

# “JOURNEY TO SHARAHAD”

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## JOURNEY TO SHARAHAD

### SHARAHADAN BRIEFING SHEET

You are representatives of Mizar Marketing, Inc., a computer distributorship in the country of Sharahad. Mizar has been very successful marketing and distributing computers in this region for the last 12 years. Your company has witnessed steady double-digit growth every year it has been in business. You attribute this to your astute customer service skills and your ability to literally speak the language of all of your customers. Your company currently distributes 100,000 units a year (and earns a commission of 15% on each unit sold). You anticipate continued growth—but then, who can predict the future?

An American computer company has contacted Mizar and requested a meeting. You assume that this meeting is some kind of exploratory visit to see if Mizar can serve as the American company's distributor. You are looking forward to meeting the American representatives, even though you don't know much about American culture (although you do speak English).

Sharahadan culture exhibits very different communication patterns and values. Sharahadans pride themselves on their ability to speak expressively and to interact with others in a close personal manner. This involves using **intense eye contact and standing very close** to the person to whom they are speaking (6-12" distance is quite common). Sharahadans like to **establish personal relationships before conducting business** and prefer to discuss personal matters first. Sharahadans are also likely to **discuss multiple topics simultaneously**, switching back and forth to keep the conversation animated, and always interjecting personal matters into the business at hand. **Sharahadans do not speculate on future events.** Any kind of prediction or claim about what will be done in the future is foreign to Sharahadan ways. **Sharahadans are also very humble**, and never brag about their achievements (bragging is considered taboo), preferring instead to use such phrases as "I have been fortunate" or "God willing" to refer to past successes or future goals. Last, Sharahadans **often imply real meanings nonverbally, usually through their degree of enthusiasm.** For example, louder vocalizations, closer proximity, and physical contact (such as a hand on another person's shoulder) always accompany positive messages (such as agreement or when giving genuine compliments).

Mizar has two major competitors in the region: Altair Computers and Vega International. Both Altair and Vega sell fewer computers than your company does and have been in business for less time. They each sell about 50,000 units a year, and currently experience a 5% annual growth rate. However, you would consider it rude to point out their deficiencies so bluntly, preferring instead to let your judgement show in your lack of enthusiasm when you praise them.

Whatever behavior your American guests display, you will always treat them with respect and communicate with them for at least 15-20 minutes—even if they violate your cultural norms.

## JOURNEY TO SHARAHAD AMERICAN BRIEFING SHEET

You and another business associate are sales representatives from an American computer company. You have been chosen to travel far away to the country of Sharahad. Your company has learned that Mizar Marketing, Inc. in Sharahad can distribute your computers in this region of the world for a much cheaper price than your current distributor, Altair Computers. You have come to meet with the company's representatives. **Your goal is to close a deal with them, asking them to sell 10,000 units a year of which their commission will be 15%.** Your current distributor in this region (Altair Computers) can currently sell only 5,000 of your computers (at a commission rate of 25%). Any deal that increases your sales volume and reduces the current commission rate would be considered an improvement and should be accepted.

You did not want to come on this trip. You know very little about the Sharahadan culture. You have heard rumors that the Sharahadans are pushy and loud, have difficulty giving straight answers, and do not take business very seriously. You arrived on a flight late last night, and had a rough night of sleep at the hotel. You have seen little of the country yet. This meeting is your first real experience with the host culture. Fortunately, you know that the representatives at the meeting will speak English, although from your earlier communications, you get the impression that they are not well versed in American cultural norms.

Your plan is to start the meeting by getting right down to business and exploring whether Mizar can meet your needs. **Before you can propose any deals, however, you need to confirm the following about Mizar Marketing:** 1) Are they growing and do they have a plan for continued expansion? 2) Can they sell additional 10,000 units a year? 3) Are they committed to high standards of customer satisfaction? If the answers to these questions are unclear or unsatisfactory, there is little point in proposing a deal.

Because you cannot afford to alienate Altair (in case this deal doesn't go through), you would prefer not to mention who your current distributor is.

As you and your partner walk into Mizar's corporate headquarters, you are amazed at the surroundings: ornate Sharahadan office suites and conference rooms furnished with both traditional and modern fixtures. After making your introductions to the people in the outer offices you are shown into a modest looking room. There, the representatives of Mizar await you. You approach them—ready to act in your most professional manner—and ready to close the deal in 15-20 minutes . . .

## JOURNEY TO SHARAHAD

### Facilitator's Directions

**Simulation Type:** Open, realistic, fictional

**Time Length:** 30-40 minutes

**Participants:** 4-5 per group [multiple groups can participate at once]

**Materials Needed:** None

#### **Goal**

This intercultural exercise simulates a business meeting of Americans who have traveled to the fictional country of Sharahad. The Americans are almost totally ignorant of their host culture, however, and must communicate with the Sharahadans in an acceptable manner. The simulation is a good way for participants to experience and adjust to different cultural communication patterns. This activity also simulates some of the intercultural barriers present in today's "global economy" business environment.

Another goal of the exercise is to emphasize some of the areas in which cultures differ. Sharahadan culture differs from American culture in several ways. By role-playing an exchange between Americans and Sharahadans, participants learn about some of the ways in which cultures can differ.

#### ***Facilitating the Simulation:***

##### **Background**

This exercise simulates an intercultural exchange between Americans and a fictional culture. Participants role-playing either culture can learn from the experience. The task is simple, but the cultural barriers are considerable. One of the greatest challenges of this exercise is to teach the cultural patterns to the "Sharahadan" participants in a short period of time.

**Situation:** the Americans have proposed a business meeting in order to gather information on Mizar Marketing. The questions relate to what kind of performance the Sharahadans can promise the Americans as their distributors. If the information is favorable, they will propose a profitable deal for both sides.

This is a problem, however, as Sharahadans do not speculate about the future. As a result, they do not presume to know what will happen, nor do they feel they can make absolute commitments about the future. They can only comment about what has happened before ("we have been fortunate"), and where they would like to be in the future ("God willing"). Aside from the obvious non-verbal differences, this will be

the greatest cultural barrier. Also, the Sharahadan custom of extreme humility will mute how they express their very successful track record—remember that bragging is considered a great taboo in Sharahad. Be sure to remind the Sharahadans of this important fact.

### **Briefing**

Divide the participants into small groups of 4 or 5 (more than one group can participate at once). Each group should have 2 “Americans” and 2-3 “Sharahadans.” Give participants a copy of the appropriate briefing sheet (i.e., Sharahadan or American).

Separate participants into two rooms: one for Sharahadans, the other for Americans. Allow them several minutes to read the information on the briefing sheet. Then take a few minutes to acquaint the Sharahadans with their new culture. Emphasize that the Sharahadans must display **close proxemics** (6-12” distant), **intense eye contact**, **humility**, the **mixing of personal matters with business**, **avoidance of speculation about the future**, and the **use of louder vocalics and closer proximity to stress agreement or approval**.

Before the American participants re-enter the room, solicit questions from them. Stress that they must observe and adapt to the Sharahadan ways if they are to be successful.

Be sure to emphasize that each group has different goals. The Sharahadans’ goal is to successfully exhibit the Sharahadan cultural ways. The Americans’ goal is to find out the information they need to know and make a profitable deal (which will entail successful intercultural communication).

### **During the Simulation**

Begin the exercise by bringing the American participants into the same room as the Sharahadans. Once the two sets of participants have been brought together, allow them to proceed with the negotiations in their own manner. Observe each set of participants carefully and be available to answer individual side questions as they emerge.

The negotiations may reach an impasse when the Americans have difficulties getting their questions answered. If necessary, remind the American participants that the Sharahadans may be trying to answer the questions in their culturally accepted manner.

The Americans may be baffled or even startled by the communication patterns of the Sharahadans. If this happens, emphasize to both sides that they should continue to show respect to each other until the end of the meeting (15-20 minutes) even if they feel that they cannot make an agreement.

### **Debriefing**

Begin by asking each small group whether or not they came to an agreement, and what that agreement was. If a group did not come to an agreement, ask them why they did not. Then, as a large group, ask the following discussion questions:

- 1) **[For the Americans]: “What kinds of cultural differences did you notice in your discussion with the Sharahadans?”**

*Differences exist in the areas of nonverbal communication (close proxemics, intense eye contact) and values (humility, the mixing of personal matters with business, and avoidance of making future commitments).*

- 2) **[For the Sharahadans]: “What things did your American guests do that you found confusing or frustrating?”**

*Chances are, the Americans will violate some of the Sharahadan cultural norms such as avoiding close distance, breaking eye contact, demanding definite answers about future potential, or even avoiding mixing personal matters with business*

- 3) **What are the ‘real world’ implications of an exercise such as this one?**

*That different cultures have different ways of doing things, and successful intercultural communication sometimes entails being aware of and adapting to different cultural patterns. So many of the patterns and protocols that we use to conduct business are not universal—and the successful intercultural communicator must be aware of these possibilities and be ready to adapt.*

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## **SUMMARY OF SIMULATION**

- 1) Divide participants into small groups of 4-5; sub-divide these small groups into 2 “Americans” and 2-3 “Sharahadans.”
- 2) Separate the Americans and the Sharahadans. Allow each group time to read their briefing sheet and learn their task. Briefly train the Sharahadans in the cultural aspects that they must demonstrate.
- 3) Reunite both groups and begin negotiations. The Americans must successfully observe and follow the Sharahadan cultural ways as they pursue their exploratory visit. An agreement may or may not be concluded.
- 4) After about 15-20 minutes, end the simulation and begin the debriefing; ask each small group to reveal whether or not they came to an agreement.
- 5) Ask discussion questions.