

When Shouting into a Vacuum is a Cacophony of Noise!

How to use new communication methods, mobile phones, texting, video conferences etc. in the best possible way

Professor Eddie Obeng

It's 5 p.m. and it's supposed to be starting but you decide you need a strong cup of coffee before you can face it - face the audio conference. You wouldn't join if you could get away with it but the politics of the situation means you have to "show your face".

But, you suspect, this was because they, like you, had given up, put their phones on mute and were working on their e-mails!

There must be a better way.

Last time was dreadful. 2 hours of slow and boring torture. And it was as if the others from outside your time zone had forgotten that you have a home to go to. It was OK for them - for them it was lunch-time. True you'd managed to do some real work by answering your e-mails during the call, but...

The conference started off in a very promising way and then quickly became an opportunity for the more vocal members of the team to compete to see who could talk for the longest without pausing for breath. The discussion went around in circles. After about half an hour one of the team joined in by mobile. You knew he was on his mobile. You also knew at what time the delayed flight to Brisbane was leaving, that Johan Freiderich had to go to airport security, the words of the latest song from Cold Play and so on. In short, the background noise was terrible.

Now, one month later, as you return to your desk with your coffee you can't remember which decisions were taken or what actions were assigned, you just hope your name wasn't on any of them.

Part of the reason was the constant confusion of everyone talking and over-talking each other. Unlike a real meeting there were no cues that someone wanted to speak - no opportunity to 'put your hand up.' Net result chaos! Also the main topics you needed to discuss weren't covered at all whilst there was real in-depth focus on trivial issues. In fact you discovered yesterday that one person who said almost nothing at all actually had all the customer information you needed for planning the next stage.

It was so annoying that no one seemed to have planned what they were going to say about the key topics and the few times the discussion came close to progress you were blocked by a lack of preparation by the key people who didn't have the relevant information available to hand immediately.

The audio meeting got better as time went on and fewer and fewer people were trying to say anything.

