

4A Managing international meetings

Aims

To understand different approaches to decision making
To manage the decision-making process effectively in meetings

1 Read what four people said about the decision-making process in their organisations and answer these questions.

- What do you see as the main advantages and disadvantages of each decision-making style?
- Which of the decision-making styles is most similar to the one in your meetings at work?
- What kind of decision-making style do you personally prefer? Why?

In my department, meetings are very focused around taking decisions. The culture of my organisation is all about speed. So this means no meeting is scheduled for more than 30 minutes and we always have a decision before we finish.

Most of my meetings are by telephone with people all around the world. There's usually not much discussion between the participants. It's just one-way communication from the boss telling us about decisions he has already taken.

I work in research and development. People in our meetings love complex arguments. They always take their time to make a decision but once a decision is taken then they follow it.

The culture in this organisation is very informal. Where I work the most important meetings are the one-to-one meetings in the corridor or around the coffee machine. Sometimes it's good to network and get informal agreement about things over a coffee like this before the formal meetings.



2 10 Kaneko Takuya works in Japan for a global electronics company. Listen to him talking about his experiences of international meetings and answer the questions.

- 1 How does Kaneko describe the decision-making style in the meetings in his company?
- 2 He says the style has to change. In what way and why?
- 3 What target does the company have for its speed of decision making?
- 4 Which two factors make it difficult to change the decision-making style in the company?
- 5 Why does Kaneko believe it's harder to get to a decision in telephone meetings than in face-to-face meetings?
- 6 How does Kaneko describe his own personal decision-making style?

3 Kaneko says 'I think frequent communication *before* meetings is very helpful to get to a decision in a meeting faster.'

- How effective do you think it is to communicate a lot before meetings in order to help decision making in meetings?
- What other ways can you think of to improve decision making in international meetings?

4 11 Listen to the opening of a meeting about product development.

- 1 What two things does the project leader say she wants to clarify at the start?
- 2 Which two decisions does she want to take?
- 3 She says she doesn't want a 'big discussion'. Why not? What is proposed instead?
- 4 The designer wants to 'slow down' the decision-making process. Why?

5 The project leader uses a five-stage process to confirm which decisions to take and how to take them. Look at the audio script on page 55 and underline the phrases she uses to manage each stage.

- 1 Say *what* you want to define.
- 2 Say *which* decision needs to be taken.
- 3 Say *how* the decision should be taken.
- 4 Check with other participants and negotiate if necessary.
- 5 Confirm the decision-making process.

What other phrases could you use to say the same thing?

6 Student A, you are the manager of a global insurance company. Student B, you are the representative of a training organisation specialising in sales education. You are going to discuss the roll-out of a specially developed training course.

First read the information below. Then Student A, go to page 84. Student B, go to page 88. In pairs, prepare your roles. Then work in Student A and B pairs and have the meeting.

You have both been involved for the past nine months in developing a new 'Leadership in sales' programme for senior sales executives across Europe. The target group is approximately 80 people. Student B has developed a concept and material for the new programme and sent this to Student A. You are now meeting to discuss next steps.

Student A sent this email two weeks ago to set up the meeting.

Hi
Thanks very much for the training concept and materials. Congratulations! It looks very good and is exactly what we wanted. We now need a meeting to discuss the process of rolling the programme out across the organisation in the first four months of next year. Meeting agenda could be:
1 When to do training
2 Where to do training
I would propose a short 20-minute meeting next Tuesday morning at 09.00.
Best regards

After the role play, form A and B groups of people who played the same role and compare your experiences.

- How effective was the start of the meeting?
- What did you do to deal with the situation? How successful was this?
- What was the result of the meeting?
- What did you learn about handling such situations in the future at work?

Cultural tip

The ways in which decisions are taken in meetings can differ significantly across different organisational and national cultures. It is important when starting an international meeting to clarify and agree with participants what is to be decided and how it will be decided.

I can outline a decision-making process in meetings.