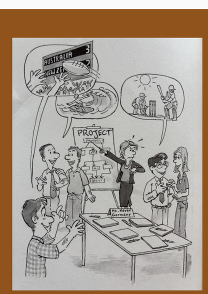
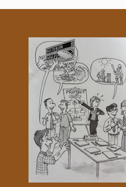
Discuss these images and take notes.



How does it relate to your own culture?

Kick-off meeting

Marianne Schuster works for a German company. She is supposed to take on project leadership for a project in Melbourne. At the kick-off meeting, she feels irritated. She simply cannot get started. The colleagues are talking about cricket, rugby, and Australian footy — in short, about private matters that, from her point of view, have nothing to do with work. She has planned and prepared the meeting precisely and sees the risk that she will not be able to discuss all the important points within the scheduled time.



Marianne Schuster works for an Austrian company. She is supposed to take on project leadership for a project in Melbourne. At the kick-off meeting, she feels uneasy. She wants to get started with the agenda, but the colleagues are chatting at length about cricket, rugby, and Australian footy — topics that, from her point of view, have little to do with work. Marianne appreciates a bit of polite small talk, but this goes on for too long. She becomes concerned that the important topics will not be discussed within the planned time.

Aisha Rahman works for a Malaysian company. She is supposed to take on project leadership for a project in Melbourne. At the kick-off meeting, she feels uncomfortable. The colleagues are chatting openly about cricket, rugby, and Australian footy. For Aisha, this feels unusual — in Malaysia, people often wait to see how a meeting leader will start and are more cautious about speaking too informally at the beginning. She worries that the atmosphere is too relaxed and that her professional role might not be taken seriously. At the same time, she hesitates to interrupt, because in her culture it is important to show respect and not to cut others short. She becomes concerned that the important points may not be discussed in the right depth.

Beruflich in Australien: Trainingsprogramm für Manager, Fach- und Führungskräfte (Handlungskompetenz im Ausland)
Warum reden Australier ungern über ihre Erfolge? Was ist davon zu halten, wenn man von einem australischen Freund als "verdammter Mistkerl" bezeichnet wird? Wieso ist es in Australien für Deutsche so schwierig, bestehende Arbeitsabläufe zu optimieren? Auf den ersten Blick mag das Leben und Arbeite...
Amzn

David Tan works for a Singaporean company. He is supposed to take on project leadership for a project in Melbourne. At the kick-off meeting, he feels puzzled. His Australian colleagues spend quite some time talking about cricket, rugby, and Australian footy before getting to business. In Singapore, meetings usually start quickly, move straight to the agenda, and focus on efficiency. David starts to worry that time is being wasted and that important topics will not be covered. At the same time, he notices that the Australians seem to bond through this informal talk. He wonders if he should join in — but feels uncertain, because it is not how business meetings are usually run in Singapore.

Case study

Intercultural Case Study: Project Planning & Decision-Making
Teams involved: Germany, Austria, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore
Starting Situation
A German and Austrian engineering consortium is working with an Australian construction company on the planning of a new production hall. The project also involves Malaysian and Singaporean partners….

Scene 1 – Kick-off Meeting
• The Austrian project leader presents a 120-page plan with milestones, responsibilities, and risk analyses.
• The German specialist insists this should be the baseline plan with strict change control.
• The Australian project leader shows a two-page Gantt chart: "This will guide us – no need to overcomplicate."
• Some Australians joke: "That's a lot of paper, mate — we'll need another project just to read it!"
• The Singaporean manager nods approvingly at the detailed plan and asks about approval steps.
• The Malaysian colleague stresses: "We must be sure the director signs off before we proceed."

Tension builds: The DACH team feels their thorough work isn't valued. Australians feel bogged down in paperwork. Malaysians/Singaporeans see the jokes as dismissive of formal process.

Scene 2 – Delivery Delay
A key supplier informs the team of a two-week delay.
• Germany: Calls an urgent change control meeting, insists on freezing dependent tasks.
• Austria: Suggests an informal workaround while documenting changes afterwards.
• Australia: "No worries, we'll just call another supplier."
• Singapore: Pushes to escalate to senior management for formal approval before switching suppliers.
• Malaysia: Warns against bypassing the director, worried about damaging trust and causing loss of face.

Tension escalates:
• The DACH side feels the Australians are reckless.
• Australians feel the others are slowing everything down.
• Singaporeans worry about accountability.
• Malaysians worry about hierarchy and harmony.

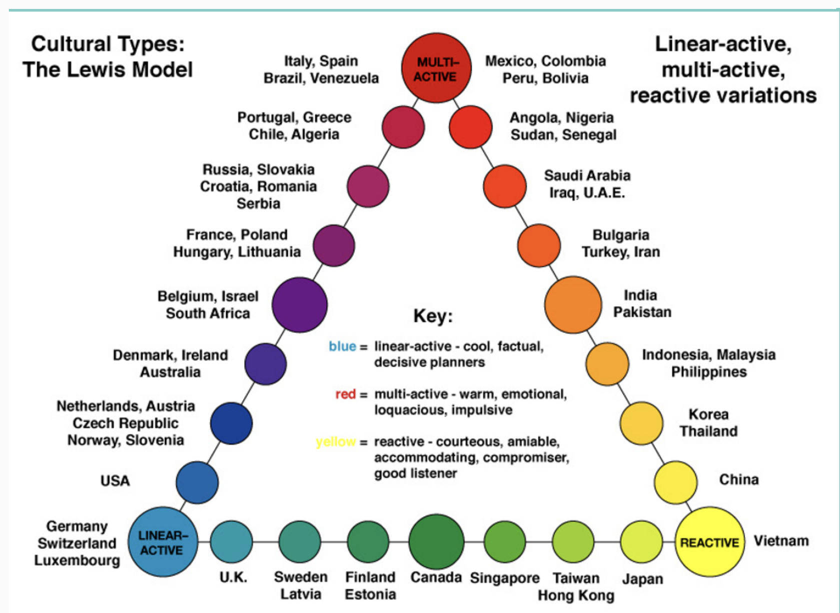
Scene 3 – Escalation
The conflict spills into a heated call:
• Germans stress rules and safety.
• Austrians try to mediate but insist on at least some formal process.
• Australians joke about "overthinking."
• Singaporeans emphasise accountability and risk.
• Malaysians express discomfort about open disagreement, preferring to take issues offline with senior figures.

Scene 4 – On-Site Decision Point (Faulty Component)
At the construction site, a component turns out to be faulty.
• German/Austrian project leader: "We must first get technical approval and management sign-off. Otherwise, we cannot proceed."
• Australian site manager: "Why wait? It's safe enough. Let's just repair it and keep going – it saves time."
• Singaporean manager: Voices concern: "If we take this decision without proper approval, who is accountable if something fails later?"
• Malaysian colleague: Avoids direct confrontation, but later suggests privately: "We should check with the director first. Making such a decision here could cause loss of face if it goes wrong."

Tension peaks:
• Germans/Austrians see Australians as careless.
• Australians see Germans/Austrians as rigid.
• Singaporeans see accountability gaps.
• Malaysians are concerned about hierarchy, harmony, and loss of face.

Reflection Questions (for participants)
1. At which moments did the misunderstandings become visible?
2. How do planning style, hierarchy, risk appetite, and communication style differ between the groups?
3. What values are in conflict here?
4. If you were the overall project lead, how could you:
• define non-negotiable milestones (safety, regulatory, approvals)?
• allow flexibility (suppliers, sequencing)?
5. What strategies could reduce frustration and build trust across the cultures?

Different perception of time



Richard Donald Lewis (1930-)
is a British polyglot, cross-cultural communication consultant, and author. He developed the Lewis Model of Cross-Cultural Communication
The core of the model classifies cultural norms into Linear-Active, Multi-Active and Re-Active, or some combination.
- Linear-active: **follow tasks sequentially**. Drivers are facts, tasks and efficiency. Communication follows clear structures - „question – answer".
  -> Examples: Northern Europe, North America and related countries.
- Multi-active: **pursue multiple goals simultaneously**. People, relationships and flexibility are the driver. Communication is dialogue-focused and simultaneous. Body language is important. Information is passed on in personal and informal networks.
  -> Examples: Southern European, Latin America, Africa, Middle-East
- Re-active: follow harmonising, solidarity-based strategies. These cultures have a **cyclical understanding for time** following the Buddhist concept of reincarnation. All events, challenges, opportunities will come back eventually. In business, people take a lot of time to make sustainable decisions for the future.

Linear-active
1. Germans, Swiss
2. US-Americans
3. Scandinavian, Austrian
4. Brits, Canadian, NZ
5. Australians, South Africans
6. Dutch, Belgian
7. US subcultures
8. French, Belgian
9. Czech, Croatian, Hungarian, Slovenian
10. North-Italian
11. Chilean
12. Russians, other Slavish
13. Portuguese
14. Polynesian
15. Spanish, South-Italian
16. Indian, Pakistani
17. Latin-American, Arabs, Africans

Multi-active

highly re-active
1. Japanese*
2. Chinese
3. Taiwanese
4. Singapore, Hongkong Chinese*
5. Finns*
6. Korean
7. Turkish+
8. Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laos
9. Malaysian, Indonesian
10. Pacific Islands+
11. Swedish*
12. Brits*

occasionally re-active

* linear-active tendencies
\+ multi-active tendencies

Contruction and trade

Intercultural lenses

From Austria/Germany
- Perception of Australians: Seen as too casual and not detailed enough. Flexible rule use and shortcuts may appear careless.
- Typical irritation: "They don't follow proper procedures."
- Learning potential: Germans/Austrians can benefit from adopting a more pragmatic, results-oriented mindset, while still ensuring safety.
- Key insight: It's not about perfect procedure but about safe enough and on-time completion.

From Malaysia/Singapore
- Perception of Australians: Work culture feels very informal and humorous, even with superiors. To Malaysians/Singaporeans, this may seem overly casual or lacking respect.
- Typical irritation: "They joke too much at work, even with bosses."
- Learning potential: Joining the informal style can build trust and rapport, while remembering that responsibility and accountability are still expected.
- Key insight: Hierarchies are flatter, but everyone is expected to speak up and contribute solutions, regardless of role.

Construction & Trade Culture in Australia – Do's & Don'ts
This handout provides an overview of the main cultural characteristics of construction and trade work in Australia, with intercultural perspectives from Germany, Austria, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Topic	Do's ✅	Don'ts ❌
Work Attitude	Be pragmatic and solution-oriented: when a problem comes up, people expect you to find a workable solution, even if it isn't "perfect."	Excessive perfectionism is seen as impractical. If you insist on 100% detail-precision before acting, it slows things down.
Safety Culture	Safety rules (WHS – Work Health & Safety) are important: bring PPE (helmet, glasses, vest, boots), join toolbox talks. Even if not enforced to the letter, you should show you know and respect the rules.	Ignoring rules completely is unacceptable – it can mean heavy fines and loss of trust.
Communication	Speak directly and simply. Clear instructions, not long explanations. Humor and self-irony build trust.	Being too formal or lecturing – long monologues or "know-it-all" attitudes are quickly rejected.
Teamwork	Get involved and show initiative. Respect is earned by helping out and being reliable, not by titles. Most colleagues use first names; tone is casual.	Overemphasizing hierarchy or titles ("I'm the engineer, so…") or avoiding hands-on work comes across as arrogant.
Time	Be punctual and expect early starts (7am is standard). Breaks ("smoko") are important for team spirit.	Being late or skipping breaks is seen as disrespectful. "Working through" breaks goes against team norms.
Pragmatism vs. Rules	Use rules as guidelines, but look for practical solutions. The expectation is a balance of safety and efficiency.	Rigid rule-following when there is a workable shortcut is seen as impractical and "un-Australian."
Social Interaction	Be relaxed and open: talk about sports (Rugby, AFL, Cricket), the weekend, travel, or weather. Jokes and banter are welcome.	Being too serious or withdrawn. Avoid sensitive topics like politics or religion, which break the easy-going tone.

Cultural Contrasts with Australia (Summary)

Germany vs. Australia
👉 Germany: strong rule orientation, detail-perfection.
👉 Australia: pragmatic, solution-focused, humorous – rules exist, but are applied flexibly as long as the outcome is safe and works.

Austria vs. Australia
👉 Austria: structured planning, careful preparation, formal respect for procedures.
👉 Australia: relaxed planning, flexible rules, informality and humor are part of everyday work.

Malaysia vs. Australia
👉 Malaysia: hierarchy and authority respected, formal communication, careful attention to senior approval.
👉 Australia: flatter hierarchy, informal tone, responsibility lies with individuals regardless of title.

Singapore vs. Australia
👉 Singapore: efficiency through clear processes, respect for hierarchy, precision in execution.
👉 Australia: efficiency through pragmatism, flexible approaches, humor and informality woven into teamwork.

Email etiquette

Intercultural lenses

Seen from Austria
- Australians' friendliness at the start of an email ("Hope you enjoyed your weekend") can feel surprisingly casual to us.
- The use of first names without titles is unusual
- in Austria, academic or professional titles are important.
- Short, positive endings ("Best", "Cheers") contrast with our preference for more formal sign-offs.
- The relaxed tone makes communication light, but it can feel as if respect for senior roles is missing.

Seen from Malaysia
- Greetings like "Hi Alex" or personal questions ("How was your trip?") may feel too informal compared to our respectful, formulaic openings.
- First-name use with managers or older colleagues feels overly familiar.
- Humor or casual comments in email may be interpreted as unprofessional.
- The lack of deference in tone - juniors addressing seniors directly - can seem bold or even disrespectful.

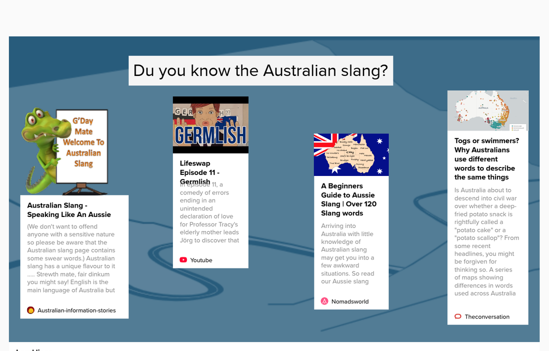
Seen from Germany
- Australians' informal greetings ("Hi Chris", "How are you?") can feel unusual compared to our more formal "Sehr geehrter Herr/Frau …".
- Their brief, relaxed style may look unstructured
- we expect a clearer flow: introduction, explanation, conclusion.
- Closings like "Cheers" or "Thanks" may seem too casual for professional email.
- The downplaying of hierarchy is striking: emails from juniors often read as if they were to equals.

Seen from Singapore
- Australians' quick, friendly openers ("Hope you're well") sound personable, but to us may lack the respectful distance usually kept in business writing.
- Writing to senior staff without titles feels unusual; hierarchy normally shapes how emails are phrased.
- Their short and sometimes joking tone may feel out of place in professional correspondence.
- The expectation that everyone contributes equally and speaks directly in writing may surprise us, as we tend to weigh hierarchy more strongly.

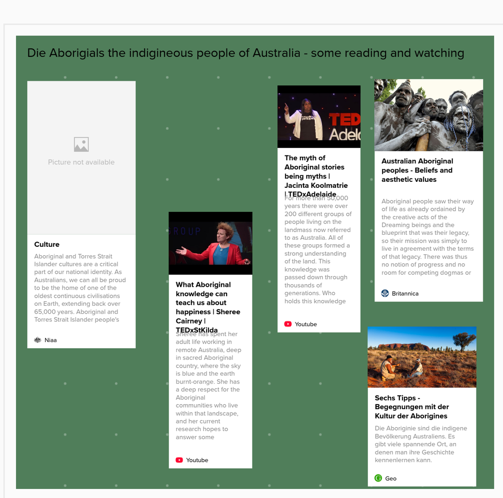
Email Etiquette in Australia

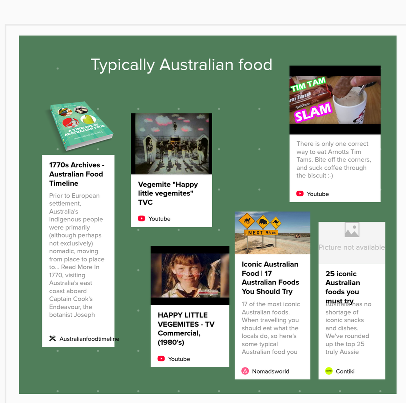
Checklist

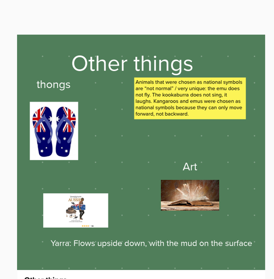
Do's ✅	Don'ts ❌
Keep it short and to the point – clarity matters more than formality.	Don't overuse titles or very formal language ("Dear Mr. Smith" / "Yours faithfully") unless writing to government or very official contacts.
Use first names (even with managers or senior staff).	Don't get straight to the point without a line or two of warm-up.
Start with a friendly, casual greeting ("Hi Alex," or "Hello Sam,").	Don't write long, dense emails – they won't be read carefully.
Add a brief personal touch before business ("How are you?" / "Hope you enjoyed the long weekend").	Don't emphasize hierarchy ("As your manager…") – Australians value equality.
Reply relatively quickly (within 24 hours if possible).	Don't ignore humor or lightness – some informality is expected.
Use a positive, approachable tone.	Don't copy unnecessary people (avoid long CC lists).
End with simple closings ("Cheers," "Best," "Thanks").	



Local lingo







Other things

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