

# EU-Japan Centre

for Industrial Cooperation

## Introduction to Japanese business culture and networking



# Outline

- 1) **Do's and Don'ts in the Japanese Business Environment**
- 2) **Japanese business etiquette**
  - 1) Corporate gifting etiquette
  - 2) Exchanging business cards
- 3) **Communication with Japanese partners**
  - 1) Communication style
  - 2) Non-verbal communication
  - 3) Communication in business negotiations
- 4) **Effective Communication**
- 5) **Conclusion**



# General Do's and Don'ts in the Japanese Business Environment

## Do

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- ✓ Emphasise personal relationships
- ✓ Pay attention to hierarchy
- ✓ Treat business cards with extra care
- ✓ Decline proposals the right way
- ✓ Pay attention to gifts
- ✓ Be open to group activities
- ✓ Learn a few words in Japanese
- ✓ Aim to be punctual!
- ✓ Clear communication, keep your promise
- ✓ Have a certain budget

## Don't

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- ✗ Call people by their first name
- ✗ Challenge someone in front of others or openly disagree
- ✗ Decline an invitation to socialise
- ✗ Boast and self-aggrandise
- ✗ Use irony or humour
- ✗ Talk too much without getting an answer
- ✗ Sustain eye contact or shake hands

# Japanese Business Etiquette

## Corporate Gifting Etiquette

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- Gifts are considered thoughtful
- Hand it at the beginning of the meeting to the most senior person
- Gifts should be presented and received with both hands
- Don't give gifts in a set of four



# Japanese Business Etiquette

## Proper way to exchange business cards

- Let the highest-level person exchange cards first
- Hold your card with two hands, with the print facing the receiver
- Use both hands to receive the card
- Give a slight bow when receiving or looking at the card
- Place all cards received on the table until the end of the meeting
- Never put cards in your pocket



# Communicating with Japanese partners

*European businesspeople and their Japanese counterparts have strikingly divergent assumptions about the nature of 'good communication.'*



Meetings are to discuss and make decisions. New information is immediately considered. Low context communication.



Decision-making primarily takes place in between meetings. New information needs to be discussed with others. High context communication.



# Communicating with Japanese partners

## Communication Styles: European vs Japanese

For Europeans, things have to be explicitly stated and meanings are taken at face-value.

Japanese don't need many words to create understanding and meanings are implied.



**“Yes”:**

- a. “I am simply listening”
- b. “I understand”
- c. “I agree”

**“We will consider it”:**

- Just a nice way to close a meeting or discussion
- a. “No thank you, not interested at all” or
  - c. “We will actually consider your proposal”



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# Communication Style

## European vs Japanese

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# Communication Style

## European vs Japanese

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# Communication Style

## European vs Japanese

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# Non-verbal communication

## Silence and body language

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### At the booth:

Many visitors stand quietly - not a negative sign

Often not confident in English

→ Smile, small bow or hello, and offer your card

Europe: after a short talk; Japan: at the start

⚠ If they seem hesitant, don't push

→ Easy way to start a conversation

# Business negotiations

## Relationship building

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### Tatemae and Honne

- **Tatemae:** the official line (formal)
- **Honne:** personal opinion / inner feeling (informal)

### Build trust to achieve a relationship based on hone

- accept invitations and formal/informal events



# Recommendations – Trade fairs

## Promotional materials – Pamphlets!

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**Key hurdle:** ineffective promotional materials

- Physical promotional material still prominent
- First impression and pitch
- Shows understanding of the Japanese market
- Builds trust and engagement

# Making Japanese business contacts

## Summary

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- **Do not expect everything from the first meeting**
  - ▷ build long lasting personal relationships
- **Learn to “read the air”**
  - ▷ body language and facial expression
- **Follow the Japanese business etiquette**
  - ▷ gift-giving, exchanging cards, and bowing
- **Always be punctual, humble and polite**



**Effort is more important than perfection**

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**Thank you. Arigato gozaimashita!**  
(ありがとうございました)