



Synopsis

The international meeting: a forum for problem solving or a huge waste of time rife with poor communication? This article highlights how culture shapes our expectations of meetings, along with our communication style and our behavior in the meeting itself.

How to ...

How to understand communications in different cultures.

How to plan and run a meeting with people from different cultures.

How to understand why different cultures do things differently.

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.

Not another meeting ...

Meetings are a fact of life for busy managers: one can easily spend half of the working week in meetings, if not more. Although they can be productive forums for communicating and decision-making on projects, or for creative problem solving, badly run meetings can also be a huge waste of time and energy.

There are many guidelines available on how to run different kinds of meeting, and what level of participation is appropriate in which type (more in a creative meeting, less in a formal committee meeting, and so on). It is harder for the international manager to sift out how to cope with cultural complexities of managing and participating in meetings.

Top Ten Meeting Complaints

Started late
Not relevant to me
Main decision makers not present
Boring
Dominated by one individual
No structure
Nobody listened properly
Not sure of outcome
Not sure why I was there
Went on too long

The problems of running and participating in meet-