
COMMUNICATION & IDENTITY IN INTERNATIONAL WORK CULTURES

COMM 3335



Summer 2023



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COURSE DESCRIPTION

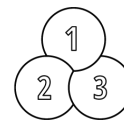
Communication and Identity in International Work Cultures explores how personal, cultural, organizational, and occupational identities shape workplaces. By travelling to Germany, Switzerland, and Portugal, we will explore how different employees make sense of their identity, employment, and the meaning of work. Tours across the country will enable students to better understand culture's influence on work, and business site visits will allow students to observe work, communication, and identities in a variety of organizations.

OBJECTIVES

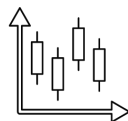
Through COMM 3335, students will:



Explain how different cultures learn
and adapt to work



Assess intersections among personal, social,
organizational, and occupational identities



Contrast similarities and differences
in communication across various work cultures



Evaluate work-life boundaries and
personal identity narratives

REQUIRED READINGS

Larson, G. S., & Gill, R. (2017). *Organizations and Identity*. John Wiley & Sons.
*e-book recommended—available for purchase on [kindle](#) or [VitalSource](#)

COURSE CONTEXTS

GERMAN BUSINESS CULTURE¹

For Germans, the task is the central and dominant issue in all business interactions and also determines the style of communication. The relationship level assumes a more subordinate role in professional life. Germans usually think that operating at the task level should form the basis of all business contacts. The next cultural standard is closely related to this aspect.

In German companies, there are countless rules, regulations, procedures and processes. German business people prefer contracts and written agreements of all types. The existence of these things and their tight and consistent application, the adherence to them and the rigid consequences, or even penalties, for not complying with them are in stark contrast to other cultures. On the one hand, this underscores a consistency and high degree of mutual obligation. On the other hand, this principle leaves little room for flexibility and individual determination.

The approaches described above have a strong impact on the relationship with regard to time. Appointments are precisely planned and it is expected that times which are set are adhered to. Punctuality is a matter of good manners.

Germans exercise a strict separation between the various spheres of their life. They clearly vary their behavior with other people depending on the sphere of their life (private or business) in which they have contact with an individual as well as the closeness of the relationship (business partner or friend). This frequently leads to Germans in business or public life being seen by members of other cultures as very remote and cold and even as overtly unfriendly.

Germans communicate very directly and explicitly. They formulate important statements directly and openly and without 'window dressing'. They can appear rude and threatening without meaning to or even noticing it. In return, they do not easily recognize and respond to verbal subtleties such as indirect hints, messages 'between the lines' and many non-verbal signals. They can therefore often miss the decisive content of an interaction.



WORKING IN GERMANY

3.7 trillion GDP

82.8 million people

3.1% unemployment rate

1. Taken directly from <https://www.expatica.com/de/employment/employment-basics/understanding-german-business-culture-100983/>

SWISS BUSINESS CULTURE²

Switzerland is one of the wealthiest countries in the world with an economy led by financial services and pharmaceuticals. Most Swiss firms (more than 99%) are small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 250 employees. Switzerland also has one of the highest concentrations of Fortune 500 companies in the world. Although there is not a minimum wage in Switzerland, the average salary in Switzerland is among the highest in the world. Consequently, the cost of living in Switzerland is also very high.

There are four official languages in Switzerland: German (63.7%), French (20.4%), Italian (6.5%), and Romansh (1%). However, you will notice some undeniably Swiss aspects that are prevalent throughout the country. For instance, the business culture in Switzerland is very formal and conservative. Their communication style tends to be direct and polite. Swiss companies generally have a very hierarchical structure. Therefore, decision-making is top-down with little input from employees. Above all the Swiss appreciate punctuality, frugality, responsibility, and tolerance. These cultural values are evident in the way Swiss people approach business. Switzerland tends to be very reserved and formal. You should expect to wear business attire in the office and stick to conversations that don't involve sharing too many personal details.

The Swiss value work/life balance in their business culture and generally frown upon contacting an employee or employer outside of working hours. They also take punctuality for business and social meetings very seriously and expect you to do likewise. It is best to be at least five to ten minutes early for an appointment. Above all, you should call if you are going to be late for an appointment and try to avoid rescheduling.

Typical office hours are Monday to Friday, from 08:00 to 17:30. Swiss workers tend to work more hours per week than workers in other European countries. A 50-hour workweek is not uncommon in Swiss business culture.



WORKING IN SWITZERLAND

748 billion GDP

8.64 million people

Skilled labor force

2. Taken directly from <https://www.expatica.com/ch/employment/employment-basics/Switzerland-business-culture-102447/>

PORTUGUESE BUSINESS CULTURE³

Portugal is a country that respects age and position. In Portuguese society, status is of crucial importance. Car brands, executive remuneration, academic titles are all very important in Portugal. Interestingly, car brand is probably the most significant element of one's status. Job title is of such importance that it is quite normal to see employees underpaid for the job they do but still be happy because of its status.

Since the Portuguese place such a high emphasis on status, they have a great respect for their superiors, which is, often exaggerated. Due to this approach, Portuguese workers are not used to asserting their own ideas or questioning management and so their bosses tend to be dictators. This culturally embedded unwillingness to challenge authority is probably the biggest drawback of the Portuguese workforce. In the workplace, it usually manifests itself in a low appreciation for team work, analyzing only the personal interest in an action (what's in it for me?) and not being keen on taking responsibility. Portuguese people are generally complacent and dislike confrontation. Disputes are typically resolved through discourse, negotiation or avoidance altogether. The workplace tends to be somewhat formal with even close colleagues using titles and last names. Very often Portuguese employees do not seek empowerment and are not used to accepting responsibility. When something goes wrong in an organization, it is the fault of a colleague, a competitor, the government or the economy. For foreign firms therefore, it may not be easy to find someone who will take personal responsibility for the carrying out of delegated work.

Portuguese people are open and welcoming to strangers and are keen to discuss various topics. A sense of humor is also highly valued in Portuguese society, and it is usually a good idea to use it in the early stages of a conversation. It is also acceptable to touch each other's arms or hands during a conversation as Portugal is an affective culture. In general, the Portuguese do not use overly exaggerated hand gestures, but they are more demonstrative when greeting friends.

The Portuguese do not like verbal directness or confrontation. Thus, it may be rather difficult to get to the point or to get an honest answer from them. In such cases, it is advisable to ask politely for a straightforward explanation. On the other hand, the majority of Portuguese are tolerant and it's difficult to offend them.



WORKING IN PORTUGAL

217.6 billion GDP

10.3 million people

97% Roman Catholic

3. Taken directly from <https://businessculture.org/southern-europe/business-culture-in-portugal/>

ASSIGNMENTS



PARTICIPATION

135 POINTS TOTAL

Your attendance and participation in class will be taken each day in class and at cultural and company visits. You are expected to engage in all in-class activities, which I will grade on a simple scale. If you are participating actively, you receive 10 points. If you are in class and participating minimally, you receive 5 points. If you miss class or an activity, you receive 0 points. You may not make up attendance or class activities.



READING QUIZZES

140 POINTS TOTAL

You will take these 5-minute timed quizzes by yourself after reading each book chapter to ensure that you have read and understood the text.



ORAL REFLECTIONS

175 POINTS TOTAL

Throughout the course, you will respond to a reflection prompt, which will ask you to connect your knowledge of communication theory and research to what you're seeing around you. You will have a few minutes to free-write your response to the prompt, and then you will orally share your reflection with the class. More detailed assignment instructions and rubrics are provided on Canvas.



NARRATIVE PAPER

100 POINTS TOTAL

In our course text, Larson and Gill (2017, p. 68) define identities as “the stories that people tell about themselves to themselves and to others.” In a final paper, you will be asked to write a fictional narrative about working professionals in America, Germany, Switzerland, and Portugal. The paper should show your understanding of similarities and differences among international workers’ personal, social, and cultural identities. Your narrative should also elucidate intersections among individual and organizational/occupational identities. More detailed assignment instructions and rubrics are provided on Canvas.

ASSESSMENT

GRADES

My hope is that you will focus on learning rather than grades in this class. With that said, if you are not doing as well as you would like in class, please don't hesitate to come talk to me so that we can discuss how you might improve your performance on the remaining assignments. I am happy to recommend study tips, explain assignments and grading criteria, or simply help you understand key course concepts. My goal is to be fair to everyone in the class, which means I will hold everyone to the same standards. If you have any grade complaints, they must be launched in writing, two days from the receipt of the grade.

GRADE EVALUATION

At the end of the course, students should add up all accumulated points and divide by 545, the total possible points available in the course. That will result in a percentage, which will be your final letter grade. For example, $510 \div 545 = .935$, which is 94%.

Final letter grades will be based on the following scale:

A >89.5%
B 79.5% - 89.49%
C 69.5% - 79.49%
D 59.5% - 69.49%
F <59.5%

COURSE POLICIES

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory for all in-person and site visits. Being in class and paying attention will help increase your chances of success. Students who attend lectures (and who read/outline the assigned materials) increase their chances of receiving a better grade in this course.

DEADLINES

All assignments are due at the beginning of the designated class period. I do not accept late work.

PERSONAL USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Out of respect for the learning environment of your classmates, please only use your technologies (e.g., iPads, laptops) for class use. I do not allow personal use of technology in class.

CANVAS + CONTACTING ME

I will use Canvas in this course for announcements, class documents, and grades. Please always check Canvas before you inquire about a document or grade.

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of the class, please feel free to discuss them with me at any time. Outside of class, the best way to contact me is through WhatsApp.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

All work for this course must be your original work. Any student guilty of knowingly using, or attempting to use another person's work will receive a grade of "F" for the course. Such conduct may also constitute grounds for dismissal from the University. This includes, but is not limited to 1) removing any diagnostic or exam materials from the classroom, 2) copying from someone else's material, 3) permitting someone else to copy from one's quiz, and 4) directly quoting or paraphrasing another's work (without citing) and self-plagiarism. Students who are unfamiliar with the University's policy on academic dishonesty or its sanctions should refer to the [Honor Code](#).

WITHDRAWING FROM THE COURSE

Please see PPS 4.09 for information about drops and withdrawals. Note that you must initiate and complete the drop or withdrawal request during the Automatic "W" Drop/Withdrawal period, which is the first 60 percent of any semester.

FAIRNESS

Texas State University is committed to social justice. We concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Texas State does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, or disability. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment will be given serious consideration.

ACCOMMODATIONS

If you have a specific disability and require accommodations (as documented by the Office of Disability Services), please let me know within the first week so I can best meet your learning needs.

CONDUCT AND CIVILITY

Every student is held accountable for abiding by the University's [Code of Student Conduct](#).

WRITING SUPPORT

Texas State University provides several online tutoring services for writing, including [SLAC's Online Writing Lab](#) (select from the Writing Help pull-down menu) and the [Writing Center's Online Tutoring](#) (select from the Student Resources pull-down menu).

RECORDING OF CLASSROOM LECTURES & DISCUSSIONS

Students are prohibited from photographing and recording during classes, and from transmitting classroom lectures and discussions by students unless written permission from the class instructor has been obtained and all students in the class as well as guest speakers have been informed that photographing or audio/video recording may occur. Photographs, videos and audio recordings may not be reproduced or uploaded to publicly accessible web environments, including Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. An exception to this will be any student determined by the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to be entitled to education accommodations, to exercise any rights protected under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, including needed recording or adaptations of classroom lectures or materials for personal research and study.

PERSONAL NOTE

I absolutely love teaching and am excited to have you in class. Truly. Please remember that I am here for you! If there is anything I can do to enhance your experience in this course, do not hesitate to come talk to me. I enjoy teaching not only because it gives me the opportunity to help others learn something new, but because I am always learning new things, too. Thus, I welcome your suggestions for this course, its contents, and my teaching style. Let's have a great class and grow together!

COURSE SCHEDULE

DATE

LESSON

DUE

ONLINE



May
15-30

Welcome
[Online Asynchronous Pre-Trip Work]

READ: Ch. 1

May
31

Introduction
[Online Asynchronous Pre-Trip Work]

Ch. 1 Reading Quiz

Oral Reflection

June
01

Exploring Communicative Approaches to Identity in Organizations [Online Asynchronous Pre-Trip Work]

READ: Ch. 2

Ch. 2 Reading Quiz

Oral Reflection

June
02

No Class

June
03

Depart USA

MUNICH, GERMANY



June
04

Arrival Day

June
05

Berlin Walking Tour
Group Welcome Dinner

June
06

Forming and Managing Identities

READ: Ch. 3
Ch. 3 Reading Quiz
Oral Reflection

June
07

Free Day

June
08

Fragmenting and Intersecting Identities

READ: Ch. 4
Ch. 4 Reading Quiz
Oral Reflection

June
09

Regulating and Resisting Identities

Cultural Visit: Dachau

READ: Ch. 5

Ch. 5 Reading Quiz

Oral Reflection

Group Dinner

June
10

Travel Day

ZURICH, SWITZERLAND



June
11

Business Site Visit: Lindt Factory

June
12

Informing Key Organizational Processes through
Discursive Approaches to Identity

READ: Ch. 6

Ch. 6 Reading Quiz

Oral Reflection

June
13

Business Site Visit: IWC Schafhaussen

June
14

Travel Day

LISBON, PORTUGAL



June
15

Walking Tour

Cultural Visit: Sintra

June
16

Free Travel Day

June
17

Free Travel Day

June
18

Free Travel Day

June
19

Free Travel Day

June
20

Business Site Visit: Pastelaria Batalha

June
21

Service Learning: Serve the City Lisbon

June
22

Researching and Practicing Identity

READ: Ch. 7

Ch. 7 Reading Quiz

Oral Reflection

Group Farewell Dinner

RETURN TO USA OR CONTINUE TO NEW DESTINATION

June
27

Narrative Paper Due

Submit Anonymous Course Feedback
