

# US Branch Cultural Leadership Scenario Cards

Role-play packet for directness, pushback, meeting control, feedback, and repair

**Audience: instructors, coaches, peer practice groups, and advanced manager cohorts**

Focus: cultural leadership, pragmatic communication, meeting behavior, conflict repair, and confident pushback in US branch environments.

Designed for advanced Japanese and Chinese managers who already have functional English and need a clearer map of American workplace expectations.

Teaching stance: culture is a pattern, not a prison. The materials describe common workplace expectations and perception gaps, then ask learners to observe the actual company, team, role, and person in front of them.

## How to Run the Scenario Cards

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1. Use groups of three: manager, US colleague, observer.
2. Give the manager 90 seconds to prepare and four minutes to act.
3. The US colleague should be direct and realistic, not cartoonishly rude.
4. The observer scores: business clarity, pushback handling, process control, dignity, and decision close.
5. After the role-play, replay the hardest 30 seconds with a stronger manager response.

### **Facilitator guardrail**

Do not reward aggression for its own sake. The target is calm authority, useful challenge, and relationship-safe directness.

# 1. The Blunt Engineer

## Context

A senior engineer says, 'No, that architecture is a bad idea,' during your project review.

Manager card	US colleague card
You are the branch manager. You feel publicly embarrassed, but the engineer may have a real technical concern. Keep authority, extract the risk, and close the discussion.	You are the engineer. You are not trying to insult the manager; you believe the proposal could fail under load. You speak quickly and directly.

## Observer focus

Watch whether the manager separates tone from content, asks for evidence, and sets a process boundary if needed.

## Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

## Replay line

## 2. Headquarters Already Decided

### Context

US staff suspect the meeting is fake because headquarters has already chosen the plan.

Manager card	US colleague card
Explain what is fixed, what is open, and where local input can still shape execution.	Push hard: 'Do we actually have any say, or is this just theater?'

### Observer focus

Listen for honesty about constraints and a credible invitation for input.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

### 3. The Deadline Refusal

#### Context

A team lead says a headquarters deadline is impossible and refuses to commit.

Manager card	US colleague card
Push for ownership without ignoring reality. Ask for options and tradeoffs.	Do not accept vague optimism. You need scope removed or more people.

#### Observer focus

Track whether the conversation reaches an action plan rather than a status argument.

#### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

#### Replay line

## 4. Silence After the Question

### Context

You ask for objections. The room is quiet. Two days later, an employee says everyone knew the plan had problems.

Manager card	US colleague card
Reset the norm. Make silence less comfortable than useful dissent.	You stayed quiet because you did not want to embarrass the manager.

### Observer focus

Notice whether the manager creates a specific structure for dissent.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 5. Public Performance Challenge

### Context

An employee challenges your data in front of a visiting executive.

Manager card	US colleague card
Respond without defensiveness. Decide whether to answer now, park it, or follow up.	You believe the data is wrong and the executive needs to know before approving budget.

### Observer focus

Watch for face-saving, factual clarity, and executive confidence.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 6. The Overly Friendly Employee

### Context

An employee uses first names, jokes in meetings, and challenges your priorities casually.

Manager card	US colleague card
Decide what is cultural style and what is a performance issue. Set expectations only where necessary.	You think informality builds trust and speed.

### Observer focus

Check whether the manager avoids turning style discomfort into discipline.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

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## 7. The Hidden No

### Context

You told a US partner, 'We will consider it,' meaning no. They announced the idea as likely approved.

Manager card	US colleague card
Repair the misunderstanding and replace indirect refusal with clear conditions.	You believed 'consider' meant there was a real chance.

### Observer focus

Listen for a clear no, reason, and possible alternative.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 8. Interrupted Three Times

### Context

A strong talker interrupts a quieter analyst three times.

#### Manager card

Protect the analyst's floor without shaming the interrupter.

#### US colleague card

You are excited and believe your points are urgent.

### Observer focus

Watch for process control and dignity for both people.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

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## 9. The Escalating Tone

### Context

Debate moves from 'The plan has a gap' to 'You do not understand the customer.'

Manager card	US colleague card
Stop the personal attack and redirect to business evidence.	You are frustrated because the same issue has appeared before.

### Observer focus

Mark the exact moment when manager intervention is required.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 10. Quality vs Speed

### Context

Headquarters wants quality review; local sales wants launch speed.

Manager card	US colleague card
Translate both values into business risk and make a temporary decision.	Push for launch: 'The market will not wait for perfect.'

### Observer focus

Look for pilot thinking, risk ownership, and review date.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 11. Performance Feedback Surprise

### Context

An employee is shocked by negative feedback in the annual review.

Manager card	US colleague card
Explain the issue directly, but acknowledge if expectations were not made clear earlier.	You feel blindsided and unfairly judged.

### Observer focus

Check for observable examples, fairness, and next steps.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 12. The Seniority Mismatch

### Context

A younger US specialist contradicts an older visiting executive from Asia.

Manager card	US colleague card
Protect the executive's dignity while preserving the specialist's useful information.	You are the specialist. You believe the executive is missing a local regulatory detail.

### Observer focus

Notice whether expertise and hierarchy both receive respect.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 13. Email That Sounds Angry

### Context

You receive a short email: 'This does not address my concern. Fix by EOD.'

Manager card	US colleague card
Decide whether to answer by email, call, or clarify. Do not assume hostility too quickly.	You are under customer pressure and think your email is efficient, not rude.

### Observer focus

Evaluate whether the manager chooses the right channel.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 14. Local Autonomy

### Context

US employees want to adapt a process that headquarters standardized globally.

Manager card	US colleague card
Define what can be localized and what cannot.	You think the global process ignores US customers.

### Observer focus

Listen for fixed/open categories and escalation path.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 15. The After-Hours Request

### Context

A manager from headquarters expects weekend responses; US staff object.

Manager card	US colleague card
Set urgency standards and protect critical work without creating constant availability.	You need predictable personal time and dislike vague urgency.

### Observer focus

Check whether the policy is clear, fair, and business-realistic.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 16. The Strong Candidate

### Context

A candidate in an interview speaks confidently and asks pointed questions.

Manager card	US colleague card
Distinguish confidence from arrogance and evaluate job-relevant evidence.	You are the candidate. You expect the interview to be a two-way evaluation.

### Observer focus

Look for bias control and evidence-based evaluation.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

## 17. Repair After a Bad Meeting

### Context

You shut down debate too quickly yesterday. A key employee is now quiet.

Manager card	US colleague card
Repair without surrendering authority.	You felt dismissed and are not sure it is worth speaking up again.

### Observer focus

Listen for ownership, invitation, and specific future process.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

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## 18. Capstone: The Product Launch Decision

### Context

Engineering, sales, headquarters, and finance disagree about launch timing.

Manager card	US colleague card
Lead a 20-minute meeting. Surface objections, control interruptions, decide next action, and assign owners.	Choose a function and push strongly for your priority.

### Observer focus

Score leadership clarity, pushback handling, decision close, and relationship safety.

### Debrief questions

- What did the manager correctly decode?
- Where did the manager need more confidence or more restraint?
- What phrase changed the emotional direction of the exchange?
- What should be documented or followed up after this situation?

### Replay line

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