Cultural Profile

Czech Republic

Figures, facts and a cultural pattern approach

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- Czech Republic: Formaorienta, Marsico Nuovo/Potenza
- Turkey: Iskilip Mesleki ve Teknik Anadolu Lisesi (IMTAL), Iskilip/Çorum
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CZECH REPUBLIC

Capital:
Prague

Geographical size:
78 868 km²

Population:
10 538 275 (2015)

Population as % of total EU:
2.1 % (2015)

Gross domestic product (GDP):
€ 163.947 billion (2015)

Official EU language(s):
Czech

Political system: parliamentary republic
EU member country since: 1 May 2004
Seats in the European Parliament: 21

Currency: Czech koruna (CZK)

Schengen area member?: Yes, Schengen Area member since 21 December 2007.

Presidency of the Council: the Czech Republic has held the revolving presidency of the Council of the EU once in 2009¹.

Cultural Profile

Culture Name: Czech, česká kultura

Language: Czech (95%), Slovak (3%), which is closely related to Czech. 2% with mother tongue Czech speak also German, Hungarian, Romani or Polish.

Socio-economic Identity: East European

¹: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/czechrepublic_en
1. CULTURAL PROFILE

1.1 THE CULTURAL DIMENSION THEORY OF HOFSTEDE

In the past the term culture and its’ meaning were explored from different points of view. A well-known, widely taught approach origins from Geert Hofstede, a Dutch social psychologist. In the 1970s little research about cultural differences had been done. At the same time there was a strong need to understand and cope with those differences due to the worldwide expansion of companies and organizations. In this time Hofstede conducted large scale studies on IBM employees and subsidies to understand differences on “work related values” depending on the national context. From his observations he developed his concept of 4, later 6, different cultural dimensions representing “preferences for one state of affairs over another that distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other”. In this sense he defines “national culture as the collective programming of the human mind that distinguishes one group or category of people from another”. According to his theory national culture is represented in values, rituals, heroes and symbols of a nation while values are deemed to be the deepest level, thus changing only slowly. Cultural differences in organizations are visible as practices. See further down below to check, how Hofstede’s 6 cultural dimensions can be characterized.
According to Hofstede each nation scores with a certain number on a scale from 1 to 120 (or recalculate on Hofstede’s website from 1 to 100). Hofstede puts a strong emphasize on the fact that cultural differences only become visible when comparing different national cultures (“culture can be only used meaningfully by comparison”). His systematic framework for assessing and differentiating national cultures kept being tested and elaborated until nowadays. Although sometimes being perceived critically and old-fashioned Hofstede’s cultural dimensions can be a useful instrument in the VET framework to understand cultural differences. In practice when applying it to work related contexts they can be used to explain relations among colleagues, hierarchies in organizations, how rules are set and followed or how organizations are led strategically. Especially for young people entering the world of work in another country those insights can be of great value to understand and adapt to “new” working habits.

The information you will find in the following paragraphs are taken of publications of Geert Hofstede. You will find all relevant sources at the end.

Now go and discover the specifics of your own country and compare to your country of destination:

www.geert-hofstede.com

Now that you know where you stand, the following tips might be useful once you immerse in the culture of your destination country:

3 Quoted from: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_66.htm

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2 https://geert-hofstede.com/
Intercultural Competences in Vocational Training. Transnational Strategic Partnership 2015-1-DE02-KA202-002520

PDI = Power distance index: to what extent do people accept that power is distributed unequally among them.

IDV = Individualism vs. collectivism: to what extent social bonds are characterized by the focus on collectives (“we”) or individuals (“I”).
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**MAS** = Masculinity vs. femininity: represents the preferences in society for “toughness” (achievement, heroism etc.) or “tenderness” (caring, cooperation etc.)

**UAI** = Uncertainty avoidance index: to what extent are people able to cope with uncertainty and ambiguity
LTO = Long term orientation versus short term orientation: to what extent societies give priority to preserving what has been established in the past (traditions, norms) or facing the challenges of the future and prepare for those.

IND = Indulgence vs. restraint: to what extent a society allows for or restricts opportunities for people to enjoy life.
1.2 The Czech Republic in the Hofstede world

“With a score of 57 in PDI there is a trend for the Czech Republic to be classified as hierarchical country. Top managers enjoy unquestioned power in organizations and the organizational culture of many companies is both hierarchical and relationship orientated. This strong respect for hierarchy has the negative effect of having subordinates to pass off any responsibility to the next level of management, hence concentrating decision-making and power”.

“The low score of 29 on this dimension indicates that the Czech culture is restrained in nature. It is said to have a tendency to cynicism and pessimism. Also, in contrast to indulgent societies, restrained societies do not put much emphasis on leisure time and control the gratification of their desires. People with this orientation have the perception that their actions are restrained by social norms and feel that indulging themselves is somewhat wrong.”

With a high score of 70 for Long-term orientation “the Czech culture is shown to be pragmatic. Therefore it is assumed that people follow a pragmatic orientation. They believe that truth depends very much on situation, context and time and show an ability to adapt traditions easily to changed conditions.”

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4 Source: http://www.mins.sk/czech-slovak-republics-cross-cultural-comparison/

5 Source: https://geert-hofstede.com/
1.3 Understand the Czech Republic from examples

In this chapter you will find some examples, how the cultural dimensions of Hofstede can find their practical expression. Those examples also provide possible explanations about why people behave in a certain way, in particular at work. They are of course not generally true or claim any form of universality. However, they can help to think about own values and those of others, thus easing the immersion into another culture in a reflective, sensitized way.

Example 1 – PDI and IDV

“Social interaction in the Czech Republic is not much different from that in other central European countries. This formality is partly caused by the Czech language where the “familiar” form is only used to address a member of the family, a good friend, or a child addressing another child and the “polite” form is used in all other situations. Additionally, the tendency toward formal behavior is strengthened by the tradition of using titles. The use of someone’s first name is limited to older family members addressing younger ones and to very good friends. It usually takes daily contact over a number of years before people are on a first-name basis. Much less informal contact reinforces the social distance between people. Czechs will stand at arm’s length from each other unless they are conveying information that should not be overheard.”

Example 2 – IDV

“The IDV score of 58 for the Czech Republic would indicate a culture that tend to reward moderately individual initiative and achievement over consensus decision-making and a group work. However, the weight of history has to be taken into account here. Visitors to the country’s’ capital working in new industries are correct to expect an individualistic behaviour from their Czech hosts; however, the same visitors should expect more collectivistic attitudes in organizations with an old history, such as brown field factories or state bodies born in the Communist period. Another explanation from history (compare Kolman et al. 1999) is that inheritance traditions are used to justify the difference of industrial development. Because the Czechs used to have single heirs, the young Czechs used to go to the city to earn a living and this developed a stronger sense of individualism and also laid ground to modern industries. Today, the Czechs are more and also more relying on industry.”

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6 Source: http://mcglobalaffairs.org/cultural-distance-of-the-czech-republic/

7 Source: http://www.mins.sk/czech-slovak-republics-cross-cultural-comparison/
2. Czech Society & Culture

Cultural Orientation

The Czech Republic is a country in Central Europe bordered by Germany to the west, Austria to the south, Slovakia to the east and Poland to the northeast. Czechs say it is “The Heart of Europe”. It has a population of about 10.5 million, about 1.2 of which live in the capital city of Prague. Prior to World War I, its territory had been a part of the Habsburg Empire. In 1918, an independent Czechoslovakia was established. Its existence was interrupted by a Nazi occupation during World War II. Afterwards, Czechoslovakia was restored and in 1948 became a Soviet satellite state. In 1989, Communism was peacefully overthrown in the “Velvet Revolution”. Czechoslovakia split up into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993.

Despite some current political pressures, the Czech Republic is economically, politically and culturally oriented in the West. The Czech Republic is member of EU since 2004, NATO since 1999 and member of OECD since 1995. The main points which are identifying the Czech Republic are beautiful landscape and many historical sights throughout the whole country.

For many Czechs, the beer is very important. The beer culture makes an essential part of Czech culture and society. The traditional Czech diet may be considered heavy, with an emphasis on meat, potatoes, and dumplings and the use of substantial amounts of animal fats, butter, and cream. Meats—primarily pork, beef, poultry, and organ meats such as liver, kidneys, brains, and sweetbreads—are frequently prepared with gravy and eaten with potatoes or dumplings (knedlík, pl. knedlíky). Soups are an important part of the noon meal. Potato and tripe soup are favorites, as well as beef or chicken broth with tiny liver or marrow dumplings. The most commonly used vegetables are carrots, peas, and cabbage. Salads were eaten only seasonally until recent years.

Czechs have always enjoyed sweets. The most common are fruit dumplings (made with plums or, in winter, preserved apricots) served with grated farmer cheese and bread crumbs browned in butter, with sugar sprinkled on top. Dumplings often are served as a meal. Popular sweet baked goods include buchty (sing. buchta), small, roughly rectangular
yeast buns with a filling of jam or preserves; *koláče* (sing. *koláč*), small cakes made of white flour with an indentation on the surface for a filling of poppy seeds, plum jam, or sweetened farmer cheese; a semisweet cake (*bábovka*) made of yeast dough and baked in a fluted tube pan; thin pancakes spread with jam, rolled, and topped with powdered sugar (*palačinky*); small raised pancakes (*livance*); and apple strudel (* jablkovýzávin* or *štrúdl*).

Czechs are mostly pessimistic but they can make fun of themselves. Czechs seem rather reserved when introduced to a new person. Usually, they do not trust people they do not know. Their behavior may appear formal – the reason may be the use of the second-person in Czech language, the ‘polite’ form. It is used with people whom you do not know, in a formal social interaction, or when younger generation is addressing the older one. Czech sense of humor or a general life attitude may be perceived as ironic or sarcastic. The same reason goes for maintaining their personal privacy and being intimate with people they know. Czech people are naturally very polite and do not tend to be overly direct in communication. They generally avoid confrontation – informal straightforwardness in dealing is common. After getting to know Czechs better you become to love their cheerful and helpful character and you can experience what a warm and firm friendship is about. They are also very hospitable and enjoy to be a nation of realistic and very practical people.

The Czech Republic is essentially a country of small cities and towns. However, there have always been hundreds of small villages in the countryside, frequently only a few miles apart. In the past several decades, there has been a tendency to consolidate them administratively. The rooms of Czech apartments and family houses are small, and bedrooms, which usually have no closets, are made smaller by the use of wardrobes. Family houses are constructed of cinder block or brick rather than wood.

The Czech Republic is covered by 55% of agricultural land as a share of land area for Czech Republic, arable land as a share of land area for Czech Republic is 41% (forest area as a share of land area for Czech Republic is 35%, permanent cropland as a share of land area was at level of 1%). The biggest heroes today are sportmen, especially ice-hockey players and football players. According to the results of popular television poll „Greatest Czechs“ we can identify Czech heroes from past – king Karel 4th, the first Czechoslovakian president T. G. Masaryk, first president of the Czech Republic V. Havel.

Anyway, this television poll actually won a fictional character from the theatrical plays. This character names Jara Cimrman. The Jara Cimrman Theater, which today features the games attributed to Jara Cimrman, as well as the fictional life and work of a man described as a genius and „Jack of all trades“. This phenomenon is typical for Czechs because it shows typical sings of Czech identity. Another Czech whose memory is still cherished is Jan Amos Komenský (1592–1670), known outside the country as Comenius. A religious reformer, Comenius also was a scientist and a founder of modern pedagogy and is referred to as the “teacher of nations“.
Economic orientation

The Czech Republic economy is one of wealthiest and stablest in Post-Soviet Europe and the CEE. It is one of the most developed industrialised economies. Its population boasts a well-educated workforce and well-developed infrastructure. Current unemployment rate is the lowest (or second lowest after Germany) in EU. This phenomenon causes problems such as labor shortages in the labor market and enormous pressure on wage increases. The poverty rate is the second lowest of OECD members only behind Denmark. It emerged from over 40 years of Communist rule in 1990, and was the first former Eastern Bloc state to acquire the status of a developed economy. The largest trading partner for both export and import is Germany and the EU in general.

The Czech Republic has a highly diverse. The industry sector accounts for 37.5% of the economy, while services for 60% and agriculture for 2.5%. The principal industries are high tech engineering, electronics, automotive, and machine-building, steel production, transportation equipment, chemical production and pharmaceuticals. The major services are research and development, ICT and software development, nanotechnology and life sciences among others. Its main agricultural products are cereals, vegetable oils and hops.

While the automotive industry is the Czech Republic’s largest industry, other key sectors in the region include machinery, iron and steel production, metallurgy, chemical production, electronics, transport equipment, textiles, glass, ceramics, defence and pharmaceuticals. However, as the automotive industry experiences a downturn in demand, the country has been focusing on diversifying away from manufacturing and toward a more high-tech, services-based, knowledge economy. The Czech Republic is reducing its dependence on highly polluting low-grade brown coal as a source of energy. Nuclear power currently provides about 30% of total power needs, and its share is projected to increase to 40%.

Graduates are looking for well-paid jobs in stable companies with both foreign and domestic capital. Most of foreign labor force work in automotive industry, construction and services (low-income job positions). The largest group of foreigners are the Ukrainians, Slovaks, Vietnamese, Mongolians, Poles, Rums, Moldavians and Bulgarians and they seek a job mostly in the industry area. Foreign workers in Czech Republic should bear in mind that business meetings in the Czech Republic are arranged well in advance by a fax or a formal letter. Because of a rather laid back attitude towards business and highly bureaucratic administrative organization structures it may take a very long for any decision to be made.

Despite this, hard work is considered to be a must for every employee. The more time you are willing to spend at the office the higher your chances for a promotion. Once you’re promoted, you will have to work even longer. The actual productivity and efficiency, however, seem somewhat less important – at least compared to other countries.
Work culture

Since the fall of communism and the influx of multi-national corporations, the work culture in the main cities of the Czech Republic has gradually shifted in line with western style culture. Initial business meetings are formal affairs with standard business dress worn and business cards exchanged. Czechs are polite and non-confrontational and sometimes what may appear as hesitancy is a form of politeness or an indirect way of saying no. Turning up unexpectedly or ridiculously early for a meeting is considered a major faux-pas.

Academic titles such as Doctor or Professor are used at work both as a form of address and in written correspondence, including emails. Meetings are expected to start on time and it is not uncommon for an associate of the decision maker to lead the meeting in the early stages until trust has been established on both sides. Many small and medium size Czech businesses prefer to explore the possibility of ‘business cooperation’ rather than a straight buyer/seller arrangement as they feel this strengthens the prospect of a long-term relationship. Job titles are considered as a source of prestige but do not always match the level of responsibility, as particularly in medium-size and small companies, all major decision making often lies with the top executive.

Social orientation

The family is the centre of the social structure. Obligation to the family is a person's first priority. Czechs prize forward thinking, logical, practical, and efficient. Careful planning, in both one's business and personal life, provides a sense of security. Rules and regulations allow people to know what is expected and to plan their life accordingly.

Czechs are private people until they get to know you. They are formal and reserved. Once you develop a personal relationship Czechs open up a bit, but they are never overly emotional. Although always polite, they seldom move to a first-name basis with people outside their extended family or very close friends. Czechs tend not to acknowledge people whom they do not know as they walk along the street or ride the train.

Picture by kirkandmimi: people in Prague (Pixabay)
The tendency toward formal behavior is strengthened by the tradition of using titles. The use of someone's first name is limited to older family members addressing younger ones and to very good friends. It usually takes daily contact over a number of years before people are on a first-name basis. Much less informal contact reinforces the social distance between people. Because Czech apartments are small, invitations to visit and casual dropping by occur only among good friends.

Czechs stand at arm’s length from each other unless they are conveying information that should not be overheard. Like other Europeans, Czechs do not show as much consideration as one finds in Britain or in smaller cities in the United States when several people are boarding a streetcar, bus, or train or waiting to be served in a store. Their tendency to get ahead of others may reflect the experience of the socialist years, when people had to stand in lines for scarce goods. Because there are no significant differences in social equality by virtue of position or ethnic background, the rules of etiquette are alike for all members of the society.

Education is very important for the most of Czech families. They want to provide their kids the best education they can effort. There is still believe in rule which says – better education means better job, better life. In that case, best education you can gain is at grammar schools (secondary school) and then follow to university where you reach at least master degree. Bachelor degree is still insufficient for the most of Czech society. This is slowly changing due to requirements of companies in the labour market. New approach of some progressive companies is about shifting from requirements to reached level of education to what a candidate really knows and he can use. Simply, soft skills are in centre of interest. Even school education system has undergone a reform. It is supposed to focus more on skills than on knowledge. But in fact, just low changes have been done. There is a big debate about the quality and basic approach to the education in Czech society. Czech Republic knows that it is running behind the countries with better education but there is low will of current political scene to make core changes. There are no big differences between Czech young people and young people from the rest of Europe or developed World. We can see typical signs of so called generations – X, Z or Y – the millennials.

As the economy grows, young people (generation Y) starts to prefer more leisure time – free time rather than hard work e.g. for international corporations. Job for them is just the way how to earn money and then travel, have a great time and enjoy the life. That is big difference to the begging of 90´s when the most of young people after their studies were eager to work, eager to do big carrier.

Everyday life

Everyday life during the week in the Czech Republic is not different to Central and Western Europe. It means work, family, hobbies (sometimes). During weekends or holidays, Czechs love their cabins (cottages) in the countryside, mountains, in nature. It’s their second house where they spend the most of their free time. They love DIY, looking after small gardens and grow some vegetable and fruit. Very popular is also BBQ sessions with family and friends where Czech beer must be involved.
Czechs like to drink beer in beer gardens, have a chat about politics, sport and other very “important” topics. Czechs are experts on every topic which resonates in society. However, some researchers say that Czechs are the second most pessimistic nation in the World (Damn it!, we didn’t win again…). Czechs spend their holidays mostly within the family. They go for visit relatives, have a talk, a lot of food, drink and good mood.
3. Read more about Czech Republic Culture, History and Work and Business Life

3.1 Czech Republic Political System, Culture and History

Czech Republic political country profile by the BBC (regularly updated):

Czech Republic in the EU
https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/czechrepublic_en

A comprehensive and deep cultural analysis and description of Czech Republic is offered here:
http://www.everyculture.com/Cr-Ga/Czech-Republic.html

3.2 Guide to Czech Republic—Etiquette, Customs, Culture & Business

Etiquette and Business Culture in Czech Republic

- https://www.commisceo-global.com/country-guides/czech-republic-guide
Sources:

1) https://geert-hofstede.com/


5) Map of Czech Republic: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ez-map.png?uselang=de

6) http://www.mins.sk/czech-slovak-republics-cross-cultural-comparison/

7) http://mcglobalaffairs.org/cultural-distance-of-the-czech-republic/
Annex: Czech Society & Culture – Practical hints around Czech homes, etiquette and negotiation

The Family

- The family is the centre of the social structure.
- Obligation to the family is a person's first priority.
- Practicality
  - Czechs prize forward thinking, logical, practical, and efficient.
  - Careful planning, in both one's business and personal life, provides a sense of security.
  - Rules and regulations allow people to know what is expected and to plan their life accordingly.

Privacy

- Czechs are private people until they get to know you.
- They are formal and reserved.
- Once you develop a personal relationship Czechs open up a bit, but they are never overly emotional.
- Although always polite, they seldom move to a first-name basis with people outside their extended family or very close friends.
- Czechs tend not to acknowledge people whom they do not know as they walk along the street or ride the train.

Czech Etiquette and Customs

Meeting and Greeting

- Initial greetings are formal and reserved.
- Most greetings include a handshake, direct eye contact, and the appropriate greeting for the time of day.
- Wait to be invited before using someone's first name or an informal greeting, as these are all signs of friendship.
- The offer to move to the informal is generally offered by the woman, the older person, or the person of higher status.
- Moving to the informal without an invitation insults the person and may be viewed as an attempt to humiliate them.
Giving and Accepting Gifts

- If you are invited to dinner, bring a box of good quality chocolates, or flowers to the hostess or a bottle of wine or good brandy to the host.
- In general, you should be cautious about giving flowers, since people over the age of 35 often see flowers as having a romantic connotation.
- If you give flowers, give an odd number, but not 13, which is considered unlucky.
- Do not give calla lilies as they are used at funerals.
- Gifts are usually opened when received.

Dining Etiquette

- If you are visiting a Czech's house:
  - Arrive on time.
  - Remove your shoes.
  - Expect to be treated with great honour and respect.
  - Dress modestly and well.
  - Do not discuss business. Czechs separate their business and personal lives.
  - Table manners are rather formal in Czech Republic.
  - Remain standing until invited to sit down. You may be shown to a particular seat.
  - Table manners are Continental -- the fork is held in the left hand and the knife in the right while eating.
  - Do not begin eating until the hostess starts.
  - Unless the meal is formal, the napkin remains folded next to the plate. At formal meals, the napkin is unfolded and put on your lap.
  - The oldest woman or honoured guest is generally served first.
  - Always refuse second helpings the first time they are offered. Wait for the hostess to insist.
  - Compliment the meal while you are eating. This allows the hostess to discuss the food and the preparation.
  - Indicate you have finished eating by laying your knife and fork parallel across the right side of your plate.
Business Etiquette and Protocol

Business Meetings

- Appointments are mandatory and should be made in advance.
- Letters should be addressed to the company rather than a specific person. This prevents a letter from being held up if the person it is addressed to is away from the office.
- Do not try to schedule meetings on Friday afternoon as many Czechs leave for their country cottages after lunch.
- Many businesses close during August.
- Punctuality for meetings is taken extremely seriously.
- Initial meetings are scheduled to get to know each other and to see if your Czech associates believe that you are trustworthy. The first meeting may be with a gatekeeper rather than the actual decision maker.
- Expect some small talk and getting-to-know-you conversation before business is discussed.
- Maintain direct eye contact while speaking.
- Do not remove your suit jacket unless the highest-ranking Czech does so.
- Presentations should be accurate, detailed and thorough.
- Have charts and figures to back up your claims.

Communication

- Czechs are both formal and somewhat indirect in their communication.
- They try not to purposely offend and will often go out of their way to protect someone's feelings.
- Czechs are non-confrontational and often take an indirect approach to business dealings.
- If they lower their eyes and become silent they are uncomfortable with something you have said.

Negotiating

- It will take several meetings for your Czech business associates to become familiar with you and appear comfortable and . Politeness prevents many Czechs from giving an absolute 'no'. However, statements such as 'It is difficult' or 'We will see' are often negatives.
- Business is conducted slowly. You will have to be patient and not appear ruffled by the strict adherence to protocol.
- Business is hierarchical. Decision-making power is held at the top of the company. Decisions are reached slowly.
• It may take several visits to reach a decision.
• Avoid high-pressure tactics.
• Czechs generally offer what they expect to get and do not often give counter-offers.

https://www.commisceo-global.com/country-guides/czech-republic-guide

Test yourself - can you hit 85% or more in our Quiz on the Czech Republic?