



Pakistan

The modern state of Pakistan was born out of the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 and has faced both domestic political upheavals and regional confrontations. It is the world's sixth most populous country.

Low levels of foreign investment have led to slow growth and underdevelopment in Pakistan. Agriculture accounts for more than one-fifth of output and two-fifths of employment. Textiles account for most of Pakistan's export earnings. Provided a positive trend is maintained, Pakistan presents opportunities for investments aiming both at using Pakistan as an export base and at tapping an emerging market with a rapidly growing middle class. Over 50% of Pakistan's 204 million people are under the age of 25. Pakistan is the largest market for Cambridge International Examinations and second largest for ACCA. Key sectors include specialised industrial machinery, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and medical products.

Pakistan's culture is very diverse, which stems from the fact that it has been influenced from a variety of different people, leaders and ethnic groups long before it gained independence. As Islam is practised by the majority of the population, this tends to have influence in governing their personal, political, economic and legal lives.

Urdu is the official language of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, however Punjabi is widely regarded as the most spoken language within Pakistan, especially within the Punjab region. English is the key language for commerce in Pakistan, and is widely used by government departments and business traders.

Pakistanis tend to favour a mix of indirect and direct communication. When speaking to people older than oneself, the style is mostly indirect. When speaking to people one's own age or younger, the style is usually direct.

Religion plays a very important role in the life of almost every Pakistani. Muslims must live according to the five pillars of Islam, which involves praying facing Mecca five times a day. Friday is the holy day when everything is closed. Further restrictions may occur during the holy month of Ramadan. During this time, as a mark of respect you should be dressing modestly (whether you are male or female), respecting prayer spaces and neither eating nor drinking in public during daylight. Avoid working lunches for the month. As it is forbidden (with some exceptions) also to drink even water, try and stick to straightforward meetings around a desk.

Allow flexibility around meetings and calls: Muslim colleagues are juggling additional prayer calls and are expected to spend more time with their families. At the end of the working day, devout Muslims will have had nothing to eat since the morning, and will need to get home both to eat and for family and community events – these may be families coming together to break fasts or Qur’an readings in the Mosque. Helping colleagues to leave punctually at the end of the day will reduce stress and be greatly appreciated.

Pakistani culture values the family above everything else. Family ties characterise the social structure and individual identity. Therefore, Pakistanis favour doing business with people they know and trust. Consequently, family members and friends are often hired to work in the same company. Besides family structures, education and experience are important qualities for a manager in Pakistan. Pakistanis are used to giving and receiving orders, and do not tend to work in teams where consensus is necessary.

Within private companies, the most senior person tends to make the final decision. However, if it is an important business matter, consensus is sometimes expected during a meeting. In government offices hierarchical structures are followed more strictly.

Negative emotions are normally not shown in public. People from Pakistan are polite and not very likely to complain about their superiors or their management style. However, Pakistani employees’ performance will improve if they are happy with their superior.

When greeting your Pakistani business partner shake hands and take your time. Introduce yourself and ask about your colleague’s well-being and family, but avoid asking about their wife or daughters. This is a good way to get to know each other to ensure a successful business relationship. Business with Pakistanis may take longer as a result of the time it takes to build relationships with them.

The decision making process is slow in Pakistani culture. Do not rush negotiations as this will only cause frustration and slow things down further.

During meetings and negotiations you should maintain indirect eye contact and stay calm at all times, although do not be surprised if your Pakistani colleagues show emotions during negotiations

When asked to do something it’s best to avoid answering with a direct ‘no’. The better answer could be something like ‘I will try’, or ‘it’s possible’. Pakistanis will often answer with ‘Inshallah’ or ‘God Willing’.

PST stands for ‘Pakistani Stretchable Time’ which means 20 minutes usually denotes an hour. Time is free-flowing, people tend to arrive late for everything (meetings, weddings, events). Transport regularly arrives/leaves late. As a guest, however, you will be expected to be punctual.

Depending on the area, women’s rights are either established, dawning, or basically non-existent. Smaller, rural areas see women as caregivers, mothers, and not much more – although women’s rights groups are beginning to crop up. More urban areas have women’s roles comparable to men. Women should ensure they are wearing conservative clothing, not revealing too much skin.

Public demonstrations and civil disorder are common. Protests often occur with little warning and while most remain peaceful, they can turn violent quickly. Avoid getting caught up in demonstrations, large crowds of people and public events.