

## Doing Business in Ireland | Irish Social and Business Culture

### An Irish Culture Overview

#### Fact File

- **Official name** – Republic of Ireland
- **Population** – 4 670,976 \*
- **Official Languages** – English, Irish (Gaelic - official, spoken mainly in areas along the western coast)
- **Currency** – Euro
- **Capital city** – Dublin
- **GDP (purchasing power parity)** – \$172.3 billion
- **GDP Per Capita** – \$37,300 \*



#### Overview

After many years of poverty combined with political unrest and rebellion against the British, Ireland gained its independence from the United Kingdom in 1922. Relationships with the UK remained difficult; the country was officially proclaimed a republic in 1949 and withdrew from the British Commonwealth. The Republic of Ireland joined the European Community in 1973 and became part of the Eurozone in 2002. This troubled history has created a very specific system of values and traditions unique to Irish society which are essential to understand for anyone embarking on a business venture with Ireland.

#### Irish Culture - Key Concepts and Values

**Family** – The family is an integral part of Irish social structure and strongly influences how people live their daily lives. Loyalty and commitment to family members is essential. Many businesses are family owned and family run. In a business environment, members of family will often be favoured for a promotion or a contract.

**Humour** – A vital element in the Irish culture is the use of humour in all situations including business contexts. Humour is frequently used in the form of self-depreciation or irony. Teasing between friends is very common and humour is a way to test people to see if they can be trusted and if they can get along.

**Religion** – About 94% of Irish are Roman Catholics. Religion has played a big role in politics, notably during the War of Independence between Protestants and Catholics. It has deeply impacted the Irish people, their cultural values and social norms giving society a more traditional and conservative perspective. For instance, divorce only became legal in 1997 and abortion is still illegal.

## **Doing Business in Ireland**

After joining the European Community in 1973, Ireland soon developed a modern economy. The 1990s saw unprecedented economic growth leading to a huge property boom and mass immigration. Ireland became known as the 'Celtic Tiger' but was soon hit by the global financial crisis in 2008. In November 2010, Ireland and the EU agreed on a financial rescue package accompanied by a four-year austerity plan to cut its budget.

Before doing business in Ireland, it is essential to be aware of the unique Irish business culture and the historical and political context in which it sits. Indeed, doing business successfully in Ireland requires an understanding of local business culture and etiquette to avoid misunderstandings, financial loss and damaged business relationships.

### **Irish Business Part 1 – Working in Ireland**

#### **o Working practices in Ireland**

- Punctuality is essential at any business meeting or social event in Ireland
- When making business appointments it is best practice to do so several days in advance.
- The Irish are inclined to follow established rules and practices, decision-making is then often a slow and systematic process.
- Business hours are usually from 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. with an hour for lunch, from Monday to Friday.
- Meetings are often led by the chairperson. However, if the meeting is less formal, no leader is particularly expected.

#### **o Structure and hierarchy in Irish companies**

- Irish businesses have a relatively flat hierarchy but there is some division between managers and their subordinates.
- The board of directors is generally the principal decision-making unit.

#### **Working relationships in Ireland**

- Irish managers often take the role of coach, creating an atmosphere of support and encouragement at work.
- Family, weather and journey are great subjects of conversation but avoid asking personal questions in a business setting.
- The Irish are generally friendly, casual and quickly move to first names.

- A friendly smile, a dynamic outlook and a way with words will be appreciated by your Irish colleagues.

## **Irish Business Part 2 - Doing Business in Ireland**

### **o Greeting practices in Ireland**

- Business cards are an essential prop and are usually exchanged in Ireland.
- It is important to shake hands firmly and confidently with all the people attending a meeting at the beginning and at the end.
- It is important to smile genuinely during when greeting Irish counterparts.
- Titles are not usually used in the Irish business culture and can be perceived as a form of boasting.
- Meetings usually start with small talk in order to break the ice. Do not underestimate the power of humour and do not take anything personally.

### **Irish Business Etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)**

- ✓ DO maintain eye contact when speaking during a meeting.
- ✓ DO remember to shake hands on first meeting. It is considered polite to do so.
- ✓ DO maintain a personal space when speaking to an Irish person, keeping about an arm's length distance.
- ✗ DON'T refer to Irish as English or British people. The violent history between the UK and the Republic of Ireland makes Irish feel very different from English people.
- ✗ DON'T ask personal questions regarding your Irish counterpart's background, occupation or income.
- ✗ DON'T show off your wealth.

### **Irish Culture Quiz - True or False**

1. It is not recommended for women to sit at the bar in many Irish pubs, as it is still considered inappropriate.
2. Speak loudly or shouting during negotiations is usually accepted.
3. Touching or hugging other men in public is considered socially unacceptable.
4. White flowers are avoided as a gift.

### **IrishCulture Quiz - Answers**

1. True, especially in the rural areas
2. False.
3. True, except in rugby or a strong slap on the back to congratulate.
4. True, they are used at funerals.

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\* Source: CIA World Factbook 2011

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