

Global Leadership in Japan: Understanding Hierarchy, Harmony, and Decision-Making

In this episode of STUDIO CCIFJ, cultural expert Ana Escobedo-Boulard discusses the cultural challenges of leading and communicating in international business, particularly in Japan.

Drawing on her experience of living and working across Mexico, Canada, Europe, Japan and Australia, Ana explains how founding a language school naturally led to intercultural coaching in order to meet evolving needs of an increasingly global corporate world.

The interview explores key differences between Japanese and Western business cultures. Japan places greater emphasis on hierarchy, preparation and consensus-based decision-making, while many Western cultures favor informality, speed and open debate. Ana stresses that neither approach is inherently better, but leaders must understand how cultural expectations shape communication, feedback and teamwork.

She also shares the example of a successful Hong Kong executive whose direct, results-driven style created tension with a Japanese team. Through intercultural workshops and executive coaching, both sides learned to better understand and adapt to one another. The case illustrates that effective global leadership requires self-awareness, curiosity and flexibility.

Ana also highlights the importance of implicit communication in Japan. Using the iceberg model, she explains that visible behaviors are shaped by deeper values such as harmony, hierarchy and collective responsibility. These principles cannot be understood through a single seminar, which is why Les Langues du Monde provides long-term coaching based on real workplace situations.

English proficiency is another important factor. Practical language coaching helps professionals prepare for meetings, presentations and negotiations, allowing them to communicate their expertise more clearly and build trust.

Ana concludes that successful international leaders need three essential qualities: curiosity, humility and continuous learning. Understanding another culture, adapting one's leadership style and seeking expert guidance can significantly improve collaboration and performance.

These capabilities can be developed with the support of Ana and her team through tailored intercultural communication, cross-cultural awareness and language coaching. To explore your organization's specific needs and challenges and identify the most relevant support, book an initial Teams call with Ana.