
Race and Class

Mexican society is divided in a number of social classes that often decide a person's position in the business community. Class divisions are based on a combination of family origin, wealth and education. These factors are rarely discussed openly but they have a strong bearing on social and business relationships.

The Age Factor

Mexico's population is extremely young. About half of the population is under 20 years old. In comparison, half of Canada's population is over the age of 40. One consequence is that young people are often treated condescendingly. This is based on the notion that the lack of experience limits the ability of the young to hold a valid opinion.

This is beginning to change, however, partly because young Mexicans are more likely to hold degrees from foreign universities. Moreover, Mexicans with business degrees are likely to come from extremely wealthy families. Canadian senior executives should not be surprised to meet counterparts or senior officials in their late twenties or early thirties.

Family

The family is the most important institution in Mexican culture. It is considered to be the root of trust, which underlies all important personal relationships. Mexicans believe that if their families know each other, the likelihood of being wronged is greatly diminished because it would cause embarrassment to the family. Families are usually large and close friends are considered as part of the family. Indeed, there is no Mexican expression for "extended family"; this concept is assumed.

The *Mañana* Syndrome

Time is a relative concept for most Mexicans, and deadlines are usually flexible. Mexicans hate deadlines, and are often late completing work that is time sensitive. Taken literally, *mañana*, means "tomorrow", but in many cases it really means "later". Mexico's easy-going business environment is often misinterpreted by foreigners as laziness or lack of interest. In fact, the *mañana* syndrome simply reflects a system of priorities embedded in the Mexican culture. Family and social obligations come first and business later. This tradition is changing quickly in the modern sectors of the economy.