

*Japanese Business Culture:
Working with Japanese Colleagues*



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Working with Japanese Colleagues



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"If we seek to understand a people we have to put ourselves, as far as we can, in that particular historical and cultural background. One has to recognize that countries and people differ in their approach and their ways, in their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking. In order to understand them we have to understand their way of life and approach. If we wish to convince them, we have to use their language as far as we can, not language in the narrow sense of the word, but the language of the mind."

Jawaharlal Nehru

RULES FOR BETTER COMMUNICATION WITH JAPANESE COLLEAGUES

- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Be careful when asking "A or B" questions (e.g. "Would you like coffee or tea?") as they are easily misunderstood. It is better to say, "We have coffee, tea, etc. Which would you like?"
- Avoid the use of slang, figurative speech, proverbs, clichés, etc. unless you are prepared to explain them afterwards.
- Don't expect Japanese to be familiar with our political or sports figures, entertainers, or other famous (or notorious) people. Humorous comments about them seldom make it across the cultural or language barrier.
- Remember that Japan uses the metric system, so reference to miles, feet, pounds and degrees Fahrenheit can cause confusion at first.
- Don't use first names or nicknames unless invited to do so.
- If possible, try to have your appointments and other activities typed up into a schedule, with all times and places indicated in writing. It can prevent a lot of confusion.

Source: Japan, A Business Traveler's Handbook.

WHEN ENGLISH IS NOT THE FIRST LANGUAGE OF THE SPEAKER...

Sometimes there are many frustrations that arise when native speakers of different languages come together and there is not a high level of fluency on either side. Often when workers are sent overseas, it is their ability or skill at their job that is the reason they are sent, not their language abilities. Sometimes that person can speak in phrases or words to get the idea across but there needs to be patience on both sides for communication to happen.

Some tips for helping in situations where communication is difficult:

1. Use as many drawings as possible.
2. Write down the information to confirm understanding.
3. Whenever changes are made, double and triple check confirmation.
4. Remember that a Japanese person often uses "yes/ I see/ uh huh" to let you know that they are LISTENING not that they are agreeing with what is said.
5. Try to put yourself in the other person's shoes. How would you do over in Japan if no one spoke English?

WORKING WITH A NON-NATIVE SPEAKER:

Remember that even though you are starting to learn to communicate about the project, plan or idea there are still some areas that problems can arise. When you work with a person over time, you start to develop a common set of words that both of you will recognize and understand. When the project is of a limited scope (i.e. training on a machine, etc.) then this will start to work quickly and you will learn to find the common ground of language.

However, please remember that the person still has a limited level of language and sometimes will say things that don't have the same effect in English. For example, a Japanese speaker may say the following:

"I require you must help now because my work is too much."

After some discussion, what the person really meant to say:

"I am very busy right now and need your help as quickly as possible."

Words like "require", "now", "you must" are words that are very demanding and cause the hearer to become defensive. Sometimes these words are used by a non-native speaker without their full impact known. Please keep these things in mind when working with a non-native speaker, even if the person has been in this country for a couple of years.

EFFECT OF LANGUAGE ON RESPONSE:

(Same questions asked to the same person in two different languages.)

1. WHEN MY WISHES CONFLICT WITH MY FAMILY...

(Japanese) it is a time of great unhappiness. (English) I do what I want.

2. I WILL PROBABLY BECOME...

(Japanese) a housewife. (English) a teacher.

3. REAL FRIENDS SHOULD...

(Japanese) help each other. (English) be very frank.

Source: Bridging Japanese/ North American Differences

WHEN AN INTERPRETER IS INVOLVED...

1. Follow the "Rules for Better Communication"
2. Write down all large numbers for confirmation.
3. Allow time for the interpreter to translate the information. This means that you will need to stop every few sentences or so.
4. Any pictures or drawings that can be used are always helpful.
5. Avoid negative questions as these are answered differently in Japanese. For example, "Don't you want to meet at 9 a.m.?" A "yes" response means that the person DOES NOT want to meet at 9 a.m.
6. Not all interpreters are familiar with your industry or product. Whenever possible explain ideas or concepts that may be new to that person. If the interpreter is unclear about the topic, it is very difficult to communicate.
7. Even though it is difficult, try to speak to the person you are talking to in the meeting, not the interpreter.

KATA - CONTINUOUS REPETITION

Training in Japan is often approached differently than in the United States. For example, when someone is learning about tea ceremony, months are spent on the practice of walking across the floor.

Remember the movie, "The Karate Kid"? When first learning about Karate, the boy was not shown moves but was instead told to wax the car. The teacher shouted "Wax on" and "Wax Off" over and over and over again. Then he was told to "Paint the fence." Up and down, up and down, over and over and over again.

"Kata" is the way of doing something and the way it is learned is through continuous repetition of the motion over and over and over again. Instead of jumping into the Karate moves, the boy was told to practice the motions many times first. The motions were learned by waxing the car and painting the fence. This caused the boy to be very frustrated. Only after mastering the motions was he allowed to work on the actual Karate moves.

Sometimes this approach to training causes frustration for a Westerner since we often take a much more "Hands On" approach to learning.

"FACE"

Japan

Honor
pride
claimed self-image
trustworthiness
individual standing or rank
politeness
respect extended by others
considerateness
dignity

United States

Credibility
individual reputation
self-respect
ego
claimed position in interaction
appearance of strength
recognized positive worth
pride
status
lack of embarrassment
self-defense

INTERPERSONAL CRITICISM

Japan

"passive" forms of criticism
(e.g. express dissatisfaction nonverbally or ambiguously)

United States

"active" forms of criticism
(e.g. express dissatisfaction by making "constructive suggestions")

COMPLIMENTS

Japan

express admiration nonverbally, by
commenting on their own limitations or
keeping opinions to themselves

United States

direct admiration to a third party

Note that feedback is handled very differently in Japanese culture.

Source: Bridging Japanese/ North American Differences

SOME OLD SAYINGS AND THEIR COUNTER SAYINGS:

THE EAST

THE WEST

"What is possible depends on the circumstances."	"All things are possible."
"One does not make the wind but is blown by it."	"Where there is a will, there is a way."
"Quiet waters run deep."	"It's the squeaky wheel that gets the grease."
"The nail that sticks up will be hammered down first."	"He travels the fastest who travels alone."

Source: JW Associates

OBSERVATIONS

JAPAN

AMERICA

Counts by starting with all five fingers extended, then closes them with the thumb first, then the index through the little finger.	Counts starting with a closed fist, then raising the index through the little finger and finally the thumb.
Pointing to oneself means pointing to the tip of the nose. "Who, me?"	Pointing to oneself is done by pointing to an area around the middle of the chest. "Who, me?"
Has difficult time handling "people who are different."	Anticipates the opposite.
Without an "introduction," nothing happens.	Salesman's success depends on the "cold call."
Into character analysis based on blood type.	Into astrology and horoscopes.
Discriminates in the politeness game.	Indiscriminate "politeness"
Places blame on the head of the organization in which mistakes occur.	Believes in placing blame on the specific offender.

Source: Japan-Think, Ameri-Think

16 Ways to Say "NO" (in Japan)

using a direct no (infrequent)
using a vague no
giving a vague or ambiguous yes or no
using silence
using a counter-question
giving a tangential (beat around the bush) response
exiting
lying or equivocating
criticizing
refusing to answer the question
giving a conditional no
saying "yes, but..."
delaying answering the question
stating regret
saying yes
apologizing

Source: Bridging Japanese/ North American Differences

Example:

Foreign businessman: Therefore, our products meet your requirements 100%. How soon do you think you can place an order?

Japanese businessman: Did you see the *sumo* wrestling last night?

F.B.: ... Yes, I did. But back to our discussion, when would it be convenient...?

J.B.: What did you think of Jessie Takamiyama [a Hawaiian *sumo* wrestler]? Wasn't he terrific?

Source: Bridging Japanese/ North American Differences

"Chotto Muzukashii" (It's a little difficult)

Polite way of saying no or "it can't be done" or "I can't do it." Often this is misunderstood and the foreign business man is likely to continue trying with presentations of how it can be done "easily", since it is only "a little difficult."

Communication Styles - Case Study #1

THE MEETING

In an American subsidiary of a Japanese company, an American manager sent a memo to his staff (two Japanese and two Americans) informing them that a staff meeting would be held at the end of the week. At the end of the memo he wrote, "Please let me know if you'll be able to attend."

The day before the meeting he still had not heard from the two Japanese. "As usual," he thought. Feeling a little annoyed he went to one of them and asked, "Are you going to be at the meeting tomorrow?" Looking rather surprised the employee answered, "Of course I'll be there."

Why was the employee surprised?

Why did he say, "Of course I'll be there"?

Source: JW Associates

Communication Styles - Case Study #2

AVOIDING "NO"

An American employee of a Japanese company was working on a presentation deadline and feeling a little overwhelmed. She decided to ask a Japanese friend colleague for some help.

He had just finished a big project and didn't seem very busy. He usually stayed at the office until eight or nine, so she asked him if he would be able to help her until seven or so. He just grinned, kind of half bowed and said, "I'm afraid I have something to do." He seemed a little embarrassed so she didn't say anymore thinking it must be something personal.

The next day she found out that he had left work early to attend the Sumo tournament.

Why didn't he just say he was going to the Sumo tournament?

Source: JW Associates

Creating Harmony (*wa*)

Before any decision is made, there is much preparation involving all different parties that are concerned. Inherent in this decision making style are several concepts that are necessary to making things run smoothly and create harmony (*wa*). These are:

NEMAWASI (ROOT-BINDING)

Nemawashi, or root-binding, is the art of “digging around the root of a tree to prepare it for transplanting.” The word refers to the groundwork or “touching base” with others that the Japanese view as necessary to secure informal consent and enlist support prior to decision-making.

As part of the process of developing group consensus, root-binding can take many forms. Several examples of Japanese customs that promote this concept of “touching base” are:

- Company New Year’s cards (*Nengajo*)
- Midsummer (*Chugen*) and New Year’s (*Oseibo*) gifts
- A ladder system of inter-office communication (*Ringisei*)
- Calling on customers and joint venture partners on a regular social basis (for example, going to bars in the evening), rather than just for important business

ENRYO (RESERVE)

Enryo, or being reserved, is another highly favored Japanese custom. Being reserved ideally involves forgetting about one’s own ego in order to clearly demonstrate that dedication to the group supersedes individual desires.

HUMILITY AND MODESTY

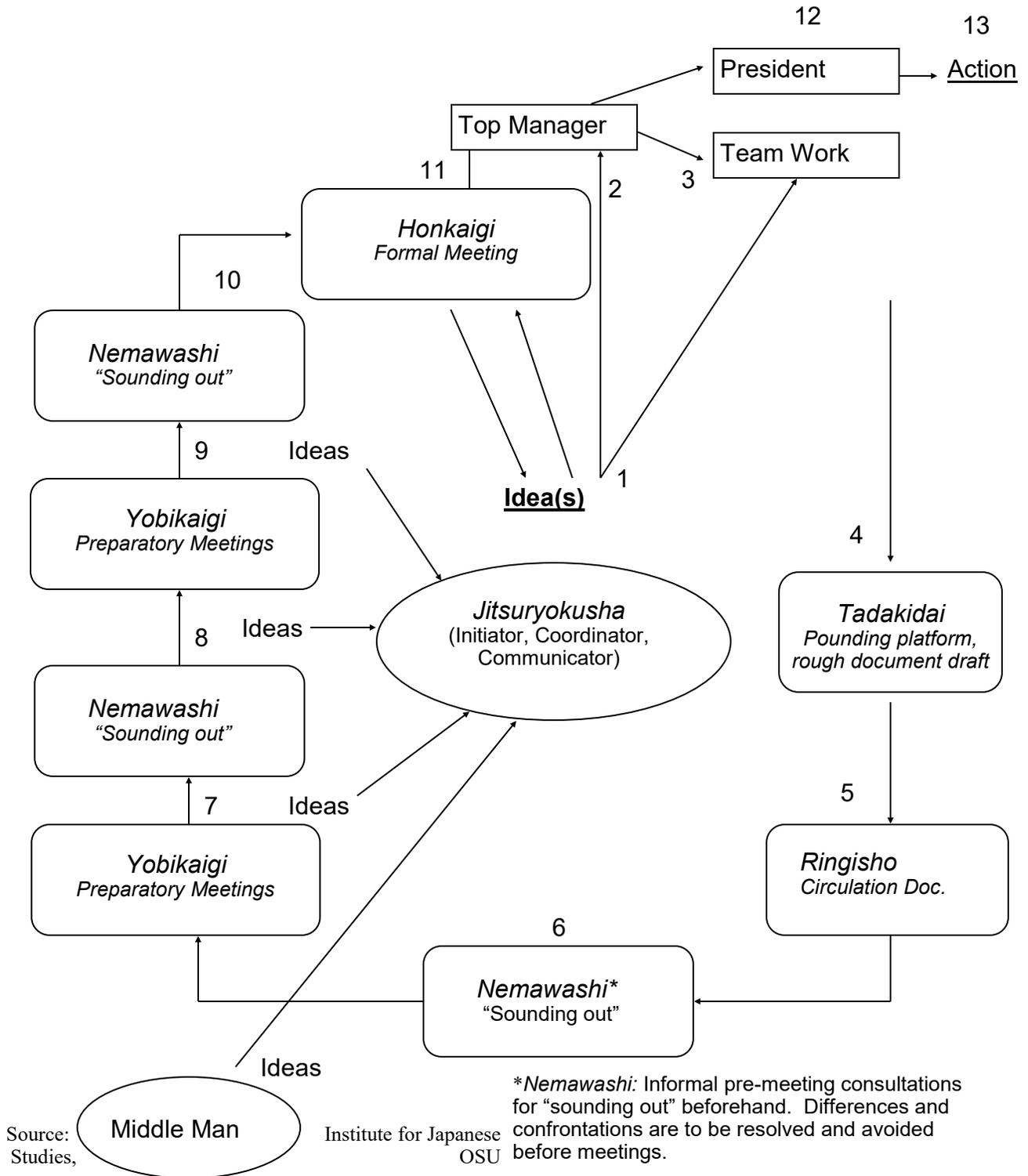
In Japanese interpersonal relationships, modesty is a highly valued cultural trait. The counterpart of modesty is overstating compliments. When used together, modesty and compliments allow you and your counterpart the opportunity to become socially closer.

The process starts with a compliment and is followed by a (self) denial. Normally a set of one compliment and its corresponding denial is repeated one or two times. The process moves from general compliment to specific compliment.

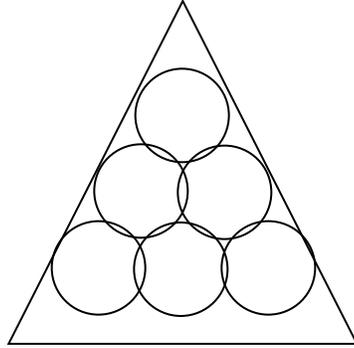
Source: GH, Institute for Japanese Studies, OSU

Japanese Style Decision-Making (*RINGI*)

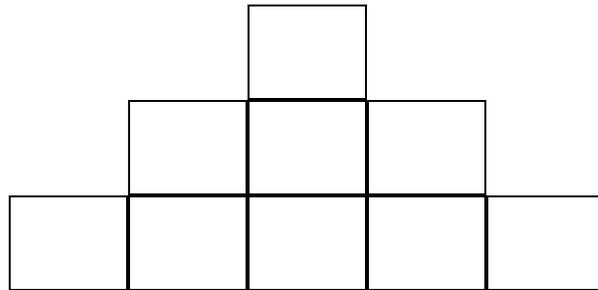
(A decision-making process involving all levels of management, with decisions being generated from the bottom to the top.)



DIVISIONS OF RESPONSIBILITY



(One section in a company)
Groupistic organizational style found in traditional Japanese companies



in a company)

Individualistic organizational style found in traditional American companies

(One section

Source: JW Associates

Decision Making - Case Study #1

WHO IS IN CHARGE?

One day, Mr. Green, an American, working for an American company in California, received a fax from a company in Tokyo stamped "URGENT". It requested a price quote and was for export signed by Mr. Ito, Manager. One of the shipping terms was unclear so he decided to call Tokyo right away.

When Mr. Green asked Mr. Ito about the shipping details, Mr. Ito said, "Let me check with the person who is handling that." Thinking that he had called the wrong person, Mr. Green was embarrassed and said, "Oh, I'm sorry. This fax was written by Mr. Ito, I-T-O. So I thought he was in charge."

Mr. Ito replied, "I'm in charge but I'll transfer you to Mr. Kudo."

Why did Mr. Ito sign the fax when he didn't understand the details?

Why did Mr. Green think Mr. Ito would know about the shipping details?

Source: JW Associates

Decision Making - Case Study #2

THE CRASH

In the eighties, a Japanese airliner crashed and nearly everyone on board was killed. Hundreds of passengers had been killed and the public was very upset. The crash was ruled an unpreventable, weather-related accident but someone had to smooth things over.

Who do you think took the blame?

Source: JW Associates

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD JAPANESE SUBORDINATE

1. Does not say “no” to supervisor; follows superior’s orders
2. Does not take too much initiative; does not give too much feedback
3. Works long hours
4. Company is first priority
5. Values group identity
6. Has a pure heart and values honesty
7. Keeps good relationships with other employees
8. Hides emotions
9. Hides abilities
10. Tries to understand superior’s heart
11. Tries to trust superior

Source: M. Yoshikawa, "Communicating with the Japanese"

THE TWELVE MOST DISLIKED INDIVIDUAL ATTRIBUTES

1. Unable to correctly make greetings.
2. Makes it to work just in time or a little late but promptly leaves at five.
3. Behaves like a lone wolf and doesn’t participate in the activities of fellow workers.
4. Draws attention to only himself through flashy (*hade*) actions or clothes.
5. Uses casual language without honorifics towards older persons or persons with more seniority.
6. Gossiping or saying bad things about other people.
7. Shows off the fact that he is learned.
8. Does not promptly return borrowed things.
9. Grumbles about being the only one who is busy.
10. Talks down and attacks other’s opinions and actions.
11. Changes attitude according to different people and gives people with weak positions a rough time.

Source: Shinnyu Shain no Kihon. (Fundamentals for New Company Employees)

PAY ATTENTION: HOW TO INTERACT WITH SENPAI

Within the group, a distinction is made between those older (entered the group earlier) and the newer members. The older member (*senpai*) will take the newer member (*kohai*) under his wing and guide the person through the different situations that arise. Often the *senpai* will take the *kohai* out drinking after work to discuss the way things are done as well as how to interact within the company. The *kohai* in return shows respect to the *senpai*. This senior/junior relationship will continue even after the younger member has worked at the company for many years.

- Learn from *Senpai*. They have more experience than you do. Learn from them with respect.
- Interact with many *Senpai*. Come in contact with as many as possible.
- Always make the *Senpai* look good. There are probably areas in which you know more than your *Senpai*. However, adopt an attitude of dignity and respect, always making the *Senpai* look good.
- Borrow the *Senpai*'s wisdom for solving problems.
- Lend out your strengths to your *Senpai*.

Source: Shinnyu Shain no Kihon. (Fundamentals for New Company Employees)

Hierarchy of Workers - Case Study #1

THE SEMINAR

In the Nashville office of a Japanese company, the manager called three Japanese employees into his office. They had all come to the United States about three months earlier. He said, "I've just heard about this international business seminar. If you're interested, I'll enroll you."

The Japanese employees bowed politely and said, "You are very kind" and "Thank you for thinking about us."

Later, the manager learned through different channels that the three Japanese employees were frustrated and embarrassed.

Why were the employees embarrassed?

How did they feel about going to the seminar?

Source: JW Associates

ATTRIBUTES OF JAPANESE GROUPS

Groups are a very important part of Japanese society. The group that you are a part of is called the "in-group" and the group that you are not a part of is the "out-group"; the boundary between these two is very important. General in-groups include family, a group of friends, a school, a company, a village or a nation.

- Rank (position) and task are separate (unlike the United States, where one's position usually also defines the work task)
- Clearly set positions- usually hierarchical
- Individuals identify through the group
- Harmony (*Wa*) within the group is maintained on the surface
- Distinct separation of "in-group" and "out-group"
- Group decision making through consensus
- Long-term relations with other groups favored over short-term relations
- Life-long membership for individuals if they are cooperative members

Source: GH, Institute for Japanese Studies, OSU

Role of the Group - Case Study #1

BEING PART OF THE GROUP

In the 1980's a Japanese automobile manufacturer built a plant in the United States. The workers were given company uniforms which they were told were mandatory and company hats which they were told were not mandatory.

When the plant opened everyone was wearing the mandatory uniforms but very few workers were wearing the company hat. The Japanese management was upset.

The workers complained that if the management had wanted them to wear the hats, all they had to do was say so. The Japanese management accused the workers of having a bad attitude.

Why weren't the company hats made mandatory too?

Source: JW Associates

EXPECTATIONS:

AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE OF JAPANESE BUSINESS COUNTERPARTS:

Examples:

- Refusal to give positive feedback
- Saying “Yes” when it is really “No”
- Failure to question uncertainty
- Not speaking in meeting
- Blind-siding in meeting
- Not clarifying expectations
- Not expressing authority decisively
- Bringing problems not solutions
- Ignoring merit on salary increases
- No problem-solving initiative
- Hesitation, tentativeness, apologetic
- Inadequate information on directions
- Disregard of obvious facts
- Non-compliance with the law
- No individual accountability

JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE OF AMERICAN BUSINESS COUNTERPARTS:

Examples:

- Giving negative feedback in public
- Overconfident, spontaneous answers
- Confrontations in meetings
- Presenting un-collaborated opinions
- Inadequate preparation for discussion
- Deciding without all the input
- Excessive written documents
- Excessive differentiation of remuneration
- Constant analysis and justification
- No demonstration of humility
- Disregard of personal feelings
- Inpatient with procedures or process
- Individualized praise or blame
- Inconsistent behavior, changing directions
- Demonstrations of disloyalty

Source: M. Yoshikawa, "Communicating with the Japanese"

MEETING MANAGEMENT (Problem areas:)

- Japanese are unable to “get in” the discussion; American perception is that the Japanese won’t participate.
- Information treatment is different; Japanese tend to infer and imply, whereas Americans brainstorm, prioritize and push for explicit resolution of points.
- Ideas are not clearly expressed (in English) by Japanese; Americans’ ideas are not clearly understood.

TO INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF SUCCESS:

- Stick to a consistent strategy and pricing policy.
- Remember to stress your successes in other markets; even if you get the response, "Yes, but this is Japan," a Japanese businessman can't help but be impressed to hear that you have done well elsewhere.
- Consider the reasons on the Japanese side for the opposition to an agreement, and think about what you might do to break the logjam.
- Ask questions which don't encourage an outright refusal ("Do you think it would be better to drop this part of the arrangement and concentrate on the rest?")
- If faced with a deadlock, try to obtain an insider's view of the company's position. You might consider arranging an informal talk with someone in the company who seems sympathetic to your point of view.
- Be flexible, and don't rule out a face-saving compromise.
- Above all, persevere if you feel you have good reasons to hold out.

Source: Japan, A Business Traveler's Handbook.

Summary - Case Study #1

LOSING FACE

A group of Japanese Engineers visited an American company to discuss the possibilities of doing some joint research. They brought a young Japanese interpreter with them to translate.

The American side contracted an experienced Japanese consultant who had lived in Japan for years and he has suggested that they prepare a brief presentation on their company, but instructed them to keep it very short and simple.

The Americans, however, prepared a very in depth presentation on the kind of research they were doing. As they were making the presentation, they realized that the young translator did not understand the technical words they were using. As the meeting progressed it became obvious that the Japanese engineers were frustrated and bored. The Americans were angry that their bilingual consultant didn't help out the young interpreter. He just sat there and watched.

Why didn't the bilingual consultant assist the young interpreter?

Source: JW Associates

Early January	Shinnekai (Parties to celebrate the New Year)
April 1	New fiscal year
April-May	Spring recruiting interviews
May	Entrance ceremony for new company members
April 29, May 3, May 5	Golden Week (Emperor Hirohito's birthday called "Green Day", Constitution Day and Children's Day)
July	Graduation ceremony for class of entering men
Early - Mid July	Summer bonus
Late July	<i>O-chugen</i> gift-giving
Summer Vacation	Company condominium
August 13-15	Visit rural relatives for <i>Obon</i> (ancestor worship)
Early - Mid December	Year-end bonus
December 23	Emperor's (Akihito) birthday
Late December	<i>O-seibo</i> year-end gift-giving
Late December	<i>Bonenkai</i> (Forget-the-year parties)

National Holidays:

New Year's Day:	January 1	
Coming of Age Day:	January 15	:for those 20 years old
Foundation Day:	February 11	:founding of Japanese State
Vernal Equinox:	March 21	
Keep Japan Green Day:	April 29	:remember Emperor Showa
Constitution Day:	May 3	:celebrate Japan's constitution
Children's Day:	May 5	
Respect for the Aged:	September 15	
Autumn Equinox:	September 24	
Health Sports Day:	October 10	
Culture Day:	November 3	:celebrate Japan's heritage
Labor-Thanksgiving Day:	November 23	
Emperor's Birthday:	December 23	

Business Card Exchanges Guidelines:

1. Cards are exchanged at the beginning of a meeting; make sure you have enough available for everyone.
2. It is best to stand up when exchanging cards with those of higher rank.
3. Facing your counterpart, bow slightly and hand your card (with the Japanese side pointing up!) either with your right hand or both hands. The same rule applies when receiving a card from someone else.
4. Make time to review your counterpart's card carefully. You might want to speak his/her name and position to be sure of correct pronunciation. If the meaning of his/her job position is in any way unclear, it would not hurt to ask for an explanation. Basically, you want to show interest in and respect to the other party.
5. DO NOT shove the card into your back trouser pocket!!
 - o If you are meeting in passing, then you may just carefully place the card in a shirt pocket or in a wallet or notebook.
 - o If you are seated at a meeting, place the card gently on the table in front of you. Look at it often during the meeting in order to refer correctly to your counterpart's name and position. If you are meeting more than one person and have received multiple cards, arrange them neatly in front of you. The Japanese hand out their business card at the drop of a hat. Don't be left out! Give your card to anyone that you want to hear from again. You'll likely go through a lot more cards during your trip to Japan than you would back home.



<http://www.mahasico.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/jbeard.jpg>

Here are two interesting Japanese business cards that are imprinted with visual guides on how to properly give (bottom) and receive (top) a business card in Japan:



http://www.mellowmonk.com/images/uke_watashi.jpg

Source: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2227.html>

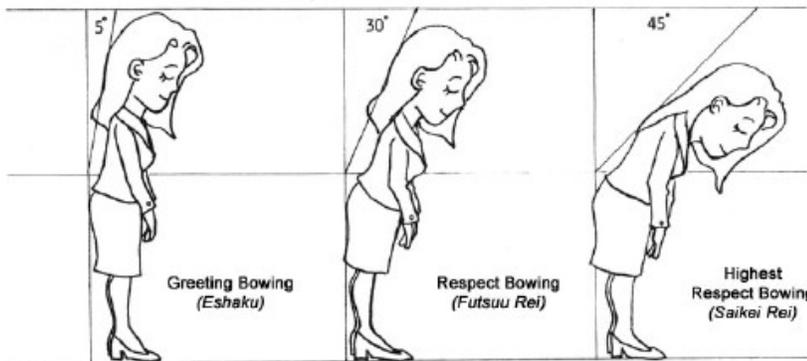
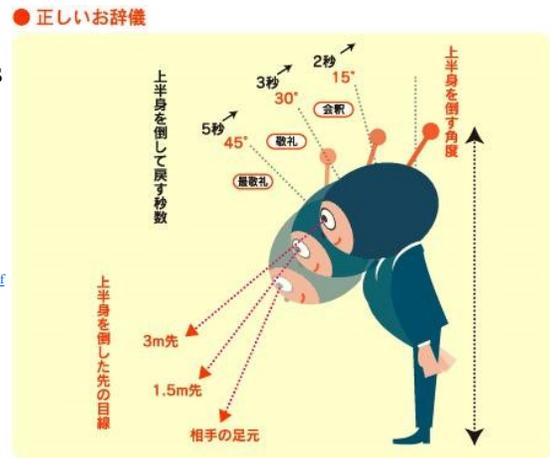
Bowing

In Japan, people greet each other by bowing. A bow ranges from a small nod of the head to a long, 90 degree bend at the waist. If the greeting takes place on tatami floor, people get on their knees in order to bow.

When bowing to someone of higher social status, a deeper, longer bow indicates respect. Conversely, a small head nod is casual and informal. However, most Japanese do not expect foreigners to know proper bowing rules and so a nod of the head is usually sufficient.

It is also common to bow to express thanks, to apologize, to make a request or to ask someone a favor.

<http://files.myopera.com/sukekomashi-gaijin/blog/omgbow.gif>



<http://blog.asiahotels.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/bow.jpg>
Increased formality -----à

The Differences between Japanese Men and Women Bowing:

- When Japanese men bow they bend forward from the waist, back straight, face down *and there is no*

eye contact!

- The culture of Japanese women (more Westernized now) is to follow several paces behind the man and to remain silent unless given permission to speak. If she is lucky to be introduced she must bent from the waist, face down and there is *no eye contact EVER made towards a male.*
- Even in modern society if one is doing business with a Japanese businessman it is important to follow his lead. If he bows, then we must bow exactly the same way in respect as another man or woman would do. There are some businessmen in Japan that would rather do business with a man than a woman, but thankfully that is changing and women are 'more worthy' of their positions in the Western World and even sometimes in Japan.

There's a slight difference in bowing for men and women. Men usually keep their hands at their sides while bowing. Women place their hands together in front of their thighs with fingertips overlapping or touching. There are also special ways of bowing while sitting. If the greeting takes place on tatami floor, the Japanese will usually get down on their knees to bow. Again, the deepness of the bow depends on the social status of the person. A bow can be used for other numerous occasions. The following are other uses of the bow other than for greeting: sincerity, apologies, ceremonies, and acknowledgement.

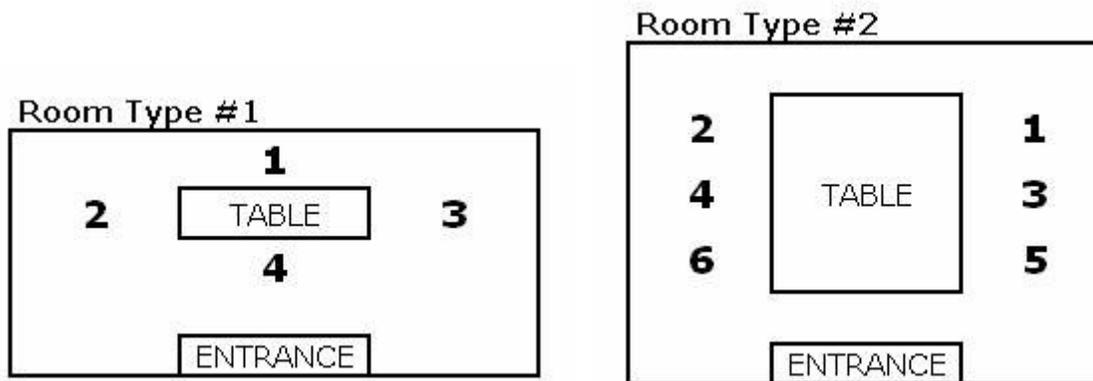
Source: <http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2000.html>
http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Is_there_a_difference_in_bowing_between_Japanese_men_and_women

SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

Seating arrangements in Japan, both in formal and informal situations, provide a means to facilitate a social or business occasion. There is flexibility within the general guidelines given below:

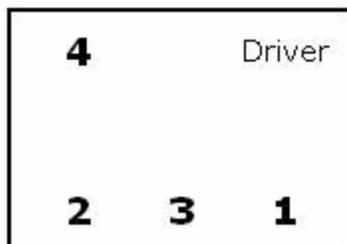
- Hosts and guests usually take opposite sides with guests on the left
- Seating is done according to rank order
- Within a given rank, priority is usually given to seniority and then male gender before female gender
- Special consideration is given to seating the guests in the best location, which is usually defined as farthest from the door and/or including the best view

Japan is a country which puts great value of seniority or ranking (person's professional title). Interestingly, specifically at a formal dining occasion, where to sit is implicitly determined based on one's seniority or ranking. We explain this rule by providing two different types of rooms where "seat one" is most valuable and "seat of the highest number" is least valuable (For example, in the example Room #1 below, if there are people age 50, 40, 30 and 25, a person age 50 sits down in seat one and a person age 25 sits down in seat four):



Do you see the reason behind this rule? The key is the person sitting at the highest-numbered seat. Usually, the youngest or lowest-ranked person has to "work" during the meal, such as calling a waiter/waitress, ordering dishes and drinks, and calling a taxi when guests go home. In other words, the person closest to the entrance has to leave the room many times.

Tip: The above rule also applies to where people sit in a taxi. Think about the reason!



Source: http://www2.owen.vanderbilt.edu/owenclubs/Japanese/en/tips_for_J.business.html

Seating- Case Study #1

HONORABLE POSITIONING

A group of American business people arrived at a dinner hosted by some new Japanese business associates. The table wasn't ready so everyone waited together in the lounge.

When they were shown to their table, the Japanese whispered and pointed to the table but no one sat down. During this awkward moment, a young, good intentioned American in the group volunteered, "I'll take the middle seat against the wall."

The Japanese sucked in their breath and glanced at the other Americans.

What happened?

Source: JW Associates

GENERAL IDEAS AROUND GIFT GIVING

- Very much a part of Japanese society
- For creating, reinforcing or dissolving social and business relationships
- Traditionally not opened in the presence of the giver
- Presented humbly "This is nothing at all", "An item of no value"
- Appropriateness and the care with which the gift was selected is more important than the price of the gift
- As sign of respect, gifts usually given and received with both hands
- After receiving a gift, customary to return one of equal value in the near future

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- Gifts of money are wrapped in paper - special envelopes - be careful
- Gifts that consist of a number of items fewer than ten should be given in odd numbers. Four and nine are to be avoided, as these mean "death" and "suffering"
- Cut flowers are reserved for courting, illnesses and deaths. Potted flowers (with roots) means that the disease will take root and never go away.
- Gifts should be individually wrapped in paper. Never use black, white, glitter or loud colors. Blue, green or conservative neutral colors are preferred.

OCCASIONS FOR GIVING GIFTS

- Year end (*o-seibo*) and mid-summer (*o-chugen*)
- Congratulatory gifts - birthdays (60, 77, 88, 99), anniversaries, weddings, births, business openings, promotions, etc.
- Travel gifts - family, friends and co-workers
- New Year's gifts - *o-toshi-dama* to the children in special envelopes
- Get well gifts - flowers (nothing with roots), fruit or money.
- Gifts of sympathy - flowers, fruit, vegetables, incense or money

Individual Business Friends & Associates

- Nothing to use in personal life like crystal wine glasses, etc. Things that can be used at the office are best. Name brand office items like pen sets, memo holders, paper weights, crystal ashtrays, desk clock, etc.
- If engraving, say something from your group to their group. Example: "In the spirit of continued cooperation between (your co. name) and (our company name)". NOT: "To: Takanori Hata. Best Wishes, Bill Smith."

Big Groups

If you work with one or two members of a multi-member team, section or department, bring a small edible treat for the group to share.

Gift giving - Case Study #1

THE FRUIT BASKET

An American company had recently begun working with a new Japanese client. In December a large fruit basket was delivered to a department manager with a card which said "To continued mutual success in the new year" signed, the Nippon Company.

The department manager later wrote a thank you letter exclaiming how much she and her family enjoyed the fruit. She also told the manager that it was so generously filled they were able to share the gift with family and friends through the holidays.

When the Japanese client received the letter, he was shocked that someone could be so selfish.

Do you know why?

Source: JW Associates

Gift giving - Case Study #2

WHERE CULTURES MIS-COMMUNICATE

Although the Japanese and non-Japanese company had already agreed to start doing business together, the non-Japanese manager visited Japan, to insure that the new business began smoothly. He read that people in the Japanese culture tend to give gifts to business associates.

So, the non-Japanese manager brought what he considered to be an appropriate gift to Japan and proudly handed it to the Japanese manager across the conference table.

When the non-Japanese manager gave the gift he said, "I brought you something to commemorate the start of our new relationship." The Japanese manager accepted the gift and held it in his hands without opening it.

Later, the gift was opened and the Japanese manager was disappointed to find two beautiful and expensive Bavarian crystal wine glasses. He chuckled to himself and told his secretary to put the gift in the closet.

Why didn't the manager like the gift?

Source: JW Associates

JAPANESE CULTURAL CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING SOCIAL ETIQUETTE DURING FIRST ENCOUNTERS IN JAPAN

I. Bowing:

- A. How deep was the bow?
- B. How many times did they bow?
- C. Where were the hands?
- D. Where did the eyes focus?

II. Name Card:

- A. Who presented the name card first?
- B. What was the rank of the person presenting it?
- C. Which way was the print facing?
- D. Was the name card presented with one hand or two?
- E. Was a question asked to gain an understanding of respective positions of giver and receiver?
- F. Where was the name card placed after it was received?
- G. How was the name card treated after it was received?

III. Seating:

- A. Did the guest wait to be seated (showing reserve)? Did the host show the guest where to sit?
- B. Did the guests/ hosts sit in rank order? Did the guests keep in their rank order or were they more relaxed with respect to rank order?
- C. How did the guest(s) react to a third person who delivered the tea or coffee?
- D. Did the guest make a statement about the surroundings such as the artwork or the window view?

IV. Post-Seating Etiquette:

- A. Was knowledge of the guest's personal preferences communicated nonverbally by the host?
- B. Did the guest show reserve?
- C. Did the host and the guest do their homework about each other?
- D. Did the host and guest find any common areas to form a bond of personal trust?
- E. Were there indications or plans for future relationships and was it clear whom to contact in the future and what should be done as a next step?

NOTE: The Japanese relax these criteria when they visit America and try to do things "American style." Nevertheless, they have a "gut level" appreciation for the above.

Source: Institute for Japanese Studies, OSU

JAPANESE NAMES: PRONUNCIATION HINTS

The phonetic sounds you need to know to pronounce Japanese names. The vowels are pronounced simply with very little exception:

- a** as in father
- i** as in police, machine
- u** as in pull, full
- e** as in enemy, elf
- o** as in original, oh

Here are most of the Japanese letters written in romanized letter for easy pronunciation. The sounds in parentheses can be created by modifying the common letters.

a	i	u	e	o						
ka	ki	ku	ke	ko		(ga	gi	gu	ge	go)
sa	shi	su	se	so		(ja	zi	ju	je	jo)
ta	chi	tsu	te	to		(da	zi	zu	de	do)
na	ni	nu	ne	no						
ha	hi	fu	he	ho		(pa	pi	pu	pe	po)*
ma	mi	mu	me	mo						
ya		yu		yo						
ra	ri	ru	re	ro						
wa				wo						
n						*(ba	bi	bu	be	bo)

Note: L and R do not exist. R when used in London becomes Rondon. N is the only consonant that can be pronounced alone. If N doesn't have a vowel after it, it's pronounced alone.

When reading Japanese names, first try and break the name up into consonants and vowel pairs and pronounce each separately. Example:

TANAKA = **TA/ NA/ KA**
KAWASAKI = **KA/ WA/ SA/ KI**
TOYOTA = **TO/ YO/ TA**
HONDA = **HO/ N/ DA**

Sometimes you will see combination consonants like *chi*, *tsu*, *shi* that should be pronounced together. Group two consonants with the next vowel. Example:

MATSUMOTO = **MA/ TSU/ MO/ TO**
SHIMADA = **SHI/ MA/ DA**
KAWAGUCHI = **KA/ WA/ GU/ CHI**

Sometimes there may be vowels next to each other that should be pronounced individually. Example:

INOUE = **I/ NO/ U/ E**
NAGAI = **NA/ GA/ I**

There are other special rules, but these are the ones that are most commonly used and will get you through most situations.

YEARLY CYCLE FOR COMPANY EMPLOYEES

January 1

New Year's Day visit to shrine

FORMS OF ADDRESS (AT A COMPANY)

ENGLISH	ROMAJI
Chairman	KAICHO
President	SHACHO
Vice-President	FUKU SHACHO
Department Head (General Manager)	BUCHO
Section Chief	KACHO
Chief	SHUNIN or KAKARICHO
Staff	KA IN SHA IN

EXAMPLES: LAST NAME + FORM OF ADDRESS

SUZUKI KACHO

TOYOTA SHACHO

MATSUMOTO SAN

SOME JAPANESE PHRASES

ENGLISH

Hello. "I'm _____. How do you do"

JAPANESE

Konnichiwa __ (Jim) __ desu. Yoroshiku. (or Hajimemashite)

SAN = Miss, Ms, Mrs & Mr

DOOZO = Lit: Please go ahead/ after you

YOROSHIKU = Lit: Please continue to favor me

HAJIMEMASHITE = Lit: It's the first time to meet you

GOMEN NASAI = I'm sorry I did that to you

SUMIMASEN = Excuse me; sorry to trouble you, sorry

KONNICHIWA = Good day; Lit: this day

KONBANWA = Good evening; Lit: this night

OHAYO GOZAIMASU = Good morning; Lit: it's early

DOMO = Thanks

DOMO ARIGATO GOZAIMASU = Thank you very much

SAYONARA = Good-bye; Lit: See you again

HAI = Yes

IIE = No

Source: JW Associates, GH

Some points to remember about cross-cultural relationships

- What seems to be logical, sensible, important and reasonable to a person in one culture may seem stupid, irrational and unimportant to an outsider.
- Feelings of apprehension, loneliness, and a lack of confidence are common when visiting another culture.
- When people talk about other cultures, they tend to describe the differences and not the similarities.
- Differences between cultures are generally seen as threatening and described in negative terms.
- Personal observations and reports of other cultures should be regarded with a great deal of skepticism.
- One should make up one's own mind about another culture and not rely on the reports and experiences of others.
- It requires experience as well as study to understand the many subtleties of another culture.
- Understanding another culture is a continual process.
- Stereotyping is probably inevitable in the absence of frequent contact or study.
- The feelings which people have for their own language are not often evident until they encounter another language.
- People often feel that their own language is far superior to other languages.
- It is probably necessary to know the language of a foreign culture to understand the culture in depth.

FOOD

Manners:

- Usually the food is brought to the face, not the face to the food.
- You can hold the rice bowl in one hand and use your other hand for the chopsticks.
- Noodles are eaten with the bowl very close and the chopsticks are used to “lead” them into your mouth. Often people will make slurping noises to show the cook how much they like the food.
- Soup can be drunk out of the bowl with your chopsticks used to dish out the solid stuff.
- When you have big pieces of food to eat (tempura shrimp, tofu, etc.) you can either use your chopsticks to separate it into smaller pieces or just bite off a piece at a time and put the rest back on your plate.

Chopsticks:

- Don't stick the chopsticks in the food and leave them there, especially with your rice bowl.
- Don't pass food chopstick to chopstick.
- Try not to spear your food with the chopsticks.
- Don't use your chopsticks to move plates or bowls around on the table.
- Don't use the chopsticks for pointing or waving around the room.
- If you need to “cut” food, use the chopsticks to separate the food into pieces by doing it in small steps.

TYPICAL FOODS:

Kaiseki ryoori

Full course dinner with soup, raw and broiled fish and vegetables. This is a very traditional style meal, often very expensive.

Sukiyaki

Thin slices of beef, various vegetables and bean curd cooked in a sweetened broth. Often cooked at the table in a group while eating.

Tempura

Deep fried shrimp, squid, fish and other vegetables.

Shabu-shabu

Very thin slices of beef with vegetables and bean curd, dipped in a fondue-like broth. Often expensive.

Sashimi

Slices of various raw fish.

Sushi

Oval-shaped rice balls topped with slices of raw fish or vegetables.

Unagi

Eel.

Teppanyaki

Seafood, vegetables and meat grilled on a hot plate at the table.

Soba

Thin noodles made from buckwheat flour.

Udon

Thick noodles made from wheat flour.

Ramen

Thin noodles in a broth soup (miso or soy sauce based) topped with various meats and/or vegetables.

Miso shiru

Soup made from fermented soybeans. Staple of the Japanese diet.

Said just before eating: II TADA KI MASU

Said after finishing: GO CHI SO SAMA DESHI TA (It was a feast)

When you want something: (item) KUDASAI