

Intercultural communication



France

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Introduction

France is an old country with a lot of history. It takes his roots in the antiquity and there is still today a major Latin influence in the French culture.

French used to be with England the most powerful countries in the world until the First World War, since they decline but they are still major countries with big influences in the world.

This history have made what France is now, it is really important to understand and to now the French history to understand why France works like it works today. The weight of the past is really important. Unfortunately we can't go too far in the detail so we won't speak a lot about history, only the major fact.

In this presentation we will talk a bit about France in general with the main points of the French society, and then about the relationship in France and at the end we will present the French business context and how to make business in France.

French Society

Today's French society is a unique and complex mixture, built by a rich history and various experiences.

French culture is also very different to others; built around several fundamental elements we are going to develop further; among them, Family, Home, Education, Religion and Politics are all highly relevant when speaking of French identity.

Historic Background

French Society is closely linked to French Historic background and was strongly influenced by past events.

From the beginning of the Gaul (the commonly admitted starting point of what became France) to more recent developments (World Wars, 21st century), it is possible to give to all major past events a particular significance in relation to the development of French society.

This part will not exhaustively list all French historic facts, but will select some relevant facts "punctuating" French history.

That's why, we've chosen, in spite of making this part more pleasant, to describe French history around its major actors that are all, in their fashion, beyond their symbolic value, largely representative of a period and of a way of thinking among French.

Vercingetorix

Vercingetorix, Gaul chief defeated by Rome legions in Alesia in 52 B.C. is an early representation of French national bravery, considered as a "uniting" figure that federated tribes under a same cause.

His leadership and his victory over Romans in Gergovia are more important than his fall; he is the proof that French are better when they work together, in unity.

Jeanne d'Arc

Jeanne d'Arc (or Joan of Arc) was a French peasant that led victories over English during 100 years war, following God's voice. She is a strong religious symbol (martyr) in one hand, as well as an important figure in French history as she incarnates Bravery and the power of Liberty will.

Louis XIV

Louis XIV, nicknamed the "Sun King" is the best example of French "grandeur"; under his reign was built the Versailles palace (still one of the most famous French symbols) but he also had a significant role in building parts of French culture that still survives nowadays (arts, music, etc.) and in state centralization.

Napoleon Ier

Napoleon is the French symbol of ambition; under his campaigns and emperor's reign, the French Empire covered the major part of occidental Europe.

More generally, he was also the "father" of the French civil code (code Napoleon) that had a strong influence in today's French civil law and over Europe at this time.

Charles de Gaulle

Charles de Gaulle is considered as the last great French figure of the 20th century; leader of French resistance to Germany during WWII and president of France from 1959 to 1968, he was, over his life, the best ambassador of French independence and sovereignty (his refusal to join NATO).

Family and Home

The family sphere and home is one of the major components of French society, as the major parts of social interactions are made in this environment.

There is in France a traditional high importance of elders within the family itself, but also in the House; it wasn't rare, until last decades, to see in several regions the cohabitation of different generations under a same roof.

The emphasis is often put in France around the notion of "intergenerational link"; and French politics has always tried to act to preserve this notion, to foster cohabitation and relations between generational "layers"; to guarantee a stable familial environment. (Highest level of expenses for family policies among OECD countries).

Nevertheless, if French families and homes are built around the notion of coexistence; the sense of privacy is also highly developed; all members having their private personal spaces. This notion of privacy is to oppose to the American concept of home described in our sources as the tolerance of others way of lives within cohabitation.

Education

Education, as for Religion and Family, will be considered as one of the pillars of French society. In fact, in almost every times of French history, French leaders and citizens expressed a strong concern towards education, and examples are many. However, two examples are noteworthy in French history;

- First, the measures taken by Charlemagne (Charles the Great, Emperor from 742 to 814) to build schools in the empire are considered as the starting point of the French modern notion of education. If Charlemagne was indeed not the creator of school in France, his attention to create and develop a decent education system makes him a kind of father of education, and his influence is still recognized today.

- Jules Ferry's (Education minister from 1881) still functioning school system "revolved" around three simple ideas; the education has to be free, compulsory and secular for every French children; this was applied at the end of 19th century.

More generally; beyond this concept of compulsory, free and secular school, which is still predominant in France nowadays, education also inherited of the rigor and competitiveness this model fostered in the past; in particular with the very French system of "Grandes Ecoles".

Before talking specifically about "Grandes Ecoles", it is important to notice that there is in France a strong value given to diploma (rather than capabilities) that is considered as the guarantee of person's value and skills and greater value is given to high-level diplomas (and the higher the value of is, more selective it is). This is where the "Grandes Ecoles" notion is important; they are state recognized schools that are also highly recognized by companies (due to the network of former students they often generated in the past, but also by the quality of education they provide), and covers a large field of specializations from business to engineer path. The other important detail is their often strong selectiveness; these schools are traditionally accessed after two years of intensive theoretical studies (classes préparatoires) starting after the Baccalauréat. These "classes préparatoires" are the standard way to succeed entry exams to these "Grandes Ecoles", but the spaces are limited and access extremely difficult for the best of them. This more and more highly criticized system (but also increasingly used) is a good example of "French paradox"; in one hand, "Grandes Ecoles" were created to enable equality of chances among candidates; but the "classes préparatoires" makes it incredibly selective (the best of them are accessible after exams). Nevertheless, it is important to note that "classes préparatoires" tend to become a shared (and even marginal in some cases) way to enter these "Grandes Ecoles", most of them enabling parallel accession from university students.

If we talked a lot about education from the institutional point of view, it is important also to highlight that French not only rely on it for the education of their children and like to have an important role on it as well; in this regard, it happens that parents handle the full education role, taking their children out of school (but it is still marginal). More generally, this educating role is provided by teaching life in community basis, "bonnes manières" and it is not rare to see French parents "scolded" by their parents, even in public; it is a way of pride for a lot of French to claim that they have a word to say on the education of their kids and showing it off.

Politics and Religion

As we saw with education, the notion of secularity is very defining of French identity; the separation between state and church was adopted in 1905 and France is until then a secular country with no official and state religion; citizen having the full liberty of cult.

Politics system in France is quite particular, as it is a direct democracy (citizen directly voting for their representants in local and national election)

Politic sphere is mainly composed of an opposition between two dominant political parties; the Socialist Party (left side, currently in the head of French state) and UMP (right side, often governing).

These two parties are important enough to make coalitions minor (both parties having traditionally enough electors to win straight the elections with allying with other parties).

Politic in France is also highly centralized (all institutions are located in Paris), but also highly elitist (political figures wealth, high salaries, etc.)

Relationships

When we study differences between cultures, the relationships are always very important. The way the people are interacting with the others can really change according to the culture they belong.

Here we try to show the main characteristics of French relationships, with the family, friends, affective and also how they deal with the self.

With the self

French individualism is different from the US individualism in that French people don't need the others to move forward and progress in their life. What people think is not really important and in general, "the others" is quite a pejorative term.

French people may seem rude sometimes. According to the book, they tend to ignore strangers and they don't care about what people they don't know think or want. One example given by the book is that some people smoke in non-smoking areas. Nowadays, it can't be possible anymore because it is punished by law but it was happening really often before that. These people are sending a message, "I don't care about you, and I just care about myself and my needs".

It can be explained by something that French people often say, "I don't care about what people are thinking about me". In fact we don't evaluate ourselves according to what strangers think about us. But we attach great importance to what close people think about us, and we'll take care about our family, friends and all the people whose opinion on us is important.

This is true and not true, a famous proverb illustrates it "one man's liberty ends where another man's liberty begins". It means that you are free to do whatever you want as long as you respect the liberty of the others. People who don't respect that aren't well considered.

In fact, it is true in a way because you can't always do what people expect you to do and also because of cultural differences, a behavior that may seem really normal for a French will shock someone from another country, for example if you make a big kiss to your girlfriend in front of people from Arabic countries, they can be shocked but it sounds absolutely normal for French people.

And it is also false because even if we claim our singularity and the right to be different, the "French exception", actually, and especially among young people, it's mandatory not to be too much different from the others if you don't want to be rejected. And discretion is something really required, for example you can't speak too loud, when you talk, you have to talk for people who are with you and not for all the people around. Speaking too loud is really rude for French people and it is taught since childhood for all kids. This point is a great difference between French and Italian people, most of French people have a problem with the Italian because of that.

Beside this lack of concern about the others, France is a country where solidarity matters. We all pay taxes for social help for unemployed people and the poorest citizens.

So it is very interesting to notice that there is a strong common sense in France and that French people will fight for the greater good. That's why you can often see big strikes in France and most of them are really well received. We can interpret that as a relic of the French revolution, which influences French politicians. On the contrary, in countries like the USA, people are "afraid" of the government. And many times government had to backtrack for some law because of the "street" pressure.

It may seem strange for foreign people to see that, "I don't care about the stranger sit just beside me but I will fight for the good of all the people of my nation. And it's well illustrated by the French

“heroes”, like Charles Martell or Jeanne d’Arc who stopped foreign invasions or Charles de Gaulle or Napoléon who provided pride and glory to the country.. Also the Abbé Pierre and Coluche more recently who came to help homeless and poor people and Platini and Zidane in football who made the pride of the nation by winning top football competition.

French are also very concerned by the protection of their private life, you’ll often see the shutter or curtains closed or hedge all around the garden to avoid direct see on their private area. “Let everyone sweep in front of his own door, and the whole world will be clean” or “each to his job and the cow will be watched well” are two typical French proverbs to illustrate this. The French vision is that if each person takes care only of its own business, everything will be just fine.

In the same way, some parts of the house, like bedrooms, are the “sanctuaries” where no one has the right to enter without invitation. Bedrooms are the most private places; sometimes even children are not allowed to enter in parents’ bedroom.

With the family

French attach a lot of importance to the family like most of Latin countries. It is a very important factor of socialization and it includes not only the close family but also the extended family, often three or four generations.

We can consider 3 levels in the family (in the parents’ point of view): the close family, with parents and children; then you can add couples’ parents, brothers and sisters and their children. This is the most common family circle that you’ll encounter most frequently. And after, the extended family with aunts, uncles and cousins. You don’t see them a lot, most of the time it is for special celebrations like weddings or some big family meetings.

Most of French people want to stay in the same area as their family or, in case they have to leave, they will try to come back later. Also when they get married they try to be close to both families as far as possible.

An explanation of this importance of the family can be found in the way of raising child. In France, the family will always be with you to give you some advice or help if you need it. Teenagers aren’t especially pushed to be totally independent. For example for your studies, if the best university you can go is in your hometown, you will go there and stay in your parents’ home meanwhile. It can happen that student just want to have their independence, but the quality of the university is more important than that. Another brake to that is also the difficult economic situation which means that a lot a family can’t afford excessive expenses. For those who leave parents’ home, they usually don’t go too far and come back home most of the weekends.

Having a family is more valuable than having a job, it comes from the “work to live” instead of the “live to work”.

The time spent with family is very important, more important than the work. In France you work to live in contradiction to Anglo-Saxon countries where you live to work. It means that you work to earn money and afterward enjoy the life with the money earned. The change for the 35 hours of labor per week was in order to fight against unemployment but also to give more free time to employees.

Closeness to family leads to an important involvement of the whole family in your life and the extended family can also be an important support network; through them you can have a lot of help, to find a job for example. When you are looking for an internship or a job, the first thing you’ll do is ask if someone in the family knows someone in your sector of interest and if you can have help for it. And if they can help you, they’ll do it, without waiting anything in return, because helping the family and using your family network is normal. And even more, if someone in the family can help you and if you don’t ask for its help, this person can blame you, “why didn’t you ask me for help?”

The country home is a place where the whole family can go on holiday together, spend good time together far away from current life troubles.

The family meal is a very important part of the day, most of the time it is during the evening meal that the family can talk about their day or whatever they want, it has an important role, so the family can be aware of your activities during the day and things that happened. It is a moment where all the family is here and can talk together instead of only passing each other. It is absolutely not a big deal if you miss it sometimes but it is quite required being there as often as possible. Even just to be informed of what is happening in the life of your family.

There are also lots of reasons to get a meal with the extended family; every special event of the life is a reason to spend some time together. Each achievement is celebrated with the family. Depending on the importance of these achievements or special events, more or less family members are invited. Such celebration always includes a big meal which can last hours. It is not unusual to see a meal beginning at 1 pm and finishing at 6 pm. This may seem unbelievable for a lot of people but in France, meal is a really important time for socialization. And because of the great importance of the family, the time spent with them eating is also important. There aren't really social rules during these family meals, just maybe the separation between kids and adults if there are too many people to have a single table, but apart from that, everybody is equal and can speak freely.

And this is an important difference with friends.

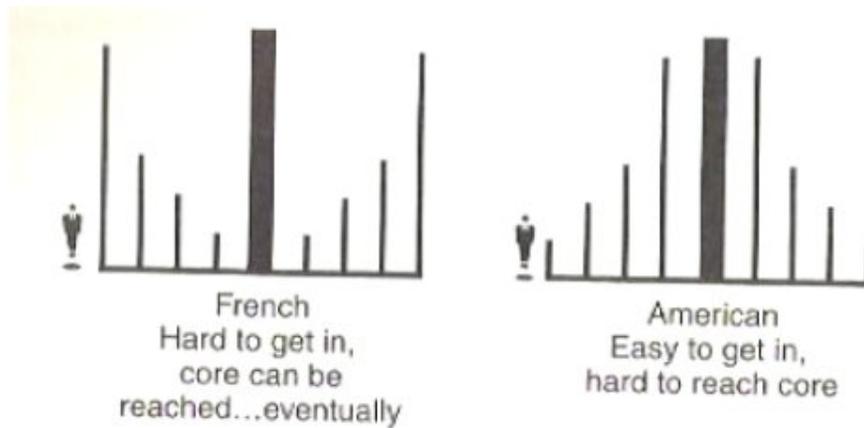
With the friends

Even with close friends, you can't really find the relation that you have with the family, there will be rules not to break a friendship. A friendship includes rights and duties, and if you fail, the friendship can be broken or seriously damaged. When the bond of trust is broken, it's quite hard to build another one.

French people have a lot of different words to distinguish people they mix with, and most of these terms don't have a translation in English. It goes from the simple acquaintance to the best friend. French people don't have a lot of "real" friends. Most of the time, it's a small group of people very close to each other. They'll do a lot of things together and have a strong link. Each person that a French person knows is "classified" between acquaintance and best friend, and according to this "classification", your expectations and the things you can do with differs.

Real friends are often old friends, most of friendships are made early in life, in the university for example. Colleagues are not supposed to become friends, it can happen, but it's not mandatory to develop a friendship with your coworkers.

A real friendship includes an important emotional investment, it is hard to become close friend. French don't give their trust easily, you'll have to spend a lot of time with them while giving evidences that you can be trusted to become close friend. But if it is hard to get in, the "core" can be reached more easily. The first "barrier" is hard to cross but after that, it becomes easier and easier to cross while the trust and friendship is growing.



A crucial point is that what is important in a friendship is not what you do together but the time you spend together. You don't need to make a special activity to feel good with your friend, talking together is enough. These moments are made to develop bonds between friends. You can discuss the all night about what you want to do during this night and then just do nothing, but it's not a waste of time, it is time spent together to listen to your friends' thoughts, some exchanges between each others.

From your friends, you are waiting for help without having to ask for it, and you will do the same in return. If your friend have some trouble, your will propose your help because that's why friends do in the French spirit, having good time together and having a ear paying close attention to your friends' troubles. You don't always want to ask for help but if it's proposed to you, you can accept.

An important characteristic of friendship is also that you can share secrets you can't say to your family. Indeed, even if family is very important, you can't tell them everything.

An important point is also that the older you become, the more important your family become. When you are young, friends are often more important than family according to the time you spend with them, but after when you have children, family becomes the most important.

With the affective

The couple is a social category, more important than the social class; it is a part of the identity.

Saying "Je t'aime", ("I love you") has a really strong meaning. There isn't much word to say when we like or love someone, only "aimer". So to say that you like and not love someone, you will add an adjective to this "je t'aime" like "beaucoup" ("very much"). Even if this adjective normally tends to reinforce what you are saying, in this case it minimizes it. Here a "je t'aime beaucoup" will not be translated by "I love you very much" but more by "I like you very much". The strongest word to show your love is the simplest one.

It's not rare to see couple arguing in France and it can be violent but it doesn't mean at all that the couple is in a bad situation. Harmony can tends to boredom, while passion makes the life more interesting even if it can leads to fights in the couple. If you look at the subject of the arguments, 90% will be really futile things and when you think about it after the argument you can't really understand how things went wrong just because of these tiny little things, and the couple remains as strong as ever.

Unlike some other Latin countries like Italy, you will never see a couple living in the house with the parents (except for the end of life of one of them, and even that is quite rare, elderly mostly go in retirement homes). When the couple decides to live together it's mandatory to have your own home. In most cases, you don't move to the man or the women' place but you take a new flat. The

former apartment is the apartment of each one past life, their life before being a couple. For the beginning of this new "situation", you need a fresh start based on an equal footing

The beginning of a relation is really different from the system of American dates. When a man and a woman go out for the first time just together, it is already clear that there is an attraction between them and going out together is the way to see if both are compatible. If they both spend a pleasant evening, it confirms the attraction. It's common to spend the night together after the first "date" if all went well. After the formation of the couple, they have to legitimate it and present the new partner to friends. The family, because of its importance, is often the last to meet the new partner. You first need to know if your couple is solid and will last. You want to present only serious relations to the family.

A new couple is always "challenged" by the different group of friends before accepting the partner in the group. The new partner has to prove that he deserves to be in couple with that person in front of the group of friends. Most of the time, friends' opinion about the new partner is very important for French people. When a couple is with some friends, they have to consider them and don't show too much affection between them, otherwise friends can feel rejected. For example, I have often experienced situations with friends saying to me and my girlfriend "go find a bed" just because we were kissing and they felt rejected, that the circle or the moment of friendship was broken by the intrusion of the couple during a friend time. But in another way, when there are only strangers around, there is no problem to have couple behavior like long kissing.

The French Business context

« Capitalisme à la Française »... Specificities of the French Economy

The French Economy is particular among the Western economical powers, in the extent that the government is seen as a pilot of the economy and French benefit from a strong Welfare system...

- Planning after the WW 2

The Planning of the Economy, which began just after World War II, is the symbol of the importance of bureaucracy in France and the need of French people for a strong structural Framework. France was indeed the only Western country to settle a Planning in the Economy during the Cold War.

- Economic Structure and values...

The French Economical Structure was also mainly drawn during the Planning Era and the “30 Glorieuses”. A few strong “champions nationaux” (multinational companies) are the figureheads and the image of the French Economy abroad (for instance: L’Oreal, Total, Vivendi, Dassault Systèmes, Carrefour, Sanofi...) whereas the SMEs make up the strong and diversified basis of the Economy. We can compare this to the French Geographical organization: Paris is the strong Economic center and concentrate almost all big companies’ headquarters. The other regions and French big cities are specialized in certain fields of activity and are made up mainly with SMEs, alongside, shops and crafts.

On that point, craft and agriculture are not any more as important as they used to be the French Economy (France is yet the 2nd exporter of farming products) but they still have a strong voice within the public opinion and influence politics on their programs.

A few small political parties are entirely based on these traditional values (for Instance a party called “fishing, nature and Traditions”), whereas the big parties take these traditional values into account in their programs... A good example is the Royer Law (effective in 1973), passed under the RPR’s government (former biggest right-wing party in France). This law aimed at protecting small shops against the rise in power of supermarkets. It decreased competition in the large retail sector in France, while enabling the RPR to satisfy a wide part of voters¹.

There are somehow hurdles to entrepreneurship and wealth creation in France. There is indeed a negative perception of wealth and success in the public opinion.

That rich people and entrepreneurs are frowned upon is to be correlated with the fact that poverty and inequalities are considered as intolerable within French public opinion... As can be seen from a survey lead 2 years ago in France², one French out of three thinks that Capitalism is not a good system and it could be good to abandon it. In France, employment and wealth are perceived somehow like pies, of which each citizen is entitled to get a share. This conception can be opposed to the Anglo-Saxon countries’ state of mind, where growth is seen as a virtuous circle that generates wealth and employment. Our French conception, that favors solidarity above all else, results in a high tax rate and a low working time.

¹ P. Askenazy, D. Cohen (2008), 27 questions d’économie contemporaine, Albin Michel

² La Tribune, [Les Français champions du monde de l’anti-capitalisme](#), Accessed in July 2013.

An explanation of the animosity toward wealth and success in France can be the Catholicism influence... Catholicism indeed promotes almsgiving and favors destitution, which is supposed to favor spirituality unlike material ownerships... charity and spirituality are assumed to enable to get closer to God.

Understanding the behavior of the French toward work

French consider Work as very important but most of them are not willing to give up their dear quality of life for work. Promotions at work are not hunted in France like in Anglo-Saxon countries because they mean more responsibilities and more work. "Workaholics" naturally exist in French companies, but they are more likely to be considered as odd people, whereas they are seen as especially careerist in Anglo-Saxon countries³. In France, people have 5 Weeks of holidays a year and take all of them, whereas the American have two weeks per year and often do not take them entirely. Actually, vacation period is seen in France as an opportunity to carry out a temporary shift in the Economy: Business Districts in French cities are deserted in August, whereas seaside resorts and their related activities are flourishing.

Other important point at know about French at work are:

- That they establish a clear separation between their private life and their professional life... They avoid talking about their personal life at work and they rarely get close to their colleagues, whereas Anglo-Saxon people often decorate their offices with family photos, children's achievement or Artworks, and like to go out with their colleagues after work.
- Style and aesthetic sense really matter when performing something at work in France: The importance is not only on the objectives but also in the WAY things are done.... The resources used, the style employed and also ethics considerations.

Alongside, the importance of solidarity in France also extends to the work field ... There is often a high support for striking Workers. Opinions surveys show that the French often support striking and demonstrating workers, even when they are bothered (by traffic jams for instance).

French may also participate in Demonstration, for causes which don't concern them directly. We can compare that for instance to Fundraising in the US, but with the French tradition of protest instead.

Insight in a French Company

A high hierarchy is a pillar of most French companies' structure. Bosses and Managers are like on a pedestal, they rarely mix-up with others and have a private office, whereas the other employees work in open-spaces. Top Managers have a strong decisional power and often delegate what they feel not like a priority. Yet they can involve other managers for brainstorming sessions or call upon their opinion for crucial decisions.

Time schedule is also really different between France and the Anglo-Saxon countries. If we take a typical French company, the working day start at 9am and ends at 6 pm, with a one hour long lunch break... Time schedule are not organized in order to release employees rather soon in the working days, like in the US for instance, but so as to let employees have numerous days off.

French workers have officially to work 35 hours per week on a full Time basis since 1997⁴.

³ Au contraire: Figuring out the French , P105

⁴ LegiFrance, [Loi n° 2000-37 du 19 janvier 2000 relative à la réduction négociée du temps de travail](#) , Accessed in July 2013

Yet, most firms ask their managers to work at least 40 hour per week; only “pen-pushers” work 35 hours/week and might be required to clock-in. Top executives organize their schedule exactly as they want... They are just required to produce a quality work on Time. This reflects the will of independency of French workers.

Alongside, it is rare in France to eat while working during lunch time: lunch time and café break are seen as real breaks to clear one’s mind and to get to know better other colleagues.

One other main point to know about French company is the importance of formality:

- Checking hands to ALL your colleagues when coming up at the office in the morning
- Being gallant with women in a company, like anywhere else in the French society
- Applying a distinction between “vous” and “tu” (both translated by “you” in English). You should use “Tu” for close working colleagues or other employees you often see. You should use “Vous” for your superiors, clients and contractors, and employees you don’t or hardly know.
- There is a different meaning for a closed door at the office... In France, “a closed door may signify nothing more than a need for privacy and Tranquility. Interruptions are almost always welcome”⁵.
- Be likable! It is naturally important to be likeable worldwide in a business context... but it is crucial in France. A French person will avoid at all costs dealing with you if he/she doesn’t like you or doesn’t trust you.

Concerning the distance communication, French people often favor Face-to-Face communication, it could be related to the very last point evoked: face-to-face communication is likely to increase trust between the two business partners. When a long distance communication is compulsory (phone call or Skype), it is always well considered to write and share a memo so as to sum up key points.

NB: These are general rules indicating how French companies GENERALLY work. You should naturally also take into account the size of the company, its personal history and corporate culture.

Doing Business in France

Applying for a job in France

The French CV

Resumes in France should ALWAYS be written in French, even when you apply to work in the French subsidiary of a multinational. This reflects the attachment of French people to their language. Most French people are proud of their language and consider it as the most beautiful in the world... Even if many can’t speak any other language properly.

⁵ Au contraire: Figuring out the French , p189

Don't get too personal in your resume; remember that French people establish a clear distinction between private and professional lives. None will care about your marital status, your age, your second names or your social security number. The personal section should be short with only the relevant info: name, address, telephone and e-mail. Otherwise, it is recommended to put a photo of you, even if it's not mandatory... You should look cheerful and be dressed in a professional outfit.

Concerning the content, the Education part is really important in France: You should first clearly describe your diploma: exact title of the diploma, Institution, year of getting, level of studies obtained through diploma (called "Bac+ x", x represents the number of years of studies after the A-levels). You should then detail the courses that you followed, the grades obtained and emphasize on the most important knowledge and skills that you have acquired through your studies.

The hobbies section, called "miscellaneous" in an English resume, is at the very end but isn't at all optional: it reveals your personality and your interests. It is supposed to give a whole idea of the person you are outside work. To sum it up, a French resume should briefly explain who you are and to give a clue about who the HR department is about to hire, whereas an Anglo-Saxon resume emphasizes on the achievements.

Job Interviews

- Job interviews are actually quite similar to the ones in Anglo-Saxon countries:
- Go as soon as possible to the subject: Why are you the best suited for the job?
 - The appearance is very important, especially at the very beginning of the interviews: you should be clean-shaven and wear a suit and a tie.

Once again, the formality is really important and applying the key elements (previously given) will show that you expect to integrate the firm in a professional way.

One main difference with job interviews is the absence of ice breakers: you should stick to the purpose of the interview and not speak about the weather or similar subjects. It won't be seen as friendly but as unprofessional.

Managing a Business Unit or a company in France

Internal and external contexts

When directing a company or managing a business Unit in France, several elements have to be taken into account, both concerning the French employees you are dealing with and the French customers that you are targeting:

- Internal functioning:
 - Mixing staffs from the Homeland and French employees is really important. People chosen have to be open minded and willing to cross cultural boundaries. This mix of cultures will reduce risks of misunderstanding due to cultural differences.
 - It's useful to offer cultural and language training courses enable to increase employee's cultural awareness and communications skills.

- US Management techniques are often the norm in multinational structure: importance of public speaking, team Work organization, performance appraisal, goal setting, coaching, etc... These techniques are flexible across cultures and accepted as people get more and more used to it.
- Yet corporate politics and values should be adapted to the French context. There are a couple of strong values defended by the French in a corporate context: Autonomous state of mind of the employees toward the employer, protesting state of mind at work as well as in the society.
- This intercultural training effort must be present at every hierarchical level. It must be organized over a long time and regularly monitored.

➤ Customers targeted:

- Cultural aspects to take into account in external communication (ex: French people doesn't like flashy communication and prefer soberness) ,
- Adopt products or services to the cultural background (for instance, McDonald's often launches sandwiches related to gastronomic specialties of the different regions of France). It corresponds to an Internalization Marketing strategy that is called "Adaptation Strategy": It enables to gain a competitive advantage by proposing a product that suits the most to the customer's needs.

Key elements to manage successfully a team:

Here are a few elements that help to understand how to successfully manage a team in France. Some of them are especially related to the French context but most of them can actually be generalized to any inter-cultural situation of Management:

- When a problem arises, you should first focus on the reason: Is this for sure cultural difference that caused a misunderstanding? There are wide differences often between two countries concerning managerial expectations, yet many behaviors depend on personality, life or Work environment. This is why you should analyze whether the problem stems from a cultural difference or the environment or the person you are dealing with.
- Short digression about the business context to explain this: Our culture is mostly part of a continual process since we are born. Most cultural Elements of ourselves are unconscious (Our conception of Good and Evil, what should be done or not...) and we become aware of that only when you deal with someone who acts and thinks in different manner. In a multicultural environment, you need to question everything you take for granted.

- As we saw previously, you have to adapt US management techniques to the French context. That means in a nutshell that your strategy has to be contextual, taking all elements into consideration: people, team, environment, department, and company culture. This is how one can successfully adapt to another culture.

Conclusion

As a conclusion we can say that this work was interesting, we learn a lot about our own culture and we also have understood why French have some habits that other cultures don't have.

The discussion during the oral presentation was extremely pleasant with students really interested by the subject and a lot of interactions.

To make the presentation, we use two books, "Au contraire: Figuring out the French" from Gilles Asselin & Ruth Mastron, and "Cultural misunderstandings: the French-American experience" from Raymonde Caroll.

These 2 books were quite interesting, they show us the differences with the US and for some we were not aware of these differences. They were not too hard to understand, good written, easy to read, we have learned a lot with these books even about our French culture and habits.

But it was differences between France and the US and not between France and Germany so it was maybe less interesting and less accurate for the presentation in front of German Student.

The big criticism we have towards the two books is that they don't explain why the differences exist, most of the time they make only a list of differences between France and US, so for our work, it was difficult to explain because even if we see the difference, we are not always able to explain it.

They also were a bit too old and some habits they describe are no longer true, so maybe a more recent book may be better to work on the subject.

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