

Brian Szepkouski has co-authored "Business Passport to Japan: Maximizing Your Success in the 21st Century" The book provides in-depth knowledge of how to successfully seize the opportunities of Japanese business life through a knowledge of Japans specific cultural challenges.

Nemawashi: Groundwork (literally, binding the roots for transplant)

This refers to the process of consensus building to make decisions through preliminary meetings and confidential one-on-one consultations. The actual meeting of a decision-making group, therefore, should harbor no surprises and may in fact be a kind of rubber stamp ritual.

High level Western executives have often asked, "Why do we need meetings before and after the actual meeting?" This strikes them as redundant. Yet for Japanese it is important to plant the seed of an idea in another person's mind and allow it to grow. This prevents blind-siding, catching someone off guard and big surprises in group meetings. Nemawashi, there can be see as a tool to preserve relationship and save face.

Tip: don't expect to brainstorm or hash out problems with your Japanese partners during group meetings. Instead, be willing to incorporate nemawashi into your trans-Pacific decision-making processes. The increased time commitment to float an idea with more than one key figure in an organization should even be reflected in your business plan.