

JAPAN CONSULTING OFFICE

Transforming cultural differences into business strengths

Details on seminar content

Working and communicating with Japanese colleagues: A practical approach

A seminar for Europeans to strengthen cultural understanding, communication and interaction in the workplace

Benefits of the training

At the end of the session you will

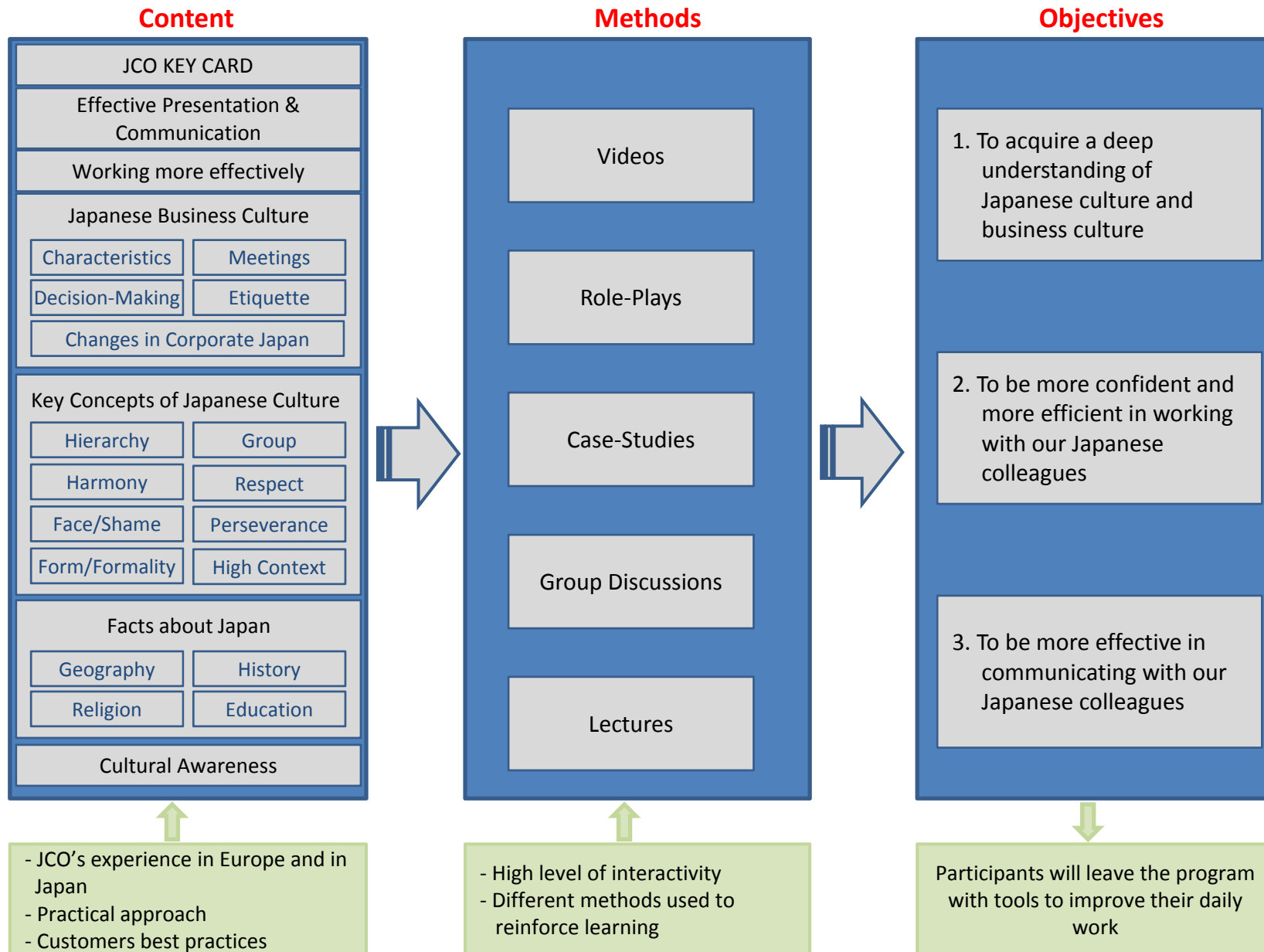
- Have a deeper understanding of key concepts of Japanese culture and Japanese work practices and how they differ from your own
- Have learned the necessary tools to adapt your working style accordingly to make your collaboration more effective
- Have learned to be more efficient in your communication with your Japanese colleagues
- Be more familiar with Japanese business protocol
- Have a clearer idea as to what happens at HQ in Japan and how to influence matters from far away

Content

The one-day seminar will cover the following key areas:

- Facts about Japan which help explain its cultural foundation
- Key concepts of Japanese culture (e.g. group orientation, hierarchy, harmony, honne/tatemaie)
- Significant ways in which the Japanese and European ways of doing business differ (e.g. meetings, decision-making, negotiation, socializing, information sharing)
- Working in a Japanese organization in Europe: How do Japanese see us? How to best meet their expectations? How to get things done?
- Case studies
- Communication: how to become more effective in communicating with Japanese colleagues (Characteristics, role plays and best practices.)
- Protocol and business etiquette
- Q&A

Working more effectively with Japanese colleagues



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Here are some interesting posts from the JCO blog that touch on relevant topics also discussed in the seminar. We also publish posts in German and Japanese.

(Blog: www.japanconsultingoffice.com/en_blog.php)

Japanese, English and the elephant in the room

Posted on 01/14/2013 by [Japan Consulting Office](#)

In the English language an expression you often hear is the “elephant in the room”. This of course refers to an obvious major problem or issue that people avoid discussing or acknowledging.

In the context of cross cultural communication between Japan and Europe such an elephant also can be found. It is the usage of language itself. Even though English is being used as a shared business and working language this very often results in misunderstandings. Here is a typical complaint raised by non-Japanese employees: „Often after talking to my Japanese colleagues and explaining something to them I get another mail with exactly the same question. Instead of saying ‘yes, yes, yes’ why don’t they tell me right away when they don’t understand. “

This seemingly illogical behaviour can be explained by looking at the role of the listener which strongly differs in the Japanese and English language.

A very famous Japanese saying goes like this: “hear 1 – understand 10“. If this rule on how to conduct a pleasant conversation is followed, it soon becomes apparent that things do not work the same as in English. It is up to the listener to infer the remaining “9” of information from the “1” received. So it is not the speaker that is bearing the main responsibility of whether the information is conveyed as intended but in fact it is the listener.

In Japan it is very impolite to interrupt the speaker even if you cannot follow what has been said. It is only permitted to ask in order to clarify if the speaker gives a verbal cue like „any questions?“ or “is everything clear?“.

The challenge for non-Japanese is that most native speakers of Japanese of course adhere to that basic rule even when using English.

So what can we do to spot the “elephant” right away?

Always pay very close attention to non-verbal signals listener might give and make sure to repeatedly ask whether you have been understood. This way you provide an opening for your Japanese counterpart so they are allowed to signal that they were not able to follow.

Sociological models often describe culture as an iceberg that consists of 2 parts, a visible one over the surface and an invisible one below the water line.

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When we first come into contact with another culture we are only able to perceive the visible part of the culture when we try to interpret their actions and behaviour. Things like facial/verbal expression or body language are easily accessible to our senses and are the first things we pick up. This can be problematic as we tend to use our own values and presumptions as a reference to determine whether we approve of the things members of other culture do and say or whether we judge them as acting “strangely”, “illogically” or even “impolitely”.

To put it bluntly, one man’s “yes” might be another man’s “no”.

As we work in an international environment we should therefore try to learn as much as possible about the things below the surface in order to be capable to interpret actions and language based on the other culture’s values and attitudes. This approach goes a long way as we aim to improve mutual understanding and trust.

When I send a question to a Japanese colleague I get 5 questions back instead of an answer!

Posted on 04/08/2013 by Japan Consulting Office

In this article we want to touch on a phenomenon that everybody working with the Japanese has likely experienced and is invariably raised in JCO’s seminars. Namely the fact that in response to your questions, the Japanese will reply with multiple questions of their own

Why does this confusing behaviour make perfect sense from a Japanese point of view?

Let’s use an interesting anecdote to illustrate the Japanese attitude regarding the passing on of information.

The pregnant wife of a Japanese expatriate in Germany went to a ultrasound scan at the end of her second trimester and came away surprised that the German doctor told her that her baby was going to be a boy. She said that, in Japan, the doctor would rather say something along the lines of *“It does look like a boy today but what tomorrow brings no-one can really say...”*. According to her words future parents would blindly trust the specialist’s judgment concerning the gender of the unborn child. So it would be unthinkable to imagine a scenario where everything was being prepared and bought for the birth of a baby boy when in fact, due to a misreading of the scan results, it might have been a girl all along or vice versa.

This absolutely matches the way any information is being passed on in Japan and holds true all the more in business life. This means that the minute details of a question one receives are very often being clarified and double checked by asking one or more questions in return before committing to an answer.

So you should be very careful to not interpret this standard behavior as a tactic in order to play for time or as a sign of distrust by your Japanese counterpart.

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From a Japanese standpoint any information that given or received should be as *accurate* and *comprehensive* as well as *consistent* as possible.

Accurate and comprehensive:

As there is no distinction between “need to know” and “nice to know” information in Japan any seemingly insignificant detail might turn out to be quite important in the long run. Hence we recommend pro-actively sending all information upfront as well as being prepared to further provide all requested information and data without hesitation.

Consistent:

In many cases things can come to a grinding halt when a preliminary price list or spec sheet that was sent before slightly differs from the final document. This lack in consistency will in most cases be seen as a warning sign that something is fundamentally not in order with the whole project which may result in having to start again from the very beginning.

Following these simple guidelines helps ensure a smooth exchange of information with your Japanese colleagues or business partners.

Customers' feedback (Examples)

Japanese feedback has been translated into English.

☑ *“It was a real eye-opener for us to see what the Europeans are expecting from their managers. The tips we received enabled us to put into practice immediately what we learned.”*

Toshiba Tec Europe, N. Takao, President & CEO

☑ *“We are extremely satisfied with the courses delivered (leadership, interpersonal skills, etc.). JCO's approach is well-designed for Japanese companies operating in Europe.”*

Mitsui Chemicals Europe GmbH, T. Weiler, HR Manager

☑ *“Everything my Japanese colleagues are doing in the company makes sense now, it gives me more confidence”*

NYK, C. Veldeman, HR Manager

☑ *“Because of my position, I think this was probably the most valuable job-applicable training I have taken in the 11 years since I started working in a professional finance role. I am not exaggerating! Since everyone I report up to is Japanese ... I think this course has already helped me immensely in understanding their communication styles and how and why things work.”*

J. Nichol, works at a European HQ of a multinational Japanese electronics company

☑ *“The training quality was perfect; the trainer was very pleasant and experienced. First I found that Japanese people are hard to figure out, now everything makes sense and it is quite logical and we*

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might take some points over too. "

Mitsui & Co. Europe PLC

☒ *"Training was helpful in everyway to understand Jap colleagues. Even after 21 years as an employee at NGK...recommended for all employees"*

NGK Sparkplug

☒ *"The training was based on the deep experience of the trainer... very practical and "living" examples made the session very interactive and practical"*

DOCOMO Communications Laboratories Europe (GmbH)

☒ *"Very interactive, very complete, good exercises and tips. Nice slides. Very helpful to use so many examples to illustrate the different points. To me, it was perfect. This training has met all my expectations. Right duration and complete. Thanks!"*

AGC Glass Europe

☒ *"I am benefiting everyday from your excellent "one day training" on Japanese culture. Today, again, during a meeting with our Japanese colleagues, I experienced typical behaviors which you described in your training by many examples. It is easier to understand and to anticipate with the very good advice you gave us."*

GlaxoSmithKline

About JCO:

At Japan Consulting Office, we've been working since 2006 to increase effectiveness in the workplace through overcoming cultural differences between Europeans and Japanese.

From our offices in **Belgium, the Netherlands, UK, Germany, Hungary** and **Singapore** we offer **in-house** and **open business seminars** worldwide. (*For a list of customers please [click here](#), for video interviews please [click here](#)*)

JCO differentiates itself by offering training programmes that are:

Interactive: We keep the group to a reasonable size in order to ensure full participation by everyone. We believe in learning by doing, so we keep the lecture to a minimum and seek as much interaction as possible from the participants.

Practical: We focus on skills and techniques rather than on theory. Our training are therefore very practical, based on many years of experience working with Japanese in Europe and in Japan and based on industry best practices. We use team exercises, sub-group discussions and role-play activities to develop such practice.

Relevant: We focus on participants' daily challenges and make sure they all leave the program with tools they can immediately apply in their work.

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