

Focus³



Case Study 2

How a Global Life Insurance Company Saved Their Japan Integration

The Scene

A boardroom in Tokyo. The Fortune 100 global life insurer operates in 50+ countries with \$680 billion in assets. Their recent \$15.5 billion global acquisition made them a top 5 player in Japan.

The American CEO has just presented the new global strategy to his Japanese leadership team. He looks around the table at his Japanese team leaders. They nod politely. No questions. No objections.

"Great! We're all aligned," he thinks confidently.

In reality, there was little alignment. Over the next 3 months, integration projects were falling behind schedule and valued managers were beginning to leave. The CEO grew concerned.

Six Months Later, Same Boardroom

The CEO presents a new initiative. A bit anxious, he asks: *"Tanaka-san, what do you think about implementing this in Japan?"*

Tanaka-san responds: *"I like the concept. However, I have concerns about timing with the regulatory changes. May I suggest we pilot it in Osaka first?"*

The CEO smiles with relief. *"Excellent point. Let's discuss the pilot approach."*

What changed? How did this transformation happen?

What Our Analysis Uncovered

The current situation was based on our Friction Point Analysis™ (FPA) - dual surveys (for Japanese and non-Japanese) along with interviews that revealed the real challenges both sides face in this multi-billion dollar integration with over 50+ integration projects:

The CEO and his managers didn't know:

- Japanese managers found it culturally challenging to disagree, especially in English
- They felt their expertise was ignored and stayed silent despite having concerns
- Valued managers were quietly leaving the company

The Japanese managers didn't realize:

- The CEO thought their silence meant agreement
- He was confused why projects moved slowly
- Western "business plans" represent strong

commitment while maintaining flexibility for unforeseen circumstances

- He wanted their input, not just compliance

The data revealed the damage:

- 80% frustrated with Western colleagues
- 75% unclear about their role

Note: Western colleagues were completely unaware of these problems!

The Transformation

We worked with them to implement a comprehensive dual methodology affecting 400+ employees across Tokyo headquarters and regional offices in Japan. Instead of conventional approaches, they developed parallel programs - building Japanese managers' communication confidence while enhancing Western executives' cultural intelligence.

The Japanese management and employees confidently applied:

- How to disagree diplomatically: "I understand the goal, but I see some risks..."
- Techniques to speak up in meetings: "May I share the local perspective?"
- Ways to share concerns early before problems grew
- How to lead multicultural teams effectively
- Understanding Western flexibility in planning

The Western management and employees established:

- Japanese decision-making processes and the importance of consensus
- How to read indirect communication signals
- Why building trust comes before pushing change
- That Japanese colleagues are slower to commit because when they do, it means 100% certainty with little flexibility
- How to encourage open input: "What challenges do you see with this approach?"

New frameworks included:

- A 'confidence-first' approach focusing on building professional communication skills rather than language proficiency
- Methods to smoothly handle both overly assertive and overly quiet participants in meetings
- Follow-up techniques that ensure mutual understanding and reduce conflict

... This program was an eye opener for both myself, and my Japan and global teams as we struggled with

a transformation. Even though I had worked in a multi-national environment for years, I learned that communicating change to people from different cultures requires specific knowledge and skills that I learned from Warren. I am sure he can help both Japanese and non-Japanese who experience frustration while working together.

- Shin Miyatsu, GM, Asia & UK Digitalization

The Recovery

Immediate results:



Business impact (tracked over 12 months):

- Employee engagement increased significantly
- Integration projects succeeded on schedule
- Manager turnover decreased dramatically
- Local market knowledge improved decision-making
- The acquisition achieved its business goals

What Made This Work

Key Success Factors:

1. **Data-Driven Approach:** Understanding real problems, not assumptions
2. **Two-Sided Solution:** Based on dual-perspective analysis, addressing challenges of both sides rather than just one
3. **Practical Skills:** Tools that could be used immediately at work
4. **Cultural Respect:** Valuing both Western efficiency and Japanese thoroughness
5. **Ongoing Support:** Continued coaching to build new habits

Critical Learning: "The problem was not language ability. It was communication style and cultural understanding. When both sides learned how to work together effectively, business results improved dramatically."

For both sides, building communication confidence and cultural intelligence delivered far greater results than conventional training methods.