

Strategies for Leading Diverse Teams Across Cultural Boundaries

Practical strategies for building inclusive,
high-performing international teams.



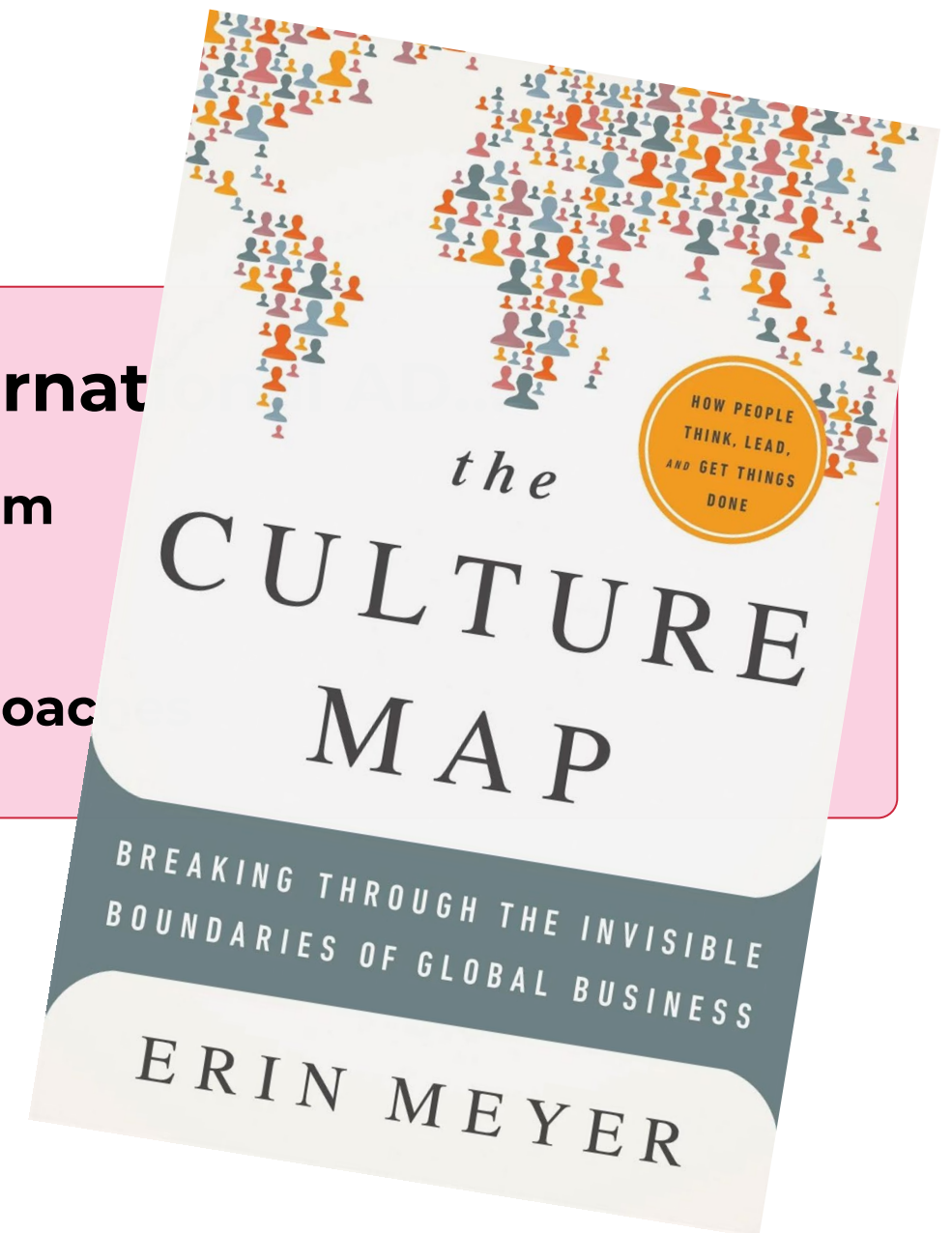
What is a team to me...

Definition

1. a group of players forming one side in a competitive game or sport.
2. two or more people working together.

As an international manager

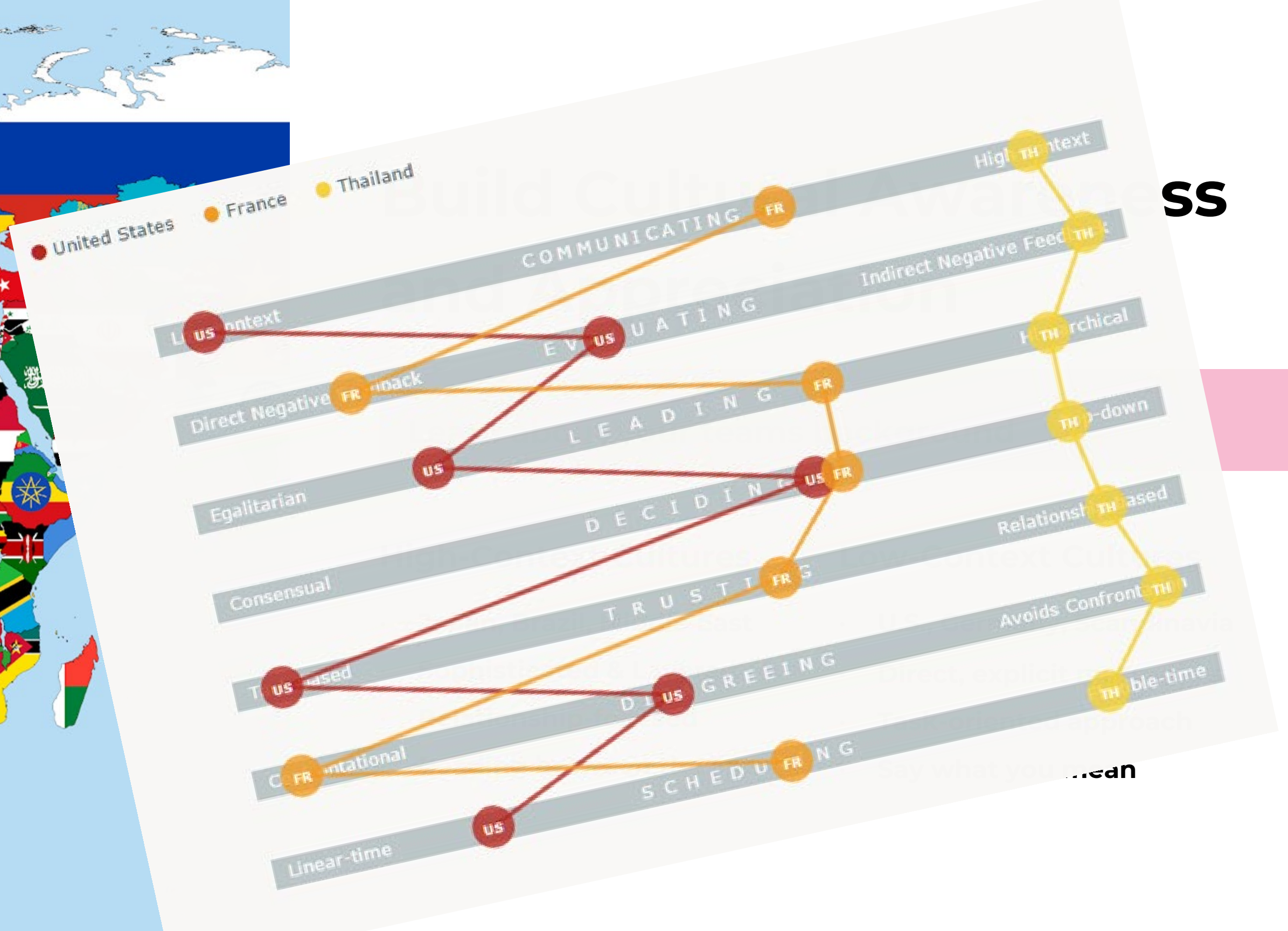
1. Office team
1. Team of coaches



The Culture Map:

Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business

by Erin Meyer



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mean



Communicate Clearly and



Standardize Channels

Email for formal updates, whats app, one on one meetings...



Use Plain Language

Avoid idioms and jargon. "Let's do a great job" beats "Let's hit it out of the park"



Disagreeing Scale

Healthy debate vs disrespect

Belonging, Safety, Reflection & Learning

Normalize Vulnerability

Share your own learning moments and mistakes. When leaders are human, teams feel safe to take risks.

Build Team Rituals

Weekly check-ins, cultural celebration days, peer recognition programs—small traditions create big connections.



Teams with high psychological safety are 27% more likely to report higher performance, 50% more likely to retain top talent, and 76% more likely to engage in strong collaboration practices



Adapt Leadership and Feedback Styles



Flex Your Approach

Some team members thrive with autonomy, others need structured guidance



Tailor Feedback Delivery

Direct cultures: "This needs improvement."

Indirect: "How might we enhance this together?"



Honor Cultural Preferences

Public praise for some, private recognition for others. Ask what works best.



Leverage Diversity as a Strength



Different Methods

how sports are approached in their home countries?
Especially in the host country of the school with local students



Enrich Student Experience

Multicultural teams enrich the student experience —
different cultural perspectives on teamwork, sportsmanship,
and perseverance can broaden students' worldviews.



Team Charter & Teamwork

Define shared values and pair staff from different cultural
backgrounds on projects to foster mutual learning.

Unite Around Shared Mission and

Your Purpose

Anchor your team in the purpose of the athletic office or coaching staff: empowering students through sports, teamwork, and character.

Model Global Citizenship

Your influence extends beyond your staff. You are shaping young athletes' understanding of global diversity.

Key Takeaway:

Using “The Culture Map” lens helps you understand why team members behave differently and how to translate those differences into stronger collaboration, communication, and leadership.

Thank you...

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Strategies for Leading Diverse Teams Across Cultural Boundaries

**Workshop for Educators & Athletic Directors in International
International School Athletics**

Matt Fleming, CMAA

American International School of Budapest



From Awareness to Action

Workshop Goal

Move beyond cultural **awareness** to **actionable strategy** for high-value, culturally intelligent programs

The Big Ideas:

Diversity as a competitive advantage

- A sound, education-based sports program is the icing on the cake in an international school

The International AD's AD's Challenge

Leading diverse teams across three layers:

- **Cultural:** Nationality, language, values
- **Sports:** Conflicting philosophies and skill levels
- **Transience:** Constant turnover demands norm renewal



Practical Leadership Strategies

1. Develop Culturally Intelligent Staff

- Build staff capacity to understand and adapt across cultural contexts

2. Standardize for Equity, Personalize for Inclusion

- Create universal systems while respecting individual cultural needs - school/program MVV

3. Decode Conflict Sources

- Understand root causes and mediate cultural perspectives

4. Engage Diverse Parents

5. Building Community & Stakeholder Relationships

- Proactively communicate expectations and build partnerships



Fairness means giving every individual what they need to succeed, not treating everyone exactly the same

Your Cultural IQ Leadership Checklist



Recruit for Cultural Curiosity

Hire staff who are flexible, eager to learn, & work with diverse populations



Over-Communicate

Explicitly explain all policies and expectations



Be the Bridge

Actively identify & connect cultural gaps; ensure your program philosophy is clear



Model Humility

Show willingness to learn from your diverse staff



Cultural Competence is a Performance Driver

The AD's role: Transform diversity into a competitive advantage and superior educational outcomes



1.) Develop Culturally Intelligent Staff

What is Cultural Intelligence

- **Cultural Intelligence (CQ)** is the ability to understand, respect, and adapt effectively to people from different cultural backgrounds
- Cultural intelligence is a core competency for coaches in an international school
- Coaches are educators first, responsible for creating inclusive and respectful environments

How to Implement

Onboard with Local Context

- Introduce coaches to local cultural norms, school values, and community expectations

Provide Ongoing Practical Application

- Observe and provide feedback on cultural understanding in daily situations

Leverage Local Expertise

- Involve long-term staff and community partners to share cultural insights

Revisit and Reinforce

- Encourage continuous reflection and adaptation

2.) Standardize for Equity, Personalize for Inclusion

- **Standardize for Equity**

- Implement universal systems for fairness: tryouts, equipment, budget
- Ensure all students have equal access to opportunities

- **Personalize for Inclusion**

- Provide flexibility to respect individual needs: religious holidays, dietary preferences as needed
- Adapt practices to make every student feel valued and included

- **Communicate Clearly Across Cultures**

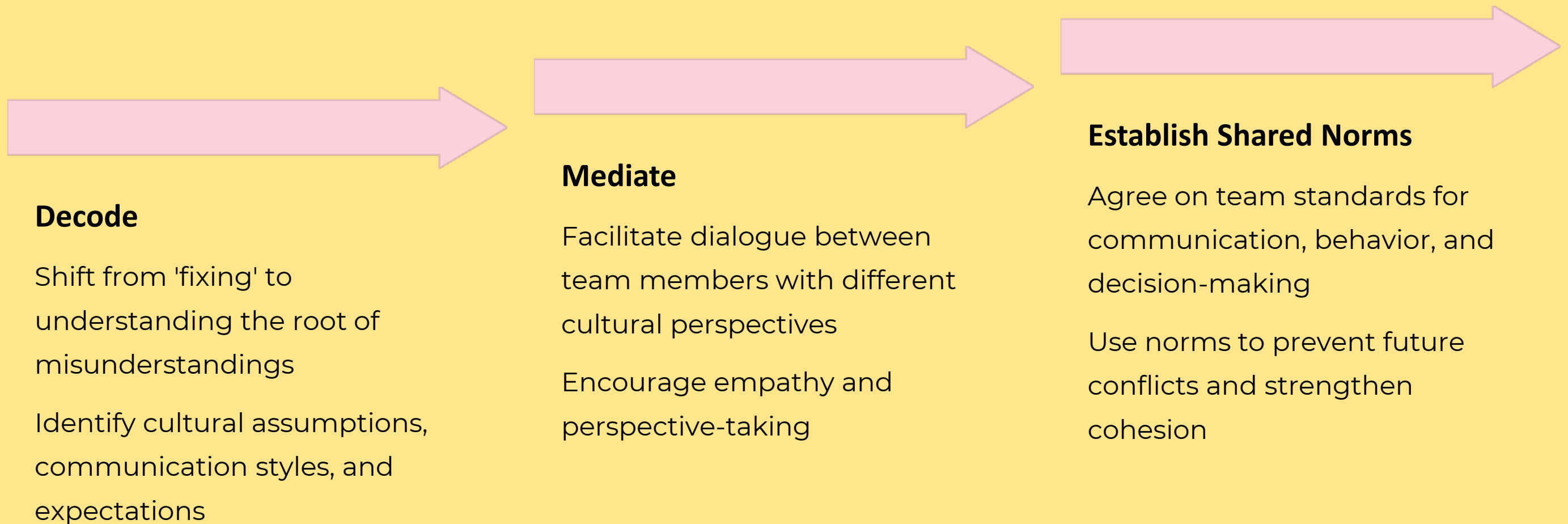
- KNOW YOUR PEOPLE! - starts with developing relationships
- Set expectations in ways all team members understand

- **Foster Cultural Adaptability**

- Encourage coaches and athletes to observe, learn, and adjust behavior based on cultural context
- Model openness and curiosity in interactions with students, parents, and local staff
- Be a global citizen

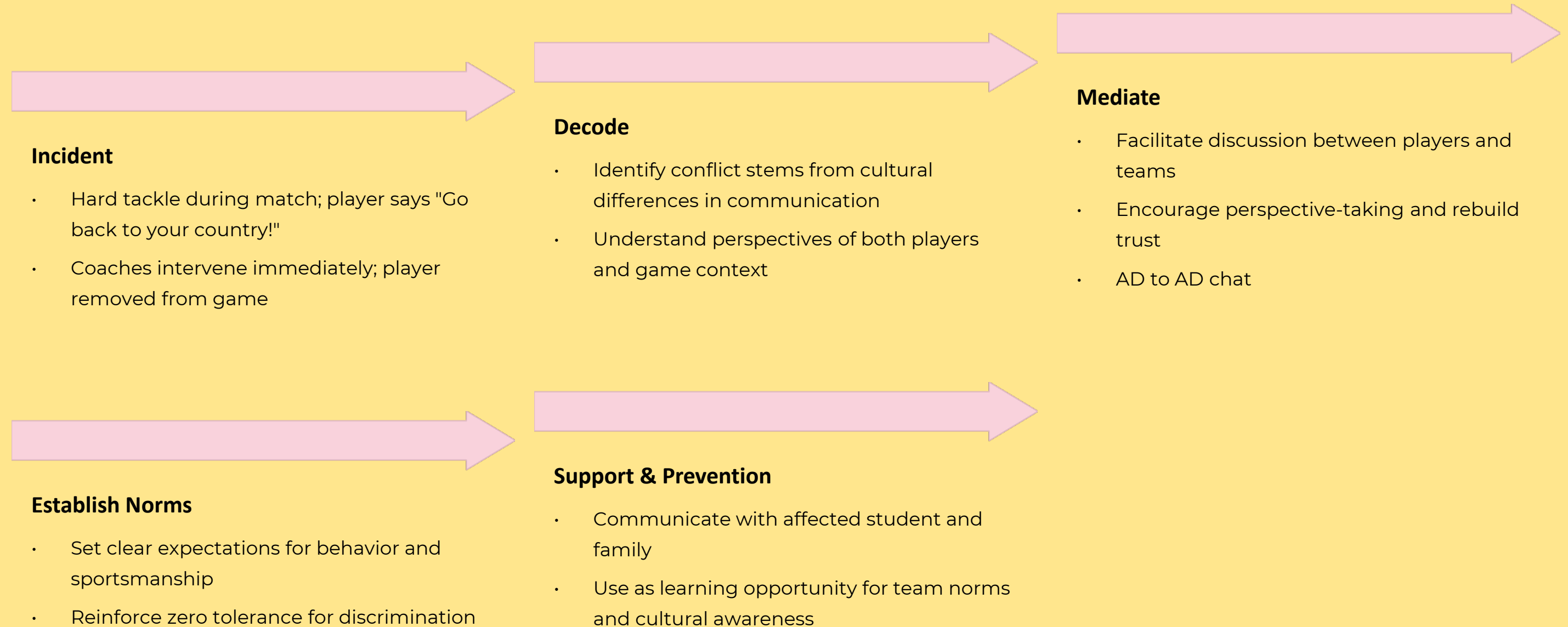


3.) Decode Conflict Sources



Handling Conflict Across Cultural Boundaries

An Example: MS Boys Soccer – Bratislava vs. Budapest





4.) Engage Diverse Parents

1

Proactive Orientation Sessions

- Provide information about the athletics program, rules, and team expectations
- Ensure all parents feel welcomed and informed
- What are the "gains" their children will achieve?

2

Explicitly Define Roles, Boundaries, Boundaries, and Expectations

- Clarify what parents can and cannot influence (practice, selection, feedback)
- Set norms for respectful communication with coaches and players

3

Foster Ongoing Dialogue & Inclusion

- Use regular check-ins, newsletters, or parent meetings to share updates
- Listen to input and feedback while maintaining clear boundaries

5.) Building Community & Stakeholder Relationships

1

Build Strong Local Partnerships

- Connect with partners, vendors, facilities, and the broader community
- Leverage local connections to access resources, venues, and expertise
- Celebrate and integrate local traditions, holidays, and cultural events

2

Foster Positive Communication

- Engage students, parents, faculty, and staff respectfully and proactively
- Address misunderstandings with cultural sensitivity - use diplomacy
- Use multiple channels to ensure clear understanding

3

Maintain Trust & Consistency

- Follow through on commitments and promises to all stakeholders
- Builds credibility across cultural boundaries

4

Support Student Development

- Apply community insights to enhance team culture and leadership development
- Encourage collaboration that benefits student-athlete growth



Leading with Cultural Intelligence



Develop Culturally Intelligent Staff

Build capacity to understand and adapt



Standardize for Equity, Personalize for Inclusion

Universal systems with individual respect



Decode Conflict Sources

Understand, mediate, establish norms



Engage Diverse Parents

Communicate expectations and build partnerships

Before You Leave, Consider:

- What is one cultural assumption in your program that you need to examine?
- Which strategy will you implement first when you return to your school?

Cultural intelligence isn't just about managing diversity—it's about unleashing its full potential to create exceptional educational experiences for every student-athlete.