

International And Intercultural Communication

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Introduction

International communication occurs across national borders, while intercultural communication concerns interaction among people whose cultural experiences, identities, languages, institutions, or social positions differ. The two concepts overlap, but they are not identical. A meeting between an Australian and an American manager is international and may be intercultural; a conversation among culturally different coworkers within the same city is intercultural without being international. The original comparison correctly recognized that cultural expectations can influence workplace communication, yet it treated Australia and the United States as internally uniform societies. A more useful analysis treats national models as starting hypotheses, then tests them against the particular organization, industry, region, generation, professional role, and individuals involved. (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009)

Why National Culture Models Need Careful Use

Frameworks such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions help managers ask structured questions about authority, individual responsibility, competition, uncertainty, time orientation, and enjoyment. They do not provide a personality diagnosis for every citizen. National averages are produced from particular samples and historical periods, and they can hide major differences related to race, migration, Indigenous identity, class, gender, occupation, and organizational culture. Australia and the United States are both immigrant societies with substantial regional diversity. Therefore, a manager should not assume that every Australian is informal or every American is hierarchical. Cultural intelligence begins with preparation, but it depends on observation, respectful inquiry, and willingness to revise an initial assumption.

Power Distance and Workplace Authority

Both countries are often described as relatively low in power distance compared with highly hierarchical societies. In practice, employees in Australia and the United States commonly expect managers to explain decisions, invite questions, and demonstrate competence rather than rely only on title. Differences may appear in style. Australian workplaces often value understatement, direct access to supervisors, and resistance to status display. American organizations may be informal in speech while still using clearly defined reporting lines, performance metrics, and executive authority.

The useful managerial lesson is not that hierarchy is absent in Australia, but that authority may be more acceptable when exercised through consultation, evidence, and practical support rather than ceremonial distance.

Individualism, Teams, and Responsibility

The original essay incorrectly describes Australia as a mainly “we” society in contrast to the United States. Both are commonly classified as highly individualistic, meaning that personal initiative, autonomy, privacy, and individual accountability are valued. However, individualism does not eliminate teamwork or public provision. Australia’s Medicare system, for example, reflects a political commitment to public health coverage, not proof that every Australian thinks collectively in all settings. American and Australian teams may both expect members to own tasks, communicate problems early, and be evaluated partly through personal performance. Managers should balance individual accountability with shared goals, avoiding the false choice between personal initiative and cooperation.

Communication Style and Plain Speaking

English is widely used in both business environments, but shared language does not guarantee shared meaning. Australian professional speech may include understatement, humor, teasing, and relatively blunt disagreement. American communication can be more explicitly enthusiastic, promotional, and achievement-oriented, especially in sales or leadership settings. An Australian listener may interpret strong American self-presentation as exaggeration, while an American listener may interpret Australian understatement as lack of commitment. Both interpretations can be wrong. Teams should clarify what confidence, urgency, agreement, and politeness sound like in their own workplace and should document decisions so that tone does not substitute for shared understanding.

Masculinity, Competition, and Inclusion

Hofstede’s masculinity dimension concerns social emphasis on competition, achievement, recognition, and material success rather than biological sex. The original essay uses the dimension too broadly and assumes simple national differences in conflict management. Both Australian and American organizations can be highly performance-oriented, but practices vary by sector and leadership. Competitive incentives may increase effort while also discouraging knowledge sharing or psychological safety. Inclusive management should define excellence clearly, recognize collaborative contributions, prevent gender discrimination, and create fair routes for disagreement. Cultural comparison is most valuable when it prompts examination of systems rather than when it labels one nation as naturally more competitive or caring. (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010)

Uncertainty Avoidance and Decision Making

Neither country is normally characterized by extremely high uncertainty avoidance, yet organizations still differ in their appetite for risk, regulation, experimentation, and documentation. A technology start-up in Sydney may tolerate ambiguity more than a hospital in Boston because the consequences of error differ. Managers working across the two countries should distinguish cultural preference from legal and professional obligation. Safety, privacy, employment, and financial rules may require formal procedures even when employees prefer flexibility. Pilot projects, decision logs, risk registers, and clear escalation routes can support experimentation without pretending uncertainty has disappeared. Effective intercultural communication makes assumptions and tolerances visible before a crisis.

Time Orientation and Planning

Long-term orientation should not be described as loyalty to old customs or willingness to follow trends. It concerns how societies and organizations balance future adaptation, persistence, pragmatism, immediate results, and normative expectations. Australian and American businesses often face short reporting cycles, but both also invest in infrastructure, education, research, and long-term brand value. Cross-border projects should explicitly agree on milestones, review points, and what counts as success. One team may prioritize rapid visible delivery, while another may prefer consultation and sustainable implementation. Scheduling conflicts are better solved through project governance than through stereotypes about national attitudes toward time.

Indulgence, Work–Life Boundaries, and Wellbeing

Hofstede's indulgence dimension refers to the extent to which societies permit gratification and leisure. It does not mean that taxation prevents Americans from enjoying life, as the original essay suggests. Workplace expectations concerning availability, annual leave, flexible work, and after-hours contact are shaped by law, industry, organizational norms, and personal circumstances. An American employer entering Australia must understand local employment standards rather than simply imitate an assumed relaxed culture. Managers should clarify response-time expectations, protect rest, and avoid interpreting boundaries as low commitment. Wellbeing policies become credible only when workload, staffing, and leadership behavior support them.

Indigenous and Multicultural Contexts

National comparisons that focus only on dominant Anglo traditions overlook Aboriginal and [Torres Strait](#) Islander peoples in Australia, Native American nations in the United States, and the experiences of migrants in both countries. Communication may involve histories of dispossession, institutional mistrust, language difference, and unequal access to authority. Respectful engagement requires more

than generic diversity training. Organizations should consult affected communities, recognize Indigenous protocols where relevant, provide accessible language support, and examine whose knowledge is treated as legitimate. Intercultural competence includes power analysis: people do not enter every conversation with equal institutional security or freedom to disagree.

Digital and Hybrid Communication

Remote work increases the importance of explicit communication. Video meetings reduce some contextual cues, written messages can magnify tone differences, and time-zone separation can create unequal burdens. Australian-American teams should rotate inconvenient meeting times, record decisions, provide agendas in advance, and avoid assuming silence equals agreement. Digital inclusion also requires captions, accessible documents, secure systems, and channels for people who are less comfortable speaking in large meetings. Informal relationship building remains important, but it should not depend entirely on after-hours socializing that excludes caregivers, disabled employees, or people who do not drink alcohol.

Practical Strategy for a U.S. Organization Entering Australia

A U.S. organization should begin with legal, market, and stakeholder research rather than a list of national traits. It should hire local expertise, consult employees, and map differences in terminology, labor expectations, customer communication, privacy, and decision authority. Leaders can use cultural frameworks to generate questions: How direct should feedback be? Who must be consulted? What evidence supports a proposal? How are disagreements escalated? The answers should come from real participants. A short intercultural charter can define meeting norms, documentation, inclusion, humor, conflict resolution, and review processes. The charter should be revised after experience rather than treated as a permanent cultural rulebook.

Feedback, Conflict, and Repair

Intercultural competence is tested most clearly when a misunderstanding occurs. A manager who hears a blunt objection should avoid immediately labeling it disrespectful, just as an employee who receives enthusiastic but vague praise should ask what decision or standard the message contains. Teams can use a repair sequence: describe the observable communication, explain its effect, ask what was intended, and agree on a clearer practice. This approach separates impact from assumed motive. Anonymous reporting, facilitated discussion, or human-resources support may be necessary when a conflict involves discrimination or unequal power. Cultural explanation must never become an excuse for harassment, retaliation, or exclusion; organizational rights and duties remain applicable.

Conclusion

Australia and the United States share language, democratic traditions, commercial ties, and many workplace expectations, but shared features do not eliminate intercultural risk. Hofstede's dimensions can organize inquiry, yet they become misleading when converted into rigid national personalities. Effective international communication combines cultural humility, legal awareness, local consultation, plain language, accessible technology, and explicit project governance. Managers should expect variation within each country and judge colleagues by observed behavior rather than nationality. The goal is not to eliminate difference but to create conditions in which difference can be expressed, interpreted, and negotiated without unequal treatment or preventable misunderstanding. (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010)

References

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