

LumiTech Shenzhen — pitch one specific change

Your group of 4–5 has **13 minutes** to draft a 90-second pitch on *one* structural change to a broken performance-review system. You won't fix everything. Find the one change that would make this system bring real information into the open.

The scenario — what's in place

LumiTech Shenzhen

320-person Chinese subsidiary of LumiTech Corp., a US-headquartered enterprise SaaS firm. Six months into running the parent's annual review template, translated unchanged from San Francisco. Something is wrong.

The four parts of the system

1. Annual cycle, seven rated dimensions

Every employee rated by line manager (and self-rated) on a 1–5 scale for:

- **Productivity** — does the volume meet the role?
- **Quality of execution** — is the work right, or does it come back?
- **Ownership** — does the person drive issues to resolution unprompted?
- **Collaboration** — do they work well across teams?
- **Communication** — do complex points land?
- **Customer focus** — does the work serve a real downstream user?
- **Growth mindset** — do they seek and act on feedback?

The gap between manager and self-rating is meant to be the conversation.

2. Calibration meeting

All line managers in a department meet for a half-day with the department head. Each manager defends their ratings to their peers. The department head moderates; ratings are adjusted in the room to fit a soft distribution (target: ~15% at 4–5, ~70% at 3, ~15% at 1–2). **No employee is in the room.**

3. Review meeting

30-minute scheduled meeting between line manager and employee. Manager walks the employee through all seven dimensions with the calibrated rating and a written comment. The employee adds written comments. The skip-level (the department head) signs off on every form before it goes to HR.

4. Translation and tooling

The form is in English. The conversation is in whichever language the pair prefers. The HRIS (Workday) translates UI labels into Chinese but not free-text comments.

San Francisco benchmark

The same template runs at LumiTech HQ with neither enthusiasm nor exits. People accept it.

What's happening in Shenzhen, six months in

The HR director has been asked by the regional VP to **diagnose and fix** before the next cycle.

- **Forms come back flat.** Ratings cluster in one band; written comments are general and positive. One regional manager called the cycle "*elaborate form-filling*." None of this is in any official report yet.
- **Departures rising.** Voluntary exits have risen since the cycle ran — anecdotally concentrated among the people the system was supposed to identify and retain. HR has not yet broken numbers out by review outcome.
- **Calibration absenteeism.** Several managers now join the half-day calibration by video. Two have skipped recent calibrations entirely.
- **Skip-level rubber stamp.** Department heads sign off everything. No one can remember a form coming back for revision.

Your redesign question. You have authority to make **one specific change** to the *architecture* — the structure of how this system works. Not "communicate better." Not "train managers more." Change the form itself, the timing, who is in the calibration room, the channel, the criteria, the language, who can see results, or who signs off. The one change most likely to make this system bring real performance information into the open. **What is the change, why does it work, who pays the cost?**

Your pitch — four parts

You have **90 seconds** for the pitch and **60 seconds** for the panel question and your answer. Decide who plays which role before you stand up.

- 1 **What's broken.** One specific failure mode. Not a list of three. One thing.
- 2 **What changes.** Your one concrete change. Change the structure, not just the wording.
- 3 **Who pays the cost.** Whose job becomes harder, whose face is at risk, whose budget shrinks, whose freedom shrinks. *If nobody pays a cost, nothing has actually changed.*
- 4 **What evidence backs it.** One source from Session 3 (feedback architecture, attribution, developmental vs evaluative feedback, J-PAL) or Session 4 (face, voice, authoritarian leadership and silence).

Roles in your group

Writer

Drafts on paper during prep. Knows the design best.

1–2 presenters

Deliver the 90s. Split parts 1+2 and 3+4 if two.

Answerer

Takes the panel question. *Not* one of the presenters — usually the writer.

The answerer rule is strict, not optional: it forces the whole group to know the pitch.

Hofstede pushback — redesign the induction

Your group of 4–5 has **13 minutes** to draft a 90-second pitch on *one* structural change to a cross-cultural induction that landed as stereotyping. Find the one change that would carry the cross-cultural insight without turning individual trainees into archetypes.

The scenario — what's in place

Lumen Bio · Cambridge HQ

UK-headquartered biotech, ~1,400 staff, expanding via a Shanghai R&D hub and direct hires from China into Cambridge. HR runs a mandatory four-session **Cross-cultural foundations** induction for incoming Chinese hires in their first month at Cambridge. Two cohorts in, the feedback is sharply critical.

The induction, as designed

The induction was commissioned from an external training provider eighteen months ago. It is built on **Hofstede's dimensions** (Power Distance, Individualism–Collectivism, Uncertainty Avoidance, Masculinity–Femininity, Long-term Orientation, Indulgence) and uses standard country scores to contrast "the UK" with "China" on each.

Four sessions, each 90 minutes:

- 1. Dimensions and country scores.** Trainer presents the six dimensions with country-level scores for the UK and China. Trainees take a self-assessment and compare individual scores to "the Chinese average."
- 2. Cases on Power Distance and Individualism–Collectivism.** Vignettes about meetings, feedback, team decision-making. Discussion contrasts "the British way" with "the Chinese way."
- 3. Cases on Uncertainty Avoidance and the rest.** Same structure.
- 4. Working across the gap.** The trainer's adjustments to make collaboration land in mixed teams.

Two trainers, both UK-based, neither having lived in China. Slides are in English. Country scores foregrounded on every slide. Each session ends with a written feedback form.

What's happening — two cohorts in

- "Treats me as a Chinese person before treating me as a person."** Most common written complaint. Several trainees said they recognised neither the "Chinese" stereotypes nor the "British" ones in their own experience.
- "The country scores feel like predictions about me."** Trainees report Cambridge colleagues asking — *"so are you more individualist or more collectivist?"* — as if the score were a personal trait.
- "The trainer answered a question with the dimension."** When a Chinese trainee challenged a vignette, the trainer pointed to the country score rather than engaging the specific point.
- Two trainees quietly declined** the second module. Both cited "stereotyping" in their decline note to HR.
- A Cambridge team manager** emailed the CHRO to say her two new Chinese hires are now reluctant to volunteer disagreement in team meetings — she suspects the induction primed them to read disagreement

as "low Power Distance behaviour" they personally don't perform.

- **Post-induction survey scores** for "this prepared me to work effectively in a UK team" dropped from **4.2 to 2.8** (out of 5) between cohort 1 and cohort 2.

What the literature says, in short

The dimension-based approach has real empirical roots: Hofstede's country scores capture differences in distributions of values, and the dimensions have been replicated across many samples. The canonical critique is that **dimension scores describe populations, not individuals**. Induction that presents them as the answer to "what's a Chinese person like" produces what Osland and Bird (2000) call *sophisticated stereotyping* — a more elaborate stereotype delivered with academic apparatus.

Your redesign question. You have authority to make **one specific change** to the architecture of the induction — the structure of *how* the cross-cultural learning is delivered. Not "ask the trainer to be more sensitive" — that's behavioural; the issue is structural. Change the channel, the input, the criteria, who's in the room, what the deliverable is, or what's compared to what. The one change most likely to carry the cross-cultural insight without turning individual trainees into archetypes. **What is the change, why does it work, who pays the cost?**

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Panel — LumiTech Shenzhen pitches

You are a **panel of four**. You will listen to three pitches in a row on the same broken system. You are *not* assessors. Your job is to ask the question that would push each design to improve.

The scenario you're hearing about

LumiTech Shenzhen — 320-person Chinese subsidiary of a US SaaS firm. Six months into running the parent's annual review template, translated unchanged from San Francisco.

The template: seven 1–5 rated dimensions; a half-day **calibration meeting** where line managers defend ratings to peers (no employee in the room); a 30-minute review meeting; skip-level sign-off.

The signals: ratings flat in one band; voluntary exits rising among the people the system was meant to identify and retain; managers joining calibration by video or skipping; skip-level signing off everything without revision.

The HR director has been asked to **diagnose and fix** before the next cycle.

How your panel works during prep (13 min)

Work as a panel, not as four individuals.

- 1 First 4 min — alone.** Read the scenario. Each panellist writes down **two** sharp questions you would ask *any* pitch on this scenario.
- 2 Next 6 min — together.** Put all eight questions on the table. Pick the **four sharpest** — one for pitch 1, pitch 2, pitch 3 (and pitch 4 in Group A). Assign one to each panellist. **Hold a backup question each** in case yours is asked first.
- 3 Last 3 min.** The synthesis lead drafts the comparison rubric (below).

Question slots during the pitches

- **Panellist 1** asks the question after **pitch 1**.
- **Panellist 2** asks after **pitch 2**.
- **Panellist 3** asks after **pitch 3** (panellist 4 after pitch 4 in Group A).
- **Synthesis lead** drafts the rubric during prep, then after all pitches runs a 3-min discussion of "*what's missing from all three?*" Not "what would I have done" — that's the lecturer's job.

What to listen for

- Is the proposed change **architectural** — anonymity, timing, channel, criteria, who is in the room — or is it the same system with friendlier wording on top?
- Who **pays the cost**? If nobody pays, the change is only for show.
- Does the source **actually fit** the proposed mechanism, or is it being mentioned to sound credible?
- What is the **failure mode** of the proposed change? Every redesign has one.

Scenario-specific listen-for. Listen for whether the redesign deals with the **calibration meeting** — the place where line managers negotiate ratings between themselves — or quietly leaves it untouched. Most groups will leave it.

Sample sharp questions

Use, adapt, or write your own. Sharpest questions are short, specific, and name the mechanism.

"You changed the form. What stops managers from inflating ratings in the new form the way they did in the old one?"

"You shortened the calibration meeting. The calibration meeting is where line managers negotiate ratings between themselves. Where does that negotiation go now?"

"You made the review developmental. The line manager is the one whose bonus depends on the rating. How do you stop 'developmental' from becoming a polite word for the same old judgement?"

"Who in your design loses something? If no one loses anything, what is actually changing?"

Synthesis lead — comparison rubric

Use during the 3-min synthesis. Start with: *"What I think is missing from all three pitches is ..."* Don't try to be a fourth pitch.

	Pitch 1	Pitch 2	Pitch 3 (4)
What does the change actually move?			
Who pays the cost?			
What is its failure mode?			

Panel — Hofstede pushback pitches

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The scenario you're hearing about

Lumen Bio · Cambridge HQ — UK biotech with a Shanghai R&D hub and direct Chinese hires into Cambridge. Mandatory four-session **Cross-cultural foundations** induction in the first month.

The design: built on Hofstede's six dimensions. Two UK-based trainers, neither has lived in China. Country scores foregrounded on every slide; self-assessment compares each trainee to "the Chinese average."

The signals: most common written complaint is *"treats me as a Chinese person before treating me as a person."* Two trainees declined the second module, citing stereotyping. Post-induction "this prepared me to work in a UK team" scores dropped from **4.2 to 2.8** between cohorts.

The canonical critique is that dimension scores describe populations, not individuals. Osland and Bird (2000) call the result *sophisticated stereotyping*.

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- 3 Last 3 min.** The synthesis lead drafts the comparison rubric (below).

Question slots during the pitches

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Scenario-specific listen-for. Listen for whether the redesign **changes the unit of analysis** away from country-level scores toward something individuals can speak from (their own work history, their team's actual practice). A redesign that keeps Hofstede as the spine but adds a "sensitivity" caveat hasn't changed the structure.

Sample sharp questions

Use, adapt, or write your own. Sharpest questions are short, specific, and name the mechanism.

"You replaced the Hofstede slides with case discussions. What stops the trainer from reading the same country contrasts into the case discussion that they were reading off the scores?"

"You moved to peer-led sessions where trainees compare their own experience. What happens when a trainee's experience doesn't match what their peers expect of someone from their country?"

"You added a Chinese co-trainer. What changes structurally about the curriculum — or is the British trainer still the one in front of the slides?"

"Who in your design loses something? If no one loses anything, what is actually changing?"

Synthesis lead — comparison rubric

Use during the 3-min synthesis. Start with: *"What I think is missing from all three pitches is ..."* Don't try to be a fourth pitch.

	Pitch 1	Pitch 2	Pitch 3 (4)
What does the change actually move?			
Who pays the cost?			
What is its failure mode?			