

“A TRIP TO MINTANA”

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A TRIP TO MINTANA MINTANAN BRIEFING SHEET

You are representatives of Daijo Electronics. Two representatives of an American company have requested a meeting. You are unaware of their purpose, status, or rank. One of you is Batori Daijo—the founder and current president of the company. It is part of Mintanan culture that the top executive of the company attend any new business contact meeting. It is expected—of course—that any other respectable company would follow the same practice. Batori Daijo is accompanied by one or two junior associates. These associates are Batori's subordinates and treat the president with great respect: never sitting without permission, never questioning the president's line of thought, and always looking after the company's best interests. The associates will do much of the talking for Batori especially if the American representatives are of a lesser rank than the president is.

Mintanan culture is a high power-distance culture. Power rests in the hands of the few, and their authority is greatly respected. Mintanan culture also has some unique attributes: subordinates should never sit (until permission is granted) in the presence of those of superior rank—it is considered a sign of great disrespect! For this reason, no one in Mintanan culture is allowed to sit until his or her rank/relation to others has been determined. To sit without this protocol is viewed as being rude and uncivilized. The handshake is unknown. Instead, Mintanans greet each other by crossing two hands (palms out) in front of their face. Direct eye contact is usually very limited. Mintanans like to discuss personal issues such as family before concluding any business deals. Mintanans use this approach as a way to judge the character of outsiders. Last, Mintanans consider anyone who criticizes superiors to be of questionable character and not worthy of being trusted.

It is likely that the American representatives will offer your company some kind of deal. Your company is well known for its quality computer parts, which you sell at the reasonable price of \$230,000 for 10,000 units (a year's supply). You used to sell them for \$200,000 for 10,000 but found that you could easily get a better price. It costs your company \$150,000 to produce the parts, so any price above \$200,000 for 10,000 units is a good price. Also, it is traditional to "haggle" in Mintanan culture. Thus, the first price that is offered is never the price that should be agreed on. Mintanans believe that a price should always be negotiated slowly, and will actually refuse any initial offers even if they are considered worthy. It is acceptable for your company to ship your parts to another company with just a small down payment, but this kind of treatment is reserved only for trustworthy and respectable individuals and companies. It goes without saying however, that no deals should be concluded with untrustworthy characters or those who have shown disrespect to the Daijo Company or its president. Whatever your answer, you will show your guests respect by listening to them for at least 15-20 minutes, and will always treat them with respect—regardless of their behavior . . .

A TRIP TO MINTANA AMERICAN BRIEFING SHEET

You and another business associate are sales representatives from an American manufacturing company. You both work directly under your company's president. You have been chosen to travel far away to the country of Mintana. Your company has learned that Daijo Electronics in Mintana can sell you the computer parts you need for a much cheaper price than can be purchased anywhere else. You have come to meet with the company's representatives. Your goal is to close a deal with them, asking them to ship 10,000 parts a year for a price of \$200,000. Your best supplier currently sells your company 10,000 parts for \$300,000.

You did not want to come on this trip. You have heard rumors that Mintana has a culture of hierarchy and authority which is different from your democratic principles. The only reason you came is because your boss refused to make the trip and demanded that you go instead at the last minute (your boss does things like that all the time—it's a miracle that your company is doing as well as it is, considering the fact that such an unmotivated individual is in charge!). 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.

You know very little about Mintanan culture. You have heard some reports that family is held in high esteem, and that most of the high tech companies doing business out of Mintana have a sort of family-like loyalty to their company. Fortunately, you know that the representatives at the meeting will speak English, although you get the impression that they are not well versed in American cultural norms.

Your plan for success is simple: you simply intend to propose a deal between your two companies in which your company will pay \$200,000 for a year's worth of computer parts (10,000 total). You will also ask that the shipments be sent with only a small advance payment. Your boss prefers that the balance be paid at the end of the year. Your boss expects you to close the deal, which will be a great boon for your company. If you can close this deal, you and your partner will split a \$40,000 bonus! You have also been given a \$20,000 travel allowance (even though the trip only cost \$10,000). That gives you and your partner \$50,000 to split! You can do whatever you want with this money!

As you and your partner walk into Daijo's corporate headquarters, you are amazed at the surroundings: expensive Mintanan furniture, tapestries, artwork, etc. After being cleared by security and the receptionist (neither of whom spoke any English), you are shown into a modest looking room. There, the representatives of the company await you. You approach them—ready to act in your friendliest manner—and ready to close the deal . . .

A TRIP TO MINTANA

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 Mintana. The Americans are almost totally ignorant of their host culture, however, and must communicate with the Mintanans 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. Mintana differs from American culture in several ways. By role-playing an exchange between Americans and Mintanans, participants learn about some of the areas 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 "Mintanan" participants in a short period of time. It may be desirable to use two facilitators: one for each cultural group.

In the exercise, the two American representatives have come to Mintana to conclude a deal to buy computer parts from Daijo Electronics. They currently buy 10,000 parts for \$300,000 from another company and believe (erroneously) that they can buy the same amount from Daijo for only \$200,000. Although they will have to pay more than they would like to, the Americans should make any deal that saves their company money. The Mintanans should make the deal only if they feel the Americans are trustworthy and respectful of their culture.

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 “Mintanans.” Give participants a copy of the appropriate briefing sheet (i.e., Mintanan or American).

Separate participants into two rooms: one for Mintanans, the other for Americans. Allow them several minutes to read the information on the briefing sheet. Then take a few minutes to acquaint the Mintanans with their new culture. Have each group of Mintanans choose a “Batori Daijo” [see *Mintanan Briefing Sheet*]. Show them the Mintanan greeting gesture: two hands crossed, palms out, in front of the face [see *Diagram 1*]. Emphasize that the Mintanans must display the cultural aspects of COLLECTIVISM (group/community harmony and well being), HIGH POWER DISTANCE (great respect for position and authority), and AVOIDANCE OF DIRECT EYE CONTACT.

Before the Americans re-enter the room, solicit questions from them. Emphasize that they must observe and adapt to the Mintanan ways if they are to be successful.

Be sure to emphasize that each group has different goals. The Mintanans’ goal is to successfully exhibit the Mintanan cultural ways. The Americans’ goal is to make a profitable deal (which will entail successful intercultural communication).

During the Simulation

Begin the exercise with the Mintanans ready to meet the Americans. This entails having Batori Daijo seated with his/her subordinate(s) standing. Arrange the chairs so that they face each other [see *Diagram 2*]. If the Americans walk in and sit without proper introductions and an invitation to sit, they will have already violated Mintanan cultural norms! The same is true if the Americans try to shake hands.

The negotiations will probably reach an impasse due to the fact that the price the Americans would like is lower than what the Mintanans are willing to sell at. Also, the Mintanan tradition of haggling over a price may confuse the Americans. Remind the American participants that they still have their large bonus and extra travel expense money to use to increase their offer. Make them aware of this.

The Americans may truly offend the Mintanans. If this happens, emphasize to the Mintanans that they should continue to show respect to their guests 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 Mintanans?”**

Differences exist in the areas of nonverbal communication (lack of eye contact) and values (High Power-Distance and Collectivism), and in the nature of the discussion and bargaining itself (including “haggling”).

- 2) **[For the Mintanans]: “What things did your American guests do that you found offensive?”**

Chances are, the Americans will violate some of the Mintanan cultural norms such as sitting before determining rank/status, trying to shake the Mintanans’ hands, speaking poorly of their boss, or trying to make a deal too quickly.

- 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.

SUMMARY OF SIMULATION

- 1) Divide participants into small groups of 4-5; divide these small groups into 2 “Americans” and 2-3 “Mintanans.”
- 2) Separate the Americans and the Mintanans. Allow each group time to read their briefing sheet and learn their task. Briefly train Mintanans in the cultural aspects that they must demonstrate.
- 3) Reunite both groups and begin negotiations. Americans must successfully observe and follow Mintanan cultural ways.
- 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.
- 4) Ask discussion questions.

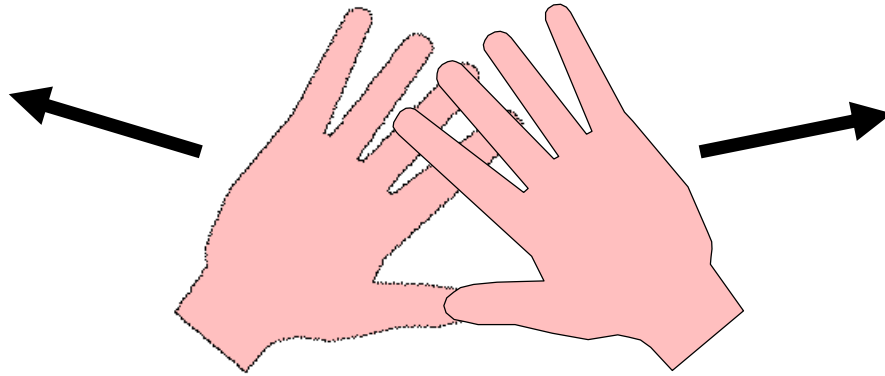


Diagram 1: Mintanan Greeting (Hand Gesture)

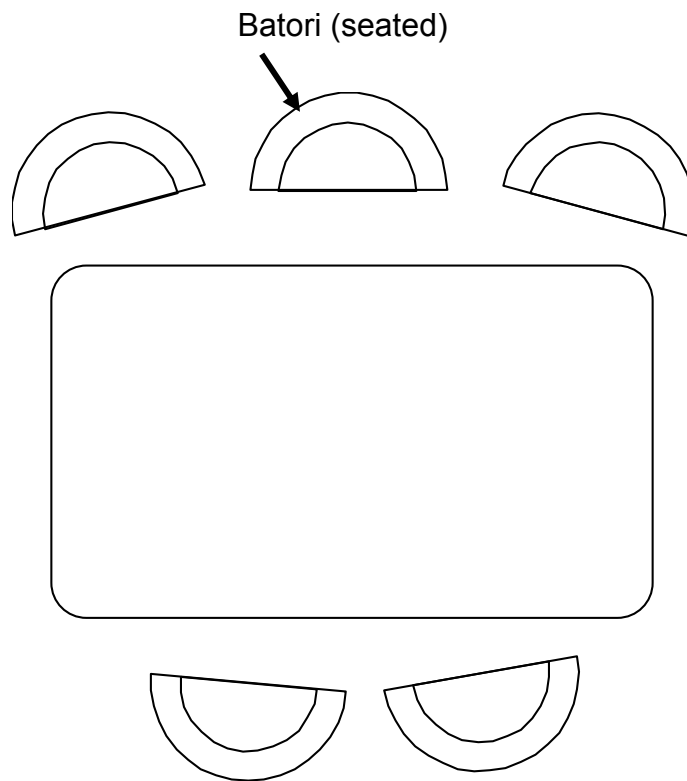


Diagram 2: Seating arrangement for the meeting