

- [Conference](#)
- [Programme](#)
- [Participants](#)
- [Exhibition](#)
- [Press](#)

- [Press Releases](#)
- [Interviews & Articles](#)
- [Logos & Banner](#)
- [Picture Gallery](#)

Business negotiations in the Middle East: Little knowledge of the other culture hinders communication



The globalisation of business has not only enabled companies large and small to focus on sales and procurement markets; they are also investing in research and development abroad. However, this also increases the need for intercultural and foreign language skills in employees and partners. “The extreme mobility of ‘high potentials’, intercultural teambuilding, international negotiations as well as cross-border business have all led to an increased appreciation of intercultural awareness in German companies,” according to Ridha Mejri, lecturer in Business English &

Intercultural Management at the Fachhochschule Worms.

Ridha Mejri is very familiar with Middle Eastern markets and is aware of the challenges which German and Arab business partners must overcome. He is also bilingual, having grown up in two cultures – Arabic and French - and he has lived and worked in the United Kingdom, France, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Dubai, Algeria and Saudi Arabia, among others. As an in-company trainer and coach, he provides seminars and workshops for business managers who want to improve their intercultural skills and lays the foundations for successful intercultural negotiations.

LANGUAGES & BUSINESS talked to him about the sensibilities and particularities which are required when it comes to intercultural cooperation in the Arab world.

L & B: What stereotypes and misunderstandings can influence relationships between German and Middle Eastern business partners?

Ridha Mejri: Many Germans think that every Arab is a Muslim, and that every Muslim is an Arab. They believe that the Arab world is homogeneous. Arabs are all millionaires, fanatical, chaotic, misogynistic, unpredictable, excessively emotional, lazy and dishonest. Germans miss clear structures when it comes to Arabs. They have difficulties with the Arab approach to deadlines and agreements. There is a lack of punctuality, self-discipline, precision, and, above all, long-term planning. Goals are often not reached, agreements and deadlines are not adhered to. Arabs appear to ignore the rules and seem to improvise a lot. Employees take no initiative, and always wait for orders from their managers. Relationships are more important than performance. Arabs like to negotiate and haggle. Germans however also see their erratic business partners as friendly, open, warm, approachable, full of humour and flexible.

Arabs on the other hand see Germans as constantly in a hurry, aloof, distant, cold, obsessed with

detail, inflexible, arrogant, know-it-all, humourless, closed, and that they live to work. They follow strict rules and regulations, neglect their family life and have no respect for the elderly. Punctuality and accuracy are seen as stress factors. German women are often scantily clad, which in their eyes indicates a lack of respect. However, Arabs also see Germans as determined, reliable, organised, accurate, honest and hard-working.

L & B: How would you describe the challenges facing German and Arabic business partners?

Ridha Mejri: Little knowledge of the other culture hinders communication considerably. This is a case of two different ways of thinking and behaviour coming into contact with each other. The more one learns and knows about the other culture, the better this interaction will work. At the same time one learns more about one's own culture. The following areas provide challenges in the interaction between Arab and German business partners:

Communication has a major impact on teamwork, employee motivation, management style, organisation and, above all, negotiations. While Germans prefer *low context* – a direct, explicit, so-called ‘hammer style’ way of communicating, Arab business partners on the other hand prefer *high context* – an indirect, non-verbal, implicit behaviour. Here, gestures, body language and facial expressions play a major role.

The term ‘Collectivism’ provides a major challenge. Arab business partners will spend a lot of time over small talk in order to build up trust and a relationship. In contrast, Germans are more task-oriented and much less personal.

Furthermore, Islam plays a major role in business life in the Arab world. This is not the case in the West. Another challenge is to manage the extremely wide range of dimensions at play in business negotiations, which include gender relations, management style, organisation, polychronic target orientation, conflict management, negotiations, low levels of uncertainty avoidance, ‘loss of face’, rigid hierarchies.

L & B: What are the characteristics of, and differences in, communication with Arab partners?

Ridha Mejri: Germans say what they mean and mean what they say. In contrast, Arabs mean ‘maybe’ when they say ‘yes’, but if they say ‘maybe’, they mean ‘no’. It is hard for them to say ‘no’ in order to save face. Germans are very direct, explicit, target oriented and very formal.

Arabs are very eloquent and love rhetoric. This is why they try to paraphrase a lot of things. The most important will come at the end. Criticism is expressed indirectly. Arabs prefer oral and informal interaction on a personal level. A person and a business become a single entity. Arabs use a wide range of gestures and body language in their communication. They interrupt frequently to show interest and commitment. Feelings are often on display and are also expressed very loudly. There is very little physical distance between persons of the same gender.

L & B: You offer seminars and workshops for business managers. What particular needs must be considered when training this target group?

Ridha Mejri: Seminar topics include “Intercultural awareness”, “Intercultural teambuilding, virtual teams”, “Diversity Management”, “International communication skills” and a number of others.

The aim of a seminar is for participants to learn to deal sensibly and constructively with other cultures, to develop empathy and thus to become aware of their own culture. The awareness that our mindset and behaviour are shaped by our culture is the precondition for being able to observe another culture objectively. It is important to understand ‘why’ and not just ‘how’.

The training must therefore also help to understand and analyse conflicts more effectively and thus to cope with these. Another part of the training is the phenomenon of culture shock and coping with it. Preparation for this should help to prevent expats or their family members from prematurely terminating their foreign deployment. This also applies to the time when expats must be reincorporated and/or integrated into the company.

September 2011

Ridha Mejri spricht am **Freitag, 28. Oktober** in "**Interkulturelle Kommunikation**" über das erfolgreich Arbeiten mit arabischen Geschäftspartnern. Die Session findet von **14.30 bis 16.00** statt.

● Quick Links

- [Workshops](#)
- [Programme](#)
- [Register online](#)
- [Sponsoring](#)

● Documents

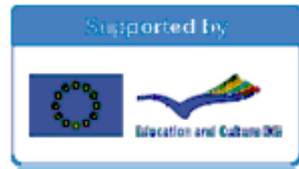
- [Conference Brochure](#)
- [Registration Form](#)
- [Post-Conference Report 2010](#)

● News

- [Quality Criteria for Language Trainers and In-house Training Providers: Interview with Sonja Malter](#)
- [Language Skills Crucial for Growth and Jobs: Interview with Kristina Cunningham](#)
- [More interviews](#)







- [Organiser](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [General Terms & Conditions](#)
- [Contact](#)
- [Disclaimer](#)