



A Multi-Phase Process for Improving Global Team Performance

Effective global collaboration, particularly in multicultural teams, is increasingly critical for organizations to achieve their goals. Often when organizations partner with us for cultural awareness programs, their goal is to improve global collaboration, which in turn has a direct impact on improved business outcomes. Instead of simply providing a one-off training program, we recommend a multi-phase global team-building approach that will be more impactful in improving team performance.

For example, when an organization based in the United States asked us for a standard cultural awareness program focusing on Japanese culture, we asked the following questions:

- “Would you like to know what your Japanese team members think about their U.S. team counterparts—their honest opinions about the challenges they are facing, and the questions and requests they have for the U.S. members?”
- “Do you want your Japanese team members to better understand U.S. culture?”
- “Would you like your Japanese team members to respond to the challenges, questions, and requests the U.S. members have for them?”

Organizations almost always want this information and a process for addressing it, because it can be difficult to obtain candid insights from Japanese team members given their communication style and the language barrier. And this applies to many cultures, not only to Japanese team members. Can you tell your global colleagues, especially those who are remote: “It is difficult to work with you for these reasons.”? Probably not. It is seldom easy to directly tell your teammates, particularly those based in

another region whom you don't know very well, about the difficulties you are experiencing with them as this could likely damage your relationship.

Here is where a third-party consultant like those of us at Aperian can add value. Being external to the organization, and with multicultural facilitation expertise, we provide a team-building environment with sufficient psychological safety for team members to honestly share what they are experiencing, including their challenges, questions, requests, and advice for team members in other regions. Such information is critical to identify high-priority areas to improve global collaboration, update the rules of engagement for each team, and take practical steps toward better team performance.

Our multi-phase global team-building process usually includes three parts:

1

Diagnostic interviews to identify the challenges each region is experiencing and to use as the basis for customizing program design

2

Regional sessions (with regional cohorts, conducted in their local language)

- ▀ Provide fundamental knowledge of cultural awareness
- ▀ Provide opportunities to describe and summarize questions and requests for other regions in a psychologically safe environment

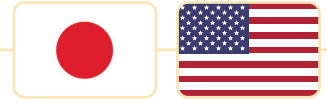
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Global team-building sessions (all the team members join from various regions)

- ▀ Deepen mutual understanding by exchanging insight on the questions and requests from other regions
- ▀ Agree on the rules of engagement in the team
- ▀ Identify high-priority areas for team improvement

Below are examples of questions and requests shared before and during the global team-building process for companies headquartered in Japan. These sessions included Japanese, U.S., and European participants:

Questions for Japan from the U.S.



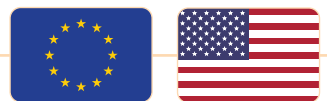
- ▶ How can we better understand or have transparency in decision making—who is making the decision, how do you go about making it, and how can we best have input?
- ▶ Why do people at headquarters in Japan always need to be in control and make the decisions, even if they are not the experts? As a global company, can we distribute control and decision-making across regions to better meet the needs of our local customers?
- ▶ The expectation from Japan seems to be that there should be one correct answer. So many changes occur over time in our market. How can we accommodate these changes in our planning?

Questions for the U.S. from Japan



- ▶ How can you move forward with optimistic plans and ideas in an ambiguous situation? We would like to see more “long-term output” in addition to “short-term output” from you.
- ▶ People seem to change jobs frequently. How can you manage role and work transitions with frequent changes of people?
- ▶ We feel left out and uncomfortable when a U.S. member tells a joke and all the U.S. attendees laugh during our global meetings. We don’t understand U.S.-based humor, especially when it is spoken in rapid American English.

Questions for Europe from the U.S.



- ▶ Our European colleagues seem to perceive that their needs always come first. Could they be more flexible to accommodate the needs of other regions?
- ▶ The critical feedback we receive from Europe seems quite harsh. Do they really mean what they are saying?
- ▶ Compromise seems hard in working with our European colleagues. How can we make that easier?

Questions for the U.S. from Europe



- ▶ How can you change your strategy every six months and say that that's a good thing?
- ▶ How can we convince U.S. colleagues to take a more global perspective vs. a U.S.-focused one?
- ▶ Why are you always 'excited' about meetings and why are questions always 'excellent'?

Questions for Japan from Europe



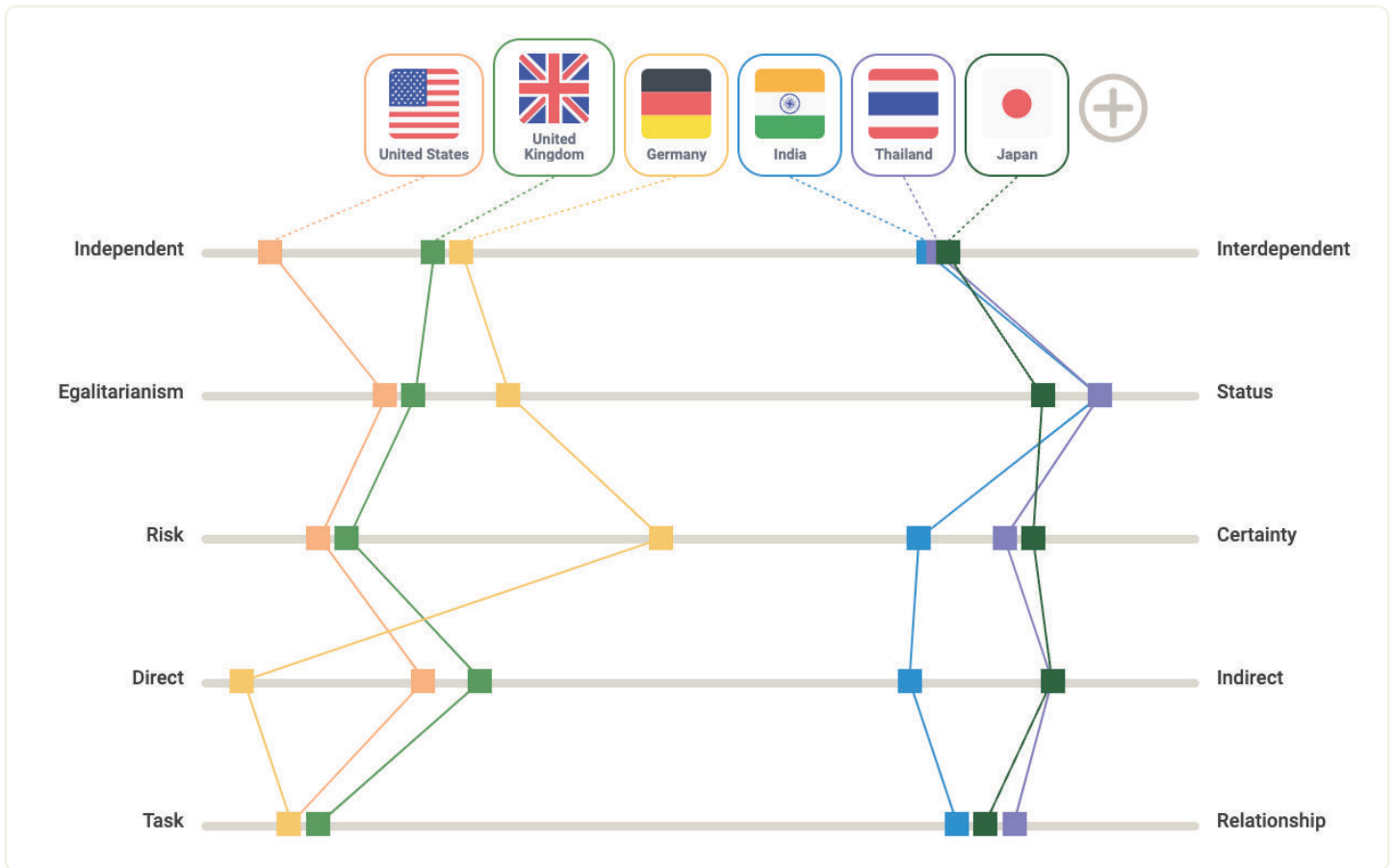
- ▶ Our company is very risk-averse today. What can we do to convince our Japanese colleagues to take more risks? What is necessary for our Japanese colleagues to be more comfortable with risk-taking?
- ▶ Japan has been the headquarters since the beginning. Do you believe that more global leadership has a chance to succeed?

Questions for Europe from Japan



- ▶ Why do you stick to individual responsibilities rather than teamwork? Do you care about what colleagues are doing?
- ▶ How can you prioritize your private life more than work? How do you manage the critical tasks while taking such a long vacation?

As with these examples, participants in team-building programs are able to raise real-time issues they are experiencing in their day-to-day work, discuss practical solutions, and plan next steps. Team members may also raise even more fundamental questions they often have wondered about but never had a chance to discuss together, such as: "Who are we? Are we a Japanese company? A U.S. company? A European company? Where are we really going in this global transformation?"



Of course, it is not possible to find solutions and answers to all of these questions in one team-building session, but there is a huge benefit for participants in considering these topics with their team members, feeling that their own challenges are understood, and understanding the challenges others are experiencing. This mutual understanding fosters greater trust within the team, which is the foundation for effective global collaboration.

Our multi-phase global team-building process addresses team performance issues in a more substantive and practical way than a one-off cultural awareness program. When team-building participants experience positive impacts on their team dynamics throughout these sessions, they then become internal promoters for this team-building process and recommend it to other divisions in their company. Thanks to this positive cycle, we have been providing these multi-phase global team-building programs to hundreds of global teams in various global organizations over the past thirty years.

Learn more about how Aperian can support global team-building in your organization through this multi-phase global team-building process.

Contact us

About the author

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Keiko Sakurai has expertise in team building, organizational development, executive coaching, management-skills training, and leadership development for multinational companies. She passionately supports individuals and teams to recognize their strengths and expand their abilities to the fullest extent possible. Industries in which Ms. Sakurai has worked include automobile and pharmaceutical manufacturing as well as high technology.

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