

# CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIALISING

## 1 Building a relationship

- Cross-cultural understanding (1)
- Welcoming visitors
- Small talk: keeping the conversation going

### 1 Cross-cultural understanding (1)



1 Look at the picture. In groups, discuss the situation. Decide what you think the people are talking about. Suggest various topics. Say what you think they are definitely *not* talking about. Then spend a few minutes acting out the conversation.

2 Read the text below. Identify the basic message implied by the text.

#### *Eye contact*

In many Western societies, including the United States, a person who does not maintain 'good eye contact' is regarded as being slightly suspicious, or a 'shifty' character. Americans unconsciously associate people who avoid eye contact as unfriendly, insecure, untrustworthy, inattentive and impersonal. However, in contrast, Japanese children are taught in school to direct their gaze at the region of their teacher's Adam's apple or tie knot, and, as adults, Japanese lower their eyes when speaking to a superior, a gesture of respect.

Latin American cultures, as well as some African cultures, such as Nigeria, have longer looking time, but prolonged eye contact from an individual of lower status is considered disrespectful. In the US, it is considered rude to stare – regardless of who is looking at whom. In contrast, the polite Englishman is taught to pay strict attention to a speaker, to listen carefully, and to blink his eyes to let the speaker know he or she has been understood as well as heard. Americans signal interest and comprehension by bobbing their heads or grunting.

A widening of the eyes can also be interpreted differently, depending on circumstances and culture. Take, for instance, the case of an American and a Chinese discussing the terms of a proposed contract. Regardless of the language in which the proposed contract is carried out, the US negotiator may interpret a Chinese person's widened eyes as an expression of astonishment instead of as a danger signal (its true meaning) of politely expressed anger.

*Adapted from Managing Cultural Differences, Fourth Edition, by Phillip R. Harris and Robert T. Moran.*

**3 If necessary, read the text again. Then comment on the following:**

- a) observations about many people from the United States
- b) observations about the English
- c) an observation about Japanese children
- d) the meaning of lowering one's eyes in Japan
- e) why looking at someone for a long time may be considered disrespectful
- f) the meaning of widened eyes in Chinese culture.

**4 Before receiving a visitor from a foreign country – or before travelling abroad – you need to think about the cultural issues that may affect the relationship.**

- a) Suggest some basic research that you should do before receiving your visitor, or before travelling. What issues should you think about?

*Note: After suggesting your own ideas, compare your list with the Skills Checklist at the end of this unit.*



- b) Listen to the recording. An Englishman, Peter Welch, who is a Director of an international company, talks about what he thinks is important in preparing for business contacts with people from other cultures. He mentions several key areas to find out about. Identify six of them. Did you think of any of the same issues?







### Discussion

**In what way is the advice in this section useful when doing business? Look again at the Skills Checklist on page 7.**

## 2 Welcoming visitors



What happens when a visitor arrives with an appointment to visit a company?  
What are the typical stages of the first meeting? What conversations take place?

-   **1 Listen to the recording in which Klaus Ervald arrives for a meeting with Lars Elstroem and Louise Scott of Evco S.A., a Swedish advertising agency.**
- Is the meeting between Klaus Ervald and Evco formal or informal? Give reasons for your answer.
  - Do they know each other quite well?
  - Klaus has a problem. What is it?
-   **2 Listen again. Think again about how Louise and Lars talk to Klaus.**  
She interrupts him at the start. Is this acceptable?  
They use first names. Is this right, given the situation?  
Lars begins to talk about the programme for the day. Is this appropriate at this stage?
-   **3 Listen to the recording of Peter Marwood's arrival at SDA Ltd., in Sydney, Australia. He has to wait a few minutes and asks Stephanie Field for some assistance. Identify two things he needs and three things he does not need.**



**Needs**

a) .....

b) .....

**Does not need**

c) .....

d) .....

e) .....



**1 Ruud Hemper from the Netherlands is visiting a customer in India. He is talking to the Production Manager of a manufacturing plant in Delhi. Listen to the recording of an extract of their conversation.**

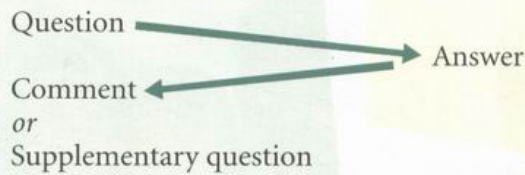
MANAGER: Is this your first visit here?

HEMPER: No, in fact the first time I came was for a trade fair. We began our Southeast Asian operations here at the 1995 Exhibition.

MANAGER: Shall we have a look round the plant before lunch?

a) What is wrong with what the production manager says?

The answer is, of course, that it breaks a 'rule' of conversation. Generally, if you ask a question you should comment on the answer or ask a supplementary question.



b) Now suggest a better version of the same conversation. There is a recording of a model version.

**2 Provide a suitable sentence in the spaces in the following dialogue.**

PETER: Have you been to Edinburgh before?

JANIS: No, it's my first visit.

PETER: a) .....

JANIS: I'm sure I will.

PETER: And ... er, is the hotel all right?

JANIS: Yes, it's very comfortable.

PETER: b) ..... So, do you have much time here in Scotland? Are you staying long?

JANIS: No, I have to go back tomorrow afternoon.

PETER: c) ..... You'll have to come back again!

JANIS: d) .....

PETER: So what time's your flight tomorrow?

JANIS: Early evening, 18.35.

PETER: Well, I can book you a taxi if you like, to get you there in good time.

JANIS: e) .....

PETER: No problem at all. Was it a good flight today?

JANIS: No, it wasn't actually.

PETER: f) ..... g) .....

JANIS: It was raining – quite hard. There was a lot of turbulence.

PETER: h) .....

## Language Checklist

### Cultural diversity and socialising (1)

#### *Welcoming visitors*

Welcome to ...

My name's ...

#### *Arriving*

Hello. My name's ... from ...

I've an appointment to see ...

Sorry – I'm a little late / early.

My plane was delayed ...

#### *Introducing someone*

This is ... He/she's my Personal Assistant.

Can I introduce you to ... He/she's our  
(Project Manager).

I'd like to introduce you to ...

#### *Meeting someone and small talk*

Pleased to meet you.

It's a pleasure.

How was your trip? Did you have a good  
flight / trip / journey?

How are things in (London)?

How long are you staying in (New York)?

I hope you like it.

Is your hotel comfortable?

Is this your first visit to (the Big Apple)?

#### *Offering assistance*

Can I get you anything?

Do you need anything?

Would you like a drink?

If you need to use a phone or fax, please say.

Can we do anything for you?

Do you need a hotel / a taxi /  
any travel information / etc.?

#### *Asking for assistance*

There is one thing I need ...

Could you get me ...

Could you book me a car / taxi / hotel / ... ?

Could you help me arrange a flight to ... ?

Can you recommend a good restaurant?

I'd like to book a room for tomorrow night.

Can you recommend a hotel?

## Skills Checklist

### Socialising (1)

Before meeting business partners and fellow professionals from other countries, you could find out about their country:

- the actual political situation
- cultural and regional differences
- religion(s)
- the role of women in business and in society as a whole
- transport and telecommunications systems
- the economy
- the main companies
- the main exports and imports
- the market for the industrial sector which interests you
- competitors.

You might also want to find out:

- which topics are safe for small talk
- which topics are best avoided.

If you are going to visit another country, find out about:

- the conventions regarding socialising
- attitudes towards foreigners
- attitudes towards gifts
- the extent to which public, business and private lives are mixed or are kept separate
- conventions regarding food and drink.

You might also like to find out about:

- the weather at the relevant time of the year
- public holidays
- the conventions regarding working hours
- leisure interests
- tourism
- dress
- body language
- language.