

MANAGING UK–JAPAN COMMUNICATION AS AN IMPLEMENTATION RISK:

**A Critical Evaluation of a UK-Based AWS Team
and Fujitsu's OneData Transformation**

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Introduction and Business Context

As Country Director of a UK-based Amazon Web Services (AWS) team, I would see UK-Japan communication as a strategic implementation risk rather than a soft culture issue. Although Amazon is headquartered in the United States, this essay is part of AWS's UK-based team that manages cross-border collaboration with Fujitsu Limited in Japan. Fujitsu is a top Japanese digital services firm. In a technology-driven workplace, communication quality can impact escalation speed, stakeholder trust, decision ownership, user adoption, and the ability to deliver change across regional and organisational borders.

The business context chosen is the AWS-Fujitsu OneData scenario. Fujitsu established its company-wide data utilisation platform, OneData, using AWS as part of its Fujitsu Transformation effort. OneData was released in April 2022 and is now used in four global areas to provide data-driven management (Amazon Web Services). The example is relevant since it does not include a simple supplier-client transaction or a limited technical deployment. A Japanese corporation is adopting AWS infrastructure to facilitate global data standards, internal culture transformation, user training, and faster decision-making. This makes communication critical to implementation.

Japan is also strategically vital to AWS. In 2024, Amazon Web Services announced plans to invest 2.26 trillion yen in cloud infrastructure in Tokyo and Osaka by 2027 to accommodate Japan's growing demand for cloud services. This demonstrates that Japan is a significant digital infrastructure environment for AWS, rather than a peripheral market. To be clear, this essay refers to Asia-Pacific, Japan, and China as APJC. This regional context is significant because the UK-Japan partnership must satisfy both local Japanese expectations and broader regional operational norms.

This essay employs Hofstede's cultural dimensions, as well as Hall's high-context and low-context communication theories, to evaluate the claim that communication gaps become project hazards when not actively handled. It will investigate if differences in directness, silence, hierarchy, and decision rhythm can impede implementation in the AWS-Fujitsu setting, and whether Country Director-level controls can mitigate those risks. The idea to be tested is that cultural differences are not the problem; rather, uncontrolled communication assumptions are.

Theoretical and Critical Framework

Hofstede's cultural dimensions assist in identifying areas of tension in UK-Japan communication, particularly those involving hierarchy, uncertainty, and individual expression. According to the Culture Factor Group, Japan's business structure can appear highly hierarchical because decisions may need to be confirmed through several layers before final approval. In contrast, the United Kingdom's lower Power Distance indicates a greater expectation of open challenge and informal access to decision-makers. In the AWS-Fujitsu context, this is important because speed can be compromised if the UK side assumes agreement before the appropriate Japanese stakeholders have aligned.

Hall's high-context and low-context communication theories describe how meaning is conveyed. In lower-context settings, meaning is typically stated clearly. In higher-context settings, meaning may be more dependent on relationship, tone, silence, and shared understanding. Carté and Fox (2008, p. 19) state that some communicators *"expect you to be able to interpret what they mean from your knowledge of the cultural values that lie behind the words, what they're actually talking about at the time, their tone of voice, and, of course, their eye and body language."* As a result, a Japanese concern may not appear as a direct objection, whereas a British challenge may not be intended as disrespect.

However, cultural theory must be approached critically. Deresky (2017, p. 186) cautions managers to be open to the possibility that *"specific people may not fit the assumed cultural prototype."* This keeps the analysis from becoming a stereotype. Carté and Fox (2008, p. 27) caution that *"stereotypes can be reinforced and relationships irrevocably damaged without your even realising it."* Thus, Hofstede and Hall should not be used to forecast individuals. They should be used to develop better management questions, such as who should be consulted, where meaning may be lost, and which issues require private clarification rather than public debate.

This is directly related to information management. According to Bocij, Hickie, and Greasley (2019, p. 6), *"it is only when data have been placed in some form of context that they become meaningful to a manager."* Communication is key in cross-cultural projects. Words, silence, and decisions are only meaningful when the receiver understands the cultural and organisational context in which they occur. The most effective analysis must consider three forces: national culture, Amazon's execution culture, and the specific project context. This critical framework avoids a simplistic "UK versus Japan" comparison, instead assessing whether communication promotes implementation, trust, and adoption.

UK–Japan Communication Differences

The first distinction is directness. UK teams may interpret direct challenge as evidence of ownership, critical thinking, and urgency. Japanese teams may express concern more subtly to maintain harmony, rank, and relationships. Carté and Fox (2008, p. 42) explain that Japanese communicators may be unaccustomed to interruptions and, when confronted with a more interactive communication style, may perceive the other person as *"ill-mannered, disrespectful, or superficial."* In an AWS-Fujitsu project, this is significant because a UK manager may believe they are accelerating problem-solving, whereas a Japanese counterpart may believe the discussion has moved too quickly or too publicly. The same behaviour can thus be interpreted as either a constructive challenge or a failure to respect process.

The second difference is silence. UK teams may interpret silence as agreement, lack of confidence, or a lack of input. In Japan, silence can indicate reflection, caution, or respect for hierarchy. Carté and Fox (2008, p. 42) caution that *"rushing to fill the silence can send a completely the wrong signal."* Silence should not be interpreted as empty communication. It should be interpreted as a signal that necessitates careful investigation. In practice, the Country Director should avoid requiring immediate verbal agreement and instead use structured checks, written summaries, and private clarifications.

The third distinction is decision rhythm. UK teams may prefer a visible debate followed by quick action. Japanese teams may prefer pre-alignment to formal confirmation. This may appear slow from a UK perspective, but it can reduce rework by ensuring commitment before implementation. Deresky (2017, p. 230) contends that *"cultural integration is an ongoing process; challenges may persist and require further effort to handle them"*. This is significant because one briefing or cultural awareness session will not resolve UK-Japan communication issues. It necessitates frequent adjustments as the project progresses.

From a leadership standpoint, the challenge is balance. If the UK-based AWS team over-adjusts, the project may lose momentum, accountability, and Amazon's execution discipline. If it under-adjusts, Fujitsu stakeholders may perceive the process as rushed, exposed, or disrespectful of internal alignment. The Country Director requires cultural intelligence without cultural paralysis: enough adaptation to maintain trust but not so much that ownership and momentum are lost.

Strategic Risks in the AWS–Fujitsu Context

Communication differences become implementation risks in the AWS-Fujitsu OneData context because the project is more than just technical. Fujitsu developed OneData on AWS as a platform for company-wide data utilisation, and it is now used in four global regions to support data-driven management. Communication must therefore simultaneously support technology adoption, training, decision ownership, and cultural change.

The first risk is false alignment. If UK teams interpret Japanese silence as agreement, issues with data governance, user readiness, or regional requirements may arise too late. This is significant because the OneData case involved numerous linked systems and around 124,000 employees (Amazon Web Services). Hidden disagreements in such a large change program can lead to delays, duplicated work, and poor adoption. Miscommunication ceases to be interpersonal in a data-driven transformation. It can have an impact on data definitions, access rules, dashboard adoption, training quality, and whether managers believe the system is reliable enough to use in daily decisions.

The second risk is speed without context. AWS's strength is scalable execution, but Fujitsu's transformation necessitated adoption throughout departments and regions. According to the case, by May 2023, the platform had around 27,000 users and supported approximately 140 departments (Amazon Web Services). For a Country Director, the message is clear: rapid deployment is insufficient. Users must understand why the change is important and how it affects local working practices. Even a technically successful platform can underperform if communication fails to instil ownership in the people who will use it.

The third risk is context collapse. This means that the message could be technically correct but culturally incomplete. MTD Training and Ventus Publishing ApS (2010, p. 17) state that context *"involves the environment that you are in and that in which your audience is in, the culture of your organization(s), and elements such as the relationship between you and your audience."* In a UK-Japan collaboration, sensitive issues such as delay, ownership, or disagreement should not be communicated as isolated task updates. They require

structured discussion, private clarification, and written confirmation once alignment is achieved.

This highlights a larger issue in technology implementation. According to Bocij, Hickie, and Greasley (2019, p. 434), *"the main change levers are innovative technology and [...] the organisation's culture and structure."* As a result, the AWS-Fujitsu case cannot be assessed solely on the basis of technical scalability. It must also be evaluated based on the quality of cross-cultural communication, which allows people to adopt the system, trust its outputs, and act on the information it generates.

Country Director Response Framework

To mitigate these risks, the Country Director should translate cultural awareness into operational discipline. The goal is not to slow down AWS, but to make it more secure by making meaning, ownership, and escalation visible.

Table 1: UK–Japan communication risks and Country Director responses

Communication risk	Country Director's response
Silence misread as agreement	Confirm understanding in a written action log after meetings
Direct challenge perceived as disrespect	Use private follow-ups for sensitive disagreements
Hierarchy delays approval	Map decision owners and senior stakeholders before milestones
UK speed clashes with Japanese consensus	Use pre-alignment before formal decision meetings
Global message lacks local meaning	Localise communication for Japan/APJC stakeholders

The table is intended to function as a control mechanism rather than a cultural checklist. Its goal is to reveal implicit meaning before it causes delay, rework, or stakeholder resistance. Written action logs protect pace, whereas private follow-ups protect relationships and face. Pre-alignment protects Japanese consensus-building while retaining Amazon's requirement for clear ownership. This is the practical value of cultural intelligence: it transforms awareness into repeatable management practices.

As Country Director, I would implement three controls. First, each key meeting should end with a decision log that includes the owner, deadline, risk, and escalation route. Second, sensitive disagreements should be resolved in smaller group discussions before they arise in formal meetings. Third, communication with Japanese stakeholders should be localised, not simply translated. This extends beyond technical projects. Amazon University Talent communicates a global early-career message about innovation, ownership, and customer impact (Amazon Jobs). However, professional experience in Amazon's talent environment

indicates that Japan-facing early-talent communication may also need to align with local graduate recruitment rhythms, employer credibility expectations, and trust-building norms. This supports the broader argument that cultural communication influences not only project meetings, but also how Amazon presents itself as an employer, partner, and operator in Japan.

Conclusion

The analysis supports the claim made at the beginning of the essay: cultural differences are not the primary issue in UK-Japan collaboration; rather, mismanaged communication assumptions are. In the AWS-Fujitsu OneData scenario, misunderstanding is more than interpersonal. It can impact user acceptance, escalation quality, decision ownership, and the overall business value of a data transformation project.

Hofstede and Hall help to explain why UK and Japanese teams approach directness, silence, hierarchy, and decision rhythms differently. However, the analysis demonstrates that these theories must be used critically. The strongest conclusion is not that one national style is superior to the other. UK-style directness can encourage speed, ownership, and challenge, but Japanese consensus-building can support risk control, commitment, and relationship stability.

Therefore, the Country Director's role is to turn cultural awareness into operational discipline. Written action logs, decision-owner mapping, private escalation paths and localised messaging are not administrative extras; they are leadership controls. Used well, they allow AWS's execution pace and Fujitsu's alignment culture to complement each other, turning cultural difference from a hidden risk into a managed advantage.

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