



**Globiana**

**COMPACT**

Business culture  
**GREAT BRITAIN**

Iris Engler



1st edition 2016, based on the German book ›Geschäftskultur Großbritannien kompakt‹, © Conbook Medien GmbH, Meerbusch, Germany, 2014

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[www.conbook-verlag.de](http://www.conbook-verlag.de)

Concept: Katrin Koll Prakoonwit in collaboration with Conbook Medien GmbH, Meerbusch, Germany

Project management and editing of the German book: Katrin Koll Prakoonwit

Project management of the English pdf: crossculture academy/change.project gmbh

Translation: Barbara A. Helfrich

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Cover design and layout: David Janik with use of licenced material from

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Composition and cover adaptation: Nicole Laka

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As a certified intercultural trainer and coach **Iris Engler** supports companies in building and expanding German-British business relations. The first ten years of her career she worked as a foreign language correspondent for several companies. In the areas of purchase, sales, marketing, production planning and finance she herself often faced the intercultural challenges her participants and coaches speak of today. After additional training in methodology and didactics she became self-employed as a trainer in 1998 and primarily supported professional and managerial staff of British companies.

In 2005 Iris Engler and her British business partner founded the intercultural consulting firm KulturAdvantage, which also covers many other interesting countries of this world. Between 2007 and 2008 she gained the qualification as trainer and coach for intercultural competence at artop, an institute at Humboldt-University in Berlin. Her profession is far more than just a job to Iris Engler - it is her contribution to reveal German-British misunderstandings and convert them into effective synergies.

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## Foreword

Great Britain is composed of England, Scotland and Wales, especially people from neighbouring European countries may ask themselves: ›So close and yet so different?‹. With this book I would like to make the British culture tangible for you. Which values and norms unite the British predominantly? How does this affect their business practices and what does this mean for you when dealing with British business partners, colleagues, customers and suppliers?

›Simply a question of individual character‹, you may think. That is what I once thought. In 1998 when as a foreign language trainer. I began to do some research. What does literature say? What do scientists say? And to my surprise I discovered the wide field named intercultural competence. During the many following conversations and trainings I began to identify an obvious pattern in British thinking and acting as well as in the mutual perception when Britons and business people from other countries meet.

Success or failure of a business intention in Great Britain or abroad in general is not only determined by your product, your service and your price but also by your intercultural competence! It is time to no longer underestimate this decisive factor but to set off to better understand your British business partners, superiors, colleagues, customers and suppliers as well as their values and their world view, to reduce sources of friction and thanks to cultural diversity even to achieve a competitive advantage. Henry Ford once said: ›If there is any one secret of success, it lies in the ability to get the other person's point of view and see things from that person's angle as well as from your own.‹

This is exactly what I would like to invite you to do in this book. Be surprised, enchanted and maybe even enriched by the otherness of the British. Let's go!

*Iris Engler*

Note: For reasons of better readability this book is written in the masculine form. Words of the male form always include the female form as well.

# 1

## An insight into the British business world

Hearing British people speak about Europe you could believe they are not part of it. In their language use there is Britain and Europe or the far away continent. **Living on an island** has a great influence on the cultural character of a nation. This means that the radius in which they feel comfortable is bigger than in areas, where people are used to being surrounded by neighbouring countries. In Great Britain you keep a **greater distance** to your counterpart, even physical contact is less. They often only greet by shaking hands at the very first encounter and a collegial or friendly pat on the back let alone a hug are perceived disconcertingly.

The weather conditions also play a role. In Great Britain both rain and fog may turn a BBQ into a trip to the cinema. If you don't stay flexible in that case, you will become bad-tempered. Being prepared to **adapt oneself to changes at short notice** is very important in Britain.

### British individualists

Today, the **Anglo-Saxon capitalism** is based on the principles of **liberalisation** and the free market. Great Britain rates among the most deregulated and privatised economies in the world. From a cultural point of view this reflects the high degree of British individualism: **self-determination, freedom, independence, openness to risk – the inner foundation of a freeborn Brit.** This is not only characterised by its world-famous serenity

but also by **thinking in options**: taking various szenarios into consideration to generate action alternatives and being able to react to changes quickly since life is change. In the British business world they focus little on one-dimensional approaches and rarely look for the perfect solution. That simply doesn't exist for most British, perfection isn't suitable for daily use, not practical enough and it constrains the basic individualistic idea. They e.g. prefer to follow the **Pareto principle (80/20 rule)** by **Vilfredo Pareto** (1848–1923)<sup>1</sup>, who among other things examined the distribution of wealth and income in England and found out that ca. 20 percent of the families own 80 percent of the fortune. According to Pareto's opinion, banks should therefore primarily attend to the interests of these 20 percent and most of their order situation would be safe. This rule is applied to many large and small projects and really means nothing else than: **more success with less effort**. Of course, Pareto is not unknown in other areas either, however, for example in German-speaking areas, it is in competition with the 100 percent which they stive for at heart.

It is therefore not surprising, that when it comes to assessing investment projects and companies in Britain the **Real Option Valuation (ROV)** or **Real Option Analysis (ROA)** has increasingly replaced the common net present value method. The difference lies in **allowing for possible risk changes** during a project and the options to react, e.g. by cancelling the project at an early stage, by expanding or downsizing it.

From a cultural point of view it can be said that **risks and changes** are **not viewed as a threat** by British managers but as a chance to better comply with the real world. According to positive thinking they are confident inside that everything will go well. They are very self-confident inside which is why they can allow a **greater openness for risk** outwardly. The way of looking at things is rather high level, not focusing too much on details but on the big picture. Staying on top of things among all kinds of changes and not being overwhelmed by details that is according to British taste.

For people from other countries, **Britsih individualism** often appears **too risky, wrongheaded and chaotic**.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Koch (2008): The 80/20 Principle.

## British generalists

Have you ever noticed that in the British business world they very often speak of **processes and optimising processes**? Maybe you have asked yourself why this is the case? Aren't the experts for order and structure to be found on German ground? Well, the drive for this isn't easy to recognise at first sight: the more brilliantly working processes are determined the quicker **vacancies can be filled with new employees**. Thanks to the defined processes (which are questioned and adjusted from time to time) these don't necessarily have to be subject matter experts but need to be able to adapt flexibly to a new range of duties. This might also explain, why the British do not identify themselves too much with their position. They have not acquired their entire knowledge painstakingly over years. They are rather generalists than specialist and hence happy to share their knowledge with others. Therefore, transparency also plays an important role in British business affairs.

## Trial and error

Who is not familiar with the principal of trial and error? This is not only very popular among US-Americans – after all, they do rank first in terms of individualism across the globe<sup>2</sup> – but also widely spread among Britons. In doing so they focus on the practical approach of trying things out and learning from mistakes rather than being convinced of theories and analysis. It is not for nothing that in British business life you hear the lesson learned question everywhere.

No matter what mistakes was made, it is important to reflect on it and learn from it. At this point it may be mentioned that in British teams there is nothing worse than searching for the culprit. Different from other countries there is **no blame culture** in Britain. It is irrelevant to find out who made the mistake; it is far more important to find a **suitable solution** for the future **together**. Of course this doesn't apply to all occupational groups and people; in this book we are persuing the cultural principle of majority rule.

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<sup>2</sup> G. Hofstede (2005): Cultures and Organizations.

## Red tape

Even in Britain you will not be able to avoid the famous ›red tape‹ in other words ›**bureaucracy**‹. On the one hand it is considered a necessary evil but at the same time the British are convinced that it is the best of its kind compared to the rest of the world. In order to promote business they are increasingly striving to reduce **unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles** and cut down regulations, which are in the way of establishing and expanding business in Britain.

The expression ›red tape‹ is also used colloquially when dealing with unnecessary hairsplitting or annoying paperwork delaying or even inhibiting necessary actions and decisions. The expression goes back to Henry VIII (1491–1547), king of England, who collected over 80 petitions tied together with a red tape in order to cancel his marriage with Catherine of Aragon. Later, a red cover emphasised the urgency to process official documents.

# Recognising cultural differences

## – Help from science

The world is an interesting, colourful and varied place, not only for people on package holidays and independent travellers but especially for scientists who study the countries of the world from a cultural point of view and then present their results to the public in the form of models and concepts. The **cultural standards** presented by Prof. Dr. phil. Alexander Thomas are an example (of many). He says:

›Cultural standards are the central characteristics of a culture which serve as the orientation system for perception, thinking and action. They offer the members of a culture orientation for their own behaviour and enable them to decide which behavior should be considered to be normal, typical, still acceptable or which behaviour should be rejected. (...) They are made up of a central norm and an area of tolerance. The norm represents the ideal value, the area of tolerance covers the still acceptable deviation from the standard values.‹<sup>3</sup>

Cultural standards should therefore not be understood as an absolute norm within a culture. Individual interpretations, fluctuations and discrepancies have to be expected. After all, in spite of belonging to a particular culture, each person is an individual. In order to be able to **differentiate** more quickly between **cultural characteristics and personal behaviour** when dealing with British business partners, colleagues, customers and suppliers, the **seven basic British cultural standards** according to Prof. Dr. phil. Alexander Thomas<sup>4</sup> are listed here and described with realistic examples.

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<sup>3</sup> A. Thomas (1999): Kultur als Orientierungssystem und Kulturstandards als Bauteile, S. 114 f.

<sup>4</sup> See S. Schmid, A. Thomas (2003): Beruflich in Großbritannien.

## 1) Self-discipline

British understanding of self-discipline is clearly illustrated in the propaganda poster produced by the government in 1939 with the slogan ›Keep calm and carry on‹, which was intended to strengthen the moral of the people in case of a major military defeat. Incidentally, it was never released and was rediscovered in a second-hand book shop in Alnwick in the year 2000. Since then it has become hugely popular, even beyond the borders of Great Britain. The ›stiff upper lip‹, an expression often used, is a further example of British self-discipline and means nothing more than ›keep calm whatever happens‹. Having **your emotions and needs under control**, not taking yourself too seriously and showing **restraint regarding your own achievements** are a few of the British virtues. If you disregard these points and openly display what you can do, what you have and what you know, as in some other countries, it is not surprising that these people appear to the British to be arrogant, overbearing and know-alls. Conversely, the British often give the impression of being constrained, unapproachable and even dishonest and their achievements, qualifications and position in the company can easily be underestimated.

## 2) The indirectness of interpersonal communication

›It's probably me‹ is not only the title of a song by Sting (English musician), but also the guarded introduction to voicing criticism. The British do **not wish to offend** their counterparts, **they feel their way forward** and tone down their objection right at the beginning of the sentence.

The freedom of each individual in his thinking, in expressing his opinion, in his private space, in the way he acts, is a basic value which we should protect and which explains very well the British indirect style of communication. As long ago as 1679, basic rights, which today are the building bricks for every democracy, were granted in Britain in the Habeas Corpus Act. It is not for nothing that we speak of a freeborn Brit or follow the principal of: ›Mind your own business!‹

When dealing with the British, the many ›coulds‹, ›woulds‹ und ›mights‹ in communication often mislead others and can be falsely interpreted as

uncertainty, ignorance and ambiguity. More in chapter 3, *Communication and impact*.

### 3) Ritualising

Is there anyone who does not know the Royal Family with its innumerable rituals? The basic **adherence to traditional values, symbols** (even today you see many people wearing a red paper poppy on 11th November which is a reminder of the blood shed in the wars), **festivities and uniforms** (e.g. the conservative dress code in business or school uniforms) – is that not a contradiction to the freeborn Brit, who wants to distinguish himself by his self-determination? By no means. If we take a closer look we can see that it is precisely these two opposites which are important for keeping society together, for its continuity and for minimising sources of friction. Self-determination and self-confidence lie within the British and not in their outer shell – and that is what can so easily be misjudged.

### 4) Pragmatism

If you take experience and empirical knowledge, analyse the **practical benefit** and the **prospects for realisation**, if you show yourself to be **ready to compromise** at all times and have **good common sense** and adapt **flexibly** to changing situations – you have found the magic formula for British pragmatism. All you have to do is to stay down to earth and be ready to muddle through. The contrast to other cultures, with a love of detail, theoretical deliberations and large-scale planning, could not be greater.

After the Reformation, (ecclesiastical reform movement between 1517 and 1648) it was recognised in England that **experience is the only reliable foundation** for knowledge. Utilitarian thinking developed from this English empirism, according to which, **actions** are assessed **by impact and benefit** and not so much by the motive behind them. This flow of thought eventually led to liberalism, which saw the well-being of the state and the happiness of the individual in greatest possible freedom and this has been the case until the present day.

## 5) Ritualised violation of rules

You can see it on Friday evenings, immediately after offices close, **exceptional circumstances** in Britain: high (really very high) alcohol consumption in a short space of time, uninhibited parties, unreserved chatter about intimate practices, short (really very short) skirts and high (really very high) heels, table dance, lap dance ... Where is the self-discipline, the stiff upper lip? You could say that the slumbering freeborn Brit has awoken to full-blown life. This ›going against all rules and regulations‹ became well known mainly as a result of Monty Python (British comedy group in the 1970s).

If you look at the very restrictive social regulations at the time of the Puritans and in the Victorian era or even the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher (she was not called the ›Iron Lady‹ for nothing), extreme rule-breaking in British society had to be the logical consequence – like a **valve function**, which can be observed particularly in the younger generation today.

## 6) Reducing interpersonal distance

How close should I get to my counterpart? What do I talk about, what do I disclose? Who do I greet and how? The image of the worldly gentleman who is always able to conduct entertaining small talk with anyone (even those he does not like) is a pretty accurate answer. **British friendliness** quickly conveys a **feeling of proximity** and should therefore not be confused with amicability in other cultures.

You might be surprised to be greeted at the supermarket till with the words ›How are you?‹ instead of a simple ›Hello‹. The cashier is unlikely to want a true answer, but you will have just witnessed an example of reducing interpersonal distance which should be interpreted as being part of British politeness and not as preparation for a deep friendship. The appropriate response is therefore the same question: ›I'm fine, thank you. How are you?‹

As a general rule, whether in daily life or in the business world, it is **easier to start up a conversation** with the British but they keep their private lives to themselves for longer and you need **more time** than in other cultures to build up a **friendship** (you tell each other how you really feel). In fact, one often wonders whether it is ever really possible to achieve this.

# 2

## Initial business contact

Even though Great Britain as described before counts to the individualistic countries in this world the British like to stick to **traditions** – more or less as an opposite pole. ›Traditional‹ means that something has **sustained the change of time** and it has proven successful. A bright new tomorrow, bathed in the warm glow of yesterday – that is what Britons strive for. No wonder, a good cup of Earl Grey or English Breakfast Tea is not only considered taking up liquid, it is far more than that: a long-established **panacea in any situation of life or business** popular across all boundaries. Even though there is no room for long ceremonies with preheated tea pots in the business world, you ought to accept a **cup of tea** (preferably with milk and sugar) as the beginning of a business relationship with thanks. And vice versa, if one day you should welcome British visitors in your own country, besides coffee you definitely ought to offer some good black tea, too.

### Addressing potential business partners

You can address potential business partners both at fairs or events and by searching online and **contacting them via the phone, e-mail or by sending a letter**. Chambers and economic organisations also provide a good platform.

Moreover, **networking** is something that is carried out very actively in Great Britain. Go ahead and also use branch networks and professional associations. While in other countries people e.g. use Xing, the equivalent

in Great Britain is LinkedIn – a excellent tool to continuously build a British network. **References, references, references** – that is what you need, no matter which branch you are dealing with.

## The first impression

One characteristic worth mentioning in British business life is **understatement**. It means that **you shouldn't be too full of yourself**, shouldn't show off your skills, titles, qualifications or achievements. Maybe ›modesty‹ is an appropriate synonym, which by no means should be mistaken for a lack of self-confidence. In fact the British are **well aware of their identity inside** and they are proud of their history and their success – simply with the difference that they don't show it off. That would be considered bad manners. This means in the first personal appointment they face their business partners **very discreetly**, overly grateful, most apologetic and extremely polite.

In doing so, any form of body contact is avoided. The British are not very tactile which means even a handshake can often only be seen at the first meeting. At first sight the British may appear stiff and unapproachable. This may also be due to their **uniform dress code**: dark suits, ties and shirts with a calm pattern for the men and classic ladies' suits or trouser suits for the women. You will meet this appearance even in places without direct customer contact. It is part of common courtesy and **expresses professionalism**. (Please refer to the section *Etiquette and dress code* for further details.)

**Business cards** are exchanged in the same way as e.g. in German-speaking regions, however, people **address each other by their first names and not their surname** and even less by any titles that might be on the business card such as ›Dr.‹ etc. (See also chapter 9.) This would contradict the idea of understatement. The British are more likely to be embarrassed if too much fuss is made about them.

## The first conversation

The British don't get on to business immediately during their first conversation with new business partners. They prefer to create a **positive atmosphere** first and find common ground. What would be more suitable than **small talk**? Non-compromising topics such as your journey and the weather are always popular. However, you should always refrain from expressing your honest opinion if it has a slightly negative touch – even statements such as ›London is well known for its fog.« or ›My arrival was rather strenuous, as unfortunately there is no direct flight to Liverpool«. The same applies to exchanging fundamental points of view, even if they are totally unimportant. **The main goal** in small talk is **accordance** and that begins with small things. If they're not right the British can imagine just nicely what it will be like with you when dealing with important business matters ...

It is especially important **not to overload** your British business partners **with too many details**. Please don't try to convince by going into specialised details! If you do so, only one thing will happen: your British conversation partner will stop listening without you noticing. His polite way will still give you the impression he is interested though in fact you have already blown your opportunity. But don't worry: in order to master reading between the lines as quickly as possible you will find the necessary linguistic equipment regarding coded speech in the following chapter.

In your first conversation, win your British business partners over by being affable and unagitated, be just nice! **Do not urge for decisions**. Give your counterpart time to position himself and leave **space for alterations** in the agenda, concerning product requirements, deadlines, actually everything. You will score with **flexibility and calmness**! Even if the first deal might not work out, the British will remember you at the next opportunity. Especially if you loosely keep in touch.

## Cultivating contact

In General the British are interested in long-term business relations. That is why **networking and building relationships** is the key to success. Get

on the phone more often rather than sending e-mails. **Personal contact counts double.** Getting on a plane and meeting in person obviously always has the greatest impact.

Sometimes the impression might occur that the British don't take work too seriously. This is probably due to the fact that business issues don't get to them too easily. They don't take work too personally and they are **emotionally little involved.**

When maintaining contact prove that you are a **positively thinking affable person** with whom it is also possible to **have fun.** In this way you can be sure to create a basis for future projects or commissions. Personally, I have hardly ever heard Britons speaking badly about others let alone casting aspersions on them. They do, however, emphasise the people they like. With them they do the most business, they are willingly recommended, they will come a long way.

### At a glance

- In your first encounter with British business partners, face them in a discreet, thankful and extremely polite way.
- The British don't get on to business immediately during their first conversation. They prefer to create a positive atmosphere first and find common ground. Practice your small talk!
- Do not urge for decisions and leave space for alterations. You will score with flexibility and calmness.
- In General the British are interested in long-term business relations. That is why networking and building relationships is the key to success.

### Caution!

- Be careful, not to show off your achievements too much. In Great Britain you will make progress through understatement.
- When making small talk avoid negative topics. The main goal is accordance with your British business partners.
- Get on the phone more often rather than sending e-mails – personal contact counts double.

# 3

## Communication and impact

The complete Oxford Dictionary contains 500,000 words. This may easily lead to the conclusion that the repertoire of linguistic expressions is very **differentiated and varied** in English. Furthermore, there are approximately 340 million people worldwide today, who speak English as their mother tongue not to mention all those who speak English as a second language.

No wonder, that the British, who can basically travel the whole world and continue speaking their mother tongue, feel very comfy due to this fact. Surely, you can deduce a certain amount of **self-confidence** of the British soul from this which should not be neglected, since the linguistic facts speak for themselves. And since the feeling of **comfort** is very popular in Britain there is a wide range of possibilities for side stepping in order to linguistically dodge unpleasant matters. For example, instead of saying you need to go to the toilet, there are several euphorisms such as ›comfort break‹, ›make use of the facilities‹ or nice excuses, such as ›wash hands‹ or ›answer the call‹.

### **There is more than one way to skin a cat**

The British are individualists inside. You have already read about this in chapter 1. They like flexibility, they like to be able to choose, they like options. This is also reflected in their communication. The British very rarely

think in terms of black and white but rather in grey tones. They don't like to be **driven into a corner nor to be pressured**, they **don't like to commit themselves for eternity**.

Even if you have a clear idea of something, don't emphasise this too much in your communication. Show yourself **flexible in thinking and acting**. Have several options ready and don't spend too much time elaborating on your idea in the beginning. It is better to put out a few feelers to see whether your idea is well received without revealing that this is your best option. If you offer various options you are most likely going to be asked which option you would favour. This is the moment to uncover your tendency. However, still don't overdo it: **The more you argue in order to convince the more sceptical** your British counterpart will get. Less is more!

## Coded speech

It is of vital importance to keep to the **restraint of going toe-to-toe with others!** The British like to feel comfortable even when disagreeing. They also like to meet at least in a neutral atmosphere in subsequent encounters. Actually, this is nothing different from **keeping face**, as it is found in Asian cultures though in far more distinct and varied ways.

They like for everything to go smoothly in terms of language, without creating a stir or getting on the wrong side of someone. This is why **inconveniences are ›wrapped up‹ in friendly words**. This way of communicating is called coded speech. In this respect it is not enough to say ›please‹, ›thank you‹, ›you're welcome‹ and ›sorry‹ as often as possible. The following example sentences in this chapter will give you an idea of all the facets of this indirect communication style.

## Apologising

The British apologise permanently. Even if something isn't their fault:

›**Excuse me!**‹ is used if you are about to do something that will cause inconveniences. If e.g. you have to get something straight/correct something:

›Excuse me, that's not quite right!‹ Also, if you have to leave a meeting early or you need to get through a crowd of people ›Excuse me, please!‹ is appropriate.

›**Sorry!**‹ is correct if you have already done something that has caused inconveniences. If e.g. you have stepped on someones foot or you arrive late at a meeting, you say: ›Sorry for being late.‹

You choose ›**I'm afraid!**‹ if you are about to say something unpleasant and are aware of it: ›I'm afraid, I'm going to have to say no.‹

›**I/We apologise!**‹ is formal and can often be found in correspondence e.g. if something went wrong: ›I apologise for any inconvenience, this has caused to you.‹ Or: ›Please accept my sincere apologies.‹ ›Apologies!‹ is also used frequently if one is late.

## Postponing appointments

If you would like to postpone an appointment the following phrases will help you:

›I think Monday is a bit too optimistic. Tuesday is more like it.‹

›I can do Tuesday instead. How does that sound to you?‹

Give your reasons:

›I've been tied up with a computer course all week. Would this coming Monday be possible for you?‹

## Establishing clarity

The meaning of ›I don't understand‹ may often be correct, however, it sounds very impolite. There are better alternatives if you want to make sure everyone is on the same page:

›I'm not sure, we're actually talking about the same thing. What do you mean by ...?‹

›Could you explain that one more time, please? I'm not sure, I've truly understood you.‹

- ›Just to make sure, that there are no misunderstandings. You think we should ...? Or do you mean we shouldn't ...?‹
- ›Just to make sure, that we are still on the same page.‹

## Sending reminders

No matter what you need to remind someone of – a pending reply, a report, a due payment, an appointment – a great method is to ask questions instead of making statements. Moreover, offer your help, simply out of politeness.

### Reminding of appointments:

- ›We're looking forward to your visit tomorrow. Is there anything, you would like us to prepare for you?‹
- ›Only one week to go, so this is just to ask you, if everything is on track?‹
- ›Are we still on for Friday next week?‹
- ›HR need the report tomorrow. Do you think you can get it to them on time, or is there anything, I could do?‹

### Reminding of something that remains to be done:

- ›I am not sure, but didn't you want to get that document to me by Friday? If you need further details, please let me know.‹
- ›I just wanted to check, whether you have everything you need to provide the necessary information?‹
- ›Do you think it would be still possible to get this done by Monday?‹

## Voicing opinions or criticism

When it comes to voicing your opinion directness isn't very popular in Britain. Hence, you ought better not state your view as a fact but rather **phrase it moderately**.

- Instead of ›I find, that ...‹ or ›My opinion is, that ...‹ it is better to say:
- ›Perhaps we should consider...‹
  - ›Could I propose, that we ...‹

›Could I suggest, that we take a devil’s advocate position and consider doing exactly the opposite?‹

As you can see in the ultimate example sentence the British e.g. also like to seek a **fictional third person** (the devil’s advocate) to express their objections.

In terms of **criticism** they also **maintain a low profile**. They want their counterpart to feel comfortable and that’s why they use the one or the other ›wrapping‹ to communicate negative feedback. Since it is frowned upon in Great Britain to blame other people they also often rhetorically seek the mistake among themselves (see also chapters 1 and 6).

Typical **sentence beginnings when voicing criticism** are:

- ›It’s probably me, ...‹
- ›I might be wrong, ...‹
- ›I see where you are coming from ... ‹
- ›Good point. Have you also thought of ...‹
- ›I might not be up to date ...‹
- ›I can’t find the sales figures in your report.‹
- ›Is there any reason why ... hasn’t been done?‹

You should, however, also **voice your positive view as often as possible**.

If e.g. a meeting went well, express this at the end with a kind sentence:

- ›Well, I think our session was quite productive. What do you think, James?‹
- ›I certainly think my trip has been worthwhile. Do you feel we’ve left anything uncovered?‹

In general, the British **like to praise frequently**. Praise functions as motivation in any situation.

## Dealing with complaints

In everyday business, smaller or larger complaints might always occur. No matter who or what they are about, do not automatically go into counter-strike but have a look at the following procedure as an alternative:

**1) Show empathy:**

- ›I'm sorry to hear that.<
- ›I see what you mean.<
- ›I can understand that you are feeling upset.<

**2) Ask for further details,** so the other person can vent his or her displeasure:

- ›Please tell me, what happened.<
- ›Can you tell me, when all this was?<

**3) Apologise,** no matter if it was your fault or not or if you have entirely understood the background story. The following sentences are supposed to be soothing:

- ›I'm sorry this happened.<
- ›That was entirely my / our department's fault. I apologise sincerely.<

**4) Explain the situation short and precise** from your point of view and emphasise that you will find out about the causes:

- ›I don't know how that happened, but I will definitely find out and let you know.<
- ›We've been having teething problems with our new computer system.<

**5) Show immediate initiative:**

- ›I'll tell you what I'm going to do right away ...<
- ›I'll go straight to the ... department and see that they send you the missing parts.<
- ›Of course we will give you compensation for the damage.<

**6) Ask for cooperation.** This aspect is especially helpful if you are dealing with upset persons who demand impossible things. Involve them in the **solution process** and address fairness:

- ›Let's try to reach an agreement. What do you think would be fair?<

**7) Give thanks for their openness:**

- ›Thank you for (calling and) letting me know.<
- ›Thanks very much for pointing this out to me.<

## Problems?

No way! Losers have problems – winners face challenges! This is why **inconveniences tend to be played down linguistically** and by no means made an issue of. Instead of talking about ›problems‹ rather talk about ›challenges‹ and thus, the world looks a little brighter. If someone talks about ›slight inconveniences‹ don't let the word ›slight‹ hide the fact that there is need for action.

**Emotional behaviour** (working oneself up, being annoyed, being stressed out etc.) is considered **highly unprofessional** in British business culture. ›Keeping one's composure!‹, is the name of the game or ›Stop complaining!‹, ›Be positive!‹, ›Be professional!‹ – and if you do kick over the traces the following sentence will help: ›I am sorry. I think I got carried away!‹

## The glas is always half-full

No matter how bad it is; there is something positive to be found in every negative aspect. That is the preferred attitude towards life in Great Britain. And indeed, it is almost always possible to **phrase a negative wording positively**. Have a look at the table:

Negative statement	Positive statement
›Don't be late!‹	›Please be on time!‹
›We cannot deliver the goods until the beginning of next month.‹	›We will deliver the goods first thing next month.‹
›No, I haven't finished the report.‹	›Well, I've been tied up with project X all week. How does Tuesday sound to you?‹
›I don't think so.‹	›My thinking may change, but I now believe ...‹
›I don't know what to say.‹	›I'll have to think about it.‹
›Your ideas were good, but your project plan is badly worked out.‹	›Your ideas were very good. I think they could be put into practice, once you've rethought some of the project plan.‹

## British humour

There is always a distinct touch of **irony, sarcasm, self-mockery or morbidity** to British humour (black humour)! It doesn't only serve to have fun but it is also a popular ›lubricant‹ in even the smallest of tricky situations. Even, in business a good sense of humour is important, especially in risky situations. Negative emotions are kept under control and a good atmosphere is maintained through humorous comments. No one should lose face. You should therefore be able to laugh at yourself and shouldn't be too full of yourself.

## Questions as an allround tool

A wonderful means of broadening your horizon or questioning ideas, visions and suggestions are questions, questions, questions. For the British, questions are something positive, they enable a **change of perspective, self-reflection** and they allow you to **reveal blind spots**.

Typical questions are:

- ›What makes you think that ...?‹
- ›Have you already thought of doing ...?‹
- ›Have you thought of other options?‹
- ›What did you experience before?‹
- ›How do you feel about ...?‹

## Giving feedback

For people from other countries it may be difficult to recognise Britons giving feedback as it is imparted very **softly and indirectly**. Since the British are very proud of their feedback culture subsequently a couple of explanations will follow to outline what the **sandwich method** is about, according to which feedback is often given with pleasure:

**1) Positive introduction:** First of all, they **praise** everything that went well. Even small details are acknowledged.

**2) Working out development areas:** They place importance on promoting the employee's self-reflection, to lead him to self-awareness and to give him the opportunity to address potential performance obstacles himself. It is about **working out** development areas **together** and not about confronting the employee with what you might consider his weaknesses.

An elegant means of getting there, again is **skilful asking!** A question can hint at specific development areas such as:

›How would you describe the current interaction with your colleagues?‹

›How do you feel about your last presentation?‹

If you as the person giving feedback would like to voice your opinion in the course of the conversation, make sure you choose your words carefully do not offend the person receiving the feedback. You might begin as follows:

›From my point of view, I would say that you ...‹

›To me, it seems that you ...‹ oder ›I have the impression that ...‹

**3) Encouraging, praising and offering support:** Finally, it is about giving the employee the feeling that he is not left alone with his performance goals but that you are approachable and interested in promoting him. British managers consider themselves people managers (See chapter 7) and it is their task to care about ›their‹ people. A boss is only as good as his staff.

## Communication problems on the phone

First of all it is necessary to mention that the British tend to answer the phone without saying their name. That may be irritating, however, this has got nothing to do with being impolite but is simply common practice.

When asking international business people if they prefer to get on the phone or to communicate via e-mail with their British business partners and colleagues, the honest answer is often the latter. This is often due to the fact that the British can **speak very fast**, the connection is bad or maybe because of the **variety of different accents or dialects** they are confronted with. In the business world people simply don't always speak Oxford English.

This is why it keeps coming to communication problems, which you shouldn't neglect. It is better to establish clarity with the help of the following sentences:

- ›Would you do me a favour and slow down a little bit?‹
- ›Sorry, I didn't hear what you said. Would you mind repeating that for me, please?‹
- ›I'm sorry, but it's rather noisy here. Could I ask you to speak up, please?‹
- ›Sorry, I didn't quite catch what you said. Come again, please.‹
- ›I'm afraid, the signal is breaking up.‹
- ›This mobile connection is bad. Can I call you on a landline instead?‹
- ›May I read that back to you to make sure I got it all right?‹
- ›Could I ask you to confirm that by email, please? Just to make sure I got it all right?‹
- ›I'm not sure I understood you correctly.‹
- ›Just a moment please. I would like to take the details down.‹
- ›Can you read that back to me, please?‹
- ›Just to make sure that I've got that right, I'll repeat it.‹
- ›Would you mind spelling your name, just to be sure?‹
- ›Excuse me for interrupting. May I have a word?‹

In order to **generate trust** it is sensible to **get on the phone more often** than writing e-mails. The more often you do so the sooner you will get used to the various dialects and the speaking tempo. Have courage!

## E-mail correspondence

In contrast to the usual so decent, genteel and polite way of British people they keep their e-mails fairly **objective and short**. The politeness that is of such great importance in personal meetings seems to be almost completely abolished in e-mails. Don't get upset, if you are **not addressed by your name** in the one or the other e-mail, they **hardly exchange any personal words**, the **valediction and the name of the sender is missing**. Also it is common practice to **address** each other **by first name** immediately and has nothing to do with impudence or a friendship-offer.

### At a glance

- The British like to feel comfortable even if there are differences of opinion. That is why they use coded speech. Unpleasant issues are expressed in a friendly way.
- There is something positive to every negative aspect. This is the preferred attitude towards life in Great Britain. Stick to positive wordings!
- The British like questions, as they enable a change of perspective, self-reflection, to broaden one's horizon and they allow blind spots to be revealed.

### Caution!

- Directness is not very popular in Britain. Pay attention to phrasing your sentences moderately.
- In Great Britain it is frowned upon to blame other people. Rhetorically, seek the mistake in yourself.
- The more you argue the more sceptical your British counterpart will get. Less is more!

# 4

## Meetings and presentations

Most British abstain from long preparations for a meeting as they consider a meeting a **suitable setting to exchange ideas**. For them it is not about presenting elaborate drafts. So, the **discussion**, as well as **looking at** a specific situation **from various angles, exploring different options** form the centrepiece of most meetings with British.

However, be gentle, as you already know. **Instead of open verbal conflicts** coded speech is deployed in such settings in all its glory (see chapter 3). This includes that you don't interrupt your British dialogue partners during discussions let alone try to finish their sentences.

### Course of meeting

It is common courtesy in Britain to arrive on time. The first and the last invisible item on the agenda is **casual small talk**. The meeting can then be opened with the words ›Let's get down to business‹. A more gentle alternative is: ›Well, Charlie, I suppose we ought to have a look at this bunch of paperwork.‹ At the latest at this point everyone will sit down at the conference table, usually with no particular seating order.

In most British meetings there is an **agenda**, however, they will **not necessarily keep to the exact order**. They will wait and see where the journey of exchanging ideas will take them. **Developing ideas together and setting rough directions** always has priority.

You might be of the opinion that a decision should be made at the end of a meeting. It should be clear who has to do what and when and this will be documented in writing. Do not necessarily expect this in Great Britain. They will often continue exchanging ideas **after the meeting** elsewhere, before, after several rounds, the result is voiced by the executive. Subject to alterations!

### Telephone conferences

If long distances need to be overcome and travel expenses need to be saved, meetings over the telephone are very popular. Telcos, however, are especially challenging, in particular if you have to communicate in a foreign language.

Subsequently you will find some tips with English example sentences, in case you are the initiator of the telephone conference:

#### **1) First of all introduce yourself:**

›Thank you for dialling in today and welcome. My name is ..., I'm the chairperson of this conference call.‹

#### **2) Remind the others when the conference is supposed to end:**

›Let me start by reminding you that our call ends around ...‹

#### **3) Name the document which is relevant for the conference:**

›I would also like to inform you that the necessary conference documentation is called ...‹

#### **4) Ask the participants to introduce themselves one at a time, after you have said their names:**

›May I now ask you to greet the other members after your name is mentioned? This allows us to check that everyone is connected properly and that the technology is working smoothly.‹

#### **5) Invite the first speaker to begin with his topic:**

›Then I would like to welcome Mr Schmidt from Frankfurt, Germany. He will update us on the latest ... and he will be able to answer your questions afterwards.‹

**6) Summarise the main aspects at the end:**

›Before we close this meeting, let me just summarise the main items.‹

**7) Thank the participants for attending the conference** in spite of busy schedules:

›Again, thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedules to be present.‹

## **Presentations**

When presenting your products or ideas and concepts to your British listeners, always remember **understatement**. Keep your presentation plain, not too colourful and especially short. Apply the **KISS principle** – **Keep It Short and Simple**. Concentrate on the **core statement**, your business partner's **benefit** and preferably don't get lost in details.

Begin with a **content overview**, give your reasons for the presentation and outline which goal or result you are pursuing. Of course, you should be well-prepared and ready for **interposed questions**. If you answer these immediately but short and crisp without losing the thread, you have done everything right. Asking questions is something very positive in Great Britain, asking good questions is even considered an art. It enables you to broaden your horizon, increase your self-reflexion and all participants (the people asking and those answering) gain new insights. Therefore you should look forward to every question, react with a smile and answer by saying ›Very good point!‹. You can also pose questions to your listeners. It is always welcome to **interactively involve** your British audience in your presentation.

Furthermore, a certain **entertainment factor** is generally important for the success of your presentation. **Storytelling** is a popular presentation method which increases both the listeners' attention and concentration considerably. You can achieve a lot with anecdotes and metaphors linked to your topic: initiate thinking processes, trigger new ways of behaviour, impart values, show solutions, pass on worldly wisdoms, show empathy, share knowledge or simply cheer up or loosen the atmosphere and make your audience laugh now and then.

This ability comes naturally to many British – this is possibly an indication for British individualism. Maybe you have heard of Speaker’s Corner in Hyde Park in London. According to a parliamentary decision from 27th June 1872 anybody may hold a speech here on any desired topic and gather passers-by without registration. Maybe a feature of the British ideal of freedom and high tolerance. Soley the Queen and the Royal Family are not to be the content of any speech. There are even signs put up as reminders.

For many foreigners, however, the following words by Comedian Jerry Seinfeld tend to be true: ›Most people at a funeral would rather be in the coffin than saying the eulogy.‹ In some countries storytelling is a competence that has to be acquired, learned or at least improved. Some might not even want to gain this competence as the chances of success are rather underestimated. You will find some tips on further reading in chapter 10.

### Tables, graphs and diagrammes

Most presentations are supported by **visual aids** such as PowerPoint slides among others. In order for you to describe these correctly the following list contains some useful terminology:

- ›Flowchart‹
- ›Tree diagram‹
- ›Histogram‹
- ›Bar chart‹
- ›Pie chart‹
- ›Chart‹
- ›Graph‹
- ›Solid line‹
- ›Dotted line‹
- ›Table‹
- ›X-axis/y-axis‹
- ›Across the top‹
- ›across the bottom‹
- ›in the upper right-hand corner‹
- ›in the bottom left-hand corner‹

### Ending a presentation

End your presentation with a **conclusion** of the most essential aspect which you would like your audience to take with them. You can also ask for spontaneous **feedback**. In this way you have the unique opportunity to find out what was well-received and what you can do better next time. Don't worry, your feedback will be ›well-packed‹ and if you have already internalised the signals of coded speech (see chapter 3) you will be able to draw valuable impulses from it.

In case we are talking about a sales presentation a **prompt follow-up** is highly recommended. Stay loosely in touch with your British business contact so as to get a feeling for how interested he really is. Be nice and **not too persistent**. If the British are interested in your offer they will **approach you on their own accord**.

#### At a glance

- British use meetings primarily to exchange ideas. It is not about presenting elaborate concepts.
- First and last invisible item on the agenda is casual small talk.
- Meetings don't necessarily end with a decision.
- Keep your presentation plain and short.
- Interposed questions and feedback are considered part of a presentation by the British.

#### Caution!

- Avoid open confrontations in meetings. Remember to ›wrap up‹ negative statements in *coded speech*.
- Don't present too many facts but rather rely on a certain entertainment factor e.g. through storytelling.

# 5

## Negotiations, decisions and contracts

Negotiating parties need one another otherwise they would not be taking part in negotiations with one another. That is the attitude taken by British business partners. A common ground forms the basis for achieving a **fair deal**. In order to reach this goal, you **get to know your negotiating partners** and find out what for them is the most important thing in this deal. At the same time you know what you yourself wish to attain and what you are prepared to give up to reach this aim. You go through many **different options** beforehand so that you can arrive at a **settlement which is satisfactory for both sides**.

Always knowing which alternative you can offer when, that is the art of negotiating, which even has a name: **BATNA – Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement**. This strategy was initiated by authors Roger Fisher and William Ury in their book *Getting to Yes*. It means nothing more than **working out the best alternatives**, to achieve a **win-win situation** for both sides. What is the best way of going about this?

### Negotiating technique

There is no such thing as a stupid question in Britain. As already mentioned, all **questions** serve for self-reflection and to broaden your horizons. In addition, they show proactivity and interest, and the **knowledge accumulated strengthens your own position**. In negotiations with British

partners it is less a case of emphasising who you are and what you want – that is the job of your counterpart – but more a case of discovering who your partners are and developing a feeling for how you can **win them over**.

Various **ways of asking questions** can be helpful:

### **Emotional questions:**

- ›How do you feel about ...?‹
- ›How does ... sound to you?‹

### **Open questions:**

- ›What would be the best way for you to work together?‹
- ›Why is ... so important to you?‹

### **Double check questions:**

- ›Am I right in thinking that ...?‹
- ›Correct me, if I am wrong. What I understand here is ...?‹
- ›If I understood you correctly, you would like me to ...?‹

### **What if questions:**

- ›What, if ...?‹
- ›If you ..., what would it be?‹

### **More information questions:**

- ›Aren't these figures possibly setting too high a valuation on it?‹
- ›Could I ask what source this information comes from exactly?‹

Go about it like Sherlock Holmes. Ask questions and collect as much information as possible. Put yourself in your counterpart's position, try to understand what makes him tick and discover his BATNA.

## **Preparation**

›You don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate.‹ (Chester Karrass) Others might say ›Good planning is half the job.‹ These sayings illustrate nicely the cultural differences.

Here are a few **central questions** you could ask yourself in order to prepare for your next negotiations:

- What will your tactics be during the discussions?
- What do you and what do you not want?
- What does the opposite party want and what does it not want?
- What is your best and what is your worst offer and what concessions can you make?
- What could be the opposite party's best and what their worst offer?
- Which questions should you ask?
- Which questions will the opposite party ask and how should you answer?
- What information should you keep to yourself?
- What would you do if you reach stalemate?
- What should you check out beforehand? Do you need additional figures, information or materials?

You should also consider:

- Is your English adequate for the coming talks or would a native speaker be useful?
- How much intercultural competence do the participants have?
- Who will be the speaker, who will take the role of observer, and who will take notes?

## The art of listening

People have two ears and one mouth. You should utilise them proportionally. However, the art of listening is often underestimated. Many people are more occupied with talking than listening.

The British like to **underline the listening** with small comments like ›Right‹, ›Oh, I see‹, ›That's very interesting‹, ›I understand‹, ›I can imagine‹, accompanied by a smile or a nod etc. In so doing they are **showing their Interesse** and the person speaking feels he is being taken seriously.

During discussions it can be very helpful if one member of the negotiating team takes over the role of **active listener**. This allows the **discussion**

**partner's needs to be filtered out more effectively** and you run less of a risk of missing the nuances between the lines.

## Options

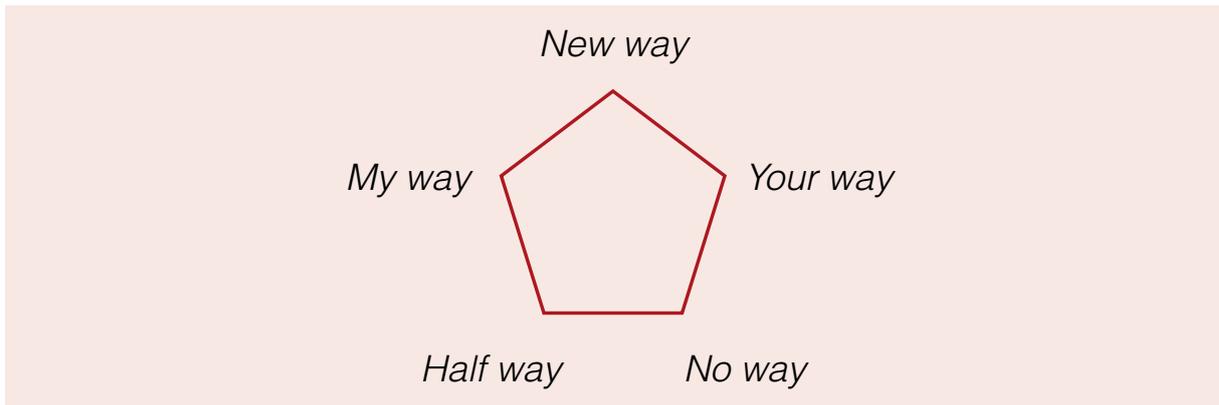
›There is always more than one way to skin a cat‹, according to a British saying. The British **like to change their opinion** if new parameters which could create **new options** arise during negotiations. They do not necessarily adhere to their initial approach and they do not like to be forced into a corner.

This means that you will rarely be able to go home after the first round of talks with the oh so hoped-for decision in your pocket. You are more likely to be asked: ›Could we have a final decision at our next meeting?‹ However, you can forestall this by using the same methods and concluding ›We have summarised the benefits for you of accepting the offer on the table. I propose that we adjourn while each party consults its advisors.‹

The British like to **conceal their fallback position** as long as possible and **use charm, humour and understatement** in order to enforce their interests – in other words **without confrontation, but in an equally target-orientated manner**. Their methods are more roundabout than in many other countries and take that much longer. There are several intermediate stages which show the progress of negotiations.

There is a tendency among the British to feel that ›foreigners‹ want to ›**outsmart**‹ them. This word alone is a wonderful example of the way they go about things: politeness and diplomacy are their greatest asset even at the negotiating table!

As there is **not only one best way** as far as the British are concerned, it is better to turn a dilemma (in black and white thinking there are only 2 alternatives) into a **pentalemma** where there are **five different options**, which allows you to choose the best path depending on the situation. An entirely new route can therefore also present a possible solution.



## Good connections

As in many countries, the British too like to point out the size and good reputation of their company. However, they are more likely to keep quiet about the **behind the scenes connections**: It's not what you know, it's who you know. There is an **old boys network** (network for one-time pupils of public schools) which is still part of British business management today. They are **actively connected with one another** and have executed many a deal. Job vacancies, too, are often filled discreetly via these channels.

Even if you have never attended a public school in Britain, it is nevertheless advisable to build up your own **network of varied British contacts**. Although some connections may not appear to be very promising on the surface, you never know! Keep the pot boiling – in a **pleasant, unassuming manner**. Doors which you thought closed or where you did not even know they existed can open unexpectedly e.g. in negotiations which have come to a standstill.

## Rejecting an offer

You will rarely hear a direct rejection in negotiations with the British. The ultimate objective is to **maintain a pleasant atmosphere**. (See chapter 3.) The expression ›interesting idea‹, for example, without any further positive qualification, is a direct indication of rejection.

›Yes, but ...‹ is easily said. The British interpret everything that follows the ›but‹ often as an **extended negative message**. You can avoid this. Simply replace the word ›but‹ by a short **pause**. Here are some examples:

- ›Interesting idea. (Pause) Perhaps we could look at ours, too.<
- ›I'm sorry. (Pause) Perhaps we haven't made it clear enough, why that might be difficult for us.<
- ›I see where you are coming from. (Pause) Have you also considered ... as a possible solution?<

In this way, it is possible to **reject an offer kindly** and at the same time bring one's own ideas and solutions into play.

## Contracts

Decisions are recorded in the minutes and then moulded into a contract. Contracts are normally seen as binding in Britain but the British are **more willing** than others **to adapt** rules and contracts accordingly if the situation has changed. Nothing is carved in stone.

### At a glance

- The British consider you to be a partner. The target of negotiations is therefore always to achieve the best alternative for both sides.
- Try to find out how you can win over your British negotiating partners.
- The British do not necessarily adhere to their original opinion. They change their point of view if new parameters come into play.
- There is not only one best way. Therefore the British think in terms of options.
- You are unlikely to go home with a decision in your pocket after the first round of talks, even if you have the feeling things went well.
- You will rarely hear a direct rejection in negotiations with the British. The ultimate objective is to maintain a pleasant atmosphere.
- If a situation has changed, the British are quickly willing to adapt contracts accordingly.

### Caution!

- People are often too occupied with speaking in negotiations. Practise the art of listening, so that you can filter out the needs of your British negotiating partners and their reasons for doing something.
- The British prefer to keep quiet about personal network connections. Good contacts can play a decisive role, even in negotiations.

# 6

## Coordination and cooperation

Prior to a first bi-national project cooperation **intercultural training** is often classed only as nice to have and a long way from must have. A few weeks after starting the project, the first question marks appear on both sides and it is usually not long before the first disputes start to loom on the horizon. Even then, the assumption is that it is merely a question of some people not getting on with one another. Eventually, however, there is a realisation that these are not isolated cases but that everyone in the project team is so ›strange‹.

The other culture then quickly acquires a very negative label. The situation becomes more and more difficult and distinct **areas of friction**, particularly in project work, can no longer be denied. Projects fail because the two sides lean in opposite directions. A rather expensive undertaking...

### Intercultural assessment

Not every high-performance employee on home ground is suitable for taking part in an international project. Not everyone who has lived abroad is interculturally competent. Not everyone who has worked for a British company has Britishness in his blood. Not every employee who wishes to enhance his curriculum vitae (CV) by spending time abroad is actually willing to embark upon this adventure. Not everyone who has read a

book about Great Britain can apply this knowledge when it comes to real situations.

**Other standards** apply for intercultural projects. Employees need additional qualifications which go beyond their specialist knowledge. You can easily test whether a candidate meets these criteria in an Intercultural Assessment Center. By carrying out specific exercises and simulations **suitable employees can be identified** in just one day, so that they can then be prepared for the forthcoming project. No doubt there are also people with natural talent who slot into strange surroundings very easily and feel comfortable, without the need for special intercultural training.

Preparation for close cooperation with British counterparts could include: the project team nominated is first made **aware** of the **main cultural differences** between Great Britain and other countries and then works out **individual communication and behavioural strategies**, in order to build bridges and to use cultural diversity for the success of the project. The following topics are especially important for the success of a bi-national project with British counterparts:

### Flow of information

The beginning of good project communication is the flow of information. The British let information flow particularly well if there is harmony on a **personal level in the team**. You do not have to be best friends, but you should **have a friendly, polite manner**, you should not insist on your own opinion too much and carefully **show yourself ready to compromise**.

**Communication routes** in British companies are not really tied to any form of hierarchy but are intended to bring together people who work with one another. This means that communication travels **in various directions** and not only from top to bottom.

**When gathering information** you should proceed **proactively** and not expect the others to automatically supply the information needed. The British do not like filtered information. They prefer to **decide for themselves which information is important** and which is not. They object to others thinking for them and prefer to use their own brains. Basically it can be said that information is acquired by **the obligation to collect** as

in many other cultures. There are also countries where the obligation to provide is paramount.

These **different expectations** when gathering information are often the reason for disputes in bi-national project work. If you are used to an obligation to provide it is easy to gain the impression that the British do not inform you correctly. Or you might even make the damaging assumption that the British deliberately keep back information. It is obvious that this can quickly undermine confidence in your counterparts.

Always **actively approach your British colleagues**, preferably in person. This not only promotes good relations, you also automatically receive the important information at a point in time which you have chosen.

## Deadlines and dates

There is certainly the awareness in British business culture for the necessity for deadlines and dates. However, the question is, at what cost? The British prefer to be **flexible in reaching the deadline**. They hold **frequent meetings** to see how far they are, for reorientation, to try and find out whether the deadlines are still realistic, to decide whether they ought to reduce the volume of the project to be able to keep to deadlines etc. By **evaluating all these ideas** they hope they can gain a **more comprehensive picture of the overall situation** and also **judge more accurately** where to set deadlines, whether they can be kept or even need to be revised.

These are **joint projects** which thrive on the exchange of ideas and are made up of various different stages which can be celebrated with a few rounds of Guinness. In other countries each team member has his own clearly defined part to play, coupled with his relevant profound expert knowledge. In this case, frequent discussion with non-experts is seen more as interference, which is time-consuming and unproductive.

## Dealing with problems

The quote ›Our team is well balanced. We have problems everywhere.‹ does not originate from a Briton but an American football coach named Tommy

Prothro (1920–1995). However, it lends itself beautifully to illustrating the British attitude toward problems because it shows that they are **open to mistakes** and is at the same time an example of their type of humour.

In British business life it is not a sin to make mistakes as long as you recognise them, acknowledge them and learn from them. (See chapter 1.) If you discover that a colleague has made a mistake, you **only draw attention to it indirectly, if at all**, you do not make any accusations. Confrontation is an absolute no go. The potential **to learn from mistakes** should have priority for everyone.

### At a glance

- The beginning of good project communication is the flow of information. For this the British need harmony on a personal level.
- Communication routes in British companies are not really tied to any form of hierarchy. Information is passed on in all directions.
- When gathering information, the British proceed proactively and do not expect the others to automatically supply the information needed. There is an obligation to collect.
- It is advisable to ring your British counterparts every now and then in order to create a good working climate. Approach your British colleagues, preferably in person.
- Deadlines are important for the British too but they prefer to be flexible in reaching them. Frequent meetings are held to see how far things are and to adjust any dates set.
- It is not a sin in British business life to make mistakes so long as one recognises them, acknowledges them and learns from them.

### Caution!

- The British do not like filtered information. They prefer to decide for themselves which information is important and which is not.
- If you discover that a British colleague has made a mistake, please only draw attention to it indirectly. Confrontation is an absolute no go.

# 7

## Leadership and motivation

Who is the boss here? If you were not told beforehand, you might well pose this question when you attend a meeting with several British businessmen. The concept of **understatement** (see chapter 2.) also applies to the managers: **do not put yourself in the foreground**, maintain a low profile, **do not emphasise your status**.

Who leads the negotiations then? Well, everybody really. **Everyone's views are important**. They are collected and juggled to and fro. They serve to broaden your horizons and are the foundation stone for subsequent decision-making (see respective section *The job of a manager* in this chapter).

If you then go from the conference room towards the **manager's desk**, you may well be surprised again because it is not in a separate office but **at the centre of activity**. Hard to believe for some cultures. Here too **status is abandoned**, **proximity to the staff** is more important. It is not a case of being able to check on employees more easily, it merely **makes cooperation more straightforward**, it takes less time for the manager to acquire a better feeling over a longer period of time for the staff's mood and their concerns, and aids the exchange of information.

That is not surprising if you know that British managers see themselves as **people managers**. This does not exclude the possibility of there being an executive floor in the headquarters of some large companies, but these are very much more accessible than in some other countries. British people managers do not have secretaries but personal assistants (PA) who do a lot of organising and offer support and bear no resemblance to the image of

outer-office dragons who shield their boss from the rest of the world. You will rarely come across a chauffeur or separate lifts and canteens reserved only for members of the board. In British working life, **hierarchy** is **much less pronounced** than in other countries and there are no status symbols.

## Styles of leadership according to Daniel Goleman

The six styles of leadership according to Daniel Goleman<sup>5</sup> are bound to be on the agenda in many management seminars:

- 1) **Authoritarian:** ›Do what I tell you to!‹
- 2) **Authoritative:** ›Come with me!‹
- 3) **Affiliative:** ›My first priority is people!‹
- 4) **Democratic:** ›What do you think of that?‹
- 5) **Performance-orientated:** ›Do it like I do!‹
- 6) **Coaching:** ›Try to do it yourself! Try it out!‹

None of the various styles is always the best, the different strategies should be **applied according to the situation**.

So much for the theory. Most people would probably agree that this is the best method. However, the question is, **which company actually works in this way?** Who has taken it to heart? Where is it no longer just wishful thinking or an ideal? What images are really present in people's heads – whether consciously or unconsciously? How well does the learning content of a seminar match inner nature and cultural heritage? Where are they implemented more quickly or more naturally?

If, for instance, you are working in the finance sector, the hierarchy is often more pronounced especially in insurance, status symbols are more important and therefore the style of leadership is more authoritarian and performance-orientated. The market is a national one, whereas the banking sector is becoming more international, and the authoritarian style of leadership is starting to become more relaxed.

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<sup>5</sup> See D. Goleman, R. Boyatzis, A. McKee (2013): Primal Leadership: Unleashing the Power of Emotional Interlligence

In the British finance sector a mixture of coaching, democratic and affiliative styles of leadership have asserted themselves.

### Empowerment

When describing styles of leadership the word empowerment is a term you often come across. It means that the employees are given the opportunity of **working more independently**. The idea behind this is to encourage them to discover their own strengths and capabilities. **Autonomy and self-determination** are no longer reserved only for the managers. The employees' room for manoeuvre grows and their influence on company progress increases while management concentrates on encouraging, stimulating and supporting the staff in this process of development. **The manager becomes a coach.**

In view of the fact that Great Britain is an individualistic country (see chapter 1.), it is not surprising that **empowerment** has become **established** there **as the style of leadership**. Empowerment does not need very much training because cultural characteristics already supply the necessary foundation for it to become incorporated into the day-to-day interaction between manager and employee.

This is different in group-orientated societies. Here they have more trouble handling so much personal responsibility and the fact that staff contribute their own ideas and concepts, especially when dealing with a superior. You expect the employees to be the performers and therefore to be controlled. They are more likely to turn their sights upwards.

### The job of a manager

How much specialist knowledge does a manager need? For Great Britain, you could answer: ›none. really. You can learn any specialist knowledge that is needed. Good **common sense and a knowledge of human nature** are more important!«

In other cultures the answer is more likely to be: ›specialist knowledge is the most important thing. Years of experience in the same field bring about the expertise which goes to make a manager!‹

British managers see themselves as **generalists**. They have extensive knowledge which, however, does not go so deep. From their point of view it is therefore realistic to acquire quickly the necessary knowledge for the job (see chapter 1). During their careers they often gain experience in very different fields of work. What counts is the big picture. They have **visions**, specify the **general direction** and in **strategic assignments** are propelled mainly by their common sense. Their **employees have the actual specialist knowledge**, meaning they then take over the role of adviser and are not only the performers. For this reason people managers **do not issue clearly defined instructions**, they ›just‹ set **targets**. It is left up to the employee to decide how he is going to achieve these targets.

Simplified, you could dare to say that a British boss is only as good as his staff. British **managers are heavily dependent on their staff** and not only the other way round. Both sides are in **continuous contact with one another** in order to keep each other up to date. As a result, it is more a case of **cooperation** in British companies and you very rarely find a top-down mentality. The manager gathers the staff's opinions and different points of view, gains an overall picture of the situation and possible options, weighs up the pros and cons and then makes his decision. The solutions should be pragmatic!

At the same time, the people managers support their employees but also make demands on them through empowerment. They feel they are responsible for a positive atmosphere in their department, which is the basis for good performance.

## Challenges in bi-national cooperation

In some countries expertise prevails, the manager's professional ability is all important. The employees therefore expect clear, detailed instructions from above. They assume that the superior is the expert and has more professional knowledge than they do. An employee can only operate within

clearly defined limits and if he is uncertain he asks. It is better to ask for ›permission‹ once too often than not often enough.

This of course is the **direct opposite to the empowerment style** (see respective section in this chapter.) For this reason some people may find it very **difficult to work under a British boss**: how do you cope with this new-found freedom? How do you cope with knowing that you most probably have more professional knowledge than your own boss? You have to be prepared to make your own way, without always asking the boss for approval. You can even challenge your boss, question his opinion, follow something up – and not just accept something because he is the boss. All this should not be underestimated. And on top of all this you have to deal with coded speech! (see chapter 3.)

Empowerment might sound very tempting but it is in reality foreign ground for many people and they find implementation difficult. This also applies to British bosses if they are not aware that their employees are used to a completely different distribution of roles. In order to avoid large areas of friction, you should urgently consider booking a training course on intercultural awareness as soon as possible. It is not sufficient just to mention that the style of leadership in Britain is called empowerment, or to give everyone a piece of paper with the definition of the word on it.

What **daily bi-national cooperation** really involves can only be conveyed over a period of time in an intercultural training course. This style of leadership often leads to employees **feeling lost**. They report over and over again that they do not know what is expected of them and that the **British boss is so vague and does not express himself clearly**. The British boss wonders why his staff are not producing results, the employee must therefore be wrong for the job. A disastrous conclusion ...

Seen from the other angle with a British employee working in a company where expertise prevails: the British often complain that the style of leadership is **very restrictive**, there is **less freedom to think for yourself** and the system is only acceptable if your opinion coincides with that of the manager. Otherwise things might easily become uncomfortable. Some bosses think they must always have the best answers for everything. Most British employees find that having their room for manoeuvre reduced is very **demotivating**.

## Motivating employees

If we look at the challenges described in the previous section it becomes clear that motivation of employees in Britain is different from that in some other countries. British employees have a **high degree of personal initiative**, they are **driven** naturally **from within (intrinsically)** and only need to be given the necessary **room for manoeuvre** by the boss in order to act this out.

### Heron's six styles of intervention

Most managers in Britain see it as their job to fully develop the inner drive of their staff. If we look at possible instruments of leadership we can see, using the six styles of intervention developed by Heron<sup>6</sup>, that the so-called pull-mechanisms in Britain have a far greater motivating effect than push mechanisms.

There are **three pull mechanisms**:

- **Cathartic/cleansing:** By asking many different questions the manager helps the employee to sort out his thoughts.
- **Catalytic:** The boss talks through a variety of questions and scenarios with the employee in order to catalyse/ reach a decision. The employee is encouraged to draw his own conclusions.
- **Supportive:** The manager uses praise and constructive feedback to increase the employee's self confidence. The focus is on what the employee has done or achieved.

Push mechanisms, on the other hand, are much more authoritarian and comprise informing, determining and confronting. Of course Heron says that a **healthy mixture, depending on the situation and employee**, is the best solution.

### Fair Play

A term which is always mentioned as being a strong element for motivation is fair play. It was originally used in sport and describes a conduct which goes beyond merely keeping to the rules. The **opposing party should**

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<sup>6</sup> See J. Heron (2001): Helping the Client. A Creative Practical Guide.

**be respected.** The **opponent's dignity should be preserved**, even in the fiercest fight, and the aim should not be a victory at all costs. Care is taken that **everyone has the same opportunities and conditions**, that participants are **fair to one another** and that **composure is maintained** both in triumph and in defeat.

Fair play can be transferred to all sorts of business situations, no matter whether colleagues, the boss and employees or customers and suppliers are involved. People who live by fair play **motivate others to achieve peak performance.**

## Choosing personnel

Who is the most suitable candidate for the vacant post? In more than 15 years as a trainer the answer I hear most often, – irrespective of which sector of industry or field of activity – is: he must have a **pleasant manner** when working together with others, **be flexible** in mind and deeds, have a **positive disposition** and must be **modest** and low key. He should **not boast** and show off about what he has achieved, and should be **proactiv**, assertive, **prepared to take risks** and should be a **good team player**. Unassuming individuals are well liked. Good **common sense** goes without saying. In interviews **practical examples from the candidate's field of activity are therefore requested** which give an idea of his way of working.

**Professional ability**, however, is **not** usually mentioned as being **particularly relevant**. In Britain, applicants do not have to show certificates but supply **references**. What former colleagues, superiors or customers have to say about the candidate counts far more than a piece of paper with a grade on it. If you change your job you do **not receive a certificate**, but a reference which merely confirms what position you held and how long you worked for the company.

When recruiting personell, **head hunters** are employed or a personal network or that of a reliable acquaintance is used (also see section *Good connections* in chapter 5).

### At a glance

- In a group of employees it is often difficult to determine who the boss is. There are no status symbols attached to the levels of hierarchy. Understatement prevails.
- British managers see themselves as people managers. They ensure a good working atmosphere, support their employees but also make demands on them.
- Empowerment describes the British style of leadership.
- British managers are generalists, it is the employees who have the actual expert knowledge. They determine the general direction, are guided by their common sense and bear the responsibility.
- British employees have a high degree of personal initiative, are driven from within (intrinsically) and need to be given the necessary room for manoeuvre by the boss in order to act this out.

### Caution!

- Empowerment might sound very tempting but for some, implementation needs a lot of getting used to because the clearly defined limits are missing.
- When looking for personell in Britain the required criteria are different from many other countries. Professional ability is often not so relevant. Instead, a potential employee should have a pleasant manner when working together with others, he should be flexible in mind and deeds and have a positive disposition.

# 8

## Business meals and after work

Great Britain is not renowned for its culinary perfection or prolonged meals in the same way as France for instance. Nevertheless, there too, business meals with colleagues and business partners are by no means uncommon. However, they do not serve to continue the negotiations or finish the discussions which took place earlier on in the day, or to convince your business partners of your own ideas and concepts, as some may wrongly assume. A business meal is intended to give you the opportunity of **getting to know each other better**, of creating a **pleasant working atmosphere** or of celebrating decisions that have already been made.

The British like to use the time for **socialising**. Leave it to your business partner to decide whether you want to talk about work or not, otherwise you might quickly be perceived as being a hopeless bore. By the way, the men often remove their ties and/or their jackets at the table in order to further underline the relaxed atmosphere.

**Good to know:** The word ›dinner‹ does not only mean the hot meal with accompaniments eaten at around 7 pm. A hot main meal with a dessert in the middle of the day is also called ›dinner‹. A quick meal in the middle of the day is ›lunch‹. In the lunch break, which is not as sacred in Britain as in some other countries, people are quite happy to eat a sandwich at their desk or they go to the in-house canteen. A simple meal around 5.30 or 6 pm is ›tea‹.

## Invitation to a restaurant

Business meals in Britain take place in a restaurant. When you enter the restaurant you normally **wait** in the reception area **until you are shown to a vacant table**. It is considered impolite to walk directly towards a free table.

At the table, you should wait until everyone has been served and the **host starts eating first**. ›Help yourself‹ is the polite invitation for you to start serving yourself from the food on the table. In many countries people wish each other a good appetite before they start their meal (e.g. ›*bon appetit!*‹ in France) but this does not exist in English. You often hear people say ›enjoy!‹ because they feel it is impolite not to say anything, but that too is most unusual. It really is alright not to say anything.

When you start your meal you **should not add salt and pepper without trying it first**. That is impolite because it makes it look as if you do not trust the abilities of the cook. If you want to **pass something to someone**, please do not reach across someone else. Give it **to your left-hand neighbour**.

Usually the **host at home pays for the meal**. If, however, your British business partners have not yet visited your country and you have been invited to Britain several times, by saying ›it's my treat‹, you can immediately make it clear that you would like to have the pleasure of paying for the meal this time. If no-one seems to be the host and no-one feels responsible for the bill, it is divided up (to go Dutch). That means the final sum is **divided equally among all participants**. There is no ›I had the steak for £ 13.50 and you had the fish for £19‹. That would be very insulting.

**Tips** in Great Britain are often much higher than in other countries. 15 percent of the total bill is normal. Caution: **Rounding up the bill does not exist**. You should not have your tip put on the credit card bill but give it in cash before you leave. If a card reader is brought to your table it will ask you ›gratitude yes / no‹, i.e. whether you want to give a tip and if so, how much. Then the amount will be added to the total sum. You do not need to give a tip in a bar where there is no waitress service. If it says ›service included‹ on the bill, there is no need to give an extra tip either.

## National dishes

When engaging in small talk during your meal you are bound to have the opportunity of speaking about national dishes or regional specialities – and of trying them. The national dish in **Scotland is Haggis**. The ingredients are not for the faint-hearted. It is made from the stomach of a sheep (paunch), which is filled with heart, liver, lungs, lamb suet, onions and oatmeal.

**Anglo-Indian Chicken Tikka Masala** (CTM) is celebrated as a **real British national dish**, a curry made from grilled marinated chicken pieces in a spicy tomato sauce. Incidentally, the English word ›curry‹ does not mean the ground yellow spice, it is the overall term used for Indian hot pots. Of course you must not forget **Britain's unofficial national dish: Fish and Chips**. The fish is fried in batter and eaten with thick fried potato sticks.

## Private invitations

Even in long-standing business relationships you will normally **not be invited home**. ›My home is my castle‹ holds true. If you hear ›You must come over for dinner!‹ you should not fall into the trap of thinking this is a serious invitation. It is **purely rhetorical, a polite phrase** and should only be taken seriously if a precise date is mentioned.

If your business partner really does invite you to his home, contrary to expectations, you should ring the next day to say **thank you** for a wonderful evening – or send an e-mail or even better a card.

## British pub culture

Even if you are tired in the evening, you should at least join the others for a pint at the pub (especially in London and Edinburgh), if you are asked. You do not necessarily have to stay until the end, although your colleagues will do everything they can to persuade you to do so.

**Large amounts of alcohol are** consumed in Britain in the presence of colleagues and business partners. If you ask for a non-alcoholic beer you will probably be looked at in disbelief and will be served with lemonade. However, no matter how many pints you consume, yesterday was yesterday.

**The following day** you are ›**back to normal!**‹ That also means that you should not assume that the relaxed behaviour of the evening before is still valid the following day.

Nor should you be surprised if you find yourself in a pub after work on the table with a striptease dancer, surrounded by respectably dressed men and women who want to have a good time. In view of the occasion, colleagues have probably arranged this dancer as a present. This type of entertainment is not only for men. Women, too, enjoy such events, willingly with a male dancer.

The easy atmosphere in a pub gives you a good opportunity of **getting to know** your British colleagues or business partners **better**, of breaking the ice, **building up trust** or just **doing a bit of socialising**. The topics of conversation jump cheerfully from one thing to another, are likely to concern anything except work, are politically inoffensive, amusing and entertaining. People dread debates on fundamental issues, they want to spend a pleasant time with one another and **to have fun**. ›It was fun‹ or ›We had a good laugh‹ are British expressions to describe joint activities which were enjoyable, even if they were of a business nature. In other cultures one might say: ›it was very interesting / enlightening / pleasant‹. The word fun might appear to some to be insufficiently serious, after all it is a matter of work.

It is interesting to note that much more happens in a pub than just heavy drinking and celebrating. People watch sports broadcasts or play on gaming machines, sing Karaoke, play bingo, they get to know new people and forget others. Not everyone you meet becomes a friend for life.

### Beer

As you will probably spend more time in a pub during your business trip or working stay in Great Britain than you would at home, here is a **short list of the various types of beer**:

Ale is the overall term for all top-fermented beers in Britain, except stout and porter. The following sub-varieties exist:

- Mild ale – Mild ale – a mild beer with only a slight taste of hops and low alcohol content
- Pale ale – light colour, distinct taste of hops

- India Pale Ale (IPA) – clearly perceptible hop bitterness, intense citrus aroma
- Brown ale – deep brown colour, tastable malt aroma
- Heather ale – from Scotland. Not only hops but also heather is added in the brewing process.
- Red ale – has a red shimmer and distinct hop and malt aromas
- Scotch-/Strong ale – A sub-variety with an alcohol content of up to 10 per cent. These beers usually have a smoky character.

Lager is the name used for the mostly bottom-fermented, imported beers.

The **unit of measurement for beer** is half-pint (usually ordered by women) and pint (usually ordered by men). A pint equals 0.568 litres.

### Rounds in the pub

Drinks and snacks for everyone are usually ordered and paid for at the bar. Bills are not split according to mine and yours. It is considered to be very impolite and self-centred if you nevertheless insist on separate bills.

In Britain, the host pays for the first round of drinks and then **everyone takes it in turn to order another round for everyone**. It is often difficult to finish one glass before the next one is put in front of you. If you have a low tolerance for alcohol, drink slowly but remember not to miss your turn when paying for the next round. British pubs today no longer close at 11pm, but in many places the gong still sounds, calling for last orders.

### Leisure activities

Individualism or not, the British **feel very comfortable in a team** and therefore like to surround themselves informally with people who enjoy the same things. In order to achieve this there are numerous **clubs and societies** on the most unbelievable topics. You can find anything from the Anti Caravan Club to the British Button Society or the Society for Prevention of Inadvertent Transatlanticism.

It is not really a case of doing something productive and sensible or of getting to know each other in depth but of **enjoying human warmth**,

**support, solidarity, companionship, and group identity** – only for the time of being together of course. For this reason you will also come across many different associations in larger companies in Britain.

**Charity** is a big issue in Britain. **Relatively large sums of money are given to charity.** Even at work, you can be called on to take part in all manner of activities in order to raise money for charity.

**Betting** is another popular leisure activity after work. Today's betting shops and the people who meet there are entirely presentable. **Horse racing** is especially popular. Is there anyone who has not heard of The Royal Ascot? It was founded in 1711 by Queen Anne and has been firmly anchored in British culture ever since. This five-day event takes place every year in the third week of June and is opened by a royal procession – the arrival of the Queen.

Other important **sporting activities** are cricket, golf and of course football. Sport is always a topic for conversation when engaging in small talk.

### At a glance

- Business meals offer a good opportunity of getting to know each other better and of creating a pleasant working atmosphere.
- Remember the specific requirements when visiting a restaurant in Great Britain.
- A visit to the pub after work is popular among British colleagues.
- Considerable quantities of alcohol are consumed. You order and pay at the bar. The host pays for the first round of drinks, then everyone takes it in turns to order another round.

### Caution!

- Do not bore your British business partners by only talking about work. They also fear discussions on fundamental issues. After work in Britain means having fun.
- ›You must come over for dinner‹ is usually only a polite phrase and should not be taken seriously until a precise date is mentioned.
- It is ›back to normal‹ the morning after visiting the pub. The relaxed behaviour of the evening before is no longer valid.

# Etiquette and dress code

No matter how close your business relations with British partners are, it is always worth remembering certain rules of etiquette when in Britain:

## Greeting and address

You usually only **shake hands** with your business partners when you first meet. This handshake is not as firm as in other countries. At further meetings you often do without the handshake

The British use **first names** when speaking to each other, even in a first business meeting, but do not use first names too often when talking to your British colleagues. That gives a ›slimy‹ impression.

If you meet someone with a **title**, such as ›Sir‹, ›Lord‹ or ›Lady‹, you should always use this title no matter how well you know the person.

At an event, the host should **introduce** the other **guests** to the most important guest **with an explanatory sentence**: ›This is Peter Smith, he is our IT-specialist‹ or ›Can I introduce Maggie Travers to you, she spent many years as our Head of Finance in Munich‹.

## Topics of conversation

Your small talk topics should be kept neutral unless your British counterpart deliberately chooses a more personal subject.

Get some information about British **sports**, such as horse racing, rugby, cricket, hurling, golf or football.

Never criticise the **Royal Family** unless such comments are made by the British themselves.

The British usually find it difficult to speak about **money matters** face to face. It is better to deal with this subject in writing. This topic cannot be

avoided in negotiations, but you should keep away from it entirely in private contact.

The British can be **very self-critical** in public. Listen to what they have to say, but do not confirm their remarks.

### In the office

The equal status of men and women in British working life is so natural it does not need to be mentioned. That applies to you too. The man leads the way into a restaurant, but that is the only occasion where the woman does not go first. Otherwise: **women and higher-ranked people always go first!** A short ›after you‹ is very ›gentlemanly‹.

**Birthdays** in the office are of no importance. Employees and colleagues do not collect money for a present and mostly you do not even congratulate the person.

**Gifts** are not a part of business etiquette. It is better to invite your business partners out for a meal or to the pub.

### Body language / gestures

You should avoid prolonged direct **eye contact** in Britain. It could easily be interpreted as staring. Conversely you should not think it is lack of interest or respect if your British counterpart does not look you straight in the eye. The British privacy radius is greater than in some other countries.

Always keep a certain **distance** when speaking to someone and avoid a friendly slap on the shoulder for instance. Your hands should never be in your pockets but should not be used for too much **gesticulation**.

It is better to use your **whole hand** and not just one finger to point to something.

Caution: You should never indicate the **number two** with your index and middle finger and the back of your hand facing away from you. Neither is it the sign for victory in Britain but an obscene gesture equivalent to an outstretched middle finger in other countries.

### In public

There has been a general **ban on smoking** in public places in Britain since 2006. If, however, you do happen to be somewhere where smoking is allowed, always offer your colleagues and business partners a cigarette first before you take one yourself. Ask if the others object to you smoking: ›Would you mind, if I smoke?‹

The British are well-known for their patient **queueing**. If you come across a sign which says ›Please queue here‹ you should do exactly that. It is an absolute no go to try and jump the queue. It is better to step back if you arrive at the end of a queue at the same time as someone else. This also applies even if there is no sign. It is considered to be good manners to let others go first.

That is also the case with **saying sorry**. It is entirely irrelevant whether you were the one to blame or not! If someone treads on your foot you say ›Sorry‹. The ›culprit‹ will say the same. You say ›Excuse me‹ when you want to be let through somewhere, for example, or you want to ask someone the way. (You will find further examples in chapter 2.)

### Dress code

In principle you dress **conservatively** in a British business environment: men wear a dark suit, a white or light blue shirt, a silk tie and black shoes. Trousers with a jacket in a different colour are unusual in the area of finances for example.

The **business dress code for women** is: dark trouser-suit or costume and if you like, high heels. Overpowering make-up and too much jewellery give a bad impression. In the summer the code is: never wear open shoes or sandals and always wear stockings or tights!

For **celebrations or evening functions** the required dress code will be stated on the invitation:

Dress code	Attire	
<b>Casual</b>	Jeans, T-Shirt, trainers	
<b>Smart casual</b>	Sportingly elegant leisure-wear	
<b>Come as you are</b>	Depending on the sector of industry, normal office-wear	
<b>Dark suit / lounge suit</b>	For him: dark suit, white shirt, subdued tie	For her: festive costume or trouser suit, short evening dress
<b>Black tie / dinner jacket</b>	For him: black dinner jacket, black silk-stripe trousers, white dress shirt, black bow-tie, cummerbund or black waistcoat, black patent-leather shoes	For her: cocktail or evening dress
<b>Morning dress / morning coat / cutaway</b>	For him: grey and black striped trousers, grey waistcoat, black jacket, white shirt, silver coloured tie, black leather shoes, possibly top hat	For her: festive trouser suit, dress and jacket or costume, hat
<b>White tie / full evening dress</b>	For him: black tail coat, white dress shirt, white waistcoat, white bow-tie, black patent-leather shoes	For her: long evening gown or ball dress
<b>Kilt (Scotland)</b>	For him: kilt (woven in wool, elaborately pleated at the back with wraparound skirt). It comes down to the knees and does not touch the floor when kneeling. Knee-length socks, special shoes, other accessories	For her: kilted skirt (skirt which can be longer or shorter, than a genuine kilt.)

# 9

## Things worth knowing

›The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland‹ is the full title of Europe's largest island state and is made up of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The English abbreviation ›UK‹ (›United Kingdom‹) is a widely used term. The name ›**Great Britain**‹ is used to mean **England, Scotland and Wales**. People born in Great Britain are called ›Britons‹ or the British. It is wrong to reduce the UK just to England and to call a person born in Scotland ›English‹. It is advisable only to call people ›English‹, ›Scottish‹ or ›Welsh‹ if you are certain that they really do come from the relevant countries. If you are not sure, stay neutral and call them ›British‹.

The Union Jack, the **Flag of the United Kingdom**, represents the unification of the said countries by superimposing the flags of each country: the red cross on a white background is the flag of England and Wales, the white diagonal cross on a blue background represents Scotland and the red diagonal cross on a white background is for Northern Ireland. The Union Flag in its present form was officially adopted in 1801.

## History

The United Kingdom of Great Britain came into being in 1707 by the **Unification of England (Wales already belonged to England) and Scotland**. **Ireland joined** in 1801 which created the **United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland** (until 1927). As the greatest colonial power in history,

it developed into the **British Empire which spanned the whole world**. In 1922 the population of the empire made up a quarter of the world's population at that time (458 million) who in turn inhabited a quarter of the world's land area. You can imagine that this must have had a considerable influence on the mentality of the people. Perhaps this explains the **strong British self-assurance and self-perception** and their generally positive attitude to life. Even the Union Jack is more than just a flag. At the moment you cannot imagine fashion without it and it is by no means only the British who wear these items. Flags in other countries are often handled very differently.

The fact that their **own language is also the language used throughout the world** may also contribute to the British having a strong feeling of inner security. How would it feel if your language was the number one language in the world?

## Politics

The United Kingdom is a **parliamentary monarchy**. The word ›monarchy‹ from ancient Greek actually means ›sole reign‹, however, the House of Commons (lower house) and the House of Lords (upper house) have legislative power and an elected government under a prime minister exercises executive power. The present monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, carries out mainly representative duties. For example she presents the government's legislative proposals for the forthcoming parliamentary year in the Queen's Speech. Prior to this, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (finance minister) delivers his budget speech setting out all proposed tax changes for the coming financial year (which in Britain begins on 6th April).

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland each have their own provincial government, parliament and First Minister.

The political landscape is dominated by two **Parties**, the Labour Party and the Conservative Party. In addition, there are the Liberal Democrats who regularly gain some 20 percent of the votes at a general election but due to the majority voting system have little influence. At the 2010 general election, however, both major parties failed, for the first time, to win the necessary absolute majority. Subsequently, the Conservative Party had to

form a coalition with the Liberal Democrats. Since the subject of leaving the EU has been under discussion, the right-wing United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) has gained in popularity.

In Northern Ireland, politics are characterised by parties which are either for or against union with Great Britain or for or against joining the Republic of Ireland. The Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru campaign for independence in Scotland and Wales.

The general election takes place traditionally every five years on a Thursday in May.

## Common Law

The British would like to believe that they have their destiny in their own hands – every one of them. They love the idea that if they accept something they always do it of their own free will. It is therefore not surprising that Great Britain does **not have a written constitution**. There is not one single document that defines the country's political order or restrains government bodies.

There is, instead, a **collection of precedents, common practices and conventions**; emphasis and meaning are **continually adapted to bring them in line with current circumstances**. Common Law, **rights established as a result of many precedences**, plays a fundamental role. A British lawyer will not say ›That is what the law says‹, but ›well, in 1789 a parliamentary decision said that ..., but in 1845 a court ruled ..., therefore in my view ...‹ The logical consequence of experience leads to opinions being formed and new laws being made to suit the current situation.

## Branches of British industry

The industrial revolution started in Britain. During the 19th century, the British created a foreign market for their products and controlled international trade. Subsequent industrialisation in other countries caused the slow **decline of British heavy industry** and the **service sector** replaced it. It now represents approx. three quarters of the entire British economy.

The **City of London** with its special rights is the largest finance centre in the world. Due to its offshore character it has the largest number of foreign banks in the world. The Scottish capital, Edinburgh, is still the 5th largest finance centre in Europe.

**Creative services** such as advertising, film and television productions, product design, books and music as well as art and the antiques trade are showing immense growth.

On the other hand, the once gleaming **automobile industry** is now a thing of the past. Jaguar, Rolls Royce, Aston Martin and Bentley were once the epitome of Britishness but in the 1980s especially, manufacturers could not hold up against international competition because of lack of investment and poor development. Long-standing British brands are now all owned by foreign companies. In 1998 BMW bought Rolls Royce and VW took over Bentley

The **aircraft and arms industry** is dominated by BAE Systems, Rolls Royce also has a substantial share in the world-wide aerospace industry. A further mainstay is the **chemical and pharmaceutical industry**. The second and third largest pharmaceutical companies in the world – GlaxoSmith-Kline and AstraZeneca – have their headquarters in Britain.

Britain's large reserves of coal, natural gas and crude oil should also be mentioned. The centre of oil production from the North Sea is in Aberdeen (Scotland). In the 1970s the fish industry here was replaced by oil production.

**Other branches of industry** are food processing, beverages, tobacco, paper, printing and textiles. **Well-known companies** include Scottish & Newcastle, Unilever, Cadbury Schweppes, British American Tobacco and Burberry.

## Celebrations

Have you ever noticed the incredible selection of **greeting cards** in British shops? You can send a card for any occasion, whether it is to say thank-you, when someone has moved, if someone has been promoted or taken a step up the career ladder, if someone is taking a career break or has passed an

exam, and of course for Christmas, Easter, a birth, engagement, wedding or for Valentine's day, which, incidentally, is not just for those in love.

Do not expect the sender of such cards to write a personal note. You will often only find a **printed sentence**, maybe with the addition of something like ›Lots of love‹ in private correspondance or ›Kind regards‹ in a business context, and then the signature. It is therefore not the written content of the card which is important but the **gesture of sending** it and thinking of the recipient in so doing. As a business partner you should certainly remember to **send Christmas cards to Britain in good time** because these are displayed in houses and offices in the run-up to Christmas.

A special celebration in Britain is **Bonfire Night** every year on 5th November. In 1605 Guy Fawkes tried to assassinate King James I in London by placing 36 barrels of gun powder in the cellar next to the Houses of Parliament. It is joked that he is the only person who ever went to the Houses of Parliament with honest intentions. The attempt on the King's life failed. The safety of the King is still celebrated today with bonfires in gardens, torchlight processions in the streets and plenty of bangers and fire crackers. Even the **annual opening of parliament** begins with the inspection of the vaults beneath the House of Lords by the Yeomen of the Guard (the British monarch's household guard). Even though Guy Fawkes' undertaking failed, he is still on the list of the 100 most important Britons and has not been forgotten.

There are also celebrations on 11th November, **Remembrance Day**, when the end of the First World War at the 11th hour of the 11th day 1918 is commemorated. Red paper poppies which people attach to their lapels are sold all over the country remembering the blood shed in the various wars. It is interesting to note that in some countries the carnival season starts at almost the same time.

The **Edinburgh Military Tattoo**, which dates back to 1950, takes place every year in August in front of Edinburgh castle. It is Scotland's largest music festival and causes exceptional circumstances in the city. Originally the focus was on military music, but today there is a varied programme of music and dance performances. ›Tattoo‹ means last orders or curfew.

On 1st March, the patron saint of Wales, **St. David**, invites you to the Welsh national day. On 17th March the patron saint of Ireland, **St. Patrick**, calls on everyone in the UK and beyond to celebrate. People in bright

processions in Ireland's main colours green and orange, move through the streets dancing, singing and laughing.

## Bank holidays

The following are ›**bank holidays**‹ or ›**public holidays**‹ in **Britain**:

- **New Year** – 1st January
- **Easter** – first Sunday after the spring full moon. Good Friday, Easter Sunday and Easter Monday are bank holidays.
- **Early May bank holiday** – first Monday in May
- **Spring bank holiday** – last Monday in May
- **Summer bank holiday** – last Monday in August (England and Wales); first Monday in May (Scotland)
- **St. Andrew's Day** – 30th November. National day in Scotland
- **Christmas** – 25th and 26th December. Presents are unwrapped on the morning of 25th

Shops are closed only on 25th December and on Easter Sunday otherwise **Sunday opening hours** apply. You can go shopping at anytime, even on Sundays and bank holidays! Some finance offices are open on bank holidays and the staff can choose whether they want to work or stay at home. Many companies only close on 25th December and 1st January.

## Useful phrases in business English

As described in detail in chapter 3, *Communication and impact*, the British like to use an **indirect, cushioned way of expressing themselves** and therefore **start their sentences with pleasant-sounding phrases**. Here are a few suggestions:

- ›As far as I'm concerned, I think that ...‹
- ›Basically, what you are saying is ...‹
- ›Do you think it might be a good idea to ...?‹
- ›Excuse me, before we go any further, could I point out that ...?‹
- ›Excuse me, but may I just draw your attention to the fact that ...?‹

- ›Furthermore, it's important to take into account that ...<
- ›Going back to what I was saying ...<
- ›I agree up to a point, but ...<
- ›I firmly believe that ...<
- ›I'd like to add something here, if I may?<
- ›I'm afraid, there seems to have been a slight misunderstanding.<
- ›I'm afraid, I can't share your view.<
- ›I'm sorry, I can't go along with you.<
- ›If I could just continue. I'll answer your questions in a minute.<
- ›If I may interrupt you for a moment ...<
- ›If I might just add something here ...<
- ›If I've understood you correctly, you're saying that ...?<
- ›In other words, ...<
- ›It depends what you mean by that.<
- ›Let me conclude by emphasising one thing ...<
- ›Let me now turn briefly to the question / problem of ...<
- ›Let me put it this way, ...<
- ›Might it be an idea ...?<
- ›Perhaps I should be more specific.<
- ›Perhaps we could return to your question later on.<
- ›There are two points I'd like to make, before I answer your questions.<
- ›There are two points to bear in mind here.<
- ›To be more specific, ...<
- ›We seem to be talking at cross purposes.<
- ›What about / how about doing ...?<
- ›With all due respect, what you are saying is impossible to implement.<
- ›With respect, I see it a little differently.<
- ›With respect, this is not what I said.<
- ›Without going into too much detail, allow me to mention ...<
- ›Wouldn't it be wiser to wait?<

## Figures of speech

The British sometimes use very **vivid** expressions and there are many figures of speech in the English language which are not always easy to understand

even though you understand each word on its own. You could learn all the idioms but if your counterpart uses expressions that are unfamiliar, it is probably easier to make him aware of the difficulty by asking: ›Is that an idiom?‹

Here are a few examples:

- ›That's none of his business.‹ – ›It's got nothing to do with him.‹
- ›He should better mind his own business.‹ – ›He should see to his own affairs.‹
- ›That's a piece of cake.‹ – ›That's not worth mentioning.‹/›That's easy.‹
- ›Chin up!‹ – ›Don't give up‹/›Don't let it get you down.‹
- ›And soon he was all at sea.‹ – ›Soon he was rather confused.‹
- ›He had himself out on a limb.‹ – ›He had manoeuvred himself into a very difficult situation.‹
- ›I had to meet him of all people.‹ – ›He was the last person I wanted to meet.‹
- ›He had no idea what he was in for.‹ – ›He didn't realise what he was going to have to cope with.‹
- ›No pain, no gain.‹ – ›If you don't work for something you will have no success.‹
- ›He is a pain in the neck.‹ – ›He is annoying.‹
- ›Are you pulling my leg?‹ – ›Are you joking?‹
- ›We need to start from scratch.‹ – ›We've got to start all over again.‹
- ›I put my best foot forward.‹ – ›I did my best.‹

# 10

## Sources of information

### Internet addresses

If you are looking for business partners in Britain or wish to set up a business idea there, the following link tips can give you some useful information.

**[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)** – British governments's internet portal regarding living and working in Great Britain with a list of all government-run contact points

**[www.scotland.gov.uk](http://www.scotland.gov.uk)** – Scottish provincial government's internet portal

**[www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)** – Welsh provincial government's internet portal

**[www.smallbusiness.co.uk](http://www.smallbusiness.co.uk)** – Internet portal with information on setting up a business in Great Britain

**<http://www.justlanded.de/english/United-Kingdom>** – Internet portal for Expats world wide e.g. on the subject of living and working in Great Britain and information on setting up a business there

**[www.debrige.de](http://www.debrige.de)** – Internet portal of the German-British society (Deutsch-Britische Gesellschaft) which promotes dialogue on cultural, political, social and economic topics

## Applications in English

<http://targetjobs.co.uk> – Detailed information on applying for a job (with job vacancies)

[www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk](http://www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk) – British employment agency's website with many good hints and advice on applying for a job

[www.thefullercv.co.uk](http://www.thefullercv.co.uk) – Website with hints and help on writing a curriculum vitae (CV) (there is a fee for some services)

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