CHAPTER
18

Culture, Etiquette and Cross-Border Negotiation

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Introduction

When negotiators from different backgrounds meet, they bring with them more than their interests and alternatives. They bring assumptions about what a negotiation is for, how it should proceed, what counts as a fair offer, how much should be said directly and how much left implicit, how quickly decisions should be made, who has the authority to make them and how trust is earned. These assumptions are shaped by **culture**: the shared values, beliefs and norms of behaviour that members of a group learn and pass on. Because cultural assumptions are usually taken for granted, negotiators often fail to notice that the other side does not share them, and they misread behaviour perfectly normal in the other side's context as evasive, rude, naive or aggressive.

Culture affects all three pillars of this book. It shapes how parties define **profit**: whether a good agreement is a signed contract with detailed terms or the beginning of a long relationship. It shapes how **power** is exercised and perceived: whether hierarchy is respected or challenged, and whether pressure is applied openly or indirectly. And it shapes **persuasion**: which arguments convince, which forms of communication are trusted and how emotions may be shown.

This chapter proceeds in five steps. Section 18.1 asks what culture is and why it matters at the negotiating table, including the culture of organisations as well as nations. Section 18.2 presents the main frameworks for comparing cultures, those of Hofstede, Hall, Lewis and Meyer, together with the Wheel of Culture of Moore and Woodrow, and discusses their uses and limits. Section 18.3 compares negotiating practices in Europe, Asia and the Americas and extends the comparison to the Middle East, Africa and Central and Eastern Europe. Section

18.4 turns to etiquette: attitudes to time, hierarchy, gifts and hospitality. Section 18.5 identifies the mistakes that cost international negotiators most.

A warning is necessary at the outset. Cultural generalisations describe tendencies in large groups, not the behaviour of any individual. Within every country there are wide differences between regions, generations, industries and people, and experienced international negotiators often adapt their behaviour to their counterparts. A generalisation helping a negotiator to form questions is useful; one replacing observation with stereotype is harmful. Osland and Bird (2000) warned against this kind of "sophisticated stereotyping" and urged negotiators to treat cultural frameworks as hypotheses to be tested in each encounter.

The Deal File illustrates a point that is often overlooked. The most consequential cultural difference in a negotiation is not always between nations. Honda and Nissan are both Japanese companies, yet their merger talks collapsed in February 2025, in large part because of differences in corporate culture, history and identity, and because one side's proposal was perceived by the other as a loss of standing it could not accept.

DEAL FILE

Why Honda and Nissan Did Not Merge

In December 2024 two of Japan's best-known carmakers announced that they would explore a merger. Honda, the country's second-largest carmaker, and Nissan, its third, signed a memorandum of understanding on 23 December to consider combining under a joint holding company. Mitsubishi Motors, in which Nissan held a large stake, signed a separate memorandum with the two companies to consider joining. The aim was a mobility company with annual sales revenue of more than 30 trillion yen and operating profit of more than 3 trillion yen. Under a tentative timetable, a definitive agreement would be signed in June 2025, and in August 2026 the holding company's shares would be listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange in place of those of the two carmakers. Honda would nominate the majority of the holding company's directors, and its president would be chosen from among Honda's nominees (Honda Motor & Nissan Motor, 2024).

The logic was clear. Both companies faced intense competition from Chinese producers of electric vehicles, led by BYD, and from Tesla, and both needed to invest heavily in electric vehicles, batteries and software. Nissan was in difficulty. Its net income for the first half of its 2024 financial year had fallen from 296.2 billion yen to 19.2 billion yen, and in November 2024 it announced plans to reduce its global workforce by 9,000 and its global production capacity by 20 per cent (Nissan Motor, 2024). For Nissan, a combination with Honda offered a route to recovery as a Japanese company; for Honda, it offered scale.

The talks ended within seven weeks. As the two sides examined the terms, Honda became concerned about the pace of Nissan's restructuring and about the risk that a joint holding company with a shared board would slow decisions. It proposed changing the structure so that Honda would become the parent company and Nissan its subsidiary, through an exchange of shares. Nissan rejected the proposal. On 13 February 2025 the two companies announced the termination of the memorandum, saying it was "most appropriate to cease discussions and terminate the MOU" in order to prioritise speed of decision-making in a volatile market (Honda Motor & Nissan Motor, 2025). They said that they would continue to cooperate in a strategic partnership aimed at the era of intelligent and electrified vehicles.

Table 18.1

The Honda–Nissan merger talks at a glance

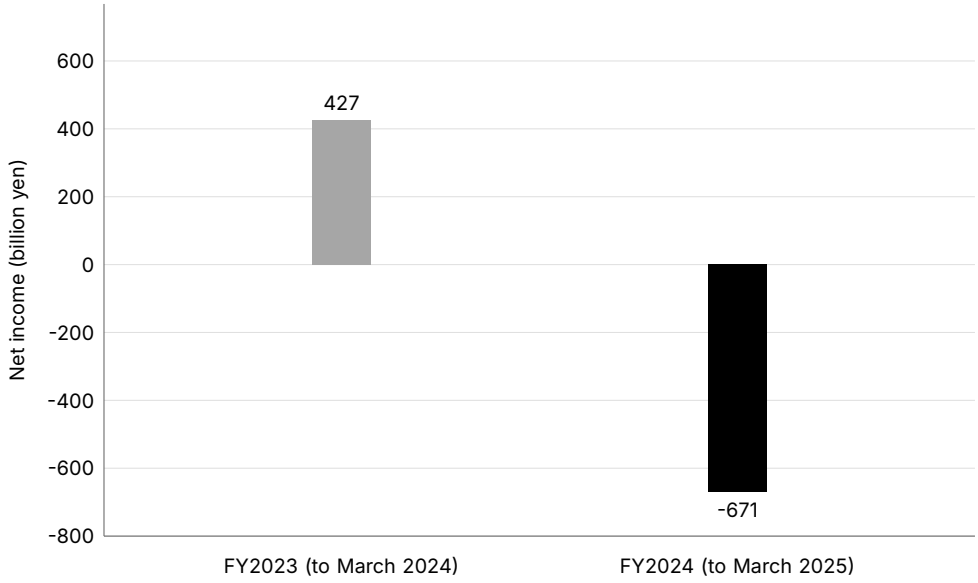
Parties	Honda Motor; Nissan Motor; Mitsubishi Motors; Renault, Nissan's largest shareholder; employees, suppliers and the Japanese government as interested parties
At stake	The creation of a group with targeted sales revenue of more than 30 trillion yen; the recovery of Nissan; investment in electric vehicles and software; the identity and independence of two companies with long histories
Timeline	Memorandum of understanding signed 23 December 2024; Honda proposes making Nissan a subsidiary in early 2025; talks terminated 13 February 2025; Nissan's chief executive replaced from April 2025; agreement on joint development of vehicle electronics and software announced 31 August 2026
Proposed terms	A joint holding company, with Honda nominating the majority of its directors, later replaced by a proposal to make Nissan a subsidiary of Honda through a share exchange

Note. Author, based on Honda Motor and Nissan Motor (2024, 2025, 2026) and Nissan Motor (2025a, 2025b).

Aftermath. Nissan's chief executive, Makoto Uchida, was replaced in April 2025 by Ivan Espinosa. In May 2025 Nissan reported a net loss of 670.9 billion yen for the year to March 2025, against net income of 426.6 billion yen a year earlier, and announced its Re:Nissan plan, which would reduce its workforce by 20,000 between the 2024 and 2027 financial years and consolidate its vehicle plants from 17 to 10 by 2027 (Nissan Motor, 2025a, 2025b). Figure 18.1 shows the reversal in its results. Honda, for its part, reported a net loss of 423.9 billion yen for the year to March 2026, after large losses and impairments related to electric vehicles (Honda Motor, 2026). In the first quarter of its 2026 financial year Nissan returned to an operating profit of 77.9 billion yen (Nissan Motor, 2026),

Figure 18.1

Nissan's net income, financial years 2023 and 2024 (billion yen)



Note. Author, based on Nissan Motor (2025a). Nissan's financial year ends on 31 March; FY2023 ended in March 2024 and FY2024 in March 2025.

and on 31 August 2026 the two companies concluded an agreement to jointly develop and standardise the core electronic control units and software for their next-generation software-defined vehicles, from the 2029 financial year (Honda Motor & Nissan Motor, 2026). The cooperation that the merger was meant to deliver began to take shape, but as a partnership between independent companies.

Questions to keep in mind. Why did two companies from the same country, with a shared strategic logic, fail to agree? What role did corporate identity, history and the perception of status play? How might the negotiation have been structured differently? And what does the case suggest about the relationship between national and organisational culture? The chapter answers these questions in turn.

18.1 What Is Culture, and Why Does It Matter at the Table?

Layers of Culture

Culture can be thought of in layers. At the surface are **artefacts and behaviours**: dress, greetings, the arrangement of the meeting room, the way a business card is presented. Beneath them are **norms and values**: beliefs about what is right, proper and important, such as respect for hierarchy, the importance of punctuality or the value placed on directness. At the deepest level are **basic assumptions**, so taken for granted that people rarely articulate them, about human nature, time, relationships and the relationship between the individual and the group. Schein (2010) developed this layered model for organisations, and it applies equally to national cultures. Negotiators usually notice the surface first and misinterpret it because they do not see the values and assumptions beneath.

Hofstede (1994, as cited in Jandt, 2018) proposed a related classification of the elements of culture into four categories: **symbols**, verbal and non-verbal language; **heroes**, real or imaginary people who serve as models of behaviour; **rituals**, socially essential collective activities; and **values**, shared feelings about what is good or bad, normal or abnormal, which lie at the core. Jandt (2018) adds two further features of culture: it is transmitted socially, through families and schools, from one generation to the next, and its members consciously identify with the group. He also distinguishes the culture of a whole society from the smaller groups within it, which scholars have called subcultures, co-cultures, subgroups and microcultures. Organisational and professional cultures, discussed next, are among the most important of these smaller groups for business negotiators.

National, Organisational and Professional Cultures

Negotiators belong to several cultures at once. **National culture** is the most studied, but **organisational culture**, the shared values and practices of a company, and **professional culture**, those of engineers, lawyers, bankers or diplomats, can be just as important. Two engineers from different countries may understand each other better than an engineer and a lawyer from the same country. Two companies from the same country may have strikingly different cultures, shaped by their founders, histories and experiences.

The Deal File illustrates this. Honda has a long tradition as an independent, engineering-driven company that has rarely relied on alliances. Nissan's recent history was very different: it was rescued by Renault in 1999, became part of the Renault–Nissan alliance under Carlos Ghosn, and then went through the turmoil of Ghosn's arrest in Japan in 2018 and a long renegotiation of its relationship with Renault, in which it sought and obtained a more equal footing. For a company that had fought to recover its independence and equality within one alliance,

a proposal to become the subsidiary of another was not merely a question of governance. It touched its identity.

How Culture Affects Negotiation

Salacuse (1998) identified ten ways in which culture can affect negotiating style, and surveyed several hundred executives and students from different countries about their preferences. His dimensions provide a useful checklist for negotiators preparing to meet a counterpart from another culture. Table 18.2 lists the ten dimensions.

Table 18.2

Ten ways in which culture can affect negotiation

Dimension	One end of the range	Other end of the range
Goal of the negotiation	A contract	A relationship
Attitude to the process	Win–lose	Win–win
Personal style	Formal	Informal
Communication	Direct	Indirect
Sensitivity to time	High: time is money	Low: time is flexible
Emotionalism	High	Low
Form of agreement	Specific and detailed	General principles
Building an agreement	Bottom-up, from details	Top-down, from principles
Team organisation	One leader decides	Consensus of the group
Risk-taking	High	Low

Note. Author, based on Salacuse (1998).

Salacuse found substantial differences between national groups on several dimensions, but also wide variation within each group. His findings support the warning in the Introduction: the dimensions are a guide to what to look for, not a prediction of what any individual will do.

Brett (2014) proposed a different way of linking culture to negotiation, by distinguishing three kinds of culture according to how people earn and protect their social worth. In **dignity** cultures, typical of North America and northern Europe, worth is seen as inherent in each person and not dependent on others' opinions; people tend to be direct and to trust others until given reason not to. In **face** cultures, typical of East Asia, worth depends on one's standing in a stable hierarchy, which others must respect; people avoid open confrontation and value harmony. In **honour** cultures, found in parts of the Middle East, southern Europe and Latin America, worth must be claimed and defended, and slights must be answered. The framework helps to explain why the same proposal can be received very differently. An offer regarded by a negotiator from a dignity

culture as a neutral business proposition may be received by one from a face culture as a public loss of standing.

KEY MOVE

Prepare for the culture of your counterpart's organisation and profession as well as its nation. Ask what a good agreement means to them, how they make decisions and what would cause them to lose face, and treat every cultural generalisation as a hypothesis to test.

18.2 Which Frameworks Help? From Hofstede to the Wheel of Culture

Hofstede's Dimensions

The most widely used framework for comparing national cultures was developed by Hofstede from surveys of IBM employees in more than 50 countries, later extended by other researchers (Hofstede et al., 2010). It describes cultures along six dimensions:

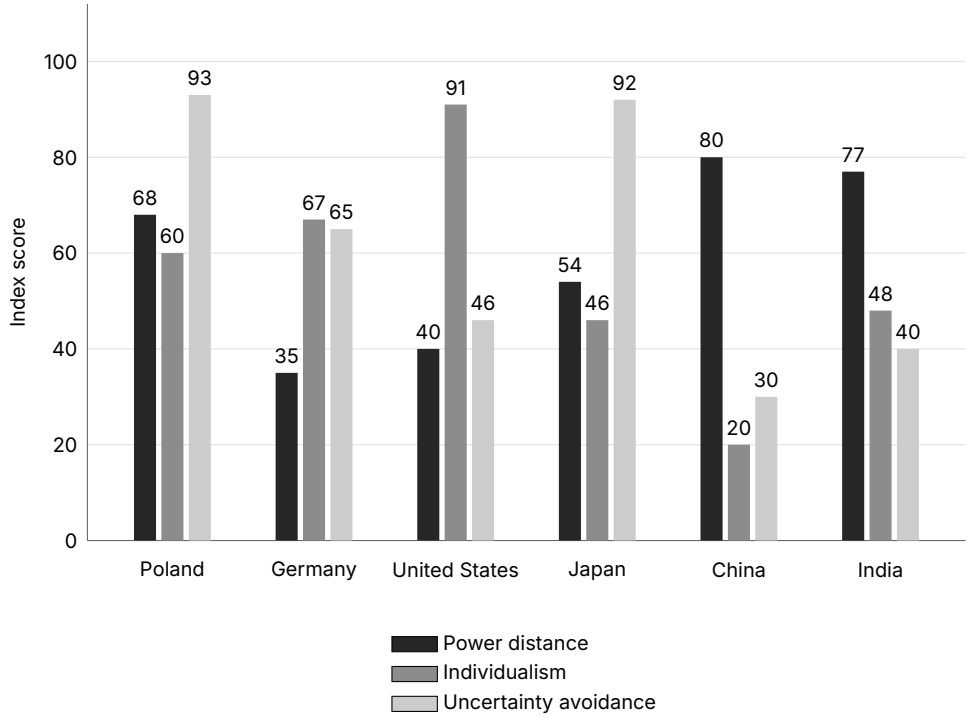
- **Power distance**: the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept that power is distributed unequally.
- **Individualism versus collectivism**: the extent to which people see themselves as independent individuals or as members of groups to which they owe loyalty.
- **Masculinity versus femininity**: the extent to which a society values achievement, competition and success, or caring, cooperation and quality of life.
- **Uncertainty avoidance**: the extent to which people feel threatened by ambiguity and unknown situations and seek rules to reduce them.
- **Long-term versus short-term orientation**: the extent to which a society values persistence and future rewards over tradition and immediate results.
- **Indulgence versus restraint**: the extent to which a society allows the gratification of basic desires.

Figure 18.2 shows scores on three of these dimensions for six countries that appear frequently in this book.

The scores suggest hypotheses for negotiators. Negotiators from countries with high power distance, such as China and India, may expect decisions to be made by senior figures and may be uncomfortable negotiating with a counterpart of lower rank. Negotiators from strongly individualist countries, such as the United States, may focus on the deal and their own interests, while those from more collectivist cultures may give more weight to the relationship and to the

Figure 18.2

Scores on three of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, selected countries (index, 0 to about 100)



Note. Author, based on Hofstede et al. (2010). Scores are relative positions of national averages, not measures of individuals. Later updates have revised some values.

interests of their group. Negotiators from countries with high uncertainty avoidance, such as Japan and Poland, may prefer detailed contracts, careful preparation and clear rules, while those from countries with lower uncertainty avoidance, such as China and the United States in Hofstede's data, may be more comfortable with ambiguity and improvisation.

Hofstede's work has been criticised on several grounds: its original data came from one company in the 1960s and 1970s; it equates cultures with nations; and its dimensions may oversimplify complex societies. Later projects, notably the GLOBE study of leadership and culture in 62 societies (House et al., 2004), have refined and in places challenged its findings. Hofstede's dimensions nevertheless remain a useful starting point for asking what to expect and what to check.

Hall: High and Low Context

Hall (1976) distinguished **low-context** cultures, in which meaning is carried mainly by explicit words, from **high-context** cultures, in which much of the meaning lies in the context: the relationship between the speakers, their status, the setting, what is not said and how things are said. Germany, Scandinavia and the United States are usually described as relatively low-context; Japan, China, Korea, India and the Arab world as relatively high-context.

The distinction has direct consequences for negotiation. In low-context cultures, negotiators expect clear statements of position, explicit agreements and detailed written contracts; silence or vagueness may be read as evasion. In high-context cultures, negotiators may express disagreement indirectly, avoid an explicit "no", rely on the relationship to fill gaps in the contract and regard a demand for exhaustive written terms as a sign of distrust. The difference extends beyond face-to-face talk. A comparison of 200 South Korean and American corporate websites found that the Korean sites relied more on animation, images and other visual formats whose meaning depends on context, while the American sites relied more on explicit text (Kim et al., 2009, as cited in Jandt, 2018). Hall also distinguished **monochronic** cultures, which treat time as linear and divide it into scheduled segments, from **polychronic** cultures, which handle several matters at once and give priority to relationships over schedules.

Luthans and Doh (2018) develop the contrast into four dimensions of verbal style. **Direct** styles state intentions explicitly, **indirect** styles convey them through implication. **Elaborate** styles use much talk and detail, as is common in Arab countries; **exacting** styles, common in England, Germany and Sweden, aim for precisely the right number of words; and **succinct** styles, common in East Asia, leave much to understatement, pauses and silence. **Personal** styles reduce the distance between speakers, as Americans do by moving quickly to first names, while **contextual** styles choose words that reflect the speakers' roles and relative status, as in Japan, India and Ghana. **Instrumental** styles are goal-oriented and centred on the sender; **affective** styles are process-oriented and require the listener to attend to how a message is delivered and to what is left out. A simple test shows the difference in practice. Invited to a meeting, a person from a high-context culture is likely to ask who will be there, so as to prepare for the relationships involved, whereas a person from a low-context culture is likely to ask what the meeting is about.

Lewis: Linear-Active, Multi-Active and Reactive

Lewis (2006) classified cultures into three broad types. **Linear-active** people, common in northern Europe and North America, plan, focus on one thing at a time, value facts and stick to agendas. **Multi-active** people, common in southern Europe, Latin America and the Arab world, are talkative and emotional, do

several things at once, value relationships and are flexible about schedules. **Reactive** people, common in East Asia and Finland, listen more than they speak, avoid confrontation, value courtesy and harmony and react to others' proposals rather than initiating. Lewis placed countries within a triangle defined by the three types, recognising that most cultures combine elements of each.

Meyer: The Culture Map

Meyer (2014) proposed eight scales on which cultures can be placed, drawn from her work with international managers: communicating (low-context to high-context), evaluating (direct to indirect negative feedback), persuading (principles-first to applications-first), leading (egalitarian to hierarchical), deciding (consensual to top-down), trusting (task-based to relationship-based), disagreeing (confrontational to avoiding confrontation) and scheduling (linear time to flexible time). A key insight of her approach is that positions on the scales are relative. A Polish manager may seem direct to a Japanese counterpart and indirect to a Dutch one. What matters in a negotiation is the gap between the parties, not the absolute position of either.

Moore and Woodrow: The Wheel of Culture

The frameworks above compare cultures on a few dimensions. Moore and Woodrow (2010), writing from long practice as mediators and trainers, proposed instead a map of the cultural variables that shape how a society negotiates, which they called the **Wheel of Culture**. Its outer rim is formed by the forces that shape a culture over time: the **natural environment**, **history** and **social structures**, including family and community, the legal and political systems, the economy, civil society and systems of religious and ideological belief. The inner rim holds what the parties bring to a particular negotiation: the **situation, problems and issues** as each culture defines them, the **needs and interests** to be met and the **sources and forms of power** each can use. The spokes are the elements of the negotiation itself on which cultures differ: roles and participation, the view of relationships, attitudes to cooperation, competition and conflict, communication, time and space, the use of third parties, the basic approach to negotiation and the kind of outcome sought. The authors open their discussion with a couple from Texas and Taiwan who had to negotiate between their families over every aspect of their wedding, from the date chosen by an astrologer to the colour of the dress, which was white for purity in one tradition and the colour of death in the other; they settled on two ceremonies. The value of the wheel for business negotiators lies less in classification than in the questions it prompts about each rim and spoke, several of which Chapter 7 used for preparation. Table 18.3 summarises five frameworks for comparing cultures.

Table 18.3

Five frameworks for comparing cultures

Framework	Main idea	Use in negotiation	Main limitation
Hofstede (dimensions)	Cultures differ on measurable value dimensions	Anticipate attitudes to hierarchy, risk, group and time	Equates culture with nation; based on older data
Hall (context and time)	Meaning may be explicit or embedded in context; time may be linear or flexible	Interpret indirect communication; set expectations about schedules and contracts	Broad categories; little measurement
Lewis (three types)	Linear-active, multi-active and reactive behaviour	Anticipate style of interaction at the table	Based on observation; risk of caricature
Meyer (culture map)	Eight relative scales of workplace behaviour	Identify gaps between the parties on specific behaviours	Focused on managers; relative positions may change
Moore and Woodrow (Wheel of Culture)	Environment, history and social structures shape issues, interests, power and the conduct of negotiation	Build a checklist of questions for preparation and process design	Descriptive map; does not predict behaviour

Note. Author, based on the works cited.

The author's research on cross-cultural communication in global business, drawing on Indian experience, emphasises that these frameworks are most useful when combined with direct knowledge of the counterpart and of the business context; cultural intelligence, the ability to notice, interpret and adapt, matters more than knowledge of any single model (Kumar, 2022, 2024a).

KEY MOVE

Use cultural frameworks to generate questions, not answers. Focus on the gap between your culture and your counterpart's on the dimensions that matter most for the negotiation: hierarchy, directness, attitude to time, form of agreement and basis of trust.

18.3 How Do Europeans, Asians and Americans Negotiate, and Beyond?

A Caution about Regions

This section describes tendencies in negotiating practice that are widely reported in the literature and by practitioners. Each region contains many cultures, and each country many sub-cultures; globalisation, education and international business experience have narrowed some differences, particularly among younger managers in multinational firms. The descriptions are therefore starting points for preparation, to be checked against the behaviour of each counterpart.

Europe

Europe is not one negotiating culture but several. In **northern Europe**, including Germany, the Netherlands and Scandinavia, negotiators tend to be direct, well prepared and focused on facts and technical detail; they value punctuality and expect agreements to be honoured to the letter. Dutch and Scandinavian negotiators are often notably egalitarian and informal. German negotiators often emphasise thorough analysis and expect proposals to be supported by data. In **southern Europe**, including Italy, Spain and Portugal, relationships carry more weight, discussions may range widely before reaching the point and schedules are more flexible. **France** combines a preference for logical argument from principles, a relatively formal style and considerable respect for hierarchy. The **United Kingdom** is often described as indirect in expression, with understatement and humour used to soften disagreement, combined with a pragmatic, deal-oriented approach.

Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Romania, has changed rapidly since 1989. Many negotiators combine a formal style at first meeting, with attention to titles and courtesy, and strong technical preparation, with growing informality as relationships develop. Poland ranks high on uncertainty avoidance in Hofstede's data, which may be reflected in a preference for detailed contracts and careful legal review. The experience of rapid economic change and of integration into European supply chains has made many Central European negotiators pragmatic and comfortable working across cultures, often as intermediaries between western European firms and other markets. The author's comparative work on investment in India and Poland highlights how institutional and cultural factors shape the expectations that investors from each country bring to negotiations (Kumar, 2020).

Asia

Japan is often described as a high-context, consensus-oriented culture in which harmony, face and long-term relationships are central. Decisions are typically prepared through extensive internal consultation (*nemawashi*) and formal circulation for approval (*ringi*), which can make Japanese teams seem slow to decide but quick to implement once a decision is made. Japanese negotiators may avoid an explicit refusal, expressing disagreement through silence, delay or phrases such as "this will be difficult". The Deal File suggests that even between Japanese companies, a proposal perceived as a loss of face for one party can be decisive.

China places great weight on relationships (*guanxi*) built over time through personal contact, hospitality and reciprocal favours, and on face (*mianzi*). Negotiations often begin with general principles and the building of trust before detailed terms are discussed. Chinese negotiators may use time strategically, revisiting issues which seemed settled, and may regard a signed contract as a stage in a continuing relationship rather than its final definition.

India combines a high-context, relationship-oriented style with considerable directness in argument and a strong tradition of bargaining. Hierarchy matters, and decisions in family-owned businesses, which account for much of Indian industry, may rest with the head of the family. Indian negotiators often value flexibility, persistence and the building of personal trust, and discussions may be long and wide-ranging. The author's research on India's economic relations with Europe shows how these preferences have shaped long negotiations between Indian and European partners, at both business and government level (Kumar, 2013a, 2013b, 2026b).

South Korea combines hierarchy and a strong emphasis on relationships with a fast pace of decision-making and considerable directness, and Korean negotiators are often willing to show emotion. The Korean–Polish defence agreements described below show Korean firms negotiating long-term relationships that include local production and technology transfer.

The Americas

Negotiators from the **United States** are often described as direct, informal, optimistic and focused on the deal, with a preference for getting to business quickly, putting proposals on the table early and concluding with detailed written contracts drafted by lawyers. Time is valued, and long silences or slow progress can cause impatience. **Canada** shares many of these features with somewhat greater formality and an emphasis on consensus. In **Latin America**, including Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, relationships and personal trust are central, communication is often expressive and indirect, hierarchy is respected and schedules are flexible. The author's study of communication in international business in

DEAL SNAPSHOT

The India–EU Free Trade Agreement, 2007 to 2026

Negotiations on a free trade agreement between India and the European Union began in 2007, were suspended in 2013 and relaunched in 2022. On 27 January 2026, at a summit in New Delhi, the two sides announced that negotiations had been concluded. Trade liberalisation would cover 96.6 per cent of trade for India and 99.3 per cent for the EU. Indian duties of up to 150 per cent on alcoholic beverages would be reduced gradually, to 30 per cent for most wines, 40 per cent for spirits and 50 per cent for beer; tariffs of up to 45 per cent on olive oil would be eliminated; and most tariffs on car parts would be removed over five to ten years. The EU, for its part, granted no market access for sensitive products such as sugar, ethanol, rice, soft wheat, beef, poultry and milk powders (European Commission, 2026a). Before entering into force, the agreement still had to be legally reviewed, signed and ratified. The author's conference paper on the realignment of India–Europe trade relations under geopolitical tension examines the economic interdependence that brought the two sides back to the table (Kumar, 2026e). Figure 18.3 shows the main tariff cuts. The negotiation brought together two very different negotiating traditions: the EU's rules-based, legally detailed approach, conducted by the Commission on behalf of 27 member states, and India's strong defence of policy space for its farmers and small industries, combined with a preference for building political trust at the highest level before closing. The long pause after 2013 and the final push at a summit illustrate how political relationships and timing shaped an agreement whose technical terms had been explored for years.

Buenos Aires found that attention to personal relationships and to local expectations of courtesy and time shaped the success of foreign firms (Kumar, 2023).

The Middle East and Africa

In much of the **Middle East**, negotiation is embedded in personal relationships and hospitality. Building trust through repeated meetings, often over coffee or meals, precedes substantive discussion; bargaining may be expected; and decisions may rest with senior family members or officials. Honour and respect are important, and public criticism can cause lasting damage. In **sub-Saharan Africa**, which comprises dozens of countries with very different cultures, common themes include the importance of relationships and of respect for age and seniority, the role of community and extended family, and a flexible approach to time; in many countries, government officials play a significant role in business negotiations. Table 18.4 summarises these tendencies by region.

Table 18.4

Tendencies in negotiating practice by region

Region	Typical goal	Communication	Decision-making	Attitude to time	Form of agreement
Northern Europe	Contract	Direct, factual	Analytical; often egalitarian	Punctual, scheduled	Detailed
Southern Europe	Contract and relationship	Expressive, wide-ranging	Hierarchical	Flexible	Principles, then detail
Central and Eastern Europe	Contract	Formal at first, then direct	Hierarchical, becoming flatter	Punctual	Detailed, carefully reviewed
United States	Contract	Direct, informal	Individual authority	Time is money	Detailed, lawyer-drafted
Latin America	Relationship	Expressive, indirect	Hierarchical	Flexible	Principles, relationship-based
Japan	Relationship	Indirect, high-context	Consensus	Patient	General, relationship-based
China	Relationship	Indirect, high-context	Hierarchical, consensus	Patient, strategic	Evolving, relationship-based
India	Relationship and contract	Mixed; argumentative	Hierarchical; family firms	Flexible	Negotiated in detail over time
Middle East	Relationship	Indirect, hospitable	Hierarchical; family	Flexible	Relationship-based

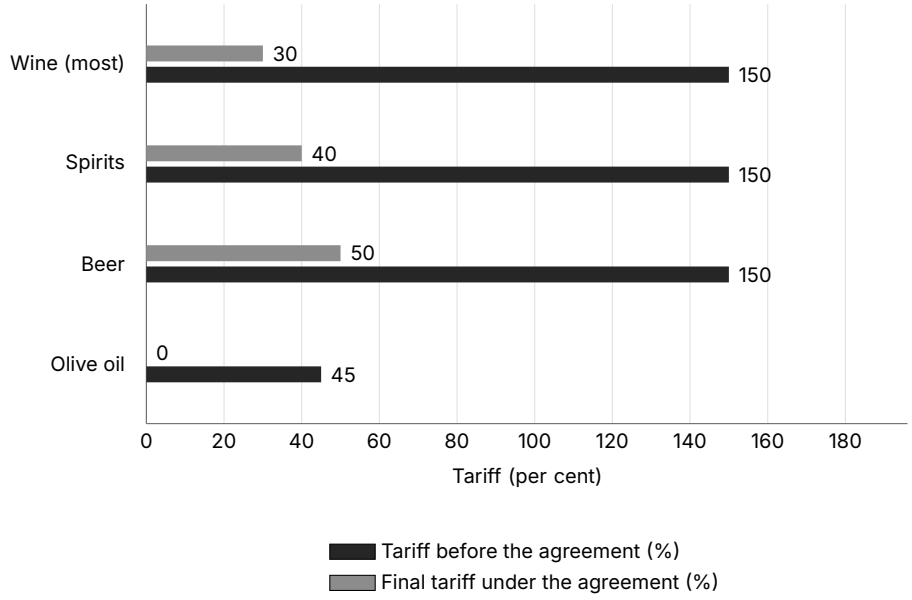
Note. Author, based on Salacuse (1998), Lewis (2006), Meyer (2014) and Brett (2014). The entries describe tendencies, not rules.

KEY MOVE

Before a cross-border negotiation, study how your counterpart's region and industry usually approach the goal, the communication, the decision and the form of the agreement, then confirm or correct your expectations in the first meetings.

Figure 18.3

Indian import tariffs on selected EU products before and after the India–EU agreement (per cent)



Note. Author, based on European Commission (2026a). The "before" rates are the maximum rates reported; the "after" rates are the final rates once phase-in periods are complete (for wine, the rate for most wines).

18.4 Etiquette: Time, Hierarchy, Gifts and Hospitality

Why Etiquette Matters

Etiquette, the conventions of polite behaviour, can seem a matter of manners rather than substance. In negotiation it is more than that. Etiquette signals respect, and respect affects trust, which Chapter 16 showed to have real economic value. A breach of etiquette may not end a negotiation, but it can create an impression of ignorance or disrespect that colours every later exchange, particularly in face and honour cultures. Conversely, attention to etiquette signals that the negotiator values the relationship enough to have prepared.

Time

Attitudes to time vary widely. In monochronic cultures, punctuality is a sign of respect and reliability, agendas are followed and meetings end on time. In polychronic cultures, relationships take precedence over schedules, meetings may start late and run long, and several issues may be discussed at once. Neither

approach is better; each makes sense within its own context. Negotiators from monochronic cultures should allow more time for meetings and for decisions in polychronic settings and should not interpret delay as lack of interest. Those from polychronic cultures should recognise that lateness may be read as disrespect in monochronic settings. Deadlines, which Chapter 17 discussed as a tactic, are also perceived differently: in some cultures, a deadline imposed early in a negotiation may be regarded as a sign of impatience or bad faith.

Hierarchy and Titles

In hierarchical cultures, negotiators expect to deal with counterparts of equivalent rank, and sending a junior representative to meet a senior executive may be seen as a slight. Titles, academic degrees and positions should be used correctly, particularly in German-speaking countries, Central Europe and much of Asia. Seating, the order of speaking and the order in which people enter a room may reflect rank. In egalitarian cultures, by contrast, insistence on titles and formality may seem stiff, and decisions may be made by whoever has the relevant expertise.

Gifts

Gift-giving is expected in some cultures and viewed with suspicion in others. In Japan and China, modest, well-chosen gifts, presented and received with both hands and often not opened in the giver's presence, are a normal part of building relationships. In parts of the Middle East and Asia, hospitality and gifts express respect. In many Western countries, by contrast, corporate rules and anti-bribery laws strictly limit gifts, and anything beyond a token may be regarded as an attempt to influence. Jandt (2018) describes a case capturing the dilemma: a public official in the United States, bound by an ethics policy prohibiting gifts of any value from clients, is offered a mooncake by a Chinese family, a gift symbolising unity and part of the custom of *guanxi*. Negotiators must therefore navigate between two risks: giving offence by ignoring local custom, and breaking the law or their company's code by giving or accepting something that could be construed as a bribe. Chapter 19 examines the legal framework, including laws such as the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and the UK Bribery Act, which apply to conduct abroad.

Hospitality, Meals and Small Talk

In many cultures, business relationships are built over meals, and accepting hospitality is part of the negotiation. Refusing an invitation may cause offence; discussing business at the wrong moment during a meal may be equally inappropriate. Negotiators should learn the conventions of their hosts: who sits where, who

orders, who pays, whether toasts are expected, and whether alcohol is customary or prohibited. Small talk, which Chapter 16 described as a way of building rapport, also varies: suitable topics in one culture, such as family, may be too personal in another, and topics such as politics or religion are best avoided in most first meetings. Table 18.5 provides an etiquette checklist for international negotiators.

Table 18.5

Etiquette checklist for international negotiators

Area	Questions to prepare	Common pitfalls
Greetings	Handshake, bow or other? First names or titles?	Over-familiarity; incorrect titles
Business cards	How should they be presented and received?	Writing on or pocketing a card carelessly in East Asia
Punctuality	Is lateness acceptable? How long do meetings last?	Impatience at delay; lateness in monochronic cultures
Hierarchy	Who should lead the team? Who sits where?	Sending a junior to meet a senior executive
Language	Will an interpreter be needed? How direct can I be?	Idioms and jokes that do not translate; speaking too fast
Gifts	Are gifts expected? What is appropriate? What do our rules allow?	Gifts that are too valuable or culturally inappropriate
Hospitality	Are meals part of the process? Is alcohol customary?	Refusing hospitality; discussing business at the wrong moment
Dress	How formal is business dress?	Under-dressing for formal cultures

KEY MOVE

Learn the etiquette of your counterpart's culture before the first meeting, check your company's rules on gifts and hospitality, and when unsure, ask. A sincere effort to respect local conventions is usually appreciated even when imperfect.

DEAL SNAPSHOT

Poland and Korea Build Tanks Together, 2022 to 2026

In July 2022, after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Poland signed a framework agreement with South Korea's Hyundai Rotem covering 1,000 K2 main battle tanks, including a version adapted for Poland, the K2PL. A first executive contract, signed in August 2022, covered 180 tanks built in Korea, worth US$3.37 billion net, and the last of them arrived in Poland in November 2025. A second contract, signed on 1 August 2025 in Gliwice, covered 180 further tanks for delivery between 2026 and 2030: 116 of the Korean model and 64 K2PL, of which 61 were to be built at the Bumar-Łabędy plant in Gliwice with Polish components and with production equipment supplied by Hyundai Rotem, together with a transfer of technology (Ministry of National Defence, 2025, n.d.). The partnership required the two sides to bridge different negotiating cultures: Korean speed and hierarchical decision-making on one side, and on the other a Polish public procurement system that combines detailed legal requirements with strong political interest in local production and technology transfer. The phased structure, with an initial off-the-shelf purchase followed by later contracts for local production, allowed trust to be built step by step, as Chapter 16 recommended where trust has still to be established.

18.5 Which Mistakes Cost International Negotiators Most?

Common and Costly Mistakes

Experience and research point to a set of recurring mistakes that cost international negotiators value, time and relationships. Table 18.6 summarises them.

Table 18.6

Costly mistakes in cross-border negotiation

Mistake	Example	Cost	Remedy
Assuming one's own norms are universal	Pressing for a quick decision in a consensus culture	Resistance; lost trust	Learn how the other side decides
Stereotyping	Treating an individual as a national average	Misreading behaviour	Treat generalisations as hypotheses
Misreading indirect communication	Hearing "this will be difficult" as a request for more information	Wasted time; false expectations	Ask clarifying questions; consult local advisers

Mistake	Example	Cost	Remedy
Ignoring hierarchy	Sending a junior to meet a senior executive	Offence; delay	Match rank; respect titles
Causing loss of face	Public criticism or a proposal that implies inferiority	Rejection of otherwise acceptable terms	Frame proposals to protect status; raise sensitive issues privately
Over-reliance on the contract	Treating a signed contract as the end of the relationship	Disputes over implementation	Invest in the relationship after signing
Under-reliance on the contract	Relying on goodwill where the other side expects detail	Ambiguity; later disputes	Agree the level of detail expected
Poor use of interpreters	Speaking in long, idiomatic sentences; addressing the interpreter rather than the counterpart	Misunderstanding	Brief interpreters; speak clearly; address the counterpart
Neglecting legal and institutional differences	Assuming home-country law or practice applies	Unenforceable terms; compliance breaches	Use local legal advice; choose governing law and dispute resolution carefully
Ignoring organisational culture	Assuming that firms from the same country share a culture	Failed integration	Study the counterpart's history, identity and decision-making

Face and Status: The Most Expensive Mistake

Of all these mistakes, the one that most often destroys otherwise viable agreements is causing the other side to lose face. Chapter 16 described face as a person's public image and self-respect, and Brett's framework shows that it carries particular weight in face cultures. Chinese culture distinguishes two aspects of face: *lien*, the confidence of society in a person's moral character, and *mien-tzu*, prestige and reputation achieved through success (Jandt, 2018). **Facework** refers to the communicative strategies people use to protect their own face and to support or challenge the face of others. Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory proposes that people in low-context, individualist cultures tend to negotiate face directly and to protect their own face, while those in high-context, collectivist cultures tend to negotiate face indirectly and to give greater weight to mutual

face and the face of the other party (Jandt, 2018). Cohen (1997), writing on international negotiation, listed the ways in which a negotiator can lose face: a rebuffed overture, a personal insult, failure to achieve goals, a derogatory remark or disregard for one's status, being forced to give up a cherished value, a revelation of personal inadequacy, damage to a valued relationship and, significantly for bargaining, making what may later be seen as an unnecessary concession.

The Deal File illustrates the cost. The economic logic of combining Honda and Nissan was widely accepted; the obstacle was the structure. A merger of equals under a joint holding company preserved Nissan's standing, even though Honda would appoint most of the board. A proposal to make Nissan a subsidiary changed the meaning of the deal, from partnership to takeover. Whatever its merits in terms of speed of decision, it was perceived as a loss of status that Nissan's management, employees and partners could not accept. Honda's concerns about Nissan's restructuring were real, but they might have been addressed through conditions, milestones or governance rules rather than through a change in the relationship between the two companies.

Adapting and Bridging

Negotiators can reduce the risk of these mistakes in several ways. They can **prepare** by studying the counterpart's culture, organisation and history. They can **adapt** their behaviour within limits, for example by allowing more time, using more formal address or being more indirect in criticism. They can use **cultural intermediaries**, such as local advisers, colleagues from the counterpart's culture or interpreters who understand context as well as language. And they can **create a shared culture** for the negotiation by agreeing explicitly on the process: the agenda, the language, the level of detail, the decision-making procedure and how disagreements will be handled. Communication scholars call such a jointly created set of understandings a **third culture**: not merely a fusion of the parties' original cultures but a new and coherent culture that individuals from different backgrounds build together (Casmir & Asuncion-Lande, 1989, as cited in Jandt, 2018). Long-standing international joint ventures and negotiating relationships often develop a third culture of this kind.

The capacity that underlies all of these strategies is **intercultural communication competence**, defined as the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures (Spitzberg, 2000, as cited in Jandt, 2018). Effectiveness means achieving one's goals; appropriateness means doing so in a way that maintains the relationship. Chen identified four areas of skill: personal strength, including self-awareness and the ability to manage anxiety; communication skills, including behavioural flexibility and interaction management; psychological adjustment to unfamiliar environments; and cultural awareness of the counterpart's customs and social system. Chen and Starosta grouped these into

three dimensions: affective (intercultural sensitivity, the willingness to acknowledge and respect difference), cognitive (intercultural awareness of one's own and other cultures) and behavioural (intercultural adroitness, the skills to act appropriately) (Jandt, 2018). Jandt also notes that what counts as competence is itself culturally defined: in high-context, collectivist cultures such as Malaysia and Thailand, initial reserve and silence until a relationship is established may be a mark of competence, although the same behaviour might be judged negatively in an individualist culture. The author's research on the role of cross-cultural communication in international business and sustainable growth reaches a similar conclusion about the value of these competences for firms (Kumar, 2024a).

Adaptation helps, but only up to a point. In an experiment with American business people negotiating with counterparts who adapted to American behaviour to different degrees, Francis (1991) found that moderate adaptation produced more favourable reactions than either no adaptation or substantial adaptation: counterparts often expect foreigners to behave somewhat differently and may be uncomfortable with a close imitation of their own style. Adair and Brett (2005) found that negotiators from different cultures follow different sequences of behaviour, such as sharing information directly or inferring it from offers, and mixed-culture negotiations reach better outcomes when the parties learn to recognise and respond to each other's sequences.

KEY MOVE

Above all, protect the other side's face. Frame proposals so that they preserve the counterpart's standing, raise sensitive issues in private and address your real concerns through conditions and governance rather than through symbols of dominance.

BACK TO THE DEAL FILE

Reading the Honda–Nissan Talks

The concepts of this chapter help to explain why two Japanese companies with a shared strategic logic failed to agree.

Organisational culture mattered more than national culture. Both companies were Japanese, but their histories and identities differed sharply: Honda's tradition of independence, and Nissan's experience of rescue, alliance and the hard-won recovery of equal standing with Renault.

Face and status were decisive. The original framework of a joint holding company allowed Nissan to present the deal as a partnership. Honda's proposal to make Nissan a subsidiary turned it into a takeover and was rejected, even though the underlying economic logic had not changed.

DEAL SNAPSHOT

Offshoring and the Snowstorm

Offshore call-centre agents working for a North American airline struggled to help customers stranded at airports by a snowstorm, because they had never seen snow or been to an airport; the airline put television news in their break rooms so that they could see what their customers were facing. The consultants A.T. Kearney found that firms moving services abroad meet four cultural challenges: communication, context, relationships and working norms. An American financial services manager who asked an Indian counterpart for a detailed work plan received the reply "I will do the needful", which was clear in India and puzzling to her, while the detail she expected seemed to her counterpart unnecessary and even a sign of distrust. Offshore agents who lacked everyday experience of credit cards had to be taught it before they could process payments, and agents who deferred to their superiors would not speak in meetings unless invited. The consultants' advice was to insist on mutual respect, avoid a mentality of "us and them", appoint liaisons who make sure that every team receives the same information and use the different strengths of each culture, as the British pushchair maker Mamas and Papas did when it placed each stage of its work where the skills for it were strongest (Luthans & Doh, 2018). Offshoring contracts are negotiated once, but they succeed or fail in thousands of daily exchanges across cultures.

Decision-making styles collided. Honda's concern about slow decision-making under a joint board, and its frustration with the pace of Nissan's restructuring, reflected the importance of speed in a market reshaped by Chinese competitors. Nissan's process, shaped by its history and its relationship with Renault, needed time to build internal consensus for painful restructuring.

The relationship survived the failed deal. By announcing continued cooperation when they ended the merger talks, and by agreeing in August 2026 to develop vehicle electronics and software together, the two companies preserved the relationship and much of the value the merger was meant to deliver, without the loss of face a takeover would have implied.

MA EXTENSION

Culture, Identity and the Economics of Mergers

Economic models of mergers usually focus on synergies, market power and the division of gains through the acquisition premium, as Chapter 9 showed. Behavioural and organisational research adds that cultural differences between merging firms impose integration costs, and perceived threats to the identity and status of the acquired firm's managers and employees can reduce or destroy expected synergies. (a) Construct a simple model in which the value of a merger equals expected synergies minus integration costs that rise with cultural distance, and in which the target's managers can block the deal if their loss of status exceeds a threshold. (b) Use the model to explain why a change in the proposed structure from a holding company to a parent–subsidiary relationship could make an otherwise profitable merger fail. (c) Discuss how earn-outs, governance rules or partnerships short of full merger might preserve part of the value. Relate your answer to the Honda–Nissan case and to the partnership agreed in 2026.

ETHICS CHECK

Cultural adaptation can be a sign of respect, but it raises ethical questions. Should a negotiator adapt to practices that conflict with his or her own values or company rules, such as the exchange of valuable gifts, the exclusion of women from meetings or expectations of personal favours? Where is the line between respecting cultural difference and accepting conduct that is unethical or illegal? Does a firm from a dignity culture have the right to impose its standards of directness and transparency on partners from face or honour cultures?

Pillar Scorecard

Table 18.7

Pillar Scorecard: the Honda–Nissan merger talks, 2024 to 2026

Pillar	Importance in this case	Evidence
Profit	High	A group with targeted sales revenue of more than 30 trillion yen and synergies in electric vehicles and software were at stake
Power	High	Nissan's weak finances gave Honda the upper hand, which encouraged its proposal to make Nissan a subsidiary
Persuasion	Very high	Corporate identity, face and the perception of status determined whether the structure could be accepted

Your Move

This is a constructed teaching case.

You are the international business director of a Polish manufacturer of dairy processing equipment based in Białystok. With tariffs on European machinery set to fall under the India–EU agreement, your company plans a joint venture with a family-owned Indian engineering firm in Pune to assemble and service equipment for Indian dairy cooperatives. The Indian firm's founder, now in his seventies, chairs its board; his daughter, who studied in the United Kingdom, runs its operations. Your team consists of your chief engineer, a lawyer and yourself. The first meeting will take place in Pune. The author's research on investment in India and Poland and on India–Europe relations provides background for your preparation (Kumar, 2020, 2026b).

1. Using the frameworks in Section 18.2, identify the main cultural gaps that are likely to affect the negotiation.
2. Who should lead your team, and how should you address the founder and his daughter?
3. Plan the first meeting: its agenda, the role of hospitality and the topics you would avoid.
4. How would you propose the ownership and governance of the joint venture so as to protect both sides' standing?
5. What level of detail would you seek in the written agreement, and how would you explain your approach to your Indian partners?

Conclusion

Culture shapes what negotiators want, how they communicate and how they decide. It operates at several levels, national, organisational and professional, and at several depths, from visible behaviour to taken-for-granted assumptions. Frameworks such as those of Hofstede, Hall, Lewis and Meyer, and the Wheel of Culture of Moore and Woodrow, help negotiators to anticipate differences in attitudes to hierarchy, directness, time, risk and the form of agreement, provided that they are used as hypotheses rather than stereotypes. Negotiating practices vary across Europe, Asia, the Americas, the Middle East and Africa, but variation within regions and among individuals is large. Etiquette, including attitudes to time, hierarchy, gifts and hospitality, signals respect and builds trust, but must be reconciled with legal and ethical limits. Of all the mistakes international negotiators make, causing the other side to lose face is among the most costly, because it can turn an economically sound proposal into one that cannot be accepted. The collapse of the Honda–Nissan merger talks, and the partnership that followed, show how identity and status can decide a negotiation even between companies

from the same country. Chapter 19 turns to ethics, which sets the limits within which persuasion, culture and power must operate.

Exercises

A. Objective Questions

1. Schein's layered model of culture places at the deepest level:
   a) artefacts and behaviours
   b) basic assumptions
   c) norms and values
   d) dress and greetings

2. In Brett's framework, cultures in which social worth depends on standing in a stable hierarchy are called:
   a) face cultures
   b) dignity cultures
   c) honour cultures
   d) linear-active cultures

3. Power distance refers to:
   a) the physical distance between negotiators
   b) the distance between a negotiator's target and limit
   c) the difference in size between two firms
   d) the extent to which less powerful members of a society accept unequal distribution of power

4. In a high-context culture, meaning is carried mainly by:
   a) explicit words
   b) written contracts
   c) context, relationships and what is not said
   d) numbers

5. In Lewis's classification, people who listen more than they speak and avoid confrontation are:
   a) linear-active
   b) multi-active
   c) reactive
   d) proactive

6. Meyer emphasises that positions on her culture map are:
   a) absolute
   b) the same for all individuals in a country
   c) fixed for all time
   d) relative to the other party

7. Honda and Nissan terminated their merger talks after Honda proposed:
   a) making Nissan its subsidiary
   b) a merger of equals
   c) selling Nissan's stake in Mitsubishi Motors
   d) a joint venture with Renault

8. Under the India–EU agreement, the Indian tariff on most European wines is to fall to:
   a) 0 per cent
   b) 30 per cent
   c) 75 per cent
   d) 110 per cent

B. Short-Answer Questions

1. Explain the difference between national, organisational and professional culture, with an example of each.
2. Using Table 18.2, describe four ways in which culture can affect negotiation.
3. Explain Brett's distinction between dignity, face and honour cultures and its implications for making proposals.
4. Using Figure 18.2, compare the likely negotiating expectations of Polish and American negotiators on hierarchy and uncertainty.
5. Explain Hall's distinction between high-context and low-context cultures and its consequences for written contracts.
6. Why must negotiators handle gifts with care? Describe the two risks involved.
7. Why is causing loss of face so costly? Illustrate with the Deal File.

C. Long-Answer Questions

1. "The Honda–Nissan talks failed because of culture, not economics." Discuss, using the concepts of organisational culture, face and decision-making.
2. Compare the frameworks of Hofstede, Hall, Lewis and Meyer with the Wheel of Culture of Moore and Woodrow. Which is most useful for preparing a business negotiation, and why?
3. Analyse the India–EU trade negotiations from 2007 to 2026 as a cross-cultural negotiation. What explains the long delay and the eventual agreement?
4. Design a preparation programme for a Polish company entering negotiations in a culture very different from its own. Include frameworks, etiquette, team composition and ways of avoiding the mistakes in Table 18.6.

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