

BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS



NETHERLANDS

WORKING HOURS

- Generally from 08:30 to 17:30 from Monday to Friday.

PUNCTUALITY

- Excellent timekeepers.

GIFTS AND PRESENTS

- Gift-giving is not a common aspect of business relationships in The Netherlands. If you decide, however, that some sort of gesture is appropriate, for example on finalizing an agreement, make the gift a reasonably modest one and make sure it is neutral – nothing with the company logo, or with your business card attached. If you are offered a gift, open it immediately and show your appreciation.

BUSINESS CLOTHING

- The Dutch tend to dress fairly conservatively in business, though standards and styles vary widely from one industry to another; formal attire is normal in banking, open-neck shirts and jeans in the IT and entertainment sectors.
- In most Dutch organisations, it is generally normal to wear a jacket, not necessarily a suit, to take the jacket off when working.
- Colour has no particular significance, and colourful shirt/tie combinations are quite usual in some sectors, such as marketing and service industries.

BUSINESS MEALS

- The Dutch are less inclined than their Belgian neighbours to combine business with pleasure. This particularly applies to the working lunch, which will be relatively fast and efficient so that you can get back to business and may take the form of a sandwich and a coffee or tea in the office, a meal in the company canteen, or a quick visit to the local café.
- The Dutch are more likely to invite business partners to a restaurant to mark a significant event, such as the closing of a deal. The probability of being invited to a private home is low.
- After-hours drinks are not appropriate for detailed discussions, as your Dutch counterpart will probably be anxious to get home, but such gatherings may represent a good opportunity for informal discussions and the development of social bonds.
- If you are invited to dine at your Dutch partner's home (a great honour), be sure to arrive pretty punctually. Dinner, which will most probably be served at 18.30-19.00 hours, is generally considered to be the most important meal of the day.



BUSINESS MEETING

- Dutch business people tend to be informal in their behaviour, although observers have noticed a slight increase in formality in recent years.
- Start by shaking hands with everybody, giving your name and saying something like “good day” or “a pleasure to meet you”. Do not feel obliged to present your business card at this stage.
- You should refrain from too vigorous a handshake or physical contact such as backslapping. Smiling suggests positive intentions but, again, should not be overdone.
- In a meeting with many attendees where not everyone knows each other, the chairperson will go around the room, to allow each person to introduce themselves, with their name and job title, or if external to the organization, the company they represent.
- Dutch can be remarkably informal at work. It is very natural for management to interact in a friendly manner with all levels of employees, with everyone referred to by their first names.
- It certainly does not infer a lack of respect by an employee if they refer

to their manager or even CEO by his or her first name

– it merely reflects a traditional aspect of Dutch culture in which everyone is regarded as an equal. Despite (or because of) the informality of Dutch business culture, there's rarely any beating about the bush when it comes to sharing opinions – from management to interns; expressing yourself is part of the workplace.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Evidence suggests that long work hours may impair personal health, jeopardize safety, and increase stress.
- In the Netherlands, 0.5% of employees work very long hours, the lowest rate in the OECD, where the average is 13%. In The Netherlands, family and children policy outcomes are generally good. Employment rates, parental education rates, and fertility rates are higher than OECD averages. (OECD Better life Index 2018).

CONVERSATION

- Fall-back topics, depending on the interests of the other party, are football, ice skating, music, the Old Masters and famous Dutch people, of whom there are plenty.
- Avoid boasting of any kind about your income and possessions or asking personal questions. Family and business are usually kept separate.
- Avoid any criticism of the Dutch Royal Family, as well as questions about legalized prostitution and marijuana in The Netherlands.
- Do not talk to anyone while chewing gum as this is considered rude.

NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

- Approx. 15 days

ADDRESSING A PERSON

- To the unsuspecting foreign business person coming to The Netherlands for the first time, all educated Dutch people seem to be a doctorandus (drs.) or an ingenieur (ir.).
- Both qualifications are the equivalent of a Master's degree. However, these titles are most often only used in official documents.
- Otherwise, titles and qualifications are used sparingly, without necessarily resorting to the level of informality characteristic of the British or the Americans.
- With the exception of university professors, it is not usual to address individuals by their professional titles, in contrast with the practice in Germanic or some Nordic cultures. Generally, you start using someone's first name during the first encounter and ever after.

