



Cultural Fluency: Identifying Skills for Business Leadership in Global Asian Markets

How can a company develop a global approach to help business leaders recognize, retain, and develop leaders in Asia and thereby drive business results?

What is a Research Working Group?

A Research Working Group (RWG) is a collaborative project at The Conference Board that brings peer companies together in a rapid deep dive and targeted focus on a compelling business issue. When firms across industries with similar concerns come together and are guided by subject matter experts, there is a rich transfer of ideas and knowledge. The result is a comprehensive report or other deliverable designed to shape a platform for enterprise-wide action and impact.

Research Brief

Although they have a global business perspective, many multinational companies find that they are using leadership competency models that measure traits and behaviors by a Western-centric yardstick (i.e., assertiveness, self-confidence, open and direct communication styles). Those from Asian cultures have profoundly different ways of communicating, doing business, and demonstrating leadership and may have experienced a cultural misfit in Western organizations, which leads to missed talent opportunities.

In her acclaimed book, *Breaking the Bamboo Ceiling*, Jane Hyun wrote: “Behavior is misinterpreted frequently by business leaders from different cultures, because it is visible, unlike thought processes, feelings, and intent.” A recent study by the Center for Work Life Policy revealed that “Nearly half of Asian men and women (48%) report that conformity to prevailing leadership models is a problem -- having to act, look, and sound like the established leaders in their workplace.” This mismatch may be hindering MNCs from achieving their desired business results in Asian markets, even with the people they currently have in place.

The Conference Board is launching a Research Working Group led by Hyun Associates to examine how leadership styles can be effective globally, with a focus on integrating Asian cultures, and how to recognize these at various stages of management. The goal of this working group is to help companies to generate innovative, culturally relevant strategies for managing talent and to strengthen results in key business units. This research will focus primarily on the diverse workforce across China and will investigate how diversity and talent teams can work with their global partners to identify successful leadership styles that are relevant to global Asian markets. The work will be informed by the maturity of the workforces in South Korea and Taiwan, or other markets that hold lessons on how to develop the sophisticated human capital approach that these times demand. This understanding will help companies design a workplace that enables business success through the identification and retention of key players, higher productivity and engagement, and reduced recruitment and training costs.

This group will be limited to 6 companies that are members of The Conference Board and will involve two meetings in the US and a group trip to Asia. This will allow the researchers to come a deep understanding of each company’s practices and challenges from both the regional and headquarters’ perspective, to provide actionable insights for each company. The final research report will be publically disseminated and will highlight case studies

of the participating corporations, and their commitment to developing their global teams, as well as a review of promising practices. The member companies will be given a private implementation session with the research team at the conclusion of this 6 month process to ensure actionable outcomes and deep value from this project.

We seek to address the following business questions:

- What skills do business leaders need to do well in a global business context, whether they have business partners in Asia, manage staff from Asia, or work with customers and suppliers in the region?
- How do multinational organizations develop an understanding of global leadership styles that can drive corporate success and encourage commercial growth in Asia?
- Based on a study of the cultural groups in China, what are some of the pitfalls that companies must avoid in attracting and retaining talent throughout Asia? What can we learn from South Korea and Taiwan?
- Where does your organization stand in their maturity to applying the cultural lens to their Human Capital practices? How can we partner talent, diversity and business teams to develop a global outlook?

Format& Takeaways

This Working Group will be comprised of 6 companies in a Case Study Partnership and last about 6 months. Led by Jane Hyun and Audrey Lee, The Conference Board will form a team of subject matter experts to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the Asia talent landscape and of each participating member company. Case studies will be developed based on interviews, surveys and embedded observations in the US and Asia. The group will meet to share their own practices and challenges in a confidential, hands-on environment. Together with top specialists, thought leaders and researchers, they will build tools and frameworks to effect change throughout their organizations. This collaboration will result in a comprehensive summary report comprising detailed findings, conclusions, and recommendations for action.

Launching in **mid-March 2013 in New York**, this working group will meet three times in person - twice in the US and in Asia in late April or early May 2013. Each company will send 2 or 3 participants to represent their diversity, talent, learning business or other engaged units. There will be intervening virtual meetings and small group teleconferences to enable the group's collaboration. The participants typically commit 2-4 hours a month to the project, outside of the in-person meetings. The working group will conclude in the summer with the release of the report of findings and an individualized implementation session with each participating company of 2 hours, (by teleconference, to allow global participation).

Research Contribution: \$40,000 per company covers all materials, access to the research, experts, findings, meetings and meals. The researchers will provide a private implementation session to the each company's participants and their colleagues. This fee enables 2 or 3 executives from each company to participate in the meetings, but does not include travel & hotel to in-person meetings. RWGs are only open to member companies of The Conference Board.

To join or for further information, please contact Daria Lamb, Director of Research Working Groups: Daria.Lamb@conference-board.org or 212-339-0428.

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