



Meetings cultural differences guess the country

Choose one of the descriptions below and give your opinion on it. Things you could talk about:

- How acceptable it is in your country
- How universal it is (or isn't)
- What countries it is okay in and not okay in
- Your personal views on its acceptability

After guessing which one you are talking about, your partner will say how much they agree or disagree with what you said.

Before the meeting

- Organizations are reluctant to agree to meetings with people they are unfamiliar with. Be prepared to provide detailed written information about your organization.
- Don't be surprised if a meeting which was arranged well in advance is rescheduled or if you find out at the last minute that a specific individual will no longer attend. They may even wait as late as the day of the meeting before a specific time is arranged.
- They generally do not like surprises in business and want to know all they can in advance so they have time to discuss everything among themselves. Meetings are not considered a good time to "unveil" a new product or service.

Arrival and starting

- Do not arrive too early, as they may feel embarrassed if they are not fully prepared to receive you. Arriving five minutes before the scheduled meeting time is generally best.
- Guests will usually be first met by the host's representative. This person will lead the guests into the meeting room, where the other attendees may already be waiting for them.
- You may be guided to a waiting room and offered tea first. Tea should not be refused.
- Meetings are almost always held in rooms specifically for business discussions, so don't expect to be invited into someone's office.
- Some meeting rooms consist of sofas and chairs around the edge with coffee tables between them.
- The highest-ranking guest should enter the room first. All other guests should then enter in order of rank.
- You should stand up when a senior person enters the room.

Body language

- If you get a boardroom table full of people nodding and smiling, this may just mean that they understand what you are saying and so give no indication of agreement.
- It is considered impolite to make eye contact, so it is usually better to look down.
- If you shake hands, do so quickly and lightly.

Business cards

- You should make sure you exchange business cards at the very start of the meeting.
- Include a translation of your job title etc on the reverse side of your business card.
- Many people include gold embossing on some part of the card, as it represents wealth, status and prestige.
- You should always hand your business card to the recipient so that the writing is the right way up for them to read, i.e. facing away from you.
- Business cards should be held in both hands when you are handing them to someone.
- You should examine the card carefully when you are given it. Putting a business card straight into your pocket is considered a lack of respect.
- Keep people's business cards on the table throughout the meeting

Gifts

- Gifts are an important business tool. Only expressing your thanks orally is considered rude.
- Avoid expensive gifts but always wrap them carefully or have them wrapped in the shop.
- If you are visiting an organisation, take one gift to present to the whole group rather than individual presents.
- Presents are often refused two or three times before finally being accepted.
- Gifts are rarely opened in front of you.

Misc.

- Do not be surprised if many of the people there observe and take notes without otherwise contributing.
- When possible, refuse with "I'll look into that," rather than "No."
- Proper business etiquette involves dressing in conservative, dark, simple attire. Bright colours and/or ornate designs are considered flashy and inappropriate.
- It is normal to speak slowly and pause between your sentences when speaking during a business meeting.
- Brevity is generally seen as a negative thing.
- It is common to be involved in a series of meetings rather than one big one during which all the major issues are discussed.
- Meetings are about building relationships and exchanging information, so it is rare for a decision to be made. Rather, they will be made later in consensus-building discussions involving all the relevant people
- Either side can bring the meeting to a close.

All the pieces of advice are actually about one country. Can you guess what country it is?

How similar or different is the business culture in that country and your own country? How does it compare to other countries that you know or know about?

What other differences do you know about for each of the headings above?

What other cultural differences do you know of that are connected to business meetings?

Choose one of the topics on the next page and talk about cultural differences and personal preferences for as long as you can.

OR

Choose a country and describe business meetings there, using the list of ideas on the next page if you like. Your partner(s) will try to guess which country you are talking about, and then say if they agree with your description.

Suggested cultural differences in business meetings topics

- Agenda
- Brainstorming
- Breaking the ice and making people feel comfortable
- Clothing and appearance
- Compromise
- Consensus
- Decision making
- Ending the meeting
- Food and drink
- Formality
- Greetings
- Hierarchy and status
- How fixed agreements are
- Humour
- Interrupting
- Introductions
- Leaving the meeting room and building
- Minutes
- Negotiations
- Number of participants
- People's involvement
- PowerPoint
- Presentations
- Rejecting ideas and proposals
- Roles
- Showing your real feelings and opinions
- Silence
- Small talk
- Timing
- Turn taking
- Venue

Answer key

The country is China