

Dutch business culture

Hierarchy

Hierarchies at workplaces in the Netherlands are often flat compared to other countries. The equality and openness of the Dutch society are reflected in the business structure, where both the managing director and employees are all considered co-workers. Managers and high-level staff that deal with lower level workers on a daily basis, do not display symbols of rank and it is common to address them by their first names. This does not mean that high-ranking staff members are not respected (they are!). The idea behind the Dutch flat hierarchy is that equality fosters productivity in team decision-making.

Meeting and decision-making

Dutch workplaces revolve around meetings. Meetings are usually informal, yet they are generally on fixed times, following certain protocols and set agendas. All members are expected to make a contribution during the meeting, regardless of their position in the company. Everyone is expected to be on time for the meeting. Try to prepare yourself, as you will most likely be expected to contribute to the discussion at some point. Most decisions are based on consensus. Everybody has to agree to a certain extent to a decision and someone can always share his opinion on a subject. This is often time-consuming. However, once a decision is made, the implementation is fast and efficient.

Time perception

“Time is money” is a typical catchphrase in the Netherlands. You are expected to be punctual. If you do find yourself running late, contact the relevant person and make them aware of this. Lack of time management is considered to be a trait of an unreliable worker.

At meetings, we prefer to get right down to business and keep the small talk short. Avoid controversial topics and getting too personal too quickly. Planning a meeting a month ahead of time is quite common in Dutch business, since profound planning is half the job in Dutch eyes.

Dress code

The Dutch dress code is rather informal and the Dutch do not put great emphasis on clothing. But during your job interview you should dress sharply. Dress codes can vary greatly between companies: some may require at least semi-formal wear, even for a typical day in the office, while others allow you to ‘dress as you please’ within sensible boundaries. Suits and ties are standard attire in certain business sectors and government agencies. However, our tip is to visit the company’s website to try and find clues about the dress code in this company.

Business behavior

Unceremonious yet respectful behavior is the norm. The Dutch are rarely very formal, but when greeting an older person and those of a higher rank, they will use the formal ‘u’ until the senior person adopts a more informal tone.

Handshakes are used in all situations. Practice your handshake with a friend, roommate or someone else and make sure it’s firm. It is recommended to maintain eye contact when you greet someone as it signals trustworthiness.

Communication style

The Dutch like to know where they stand, and if they have something to say, they will usually say it. The direct way of speaking eliminates the chances of ambiguity.

Dutch people will mostly try to understand your cultural background. When preparing for the Dutch labour market, know that there are individuals who will do their best to understand cultural differences and will try to assist you, but also people who will strike you with their boldness with little regard for your cultural background. Each individual will handle this differently.

Coffee breaks

A lot of information is passed on through word of mouth, and once you are a trusted figure among colleagues, you will undoubtedly hear plenty of information at the office coffee machine. Small talk: there are a few topics Dutch like to talk about: family, hobbies, cultural events and sports, your home country or city and of course: the weather.

Interesting websites

Want to know more about Dutch business culture or about finding a job in the Netherlands? Have a look at these websites and the webinar about the orientation year.

[Study in Holland](#)

[IND](#)

[Orientation year](#)