



Case Study

A fact finding mission to Kazakhstan, a case study developed and written by Bettina Strewe (used by permission)

The case

The manager of a German company Peter Hahn and his financial assistant set out for a fact-finding mission to Kazakhstan.

It was their first journey to Eastern Europe and because of this they were not sure what to expect. However, they were told by a businessperson, who had set up a joint venture with a private IT company in Almaty, that especially young business people seem to be well acquainted with time-efficient and goal oriented business practices. For this reason they were not expecting many behavioural differences or even obstacles.

However, there was still very little they knew about the company they wanted to do business with, except that it used to be a state-owned enterprise that had returned back into private ownership. In addition, they did not have time to carry out any research on the country.

So they decided to take two days off for this very interesting and promising trip.

After a long flight they received a warm and friendly welcome by the general director of the private Kazakh company that manufactured agricultural products. When he greeted the director, Peter Hahn thought to himself that he must be well into his fifties and thus must have grown up during the time when the country was a Soviet republic.

After exchanging some greetings, the German guests were invited for a drink in the director's office and then to dinner in one of the most exclusive and expensive restaurants in the capital. Conversation consisted mainly of small talk, the journey, the impressions the guests had gained until now, and the beauty of Kazakhstan, their home country. The Kazakh partners even asked about their German guests' families, which was a bit surprising for the Germans.

The menu consisted of seven courses, including much alcohol and beverages the Germans had never tried before. After this rich dinner, the Kazakh partners invited their German guests to a club. The Germans however had had a long day traveling and therefore tried to resist

as politely as they could. But the Kazakhs insisted on spending the evening together, arguing that the German colleagues could sleep at home. The Germans could not wriggle out of the situation. It was a long night and as a result, they were exhausted the next day.

Thus the first day had passed without any discussions concerning business plans, ideas, finances, time schedules etc. The day after, they would fly back home. In consequence, that very day they would have to focus completely on the project at hand with the Kazakh partners. It was a beautiful day and the Germans were hopeful to succeed with their plans.

When they entered the hotel lobby, the Kazakh partners were already waiting for them, dressed casually. They were in a great mood and promised their German partners an interesting sightseeing trip. The Germans, who thought that it was some sort of business sightseeing with tours of other enterprises, factories or workshops, agreed to the trip. They asked what exactly they would be visiting. You will see, replied the Kazakh partners.

The Germans started to feel uncomfortable. And the car drove on to picturesque countryside instead of driving to other partners or factory sites. The Germans started to become uneasy because they had the impression that the second day would also pass without the Kazakh colleagues engaging in any business talks with them. The project manager and his finance manager became nervous: at home a lot of work was waiting. The team would have to present a report to their general manager. What hindered the Kazakhs from moving on to work issues? Did they have something to hide, or were they not prepared at all? If so, why did they not say so before, so that the expensive trip might have been postponed?

The more uneasy the Germans became, the merrier the Kazakhs became.

Task

Analyse the case study using a culture reflexive approach.

Think about the possible expectations the German team and the Kazakhs had with regard to the first meeting.

Use the results of your analysis to make suggestions as to how the Germans might move ahead.

