



Polish Business Culture *Poland is closer than you think*



Background

Poland, located in the middle of Europe, is inhabited by friendly and hospitable people. A modern economy of the 21st century is closer than you think. The country has historical links with different east and west countries which makes Poles very tolerant and open. Any potential blunders arising from cultural differences do not carry glaring consequences. Western cultural values and models can be found in both Polish business and daily life. Poles are hard working people, and pay attention to their free time and family life. The following guidelines are intended to help avoid confusion and to facilitate effective communication.

General remarks

Business dress: First impressions are always very important in the business community. Business dress in Poland is formal and conservative. Businessmen tend to wear dark suits and ties while women wear muted color suits with either trousers or a skirt.

Hours of business: Working hours are generally between 8am and 4pm, Monday to Friday. Poles do not usually take a formal lunch break during the working day. Most Poles take their holidays in the summer, i.e. July and August.

First contacts and making appointments: If you wish to meet with someone, you will have to make an appointment in advance by letter, fax, e-mail or preferably by phone. Polish etiquette requires the giving of your full name both when calling and answering the phone. Unannounced visits are not well received.

Punctuality: It is important to arrive on time although you might be forgiven for being up to 15 minutes late. You must notify in advance whether you will be late. Punctuality is a sign of respect and effective work.

Trust: Trust and honesty are also valued.

Language of business

Polish is the official language of business in Poland, although English is also widely understood and spoken in business circles in larger cities. English is also the primary language which is used during negotiations with foreign business partners. Some businessmen speak also other languages, the most popular of which are German and Russian. If you manage to learn a few Polish phrases it will certainly impress your Polish colleagues.

| Key Facts | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Official Language | Polish |
| Working hours | 8.00-16.00 |
| Communication style | Direct |
| Family and relationships | Highly valued |
| Greetings | Confident handshake coupled with direct eye contact |
| Punctuality | Max 15min grace period |
| Accepted meeting locations | Restaurants/ company headquarters |
| Use of titles | Common Mr/Ms. 'Last name' |

Key Etiquettes

Business Cards

- Business cards should be printed in English. Upon receiving the opposing party's business card, you should take a moment to study it before placing it in your pocket.
- It is good to use the card during the meeting when addressing the partner using his job title.
- The business card should be given hand to hand (and not, for example, put on the table) and in such a way that it can easily be read and, therefore, face up and reversed to the recipient (never "upside down").
- Business cards should be respected, as they represent the way in which we treat the owner.

Greetings

- Business associates greet each other with a firm handshake and direct eye contact. Introductions should include a person's full name and title. Do not shake hands in a doorway because it is considered to bring bad luck.
- The gentleman is introduced to the lady, junior to the senior and younger to older.
- Men should wait for a woman to extend her hand and Polish men will sometimes kiss a woman on the hand as a sign of respect.

Gifts

- Gift-giving is an established practice in Polish business; gifts are usually given at the beginning of a relationship and at the completion of a project. The gifts should not be too expensive.
- Poles like to offer their business partners Polish landscape albums. Albums with Polish cultural heritage pictures are also popular. Very often gifts are collections of Polish music. Amber is also common.
- If invited to a business partner's home, it is normal to bring flowers, sweets or a bottle of wine or other alcohol.

Cuisine

For centuries the Polish kitchen has been the arena for competing influences from France and Italy. It also borrowed extensively from more exotic tables as Tatar, Armenian, Lithuanian, Hungarian and Jewish. Locally made dishes specific to different parts of Poland will also spoil you for choice. For example, from Mazovia in central Poland comes *żurek soup* – a sour rye soup. The Eastern belt is known for the world famous *dumplings (pierogi)*, Western Poland will treat you to *aromatic duck dishes*, while North East Poland to the best *potato dishes*.

At the table: The guest of honour (or his wife) sits to the right of the host. Polish table manners are western and good manners are appreciated.

Toasts and Speeches: Speeches and toasts are common in Poland. In most situations it is impolite to reach for your drink until the host proposed a toast.

Entertaining and drinking

- Visitors are usually taken to restaurants or company lodges.
- Invitation to the restaurant aiming to build relationship should not be rejected as it is an integral part of the Polish culture.
- At present less alcohol is consumed than some years ago and people tend to leave receptions and dinners earlier than before.
- During the official business talks in Poland soft drinks, tea, coffee and/or biscuits are usually served.
- Poles have a good work ethic and it is not unusual to work through the day without a lunchbreak.

Holidays

Polish summer holidays start on the 28th of June and last until the end of August. In companies, the summer holiday season is practically at the same time. It is also difficult to arrange business appointments before and after Christmas and Easter.

Official Holidays in Poland

| | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| January 1 | New Year's Day |
| January 6 | Epiphany |
| Sunday in Spring (movable) | Easter Sunday |
| Monday following Easter Sunday | Easter Monday |
| May 1 | Labour Day |
| May 3 | Constitution Day |
| 7th Sunday after Easter | Pentecost Sunday |
| 9th Thursday after Easter | Corpus Christi |
| August 15 | Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary |
| November 1 | All Saints' Day |
| November 11 | Independence Day |
| December 25 | Christmas Day |
| December 26 | Boxing Day |

Discussions and negotiations

Preparation of the meeting

- Before the first meeting, interested parties should present potential Polish partners with their business profiles.
- Agenda, purpose and participation of people in the meeting should be clearly defined and agreed upon in advance.
- Business meetings should be started with some small talk to get to know Polish colleagues and build trust before embarking on any specific business negotiations. Important business issues should be discussed in person and phone calls are sometimes essential to establish a basis for a formal written agreement.
- Meetings prepared in a professional manner are appreciated by Polish businessmen.
- Small talk topics can include, among others, sports or family life.

Communication

- English is the common language of business communication.
- Poles have a direct communication style. The use of Mr. and Ms is common in Poland especially among the older generation.
- Eye contact should be maintained at all times as it is seen as a sign of respect and trust.
- People usually say what they think and address matters directly and they do not try to hide their emotions.

Business talk

- Business negotiations are normally held in offices, not in restaurants. It is acceptable to continue talking business at lunch, but take the lead from the host.
- Business structures in Poland are hierarchical and the style of management has been often described as authoritative. Decisions are made from the top and authority is respected. The most senior members of a company will often make the decisions, so it is advisable to arrange meeting with them rather than with junior representatives.
- It is expected that the person coming to the meeting is prepared and made presentations in an efficient and businesslike manner.
- Poles like to ask a lot of questions in connection with this presentation. Thus, all presentations should be comprehensive to avoid additional questions and explanations.
- The word has a very high value - verbal promises are just as important as the written agreements.
- Differences in the point of views on professional issues are not seen as a criticism of the person.

Selected differences between Polish and Finnish business culture

The communication problems between Finnish and Polish businessmen are not usually caused by the lack of language skills, but rather by a slow pace at which the information is exchanged. Waiting for a reply from a Finnish associate for a long time may be frustrating for the Polish professional.

| Poland | Aspect | Finland |
|---|------------------------|---|
| Focus on relationship | Focus of partnership | Focus on business objective |
| Direct and emotional expression of opinions | Expression of opinions | More reservation in combining emotions with opinions |
| More hierarchical approach to business titles | Seniority | Less focus on business titles and seniority |
| Small-talk is highly valued | Small-talk | Small talk is not always expected |
| Mr/Ms. 'Last name' format when addressing a business partner is prevalent | Title reference | 'First name' format when addressing a business partner is prevalent |