

Swedes – the Japanese of the North: honest, efficient and obedient

Sweden is arguably the most Americanized country in Europe, yet the cultural differences are more profound and more subtle than what is apparent to the casual visitor.

Top 10 observations of Swedish business ethics!

1. Experts at Avoiding Confrontation

Swedes dislike face-to-face conflicts and will either change subjects or claim to agree with the other person to avoid exposing a difference of opinion.

2. Japanese-style Consensus-Decision Making

Everyone involved in the decision is included in non-argumentative discussions which are aimed at finding a compromise. It can be a lengthy process but once reached, Swedes stick to the agreement.

3. Flat Organizations without Hierarchy

Swedish companies are often horizontal in structure with employees on all levels given a lot of responsibility and well respected.

4. Swedish Managers: Diplomats not Order Givers!

Responsibility is delegated throughout the organization and employees work on their own initiative rather than being assigned tasks by management. Why? The assumption is that the employee is a competent and willing person able to do his job.

5. Lack of Bureaucracy

It is easy to get hold of email addresses and mobile phone numbers for top management. Hands-on and down-to-earth, they do not hide behind secretaries and closed doors.

6. Young Management

The average age of a CEO in Sweden is 48, compared with the European average of 55. In "newer industries" like IT and biotechnology, managers are often even younger.

7. Reserved Communication Style

Swedes use few words but generally mean what they say. What they do not say is often more important than what is said. Oral agreements are usually genuine and binding.

8. Importance of Leisure time

Employees have at least five weeks paid vacation per year so many disappear on the 1st July for one month. This can be frustrating for international business partners.

9. The Virtue of Honesty

Giving false impressions, lying and boasting is not part of their nature so they do not always make the best salespeople. They may instead point out weaknesses or flaws in a proposal or product dumbfounding foreigners.

10. Swedish Companies – A Pleasant Working Environment

Companies invest in their employees and create a nice working environment. As a result employees are generally loyal and dedicated.

“You need to be aware -and Ford encountered this -that Swedes are consensus-driven decision makers, plan ahead and stick to the plan – the US attitude of “Let’s just get started and we can change it later” is not warmly received.”

Keith Curtis, Commercial Officer US Embassy

“Swedes are disciplined, conscientious and usually trustworthy. The management attitude is not one of superiors versus subordinates, but more that of equality and coordination.”

Alex Corovic, Ericsson Headquarters Kista

Sample Article [Alannah Eames](#)

www.alannaheames.com