

Doing Business with the Japanese – A one stop guide to Japanese business practice
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Doing Business with the Japanese is the first publication of the *Japanese Business Language and Practice Project* and focuses on understanding the Japanese business mind. It is a handy A5-sized paperback which is packed with useful information about the Japanese economy and ways of overcoming the mystique of doing business in Japan. It is presented in the form of nine essays. Each essay covers a particular topic, ranging from big business and finance to the legal implications of foreign investment and everyday advice on practical matters like table manners. The book is indeed enriched by contributions from no fewer than 24 individuals, each drawing on their own personal and specialist knowledge and experience of Japan.

Business people at the sharp end will find that the most accessible and relevant information appears in Chapter 5 *Overcoming Difficulties*, Chapter 7 *Face to Face - Do's and Don'ts* and Chapter 9 *Getting about in Japan*. Here you find essential practical guidance on, for example, the use of *meishi* (business cards), travelling, dress code, *nemawashi* (decision making) and etiquette. Remaining issues, such as the weather and sources of government support for UK exporters, are tucked into the appendices at the back, together with useful addresses, a brief and limited overview of the language and a list for further reading.

What is refreshing about this publication is the contributors' own personal accounts and anecdotes of their experiences of dealing with the Japanese. The authors thankfully do not limit themselves to producing a standard guide with stock 'what to do' recommendations for every situation. They manage to go more deeply into the enigmas and unanswerable contradictions facing UK traders in Japan. For example, as David Powers says in Chapter 5, *The challenge currently facing outsiders trying to do business in Japan is both to adapt their business model to what is acceptable locally, and to encourage change in local practices*.

Whatever the extent to which export firms do try to adapt, the process of doing business in Japan is going to remain a slow one, requiring much patience. As the authors make clear, consensus building in Japanese firms goes at its own speed and *time-wasting is an honoured Japanese tactic* (p. 103).

The authors have managed to bring together a variety of insights sensitively into one volume. However, what the book gains from its rich diversity of personal accounts, it loses in terms of cohesion and accessibility. It is better read as a volume of stand-alone chapters. Many of the chapters reinforce, but also repeat, the same points, such as the slowness of decision-making. Several authors speculate on the future for Japan, which becomes a subject in its own right in Chapter 8, incongruously followed by 'Getting About in Japan', which should have come earlier. The book would also have benefited either from an overarching introduction, or a conclusion, summarising all the various issues that a business person should know in brief before setting forth.

However, the mix of practical guidance and reflective insight does not detract from the book's inherent richness. The diversity of style and content mean that the book can appeal to a range of different readers (e.g. students of East Asian area studies needing an overview, as well as business people). This favours buying the book either as a resource to dip into (as the need arises, for example, on particular issues), or buying it to read as preparation on the flight going over.

There is something of use in it to all those interested in Japan and the Japanese. It makes a handy addition to the existing and, certainly, it would have been a book that Sir Peter Parker (to whom it is dedicated), with his unique understanding of the complexity of doing business in Japan, would have appreciated.