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BULLETIN



SWEDISH BUSINESS CULTURE

In this bulletin you will find:

- Guidance on how to better understand Swedish business culture
- Practical tips on how to establish good relationships with Swedish business partners
- Recommendations of cultural aspects to consider
- Two interviews with Swedish and Lithuanian professionals

UNDERSTANDING SWEDISH BUSINESS CULTURE: THE THEORY

When it comes to living and working in Sweden, understanding the local culture and personal behaviors plays a crucial role in ensuring a smooth transition. Despite the small geographical distance between Sweden and Lithuania, there are notable differences in Swedish business culture that individuals need to be aware of.

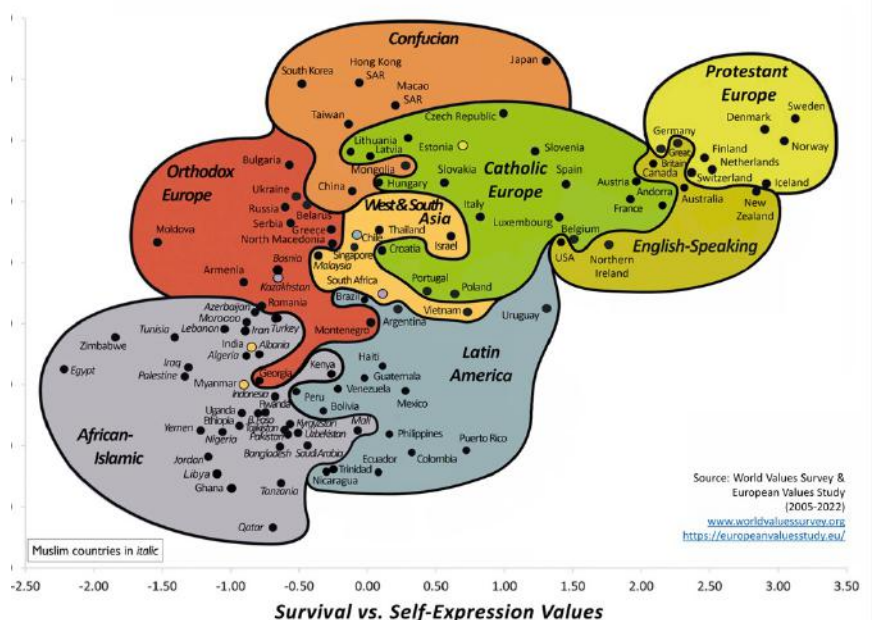
By familiarizing oneself with these unique aspects, one can effectively navigate the Swedish business environment. In this bulletin, you will find a comprehensive overview of Swedish business culture, shedding light on key highlights that will help individuals better prepare for their professional endeavours in Sweden.

Let's start with analysing Inglehart & Welzel cultural map of the world* WVS Database (worldvaluessurvey.org). The map visually represents the differences in cultural values between societies based on two main dimensions. The vertical y-axis represents the transition from traditional to secular-rational values, while the horizontal x-axis represents the shift from survival to self-expression values.

Moving upward on the map indicates a shift from traditional values to secular-rational values. Traditional values typically involve adherence to long-standing customs, beliefs, and social norms, while secular-rational values prioritize rationality, individualism, and modernization. Moving rightward on the map signifies a shift from survival values to self-expression values. Survival values are associated with societies that prioritize economic and physical security, while self-expression values focus on personal freedom, creativity, and individual fulfilment.

By analysing these dimensions on the map, we can gain insights into how different societies prioritize and emphasize certain cultural values.

The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023



Lithuania falls in the middle of the self-expression values axis, indicating that decisions in Lithuania are primarily driven by rationality and financial stability. On the other hand, Sweden is positioned in the top right corner, which sets it apart from other European countries. Sweden exhibits high levels of self-expression values and places a strong emphasis on individualism, personal freedom, and individual fulfillment.

Swedish upbringing places significant importance on individual autonomy and independence. Individuals are encouraged to make life choices that align with their own desires and aspirations, rather than being driven by external influences such as family expectations.

Knowing cultural differences can help you navigate social settings in Sweden. Swedes tend to keep their work and personal lives separate. So, whether you're living or planning a business there, being mindful of this can help you build stronger connections with Swedes by adjusting your interactions accordingly.

Some examples of how that works in practice:

- **Maintaining Distinction Between Office Colleagues and Personal Life Friends:** Swedes tend to maintain clear boundaries between their office colleagues and personal life friends. While they may form close relationships with colleagues at work, they typically keep these interactions separate from their personal lives outside of work. This separation helps prevent conflicts of interest or potential complications arising from mixing professional and personal relationships.
- **Separation between Business Transactions and Personal Relationships:** In business transactions or financial agreements, Swedes prioritize separating professional dealings from personal relationships. They aim to ensure fairness, transparency, and trust in financial transactions by keeping them distinct from personal connections. This approach helps avoid potential conflicts or misunderstandings that may arise if financial matters were intertwined with personal relationships.



THE INDIVIDUALISTIC APPROACH IN SWEDISH SOCIETY

Privacy holds great importance in Swedish culture, encompassing aspects that make individuals vulnerable while promoting equality and flat hierarchies. By understanding what is considered private in Swedish society, individuals can navigate social interactions more effectively and respect the boundaries set forth by Swedish culture. Below you can find some examples that are deemed private in Swedish culture:

- **Differences between Individuals:** In Swedish society, individual differences are considered private matters. Swedes value personal autonomy and respect for diversity. Discussing or highlighting differences between individuals may be seen as intrusive or potentially divisive. Instead, it is encouraged to focus on commonalities and shared values to foster unity.
- **Disagreements:** Swedish culture places a strong emphasis on avoiding conflicts and maintaining harmonious relationships. As such, disagreements are generally regarded as private matters that should be kept to oneself. Expressing differing opinions openly may be seen as disruptive and could potentially highlight the differences between individuals rather than promoting cohesion.
- **Different Opinions:** Similar to disagreements, different opinions are also considered private matters in Swedish society. Swedes value consensus-building and finding common ground rather than engaging in debates or confrontations over divergent viewpoints. Expressing alternative perspectives may be seen as challenging the prevailing harmony or potentially causing unnecessary tension.
- **Feelings, Pain, or Disabilities:** Swedish culture highly respects individual privacy when it comes to feelings, pain, or disabilities. Sharing these personal experiences is generally reserved for close relationships or trusted confidants rather than public discussions. Swedes prioritize creating safe spaces where individuals feel comfortable

opening up about their emotions but discourage public displays of vulnerability.

- **Hierarchy at Work:** Discussing hierarchy at work is discouraged in Swedish culture due to the promotion of flat hierarchies and equal opportunities within the workplace. Sweden values a collaborative work environment where decisions are made collectively rather than being dictated by hierarchical structures. Openly discussing hierarchical differences may undermine this egalitarian approach and create unnecessary divisions among colleagues.
- **Truth as a Private Matter:** In Swedish culture, truth itself is regarded as a private matter. This means that personal truths or sensitive information should not be shared without explicit consent from the individual involved. Respecting privacy extends to respecting an individual's right to control their own narrative and decide when and how they share personal truths with others.



THE PUBLIC APPROACH IN SWEDISH SOCIETY

On the other hand, quite some Swedish society values or aspects are considered public. These aspects include similarities, agreement, facts, equal accessibility for all, equal opportunities, and harmony:

- **Similarities:** In Swedish society, similarities among individuals are celebrated as they foster a sense of unity and belonging. Recognizing shared experiences or commonalities promotes social cohesion and allows people to connect on various levels. Emphasizing similarities enables Swedes to build strong bonds within their communities.
- **Agreement:** Agreement is another essential aspect considered public in Swedish society. The ability to find common ground and reach consensus is highly valued. Swedes aim to create harmonious environments by focusing on areas of agreement rather than dwelling on differences or engaging in confrontations over conflicting opinions.
- **Facts:** Facts hold great significance in Swedish society as they form the foundation for informed decision-making and rational discourse. Objective information is valued over personal beliefs or subjective viewpoints when discussing important matters. Swedes prioritize evidence-based discussions that rely on verifiable facts to promote clarity and accuracy.
- **Equal Accessibility for All:** Swedish society places a strong emphasis on equal accessibility for all individuals regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances. This includes ensuring physical accessibility to public spaces for people with disabilities, providing inclusive services such as healthcare and education, and promoting equal opportunities across various domains of life.
- **Equal Opportunities:** Equality of opportunity is deeply ingrained in Swedish culture. The principle of meritocracy guides societal systems to ensure that everyone has an

equal chance to succeed based on their skills, qualifications, and efforts rather than factors such as gender or socioeconomic background. Equality of opportunity extends across education, employment, healthcare, and other spheres.

- **Harmony:** Harmony is highly cherished in Swedish society as it fosters positive social dynamics and peaceful coexistence among individuals from diverse backgrounds. Striving for harmony involves maintaining respectful relationships with others and seeking compromises when conflicts arise. Swedes value creating balanced environments where everyone feels included and respected.

A Swedish individual in a group, i.e. at work or in a team, tries to be:

- Similar, not to stick out,
- Happy and positive,
- Non-confrontational and pleasant,
- Protect own and each other's privacy.



MAKING IMPRESSIONS IN SWEDISH CULTURE

In Swedish culture, making a positive impression is highly valued and plays a significant role in establishing meaningful connections and building successful relationships. This chapter explores the key aspects of making impressions in Swedish culture, providing insights into the cultural norms and behaviors that are important to consider.

HOW TO MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION?

Recognize everyone. A key aspect of making a good impression is recognizing and valuing everyone around you. Acknowledge the presence and contributions of your colleagues or acquaintances to foster an inclusive environment. Show genuine interest in getting to know people's names, backgrounds, and perspectives. By recognizing the worth of each individual, you demonstrate respect and create meaningful connections.

Be pragmatic. Being pragmatic means approaching tasks or situations with practicality and efficiency. Focus on finding effective solutions that address challenges or meet objectives while considering available resources or constraints. A pragmatic mindset allows you to navigate complexities with ease while demonstrating competence and reliability.

Delivering according to plan. Fulfilling commitments is essential for building trust and credibility. When you make promises or agree to take on responsibilities, ensure that you follow through on them within the agreed-upon timeframe. Consistently delivering on commitments demonstrates reliability and professionalism.

Anticipating needs. Anticipating needs involves proactively identifying potential requirements or challenges before they arise. Take initiative by understanding the context or expectations of a situation and preparing accordingly. By anticipating needs, you demonstrate foresight and resourcefulness while enhancing efficiency.

Collaborating effectively as a team player. Collaboration is key to achieving collective goals in both personal and professional settings. Actively engage with others by listening

attentively to their ideas, providing constructive input when necessary, and working towards shared objectives. Being an effective team player involves respecting diverse perspectives, communicating openly, sharing responsibilities equitably, and fostering a supportive environment.

Taking initiative. This means being proactive rather than waiting for instructions or guidance from others. Identify opportunities for improvement or suggest innovative ideas that contribute to the overall progress of projects or initiatives. Taking initiative demonstrates enthusiasm for learning and growth while showcasing self-leadership.

Maintaining a positive attitude towards work creates an inviting atmosphere that promotes collaboration and productivity.

WHAT COULD MAKE A BAD IMPRESSION?

Show disrespect to superiors. Swedish culture places great emphasis on equality and flat hierarchies. Displaying disrespect towards superiors, such as openly challenging their authority or disregarding their opinions, can be seen as disruptive and disrespectful. Swedes value respectful communication and expect individuals to treat superiors with deference while still maintaining open dialogue.

Theorising. While intellectual discussions are valued in Swedish culture, excessively theorizing or engaging in abstract thinking without practical application may be perceived as impractical or disconnected from reality. Swedes appreciate pragmatic problem-solving and prefer concrete solutions over excessive theoretical speculation.

Disregard teamwork. Swedish culture emphasizes collaboration and teamwork over individual achievements. Prioritizing personal excellence at the expense of collective goals or neglecting opportunities for cooperation can create a negative impression. Swedes value inclusivity, shared responsibilities, and achieving common objectives through collaborative efforts.

Working long hours (implying poor planning skills). In Swedish culture, working long hours may imply poor planning skills rather than dedication or productivity. Sweden values work-life balance and efficient time management. Working excessively long hours might be interpreted as an inability to prioritize tasks effectively or manage time efficiently, which can leave a negative impression on colleagues.

Being competitive. While healthy competition is appreciated, displaying excessive competitiveness can create tension and disrupt harmonious relationships in Swedish culture. Swedes value cooperation, fairness, and mutual support rather than cutthroat competition that undermines team dynamics or fosters division among individuals.

Being obedient. While obedience is generally regarded positively in some cultures, being overly obedient without offering constructive input or critical thinking can be viewed as passive or lacking initiative in Swedish culture. Swedes encourage active participation and expect individuals to contribute their ideas and perspectives rather than simply conforming without question.

Considering Work as the Highest Priority. While work is important in Swedish culture, considering it the highest priority above personal well-being or other aspects of life can create a negative impression. Sweden values work-life balance, leisure time, and holistic well-being. Focusing solely on work may be seen as neglecting other important dimensions of life such as family, hobbies, or personal relationships.



OTHER IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF SWEDISH WORK AND BUSINESS CULTURE

Building trust in business relationships is crucial for establishing strong and effective collaborations. Trust forms the foundation of successful business interactions and contributes to long-term partnerships. In the chapter below you will find the summary of the main aspects that contribute to building a strong base for your successful business relationships.

BUILDING TRUST IN BUSINESS RELATIONS

In Swedish culture, trust-building holds great significance and is considered essential for establishing strong relationships and effective collaborations. Trust forms the foundation of interpersonal interactions, business transactions, and societal cohesion in Sweden. In this section, you will find summarized key reasons why building trust is highly valued in Swedish culture.

- **Social Cohesion:** Trust is seen as a fundamental element in maintaining social harmony and cohesion within Swedish society. Swedes believe that trust enables individuals to rely on one another, fostering a sense of community and collective responsibility.
- **Transparency and Openness:** Swedes value transparency and open communication as integral components of trust-building. They appreciate honesty, directness, and the willingness to share information openly. This helps establish credibility and reliability within personal and professional relationships.
- **Reliability:** Trustworthiness is highly regarded in Swedish culture, with people emphasizing the importance of keeping commitments and delivering on promises. Being dependable fosters a sense of security and reliability both personally and professionally.
- **Long-Term Perspective:** Swedes tend to focus on long-term goals rather than short-term gains. Trust-building plays a vital role in establishing enduring relationships based on mutual respect, support, and shared values.

MAINTAINING LOW-STRESS ENVIRONMENT

Sweden is known for having a relatively low-stress environment compared to many other countries. Swedes generally prioritize creating a safe atmosphere and tend to avoid confrontation whenever possible. This emphasis on a calm and relaxed atmosphere contributes to the reputation of Sweden as a country with low-stress levels.

One reason for the low-stress environment in Sweden is the efficient social welfare system that provides support and security to its citizens. The Swedish government places great emphasis on ensuring social well-being, which includes factors such as healthcare, education, and work-life balance. This focus on social welfare helps reduce stress levels by providing a safety net and promoting a sense of security among individuals.

Additionally, Swedes value work-life balance and prioritize leisure time alongside their professional responsibilities. The concept of "lagom," meaning moderation or just enough, is often embraced in Swedish culture. This approach encourages individuals to find a balance between work and personal life, avoiding excessive stress or overwork.

RESPECTING PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

In Swedish work culture, it is important to respect personal boundaries in the office. Swedes value their personal space and prioritize creating a safe and comfortable atmosphere for everyone. Respecting personal boundaries means understanding and honoring an individual's need for privacy, physical distance, and emotional space.

To respect personal boundaries in the office, it is essential to be mindful of others' personal space. This includes maintaining an appropriate physical distance from colleagues unless invited closer, refraining from touching others without their consent and being aware of individual preferences regarding personal conversations or sharing personal information. It's also important to listen actively, show empathy, and provide support when needed while being mindful not to intrude on someone's privacy.

By respecting personal boundaries, individuals can contribute to a positive work environment where everyone feels valued, respected, and comfortable expressing themselves.

PUNCTUALITY

In Swedish work culture, punctuality is considered very important. Swedes value efficiency and respect for others' time, so being on time for meetings, appointments, and work-related commitments is highly valued.

Swedish workplaces often have a strong emphasis on timeliness and adherence to schedules. Arriving late to meetings or other work-related events may be seen as disrespectful or unprofessional. It is expected that employees arrive on time and are prepared to start their tasks promptly.

Punctuality also extends beyond the workplace in Swedish society. Swedes generally prioritize being on time for social engagements and other personal commitments as well. This emphasis on punctuality reflects the overall value placed on efficiency and respect for others' time.

To ensure punctuality in Swedish work culture, it's advisable to plan, allow sufficient time for travel or preparation, and prioritize punctuality in all aspects of professional life. Being mindful of deadlines and delivering work on time is also essential to demonstrate professionalism and respect for colleagues' schedules.

It's important to note that while punctuality is highly valued in Swedish work culture, individual experiences may vary slightly depending on the specific workplace or industry. Nonetheless, it is generally considered good practice to prioritize punctuality to align with the cultural norms in Sweden.

PLANNING

To ensure successful and efficient work in Swedish culture, it is important to prioritize planning ahead and avoid spontaneous meetings. Planning in advance (3/6 weeks ahead) allows for better organisation, preparation, and coordination among team members.

By planning ahead, individuals have the opportunity to allocate sufficient time for tasks, set clear objectives, and gather any necessary resources or information. This approach helps minimize the likelihood of unexpected delays or disruptions and promotes a more structured and productive work environment.

Avoiding spontaneous meetings also aligns with the value placed on punctuality in Swedish work culture. By scheduling meetings in advance, all participants have the opportunity to plan their time accordingly, ensuring that everyone can be present and fully engaged. This helps foster a respectful atmosphere where individuals' schedules are considered and maximizes the effectiveness of collaborative efforts.

OFFICE DRESS CODE

The typical dress code in Swedish offices is generally professional, but it can vary depending on the specific workplace and industry. Sweden is known for its relaxed and informal culture, so the dress code in many Swedish offices tends to be more casual compared to some other countries.

In most Swedish offices, employees often wear business casual attire. This typically includes clothing such as dress pants or skirts, blouses or shirts, and closed-toe shoes. Men may opt for dress shirts with or without ties, while women may choose dresses or blouses paired with skirts or slacks.

However, it's important to note that there are also companies and industries in Sweden where a more formal dress code is expected. For example, in traditional corporate settings or industries such as finance or law, employees may adhere to a more formal business attire with suits for men and tailored dresses or suits for women.

Ultimately, the specific dress code will depend on factors such as the company's culture, industry norms, and the nature of the work being performed. It's always a good idea to observe what others are wearing in your workplace or consult any guidelines provided by your employer to ensure you are dressing appropriately.

FIKA AT WORK

Fika is a concept commonly practiced in Swedish workplaces. It refers to a break or social gathering where colleagues come together to enjoy coffee (or tea) and pastries. Fika is more than just a coffee break; it serves as a way for individuals to connect, relax, and foster relationships in the workplace.

During Fika, coworkers pause their work tasks and gather in a communal space, such as a break room or shared kitchen area. They engage in casual conversations, share stories, and get to know each other on a personal level. Fika

provides an opportunity for colleagues to build trust and strengthen their working relationships. The practice of Fika is deeply ingrained in Swedish culture and is considered an important part of the workday. It helps create a sense of community and promotes a healthy work-life balance. Fika breaks are typically taken once or twice a day, with specific times designated for this purpose.

During Fika, discussions can range from work-related topics to personal interests or current events. In addition to its social benefits, Fika also has practical advantages for productivity. By taking regular breaks and connecting with co-workers during these informal gatherings, employees can reduce stress levels, enhance creativity, and improve overall well-being.

FOOD IN SWEDISH CULTURE

When it comes to food in Sweden, it is highly valued and considered important. Swedes place importance on enjoying meals and creating an inclusive environment for everyone. It is always a good practice to ask about allergies and food intolerances to ensure that everyone can enjoy the meals without any issues.

In Swedish culture, food plays a significant role, and there is a focus on quality, freshness, and sustainability. Traditional Swedish cuisine often includes dishes such as meatballs, herring, gravlax (cured salmon), crispbread, lingonberry jam, and various dairy products like cheese and yogurt.

To accommodate different dietary needs and preferences, many restaurants in Sweden offer vegetarian or vegan options alongside their regular menu. It's common for menus to indicate allergens or specify if a dish is suitable for specific dietary restrictions.

PRACTICAL TIPS ON BEHAVIOURS

When it comes to demonstrating good behavior and trying to fit-in in Swedish society and business culture, there are several practical tips to keep in mind. These include:

- Never interrupt anyone and wait until they have finished speaking before interjecting or responding. Interrupting someone can be seen as disrespectful and can hinder effective communication and collaboration. By patiently listening to others and allowing them to express their thoughts or ideas fully, you show respect for their opinions and contribute to a positive work environment. Active listening also allows you to gain a better understanding of the topic being discussed and enables you to provide more thoughtful and relevant responses.
- Avoid conflicts or confrontations. Swedes prioritize creating a safe and harmonious atmosphere, where open communication and collaboration are valued over confrontation. Instead of engaging in confrontational or aggressive behaviour, Swedes tend to focus on consensus-building and finding common ground.
- There is generally no flexibility or leeway when it comes to handling deadlines and time management. Punctuality and meeting established timelines are highly valued, and individuals are expected to prioritize and adhere to set schedules.
- These topics can help maintain a positive and inclusive atmosphere:
 - ◇ hobbies and interests
 - ◇ travel
 - ◇ food
 - ◇ books, movies, or TV shows
 - ◇ current events, etc.
- Avoid behaviours such as shouting or engaging in loud conversations, it's important to maintain a considerate and respectful approach.
- Avoid excessive self-promotion flaunting one's achievements or constantly reminding others of your successes. It is important to maintain a humble and modest approach and appear similar to others. Instead, focus on sharing credit with colleagues.
- Finally, respect rules and regulations. Adhering to guidelines and policies helps Swedes to ensure fairness, consistency, and accountability within the workplace and life in general.



To summarize the Swedish business culture, it can be described as having a relatively low-stress environment that prioritizes creating a safe and relaxed atmosphere. Swedes value work-life balance and embrace the concept of 'lagom,' meaning moderation and working to a just sufficient standard. They prioritize open communication, collaboration, and consensus-building over confrontation or bringing bad news. Swedes also prefer to keep their personal life separate from work colleagues and respect personal boundaries. As to making business relations, good advance planning and punctuality are important, but of utmost and primary importance is to build trust throughout all steps and respect for the Swedish way of living and working.



Agne Baronaite

THANK YOU!

We extend our sincere gratitude to our Club Board Member Agne Baronaite for collecting extensive sources of information and preparing the text for this bulletin!

Agne has been living in Stockholm for nearly five years and has gained valuable experience working with major Swedish banks for almost 12 years. Her understanding of Swedish culture is influenced by both her personal and professional experiences. Agne is a natural networker who skilfully leverages her personal and professional insights to navigate and embrace various cultural dynamics effectively.

INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW WITH HÅKAN MOLIN

Håkan has an entrepreneurial background with experience in a wide range of functions in banking and insurance. His relationship with Lithuania started 10 years ago when he was offered a job opportunity in Vilnius. At that time, Håkan moved from Beijing, China to Vilnius. He took on the position of General Manager at Handelsbanken in the Vilnius branch and lived there for 2 years.

After his time at Handelsbanken, Håkan's interest in Lithuania grew even more, leading him to start his own company focused on forestry investment in Lithuania. What was once a hobby became a serious business venture for him. As a result, Håkan now owns an apartment in Vilnius and regularly travels there for work, spending at least a couple of days per month.

Håkan is a fan of Lithuania and is actively involved in multiple start-ups and international investments, particularly in the forestry sector. He has expanded his ventures to include the solar business as well. Håkan also organizes trips for investors in Lithuania, making him a true ambassador for the country. Currently, Håkan is involved in seven ventures in Lithuania and two ventures in Latvia, with a primary focus on the forestry industry.

IN YOUR EXPERIENCE, WHAT ARE THE MAJOR DIFFERENCES IN BUSINESS CULTURE AND ETHICS BETWEEN LITHUANIA AND SWEDEN?

Business in Sweden is more transparent than in Lithuania. Businesses are becoming increasingly transparent in Lithuania too. Some gray zone activities are still visible patterns in Lithuanian business practices. And that depends on what stage the country is developing. Overall, the business environment in Sweden is straightforward to cooperate with knowledgeable professionals.

ARE THERE SOME IMPORTANT CLIENTS/CUSTOMERS' CULTURAL ASPECTS LITHUANIAN COMPANIES SHOULD KNOW WHEN BUILDING AND TRADING PRODUCTS AND SERVICES FOR/IN SWEDEN?

It's important to know that Swedish people have embarrassingly low knowledge of Lithuania. I would like to emphasize the importance of convincing your Swedish partners to visit Lithuania and gain understanding and knowledge about Lithuania as a very successful and qualified country with great pace of development, especially in Wi-Fi and mobile network standards. One of the main reasons why many Swedes don't know much about Lithuania is because till 1990 Lithuania was part of the Soviet Union, and this is how Baltics were represented in school.



Håkan Molin

From my personal observations this is what Swedes think/knowledge about Lithuania:

- Many are not sure where Lithuania is located. Swedes find it hard to put all three Baltic countries in order. So be sure that your business partners buy the correct flight tickets to Vilnius, not Riga.
- Think that Lithuania is very close to Ukraine.
- Think that Lithuania has a high level of criminality, and Vilnius is a dangerous capital. But actually, it is more safe than Stockholm.
- Some people think that it is a poor and underdeveloped country, with a large number of Russians.
- Entrepreneurs think that it is complicated to do business, and partly due to corruption.
- Swedes think that all three Baltic countries have same size of population, but this is false.

WHAT ARE THE TIPS FOR LITHUANIAN COMPANIES? HOW TO TACKLE THOSE KNOWLEDGE GAPS? ARE THERE WAYS TO SHOW THAT LITHUANIA IS A SUCCESSFUL COUNTRY?

Present the advantages and competitiveness of Lithuania. Invite people to visit Lithuania and address knowledge gaps by showcasing cities. Invite investors and present Lithuania as a great opportunity to get to know the country. Additionally, take somebody around the city to show them the new architecture.

Below are some facts that should be shared to Swedish companies:

- Lithuania is one of the fastest-developing countries in the European Union.
- Lithuania is a member of the Schengen, the European Union, the NATO and the eurozone.
- The Internet in Lithuania is one of the fastest in the world.
- It is a country with great infrastructure and “green” cities.
- An educated workforce – one of the highest education levels of the population in the European Union. Good English language skills.

Also, it is important to explain the differences between the three Baltic countries. Spend time presenting countries, provide relevant statistics etc. Talk and give more information about Lithuania as being different from the rest of the Baltic countries.

WHAT IS THE GENERAL APPROACH TOWARDS HIERARCHY AND AUTHORITY IN SWEDISH WORKPLACES? HOW DOES THIS AFFECT COMMUNICATION AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES?

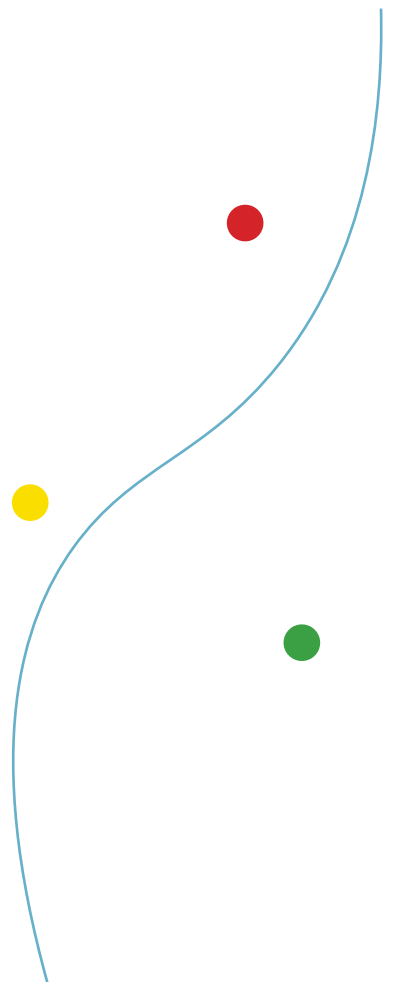
When comparing pure Lithuanian companies to Swedish companies with branches in Lithuania, several differences can be observed. Lithuanians working for Swedish companies tend to adapt quickly to a similar view focused on teamwork and collaboration, which are highly valued by Swedish companies. Employees are encouraged to work together, share ideas, and support each other's initiatives. This collaborative mindset creates a positive and innovative work environment where employees feel empowered to contribute their skills and expertise.

On the other hand, in Lithuania, people tend to be more afraid of making mistakes and often strive diligently to prevent them. This fear of being blamed for mistakes can be attributed to cultural factors and a desire for perfectionism.

In contrast, Swedish companies have a more accepting attitude towards mistakes. They understand that mistakes are an inevitable part of the learning process and encourage employees to learn from them rather than placing blame.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN THE CONCEPT OF “LAGOM” AND HOW IT APPLIES TO SWEDISH WORK CULTURE? HOW DOES IT IMPACT DECISION-MAKING AND COLLABORATION?

It is common to use the word “lagom”, but it is not worth focusing on it but rather on building trust. Swedes are more into building trust than writing more detailed agreements. Successful Swedish businessmen emphasize networking and trust. Lithuanians are more into documentation, and it comes from different traditions. Lithuanians tend to document a lot, documentation is done just to be done and not used anywhere. Complex procedures, such as involving notaries and obtaining approvals for agreements, are common in Lithuania. This emphasis on documentation aims to ensure safety and security in business transactions. To achieve successful business interactions between Swedish businessmen and Lithuanians, it would be beneficial to find a middle ground that combines elements of both approaches. Establishing trust through networking can help create a solid foundation for collaboration. At the same time, ensuring proper documentation and following necessary procedures can provide a sense of security and reduce potential risks.



HOW TO BUILD A STRONG NETWORK AND PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH SWEDISH COMPANIES?

If you invite somebody to Lithuania it will be easier to stay longer in touch, shared experiences will bond a bit. Build trust and try to find a decent way to do business, don't stretch negotiations to the last point, which could impact long-term relationships.

It takes time to build trust, share values, prove that you deliver according to the agreement and overall keep the counterpart informed even if you have delays. It is important to communicate and keep your business partners updated. Not to communicate is a very bad sign.

Avoid over-smart grey zone trading activities. Overall, it takes a longer time to build relationships with business colleagues, even though it is not hard to maintain contact. Facebook is used in Lithuania for business purposes, which is the opposite in Sweden. Swedish people use LinkedIn.

Transparent, open, honest. Don't hide things, put things as they are on the table.

HOW TO CONVINC SWEDISH PEOPLE TO TRAVEL?

Swedish people like to travel. Explain that the flight to Lithuania is short and comfortable. Market your country's benefits, good hotels and restaurants. Show your potential investors production facilities, describe your working standards, etc.

WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF LITHUANIANS?

For Lithuanian people, it takes longer to share personal things with colleagues. Lithuanians separate more work and private matters.

ARE LITHUANIANS TOO DIRECT, HOW TO COMMUNICATE NEGATIVE FEEDBACK?

I don't think that Lithuanians are too direct, but they tend to not admit mistakes or that something has been done incorrectly. It seems as if it is dangerous for them to make mistakes and they are a bit afraid to give proposals. Lithuanians are waiting for instructions. More hierarchical country.

INTERVIEW WITH MANTAS ZALATORIUS

Mr Zalatorius is a practicing international manager, mentor and advisor with more than 30 years of strategy and cross-cultural leadership as well as 25 years of experience working with Swedish companies. His leadership values matured working with and for Sweden. Since 1994, Mantas has worked at the Swedish Trade and Invest Council in various executive positions, including Vice President with the placement in Stockholm. He currently holds the position of Chief Business Development Officer at Creditonline. Mantas is also CEO and Founder of advisory firm Veritas Strategic Partners, he is considered to be one of the best experts on Swedish business culture. Mantas is awarded the Swedish Royal Order of Polar Star, Officer 1st Class.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE WHAT CULTURE IS IN THE BROAD SENSE?

Culture, in a broad sense, is the shared beliefs, values, and practices of a group of people living in one territory, one society and usually speaking one language. To put it simply – it is a dynamic process of solving dilemmas related to relationships with other people, nature and time. These elements are learned and passed down from generation to generation, shaping how people see the world and interact with each other. Cultural differences are variations in these value systems, and they become apparent, particularly during challenging situations where underlying values clash.

We are social chameleons, and we can imitate and pretend if we need to, but it is only during challenging situations when underlying values clash, those cultural differences become apparent. According to my Professor and cross-cultural expert Fons Trompenaars (who also wrote the best-selling book “Riding the Waves of Culture”), culture can be understood through seven dimensions. Although Lithuania and Sweden are separated only by the Baltic Sea, of these seven dimensions only two unite us, and five separate us. In my opinion - the difference is huge, much bigger than we could expect.



Mantas Zalatorius

COULD YOU BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THOSE DIMENSIONS NOTING WHICH ARE TYPICAL TO SWEDEN AND WHICH TO LITHUANIA?

These dimensions define:

- Particularism vs. Universalism: This refers to the importance of rules vs. relationships. Sweden leans strongly towards universalism (rules, unified procedures, clarity), while Lithuania might be closer to particularism (relationships, exceptions, at ease with ambiguity).
- Individualism vs. Communitarianism: This focuses on self vs. group. Sweden scores high on communitarianism, while Lithuania is leaning towards individualism.

- Diffuse vs. Specific: This describes expressing emotions openly vs. holding them back as well as the nature of the relationship. Swedes might be more specific (reserved), while Lithuanians could be more diffuse (expressive).
- Achievement vs. Ascription: This explores how work and personal life intertwine. Sweden might have a clearer separation (achievement), while Lithuania might have more overlap.
- Performance vs. Status: This focuses on valuing performance over status or hierarchy. Sweden might be more performance-oriented, while Lithuania might place more emphasis on status.
- Sequential vs. Synchronic: This describes time management styles. Both Sweden and Lithuania prioritize sequential (order and planning), but Lithuania could be more synchronic (flexible).
- Internal vs. External Control: This explores how people perceive control over their environment. Both Sweden and Lithuania lean towards internal control over a situation, while Lithuanians could still have a relict of a bit more of an external control view, i.e. believing that they depend on the situation and the others.

As I previously pointed out, Lithuanians and Swedes are more or less united only by the last two dimensions. This is a very significant cultural difference, and therefore misunderstandings and miscommunication in business or work relations are coded in.

WHAT PRACTICAL TIPS COULD YOU GIVE TO LITHUANIAN BUSINESSMEN WHO AIM TO WORK IN SWEDEN?

I can give very straightforward advice on a few main 'what Not to do' – by checking these boxes you will avoid major cross-cultural potholes. But please be mindful – cross-cultural differences are much higher and more complex. Should someone need more professional advice based on your situation, I would be happy to assist.

10 major “DO NOTS”:

1. Don't be late. Not even a couple of minutes. Being late in Swedish business culture is the same as showing disrespect to a person's time. If you are late and cannot avoid it, call and warn about it in advance.
2. Don't brag about yourself or your achievements. This will be seen as being big-headed and you may be rejected as a poor fit to Swedish culture.

3. If you have quoted the price, don't offer big discounts later. The maximum discount then could be only 1-2 per cent. If you suggest a bigger discount, it may be seen as a signal that you are not honest and are trying to deceive.
4. Understand the decision-making structures. Don't be surprised when someone comes to the meeting who has a lower role or title than yours. It does not mean that this person has no power of decision-making. In Sweden, even a Project Manager can have the autonomous right of making a full decision.
5. Don't show familiarity too early. Do it only after you know the person well. The initial relationship may feel rather formal.
6. Don't get too confused over the Swedish way of saying 'no'. Instead of strictly disagreeing, they can ask you to extensively align with numerous stakeholders or parties. Again, be consistent and do it, as it may also mean you are tested (how patient or willing you are) or it may also mean, in surprising cases, a positive result.
7. Don't rush. It takes time to achieve successful results in Sweden, usually from three to five years. If you lack strategic patience, you shouldn't even try. Swedes are communitarians and so they allow new people into their circle cautiously and with great difficulty. But, if you succeed in getting into their circle, they will take care of you.
8. Don't stick out too much. Communitarians generally dislike those who stick out. That is the main aspect of the "Lagom" culture in Sweden. If you have proposed an incredible initiative, be patient and do not push it too hard. Wait for the alignment – an agreement can take time as otherwise your initiative can be seen as inappropriate 'sticking out'.
9. Don't get too emotional. If you encounter a conflict or issue, suggest your counterpart take a break, calm down, discuss an issue internally, get back relaxed, and only then try to find a solution with your counterpart. Good advice is to use data in your argumentation rather than opinions.
10. Don't expect quick results. If you wish to do a significant business, first you have to prove that you can be trusted in small things. Be consistent. Quality and trustfulness are in most cases more important than a low price or one-time "good deal".

So in summary, try avoiding behaviors that might be seen as arrogant or disrespectful in Swedish culture, be patient and seek to build trust and long-term relationships in business.

THANK YOU!

We sincerely thank the interviewed experts Mr Håkan Molin and Mr Mantas Zalatorius for sharing their knowledge and advice to help Lithuanian companies understand Swedish business culture.



TO BE CONTINUED...

This is the fourth information bulletin that Lithuanian Professionals in Stockholm Club has issued. The series of bulletins aim to provide local knowledge on various topics that are important for Lithuanian businesses aiming to expand or start in Sweden.

In preparing bulletins we utilize our network and professional contacts that own specific knowledge so that bulletins are comprehensive, competent, and useful for Lithuanian businesses.

LITHUANIAN PROFESSIONALS IN STOCKHOLM CLUB - LPS CLUB

We are a non-profit organisation which unites Lithuanian professionals in Sweden to support each other's professional growth, promote Lithuania, and enjoy joint activities. Our Strategic Directions are:

1. Lithuanian business enablement in Sweden
2. Better visibility and image of Lithuania in Sweden
3. Networking, fun, high professionalism and knowledge of our members.

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Designed by Gita Juchnevič
"Coliukės dizainas"

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