

## CULTURE INSIGHTS 2026

### Spain, SMEs & Leadership Futures

By Beth Camprubí on 19/02/2026

## Business Case

**Same project - Same delay - Three countries - Three realities.**

### Context:

A **Spanish SME** (80 employees) is working with two new partners:

- a **German company** (operations & compliance)
- a **UK company** (commercial & client-facing role)

The working language is **English**. The project is moving fast, until a **2-week delay** appears due to an internal resource issue on the Spanish side.

A decision must be made:

- adjust the timeline
- reassign responsibilities
- communicate the delay clearly

**NOTE:** Same facts. Different cultural reactions.

### What happens next - culture in action:

-  **Spain - Focus:** relationship + flexibility
  - The delay is explained **personally**
  - Context matters (“*we had several things happening at once*”)
  - Solution is proposed **in conversation**, not always in writing
  - Trust is assumed to compensate for lack of detail

**Underlying logic:** If they understand the situation, they’ll be flexible.

-  **Germany - Focus:** structure + accountability
  - Immediate need for **clear facts**
  - Written clarification requested
  - Impact analysis expected (what changes, what doesn’t)
  - Responsibility must be explicitly assigned

**Underlying logic:** If the process is clear, trust follows.

**United Kingdom - Focus:** pragmatism + action orientation

- The delay is acknowledged **briefly and with understatement**
- Statements may **mean the opposite of the literal words** (e.g., “Interesting” → you’re wrong)
- They focus on **what action can be taken next**, not theorizing or debating principles
- Politeness is a **strategic tool**, not a consensus-building effort
- Written and verbal communication emphasizes **solutions and results**, not relationships or emotions

**Underlying logic:** Truth is truth when it works. Just do it. Focus on action, not consensus.

**Where friction appears?**

Same situation	How it’s interpreted
<i>Informal explanation</i>	<b>Spain:</b> transparency / <b>Germany:</b> lack of rigour / <b>UK:</b> undervalued words
<i>Direct request for clarity</i>	<b>Germany:</b> efficiency / <b>Spain:</b> pressure / <b>UK:</b> procedural impatience
<i>Understated response</i>	<b>UK:</b> signal of disagreement / <b>Spain:</b> friendly / <b>Germany:</b> unclear
<i>Lack of theorizing</i>	<b>UK:</b> normal / <b>Spain &amp; Germany:</b> uncomfortable

**NOTE:** No one is wrong. But **everyone interprets intentions differently.**

**The real issue?**

The challenge is not:

- competence
- commitment
- or language level

It’s the **unspoken rules** around:

- responsibility
- decision-making
- how clarity is shown
- how action is prioritized

**NOTE:** Culture lives in the **how**, not the **what**.

## Why this matters for SMEs?

In many SMEs:

- √ culture is **lived**, not named
- √ communication relies on **goodwill**
- √ expectations are rarely aligned explicitly

This works, **until international growth enters the room**. Then:

- √ English is not enough
- √ good intentions are not enough
- √ action orientation and pragmatism must be explicitly addressed

## Reflection

International collaboration doesn't fail because people don't care. It struggles because they care "**differently**". Awareness and **clarity on action points** prevent invisible friction from slowing things down.

—

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Let's connect the dots!

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## Resources:

- <https://geerthofstede.com/country-comparison-bar-charts/>
- <https://www.amazon.co.uk/New-Narrative-Culture-Values-Shape/dp/B0DZT7Z5V7>
- <https://www.lavananguardia.com/economia/20250721/10908243/crecer-gran-reto-pymes-entorno-global-competitivo-smr.htm>