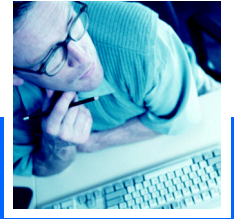


Managing international teams

By Alison Town



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Synopsis

When there is a cultural mix or you are managing overseas, leading the team can become a major challenge. Mixed culture teams can be highly effective because of the quality decision-making that different viewpoints can produce. They can also be disastrously ineffective, paralysed by communication difficulties and interpersonal conflicts. This article introduces the main cultural impacts on team behavior and provides practical tips for making differences help rather than hinder the team.

How to ...

How to classify different cultures and understand their peoples.

How to understand and focus on culture and performance.

How to understand and focus on culture and communication.

Alison Town

Alison Town is an international training consultant based in Paris, providing inter-cultural coaching and development. She is multilingual, an avid traveler and keen people-watcher. Her professional background includes human resources experience in a variety of international organizations. Areas of special interest include expatriate management, cross-cultural negotiations, team working and people development.

Introduction

Leading a team can be a huge challenge for a manager at the best of times. Assembling a group of people, calling them a team and expecting to get easy results with little management input has never been very realistic. In a world where teams are increasingly made up of different cultures, team leadership becomes more difficult and more time consuming for the team leader.

Effectively leading an international team requires an understanding of how national cultural values shape behavior at work, and in particular, in the team context. This article will highlight the key areas where national culture has an impact on teamwork and provide suggestions for dealing with the challenges of international team leadership.

Classifying cultures

Whether managing a mixed nationality team in your home country, or managing abroad as an expatriate, you will undoubtedly notice differences in the way various nationalities behave in and out of work. Team behavior cannot of course be accurately predicted based on nationality, but useful guidelines can be drawn from intercultural research.

Putting different countries into boxes is fraught