culture in the countries we associate with.

Russia

Until recently, people and businesses were oppressed by the state and this has affected people's attitudes. It is not uncommon for laws to be ignored and taxes to go unpaid. In some cases, only contracts between close personal friends are acknowledged. Therefore, networking is vital for successful business. Presently, the legal situation in Russia is in a state of flux, with laws constantly being rewritten. Those that exist are often unenforceable. Most agreements are therefore made on a trust basis, so it is vital that personal relationships do not break down. The management style is centralised and directive. Too much debate can indicate a lack of decisiveness. Subordinates take orders from the 'big boss'. Many westerners see this as a lack of initiative on the part of middle managers, but in actual fact, middle managers have little power. Most delays occur because the question has not been presented to actual decision-maker. However, things are changing in Russia. The old regime is gradually being replaced by western business style, and younger managers will have a much more modern approach than their older counterparts.

South Korea

South Korea is one of the world's most successful economies, having seen five consecutive decades of high economic growth. When faced with adversity, South Koreans change direction quickly and effectively. Despite the frantic economic growth, South Korean society is still very conservative and conformist due to the influence of Confucian values. Companies are hierarchical and regimented and 'face' is very much valued. Consequently, change can sometimes be slow and painful. Managers are paternalistic, authoritative figures who expect their instructions to be carried out obediently and respectfully. In return, they give their subordinates support and help, not only in work issues but in home issues as well. Group harmony is important, so South Koreans avoid confrontation and blame, especially among people of equal rank. Friendship is therefore vital to business success. The Korean saying 'make a friend first and a client second' sums this up exactly.

Australia

Australia has a relatively small population in relation to its vast size. Its geographic isolation and its small domestic market mean that international trade is essential to guarantee future prosperity. Increasingly, this is done in countries in Asia rather than Commonwealth countries. Australian managers are not considered to have superior status to other workers. Their jobs are just different. Authoritative management styles are not appreciated among Australians workers. Instead, managers adopt a more consultative and inclusive style which encourages open debate. Challenging superiors is acceptable, indeed it is a sign of commitment and professionalism. Outsiders may consider such dialogues confrontational, but Australians regard them as effective ways to communicate ideas. Australian managers like to be seen as 'one of the boys' and they are more likely to socialise with their team than segregate themselves and just mix with other managers.

UK

In the last half century, Britain, like many industrialised countries, has moved away from heavy engineering towards service and high-tech industries. With this has come a major shift in management style. Hierarchical systems have been swept aside and replaced by modern business models, heavily influenced by the US. The 'job for life' is rare. Neither managers nor junior workers expect to climb the corporate ladder within one company; rather, they manage their own career paths by progressing from company to company. Such short-termism can be frustrating for outsiders. British managers tend to be generalists rather than specialists, and are not necessarily the most technically competent person in the team. Instead, they are expected to have the necessary interpersonal skills to ensure the team works together effectively. They cultivate a close and humorous relationship with subordinates, which may be considered too soft. Giving direct orders can be seen as impolite, so managers often make indirect requests rather than explicit instructions, which is sometimes confusing for non-British people.

Which country is being referred to in these statements? Use A for Australia, R for Russia, SK for South Korea, and UK for the United Kingdom. Use capital letters.

1. "The people I deal with keep moving on to new jobs."
2. "Unless you're friends, they may not honour your agreement."
3. "It's frustrating because the official regulations keep changing."
4. "Disagreements between colleagues are frowned upon."
5. "I thought the manager had the authority to make a decision, but it turned out that he didn't."
6. "The manager and another member of staff had a huge disagreement in the meeting, and no-one seemed to care."
7. "They weren't terribly charming – they just wanted to get on with making the deal."
8. "I expected the manager to have more technical knowledge than he actually did."
9. "I dealt with two companies in this country last year. One was really hierarchical, but the other was really modern."
10. "The manager kept asking me about my wife and children. I don't know why it was so important to him."
11. "He has a PhD but he never refers to himself as a doctor."
12. "I thought that there'd be tariffs to pay, but the firm seemed quite content to overlook them."
13. "I didn't realise I was expected to do it this way. I thought the manager was just offering a tip."
14. "The managers sat with the junior workers at lunch. I expected them to have their own table."
15. "The junior workers do what their boss wants them to do without question."
16. "I hoped the senior manager would be prepared to discuss the matter with me, but he refused to engage in any form of debate."