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## United Kingdom

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The United Kingdom is made up of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It has a long history as a major player in international affairs, and fulfils an important role in the UN and Nato. At the beginning of the last century Britain commanded a worldwide empire as the foremost global power. Two world wars and the end of empire diminished its role, but the UK remains an economic and military power, with political and cultural influence around the world.

Britain was the world's first industrialised country. Its economy still remains one of the top ten in the world, but it has for many years been based on service industries rather than on manufacturing. More recently, the UK has suffered a deep economic slump as a result of the 2008 financial crisis, which revealed its over-reliance on easy credit, domestic consumption and rising house prices. Efforts to rein in the public debt – one of the developed world's highest – has led to deep cuts to welfare, government services and the military, prompting concern about social equality and a possible loss of international influence.

The British have historically been renowned for their politeness and courtesy. This is a key element of British culture and is a fundamental aspect of British communication style, but it is also accompanied by an indirect manner of communicating. When doing business in the UK you generally find that direct questions often receive evasive responses and conversations may be ambiguous and full of subtleties. Consequently, it is important to pay attention to tone of voice and facial expression, as this may be an indication of what is really meant.

The British have an interesting mix of communication styles encompassing both understatement and direct communication. Most British are masters of understatement and do not use effusive language. If anything, they have a marked tendency to use words such as 'perhaps', 'possibly' or 'it could be'.

The importance of humour in all situations, including business contexts, cannot be overestimated. Humour is frequently used as a defence mechanism, often in the form of self-depreciation or irony. It can be highly implicit and in this sense is related to the British indirect communication style.

'Stiff upper lip' is a term often used to describe the traditionally British display of stoicism and unflappability when faced with difficult situations. Many other cultures admire this trait though they hold it up to ridicule if taken to extremes! The modern version of the traditional 'stiff upper lip' means the British are generally modest, understated or reserved.

The British like to work in teams and identify with personal commitment to a group. Individual initiatives are generally taken following a group consensus to proceed. However, there is also a strong feeling of individual accountability for implementation. Company loyalty is less common now than before the radical corporate structuring of the past few decades. Younger professionals incorporate a regular change of companies into their career planning.

Punctuality is important in business situations. In most cases, the people you are meeting will be on time. Call if you will be 10 minutes later than agreed. Having said that, punctuality is often a matter of personal style and emergencies do arise. If you are kept waiting a few minutes, do not make an issue of it. Likewise, if you know that you will be late it is a good idea to telephone and offer your apologies.

Written communication is addressed using the person's title and surname. E-mail communication style remains more formal, at least initially, than in many other countries. Apart from the younger Millennial generation, most British do not use slang or abbreviations and will think negatively if your communication appears overly familiar.

As a nation, the British tend not to use superlatives and may not appear overly animated when they speak. This does not mean that they do not have strong emotions, merely that they choose not to put them on public display. They are generally not very demonstrative, and, unless you know someone well, may not appreciate it if you put your arm around their shoulder.

Kissing is most often reserved for family members or close friends. The British are quite reserved people. Privacy is important. This extends to not asking too many personal questions at the outset. Even close friends do not ask pointedly personal questions, particularly concerning one's salary or financial situation. Friendships may take longer to build in the UK, however once established, they tend to be deep and may last over time and distance.

British society is perceived to be increasingly risk-averse and fearful of litigation, but this remains at odds with the evidence. Britons approach potentially dangerous pastimes, from binge drinking to urban cycling with a disregard for any potentially lethal consequences!