



## Case Study 1a

# Meeting Participation Across Asia:

# Building Confidence First

### The Scene

A Tokyo office of a Fortune 100 semiconductor equipment manufacturer. This industry giant operates in 24 countries with over 34,000 employees globally and approximately 2,500 in Japan. Their Japanese engineering teams were some of the most technically skilled in the industry, and regularly attended critical global meetings. Yet, despite having valuable insights that could drive innovation and solve complex customer challenges, these employees remained silent until called upon.

### The Challenge

Despite strong technical expertise, Japanese team members were hesitant to speak up in English meetings. Without their expertise, global initiatives were moving forward without crucial local market knowledge, and talented engineers were being overlooked for international opportunities. The cost was mounting—both in missed business opportunities and untapped human potential.

*“In English meetings, I have to do the talking for my team of managers, asking questions, giving opinions. It’s just not sustainable. I am Japanese, too, so they should be able to do it. They must!”*

— One business unit leader, expressing his frustration.

## What Our Analysis Uncovered

Through our comprehensive Friction Point Analysis™ (FPA)—dual surveys (for Japanese and non-Japanese teams) along with detailed interviews—we revealed the real challenges both sides faced in this multi-billion dollar global operation:

### Japanese teams identified their top challenges as:

- Leading global teams or projects
- Influencing people and outcomes using English
- Providing feedback, opinions and comments without being asked
- Disagreeing with someone’s opinion or points

### Global colleagues struggled most with:

- Clearly communicating their meaning to Japanese teams
- Clarifying whether or not they were understood
- Getting clear commitment from Japanese colleagues

### The emotional impact was telling:

- 78% of Japanese staff felt “not confident” in English meetings
- 77% felt “frustrated” during global discussions
- 72% felt “nervous” when expected to contribute

## The Transformation

This semiconductor leader implemented our “Speak Up with Confidence” program, focusing on practical communication skills rather than language proficiency. Instead of traditional English training, we developed confidence-first techniques that Japanese professionals could use immediately.

### Japanese teams built confidence to:

- Interrupt diplomatically with phrases like “May I share the local perspective?”
- Disagree constructively: “I understand the goal, but I see some risks...”
- Control conversation pace using simple techniques to ensure mutual understanding
- Share concerns early before problems escalated
- Lead multicultural discussions with no hesitation

## The Results that Followed

### Immediate Impact:



### Business Impact (12-month tracking):

- Japanese team participation in global meetings increased significantly
- Project timelines improved due to earlier identification of technical challenges
- Local market insights now consistently inform global product development
- Faster time-to-market for Japan-specific product adaptations
- Enhanced global team cohesion and competitive advantage

## What Made This Work

### Three Critical Success Factors:

1. **Confidence-First Approach:** We addressed hesitation, not English ability. Participants learned that their current language skills were sufficient for effective communication.
2. **Practical Techniques:** Five essential skills that transform hesitation into influence—mastering the mindset to speak up without hesitation,

jumping into conversations naturally, disagreeing diplomatically, participating proactively, and controlling conversations to ensure understanding.

3. **Cultural Intelligence:** Both sides learned to work together more effectively, valuing Japanese thoroughness alongside Western efficiency.

## Participant Voice

*“I learned a lot. Especially for me, the biggest thing is no hesitation. Usually, silence is golden. But what I find for these two days practice, is that once I step out with the first step [using No Hesitation], all the rest is natural. So the most important thing is the first step. So this is the biggest change for me.”*

— Manager, Global Semiconductor Company

*“The biggest mindset change from my side is it’s not always the English or language problem. It’s all about communication. Once we understand our ultimate goal is communication using the 5 skills, everything will go smoothly and naturally.”*

— Technology Manager, Global Semiconductor Company

## Beyond Japan

The success sparked expansion across Asia, with similar programs now implemented for teams in China, India, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan. Each program maintains the core confidence-building approach while adapting to local cultural contexts. (See Case Study 1b)

**The Bottom Line:** This global manufacturer didn’t need their Japanese teams to speak better English—they needed them to speak up with confidence. By applying the 5 essential communication skills, that business unit leader no longer had to do all the talking for his managers. **Building communication confidence delivered far greater results than conventional training, proving that when teams learn to work together effectively, business results improve dramatically.**