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## **Workshop Doing Business With Japan**

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## Course Plan

### Day 2

#### Morning Session

##### Module III. Communication and negotiation

9:00 - 9:45            *PowerPoint:* III.1. Ten key notions in Japanese culture

9:45 - 10:30        *Task:* understanding Japanese behaviour

Break

11:00 - 11:30       *PowerPoint:* III.2. Language and communication

11:45 - 12:30       *Task:* Case study on trust in business relationships

Lunch

#### Afternoon Session

##### Module IV. Visiting and hosting

13:30 - 14:15       *PowerPoint:* IV. Do's en don'ts for sending a team to Japan and when hosting Japanese in the Netherlands/Northern Europe

14:15 - 15:00       *Task:* preparing a visit to a Japanese company

Break

15:30 - 16:15       *Task:* Preparing for a visit from a Japanese team

16:15 - 17:00       *Assessment of the workshop:* assessment sheet, questions, closing.

## Module I : The Japanese company (*kaisha*)

### I.1. Dutch/Northern European and Japanese Cultural Values

- a. Introduction
- b. Table of cultural differences
- c. Examples of differing values
- d. Task: understanding cultural differences

#### a. Introduction

- We make sense of the world through our own cultural presuppositions and values; our cultural values are the glasses through which we look at reality.
- Our own cultural values are invisible to us; they are our blind spot.
- If we think in our own cultural terms, we make decisions and value-judgements that are valid in our culture. In a different culture, our actions can have a very different, and sometimes even an *opposite* meaning.
- We need to become aware of values of other cultures to understand how people function and to communicate effectively with them.
- When we become aware of our own cultural values, we see how they influence our actions and communication strategies. Then we can adapt them to the culture that we are dealing with.
- We understand people from a different culture if we can explain a problem *from their point of view*.

**I.1.b. Table of cultural differences**

| <b>Dutch/Northern European</b> | <b>Japanese</b>       |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Egalitarian                    | Hierarchical          |
| Informal                       | Formal/Ritualistic    |
| Individual-centred             | Group-centred         |
| Personal opinion               | Harmony               |
| Rules/Responsibility           | Loyalty/Relationships |
| Content                        | Form/Context          |
| Efficiency/Result              | Care/Process          |

**Similarities**

|   |
|---|
| Consensus Culture ( <i>different methods!</i> ) |
| Economy (dislike of waste)                      |
| Simplicity (dislike of exaggeration)            |

### **I.1.c. Examples of differing values**

#### *Examples of Japanese complaints about the Dutch*

- How can you go home when there is important work to be finished?
- Why can you not take over a colleague's work?
- Why do you leave a piece of paper lying around?
- Why do you not apologize for your mistakes?
- 

#### *Examples of Dutch complaints about the Japanese*

- It is just crazy to work late every day
- Why do you work so inefficiently?
- Why are your requests and feedback so vague?
- What strange logic do you follow?

### **I.1.d. Task:**

- Explain these case of mutual misunderstanding using the table of cultural differences

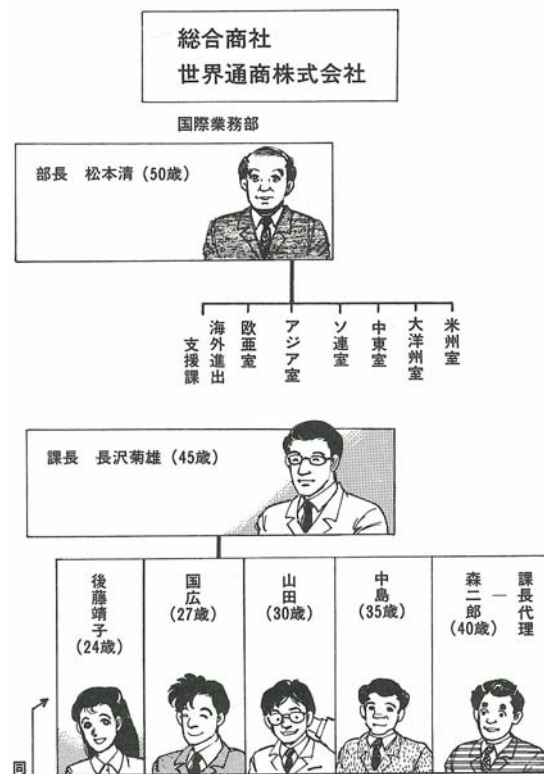
Use an example from your own experience of dealing with Japanese by making use of the different values in the table

## I.2. The structure of a Japanese company

- a. Hierarchy
- b. Loyalty
- c. The In-group and the Out-group (*uchi* and *soto*)
- d. Task: positioning Japanese within their company

### I.2.a. Hierarchy

- Japanese companies have a military structure with a clear hierarchical order
- There is constant expression of rank differences:
  - *honbucho* (general manager)
  - *bucho* (division manager)
  - *kacho* (section manager)
- age and seniority take precedence over ability
- the *senpai/kohai/dokyo* system (senior-classmate-junior)
- colleagues are referred to by rank, not by name





### I.2.b. Loyalty

Loyalty to the group is the highest ethical value of an employee. The dependency relationship between mother and child (*amae*) is later taken over by the school and then the company.

- Characteristics of the Japanese employment system
  - lifetime employment
  - long hours
  - loyalty to team, division, company (concentric circles)
  - no public criticism on own company
  
- In-company training
  - New hires get an intensive in-house training for 6 months to year, and are then placed in a in a section somewhere in the company
  - Employees change section every three years, sometimes more often
  - Employees know many aspects of the company
  - Employees have general skills, and can cover for colleagues
  
- Cultural characteristics of Japanese employees that have strong positive value within their culture:
  - *gambaru*: perseverance, applies to individuals and to teamwork
  - *gamman suru*: self-sacrifice, not complaining. This is a feature across Japanese culture, and gets a lot of respect.
  
- Taking responsibility for mistakes:
  - Because of the group culture, the manager takes responsibility for his group
  - Under normal circumstances, there is no scapegoating of a single employee: the group as a whole is responsible for the result of teamwork

### I.2.c. The In-group and the Out-group (*uchi and soto*)

- The in-group is dependent on context, and ranges from very small to very large
  - The section or work unit
  - Graduates from the same year or the same university
  - Employees with the same hobby
  - The company or business field
  - Japanese abroad
  
- The out-group consists of everyone who is not in a specific in-group. Usually this is a great disadvantage, but it can also have advantages such as not being held to the implicit rules of the group.
  
- ***Information only circulates within the in-group***
  - This is true on all levels of Japanese companies
  - Employees outside the in-group are not part of those in the know and cannot function properly
  - Information is usually exchanged on an informal basis, after hours and outside of meetings.
  - Non-Japanese are usually always 'outside the loop' and the in-group, independently of their rank in the company
  
- Special cases
  - Non-Japanese who work for Japanese companies should be treated according to their own cultural values. One needs to realise that the important decisions will be taken at the Tokyo Headquarters by Japanese.
  - Japanese who have lived in the West for a long time will have few superficial Japanese cultural traits, and their behaviour will mirror Western practices. But on a deeper level of cultural awareness they are still Japanese. Their relationship with Tokyo Headquarters will also follow the Japanese pattern.

**The relationship between client and seller is much more extreme in Japan than in the West**

- Japanese sellers are extremely customer-oriented
- Japanese customers and clients expect excellent service
- This influences all hierarchical relationships: a director at a seller company will be polite to a low-level employee of a buyer company
- In many cases client-seller relationships are intertwined in Japanese businesses

**I.2.d. Task: positioning Japanese within their company**

- Position Japanese people you work with within their company.
- Make a diagram of their network and hierarchical relationships
- Indicate clearly who belongs to the in-group and who belongs to the out-group
- What kind of relationships do you have with these people?

**Module II. The Japanese decision-making process**

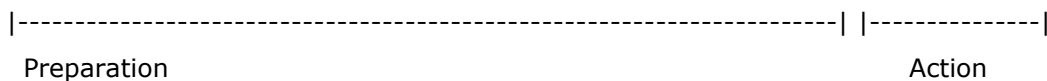
**II.1. The Japanese decision-making process**

- Differences in decision strategies
- Preparation (*nemawashi*) and decision process (*ringi seido*)
- Process and result
- Task: Elaborating strategies to comprehend the decision-making process

**II.1.a. Differences in decision strategies**

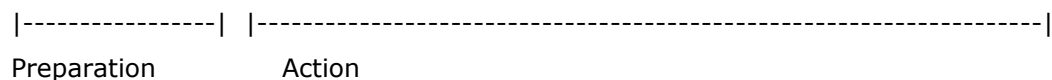
**Japan:**

- long and elaborate, almost endless, preparation; then quick and effective action



**Netherlands:**

- reasonably quick decision; then actions are taken slowly, often with delays



**Quote:**

"If you want to do business with the Japanese you have to take enough time. In Japan, the decision-making process has many levels. The Dutch are used to a far less complicated decision-making process: employees at certain levels in the organisation can take decisions up to a specific amount. In Japan this does not exist, and the whole hierarchical pyramid has to be consulted. Once you know this and take it into account, you will achieve a satisfying end result. But if you do not take enough time, then you achieve the opposite result: the Japanese will get flustered. It is just not possible for a Japanese person to take a decision within one hour, however much he may want your product." (Jaap Rost Onnes, quoted in Härriet Kroon, *Zo Onbeleefd (so rude)*, p. 169, my translation)

**II.1.b. Preparation (*nemawashi*) and decision process (*ringi seido*)**

- Preparatory investigation (*nemawashi*, literally: digging at the roots): key people are informally consulted to see if they think the proposal would be a good idea. A proposal will only be written up if there is enough support for it at this stage.
- A formal proposal (*ringi-sho*) is drafted and circulated among all concerned parties within the company, with a cover page for successive layers in the hierarchy to put their seal of approval. The idea can be shot down at any level by a single person, although in practice people will sign on if they think a majority or an important player supports the proposal. The sponsor of the proposal still has to be convincing, both formally and informally, and will be morally responsible for the ideas contained in the proposal.
- When everyone has agreed (consensus, not a majority), the proposal is ratified at the top, and put into action. Because everyone involved in the decision already knows the details and has agreed to it, action is usually swift and efficient.

### **II.1.c. Process and result**

- Perfectionism: there is only one way to do things correctly
  - Avoiding mistakes at all cost
  - Avoiding risk
  - Checking and re-checking endlessly
  
- Process and result
  - The desired result is less important than the process of achieving it
  - As long as the usual pattern is followed, employees can manage to avoid risk
  - Success is measured by following the process correctly, not judged by results that have been achieved (influence of fatalism in Japanese thinking)
  
- Perfectionism and precedence of process over result are two factors which greatly impact the decision-making process, and contribute to its being so slow. To avoid risk and mistakes, much information is constantly required.

**II.1.d. Task: Elaborating strategies to comprehend the decision-making process**

- A Dutch company is negotiating with a Japanese company about providing services in Europe.
  - A proposal from the Dutch side has been made months ago, but no official reaction has been forthcoming
  - The Dutch company receives many requests for detailed information, but there seems to be no clear pattern in these requests.
  - Requests for clarification made by the Dutch company to their contact person in the Japanese company only yield vague and evasive answers

**Task:**

- How can the Dutch company find out where the process is at, whether it is still being considered at all, and when a decision will be taken by the Japanese side?
- Work out different strategies the Dutch firm could use

## **II.2. Handling information**

### **II.2.a. High-context and low-context cultures**

Japan is a high-context culture

- Japanese offices are large open spaces, shared by a whole section; the manager does not sit in a separate office, but to the side of the shared space.
- Vertical information streams are good in Japan. Collaboration between the floor and management is clearly seen in the production process and in offices. Suggestions from below are taken seriously and there is an innovation drive from the bottom up.
- There are formal and informal information networks. Meetings are used to present and agree on points which have been discussed beforehand and are known to all. Junior employees and committees will have pre-meetings to prepare meetings.
- The informal flow of information takes place in restaurants and bars after work, and it is vital to participate to keep attuned to the information flow.



### II.2.b. The function of information in Japan

- The Japanese side in a negotiation or business collaboration will want *a lot of detailed information* about the companies they do business with, because:
  - They want to come to their own conclusions, usually from the raw data itself
  - They do not want and in fact cannot depend on the logical analysis of Westerners – they need to make their own analyses and come to their own conclusions
  
- The Japanese will keep looking for the real cause of the problem.
  - They have an obsession with perfection
  - They will ask “*why?*” five times to get to the heart of the problem
  
- Perfectionism: there is only one way to do things right, and collecting as much information as possible diminishes the risk involved
  - If the process has been followed scrupulously on the basis of all available information and things still go wrong, no-one is to blame since everyone has done their utmost best.
  - If it appears later as though someone has omitted something or failed to check something, then this will have repercussions.
  
- Additional requests for information from the Japanese side can be frustrating, but they are also an indication that the decision process is still ongoing, and show the Japanese side is still interested.

**II.2.c. c. Task: planning a productive meeting**

A team of Japanese contacts has come over (choose one)

- on a fact-finding mission
- to discuss a joint project

Set up the team that will be present at the meeting and decide:

- The goal(s) of the meeting
- What information to prepare
- How to communicate this information
- How to conduct the meeting
- How to evaluate it
- What plan of action to undertake

**Module III: Module III. Communication and negotiation**

**III.1.a. Ten key notions in Japanese culture**

|                                |   |
|--------------------------------|---|
| <i>wa</i>                      | harmony: fundamental concept in Japanese life: striving for, achieving, and keeping harmony and harmonious relationships                                |
| <i>amae</i>                    | Dependence; the relation between the child and the caring mother; this relation is extended to person and in-group, and employer-employee relationships |
| <i>tatemae</i><br><i>honne</i> | Polite/superficial feelings versus True/inner feelings. This distinction is always clear to Japanese.   |
| <i>kao</i>                     | "face"; one's worth and status: this needs to be acknowledged and respected at all times  |
| <i>giri</i>                    | Promise/debt; services that people perform in a relationship and which results in mutual indebtedness   |
| <i>ningen kankei</i>           | Human relationships; more important than words and explanations   |
| <i>haragei</i>                 | non-verbal communication (lit. from the stomach, gut) which helps in establishing the emotional atmosphere ( <i>fu-iniki</i> )                          |
| <i>shinyo</i>                  | <i>Trust</i> , in people in general and business partners in particular   |
| <i>chokkan</i>                 | Intuition – contrast with rational and logical Western way of thinking  |
| <i>habatsu</i>                 | In-group, clique: everyone belongs to several of these  |

**III.1. b. Task: understanding Japanese behaviour**

Task: take a few instances of Japanese behaviour from your own experience or that you have heard of, then explain and justify this behaviour by using some of the ten key notions in Japanese culture outlined above.

### **III.2. Language and communication**

- Linguistic cultural differences
- Communication in meetings
- Establishing trust
- Task: Case study on trust in business relationships

#### **III2.a. Linguistic cultural differences Culture**

##### **Quote**

"There are plenty of cultural clashes in business discussions between Dutch and Japanese. I have witnessed conversations in which Japanese acted as if they understood English. They would say: "Yes, is that so", and then would keep repeating "Yes, is that so". Japanese can be very convincing, and the Dutch would get enthusiastic, and give elaborate speeches. I could see from the Japanese faces that they were panicking, since they had no idea what was being said. But the Dutch did not realise at all and just kept going.

(Jaap Rost Onnes, quoted in Härriet Kroon, *Zo Onbeleefd (so rude)*, p. 168, my translation)

##### **Quote**

"In Japan one learns to be economical with words. It is better to read someone's intentions from their behaviour, their posture or their facial expressions, than having to rely on what someone communicates verbally." (Kimiko Kawaba, quoted in Härriet Kroon, *Zo Onbeleefd (so rude)*, p. 173, my translation.)

- English language ability
  - The grammatical structure of English and Japanese are fundamentally different
  - Japanese people usually have poor English listening comprehension (Japanese children who grew up abroad being the exception)
  - Japanese can usually understand written English *at their own pace* reasonably well.
  
- Silence during conversations
  - Japanese people are used to much longer and much more frequent silences than is usual in the West, and feel comfortable with regular silences
  - Japanese need time to think, to evaluate and reflect on the situation
  - Westerners should be careful not to fill the silence up with words
  
- Yes (*hai*)
  - “Yes” usually only means “I have heard you”
  - Saying yes frequently, nodding, and making sounds are ways to encourage the speaker to continue talking.
  
- No - Japanese people will avoid saying “no” at all cost. Therefore, one must be able to interpret their rejections. There are reputedly 17 main ways of saying “no”:
  - "I will consider it"
  - "This may be difficult"
  - "I will get back to you later on this"
  - "It is hard to say"
  
- logic:
  - The way of arguing and coming to conclusions is different from that in the West
  - Questions may seem odd or out of place, but they will make perfect sense in the Japanese way of thinking.

### **III.2.b. Communication in meetings**

- Hierarchical seating: the highest-ranked person sits in the chair which is farthest from the door, or in the middle surrounded by assistants. The highest-ranked person can be an observer who sits back and only listens, leaving the talking to a subordinate or someone who speaks English well. If there are women present on the Western team, it is especially important to establish authority immediately.
- Formality and ritual: the beginning of the meeting involves an elaborate greeting ritual, where people are introduced in the right order and seated in the right place, in order to establish hierarchy and role clearly.
- Time: it is important to always be on time for the beginning of meetings; time in meetings is flexible and depends on progress.
- Agreement and consensus are the goal of every meeting. Following a set agenda and achieving consensus are opposite and incompatible goals.

### **Communication style in meetings**

Uncomfortable and difficult for Japanese

- improvisation
- new ideas and proposals
- spoken English

Comfortable and productive for Japanese

- predictable discussion
- information being communicated beforehand
- a context everyone is aware of
- Written communication, especially in English
- Much information in the form of raw data, images and graphs

Communication styles are very different. Meetings will be much more productive and comfortable for Japanese business contacts if as much information as possible is communicated in written form beforehand, and if there are no surprises during the meeting.

### **II.2.c. c. Establishing trust**

- Business relationships are based on trust and on establishing long-term contacts
  
- The most important part of the negotiating process for Japanese is getting a good impression about the prospective business partner and establishing trust.
  - Japanese will not want to do business with you if they cannot get a good impression of you.
  - An unreliable business partner represents a heavy liability for a Japanese team, especially on the personal level of the one responsible for the contact.
  - It is especially important for service-oriented companies to project a reliable and trustworthy image.
  
- In the beginning of the business relationship there will be constant tests of sincerity and trustworthiness. Every time such a test is passed, the relationship will grow stronger. Once a good partnership is established, problems are faced together and mistakes will be seen as a common challenge.
  
- Price negotiations, the bottom line of an agreement, is less important to the Japanese than a trustworthy relationship. It will not be the immediate concern of a negotiating team, and will only be discussed once a decision has been made to work together. This does not mean that price is irrelevant, of course; be prepared for tough discussions on price at a later stage.



**III.2.d. Task: Case study on trust in business relationships**

**Task: Analyse the case study of the breach of trust in the Appendix**

- How could it have been avoided in the first place?
- Once the termination letter was sent out, what kind of damage control would have been effective?
- How should one deal with such eventualities in the future?
- Which cultural traits played an important part in this case?

## Module IV. Visiting and hosting

### IV.1. Do's en don'ts for sending a team to Japan

- a. Making contacts
- b. Organizing a visit
- c. Making a good impression
- d. Task: preparing a visit to a Japanese company

#### **IV.1.a. Making contacts**

- Introduction : importance of a proper go-between (*chukaisha*) who makes the first contacts
- Putting together a delegation with the right mix of people and expertise
- Importance of ritual meeting at senior level (*aisatsu*, literally: greeting), with exchange of presents.
- *meishi*: business cards: this indicates the place of the person in the hierarchy of the company; Japanese need to have this information to decide how to speak to the other person and what level of politeness to use



#### **IV.1. b. Visiting Japan**

Visiting a Japanese company; the programme will be filled with meetings, visits to factories and sites, and entertainment during the evenings

- Visits to companies
  - Ritual visit to senior management (*aisatsu*)
  - Visit to sites, production facilities, for example talking with engineers about processes
  
- Relaxation
  - All evenings will be used to get informally acquainted, with trips to exclusive restaurants followed by bar visits
  - This is very important to cultivate good relationships
  - As a rule, do not ask questions which are too private or personal; ask about life in Japan, hobby's, and so on
  - Work issues will come up, but leave the initiative to the Japanese
  
  - Playing golf together is an opportunity to get to know each other better in an informal atmosphere, and a rare occasion for one-to-one conversation. Since playing golf is very expensive in Japan, it is reserved for important guests; it is also greatly appreciated by Japanese when they are on business abroad.
  
- The hospitality displayed by Japanese should not be seen as real friendship, and is not an indication that a business deal is about to be settled.

#### **IV.1.c. Making a good impression**

- The Japanese must have a good feeling for the people they do business with; one has to come across as:
  - Serious
  - Well-informed and well-prepared
  - Sincere
  - Trustworthy
  
- Standing for the values your company represents:
  - Japanese companies have a clear company culture and a reputation known to everyone
  - Being the industry leader gives an enormous amount of prestige and is seen as a guarantee for reliability.
  - If your own company subscribes to Japanese values such as *kaizen* (continuous improvement), mentioning this will make a positive impression.
  - These values will be tested in all aspects of how you represent your company (see the Japanese striving for perfection)
  
- If you are negotiating in Japan
  - Do not clearly state how long you will be staying, as it is against your best interests to be forced to make decisions against a fixed deadline.
  - Not taking enough time to cultivate a business relationship can be seen as showing little interest and not being respectful.

**IV.1.d. Task: preparing a visit to a Japanese company**

Prepare a visit to a Japanese company. Start by specifying the setting:

- The purpose of the visit
- Whether it takes place in Japan or at a European branch office
- The number of people in the team and the level at which they work in the company
- The length of the visit and the interest in sites and processes

Decide on a strategy to achieve the goals of the visit; be sure to use the cultural insights we have dealt with in this workshop

## **IV.2. Do's en don'ts when hosting Japanese in the Netherlands/Northern Europe**

- a. Ritual and structure
- b. Task: Preparing for a visit from a Japanese team

### **IV.2.a. Ritual and structure**

- The importance of ritual
  - Meeting the delegation at the airport
  - An official welcome
  - Presentation to senior management (ceremony)
- Structure the visit as much as possible:
  - Plan a lot of activity, much seeing and doing
  - Have an assistant accompany the team everywhere, or hire someone to do this.
- Respect and ritual
  - The hierarchical ties between Japanese have to be respected in public, even if it is Western usage to treat people more equally. Not respecting the Japanese hierarchy when dealing with a visiting delegation will be experienced as demeaning.
- Have as much written information as possible ready about processes in the company in the form of folders, information sheets, and so on.
- Show processes as much as possible: Japanese are much more focused on visual and physical experiences, and much less focused on language, especially when it is spoken.
- Make sure you give the Japanese a good impression about the kind of people they will be doing business with
- It is very important to have plenty of opportunity for informal contacts, so schedule plenty of social activities, such as drinking and eating, tourist visits, golf, etc.

**IV.2. b. Task: Preparing for a visit from a Japanese team**

- A delegation from a Japanese company is visiting the Netherlands for three days.
  - Mr. Kato, age 48, is a manager who has been to the Netherlands before; he speaks reasonable English
  - Mr. Watanabe, age 40, is a technical specialist, and speaks little English
  - Mr. Honda, age 32, is Kato's assistant and speaks English well
  
- Make a complete schedule for this visit and prepare a fax to send to the Japanese company
  
- Variation: use a visit that has been arranged within your own company as an example; set the goals of the visit and elaborate a strategy to achieve them. Be sure to use the cultural insights we have dealt with in this workshop

### Select Bibliography

Christalyn Brannen and Tracey Willen

*Doing Business with Japanese Men - A Woman's handbook*

Clear and very useful message about how women should establish their authority when dealing with Japanese businessmen. Short text filled with many real-life examples. Also includes tips on what to wear, where to stay, and what to pack.

Edward T. Hall en Mildred Reed Hall

*Hidden Differences – Doing Business with the Japanese* (New York, Anchor, 1987)

The seminal work on differences between American and Japanese business culture. Clear, well-written, accurate, and to the point.

James Day Hodgson, Yoshihiro Sano, and John L. Graham

*Doing Business with the New Japan* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2000)

Well-written and clear on cultural differences and negotiating strategies, with complete case-studies in the automotive industry and in politics.

Härriet Kroon

*Zo Onbeleefd – Japanners in Nederland (So rude: Japanese in The Netherlands)* (Amsterdam; Atlas, 2001)

A journalist's account of how the Japanese view the Dutch and The Netherlands. Useful for those who work with Japanese people living in Holland. Available only in Dutch.

Boye Lafayette DeMente – *Japanese Etiquette & Ethics in Business* (NTC Business Books, 1994)

Doing Business with Japan through keywords. Practical but unstructured information which makes no distinction between important information and details.

Robert M. March

*Reading the Japanese Mind – the Realities behind their Thoughts and Actions* (Kodansha International, 1996)

A Good analysis by a professor of international business who spent a long time in Japan, in a mixture of academic and journalistic styles.

Noboru Yoshimura en Philip Anderson

*Inside The Kaisha – Demystifying Japanese Business Behavior* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1997)

This book calls the usual theories about Japanese business into question and describes paradoxes as guidelines Good for those with some knowledge of Japan, but it can be confusing for beginners.