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SPEZIELL. INDIVIDUELL. EFFEKTIV.

Welcome to your culture specific training Australia over three days!

June 2026

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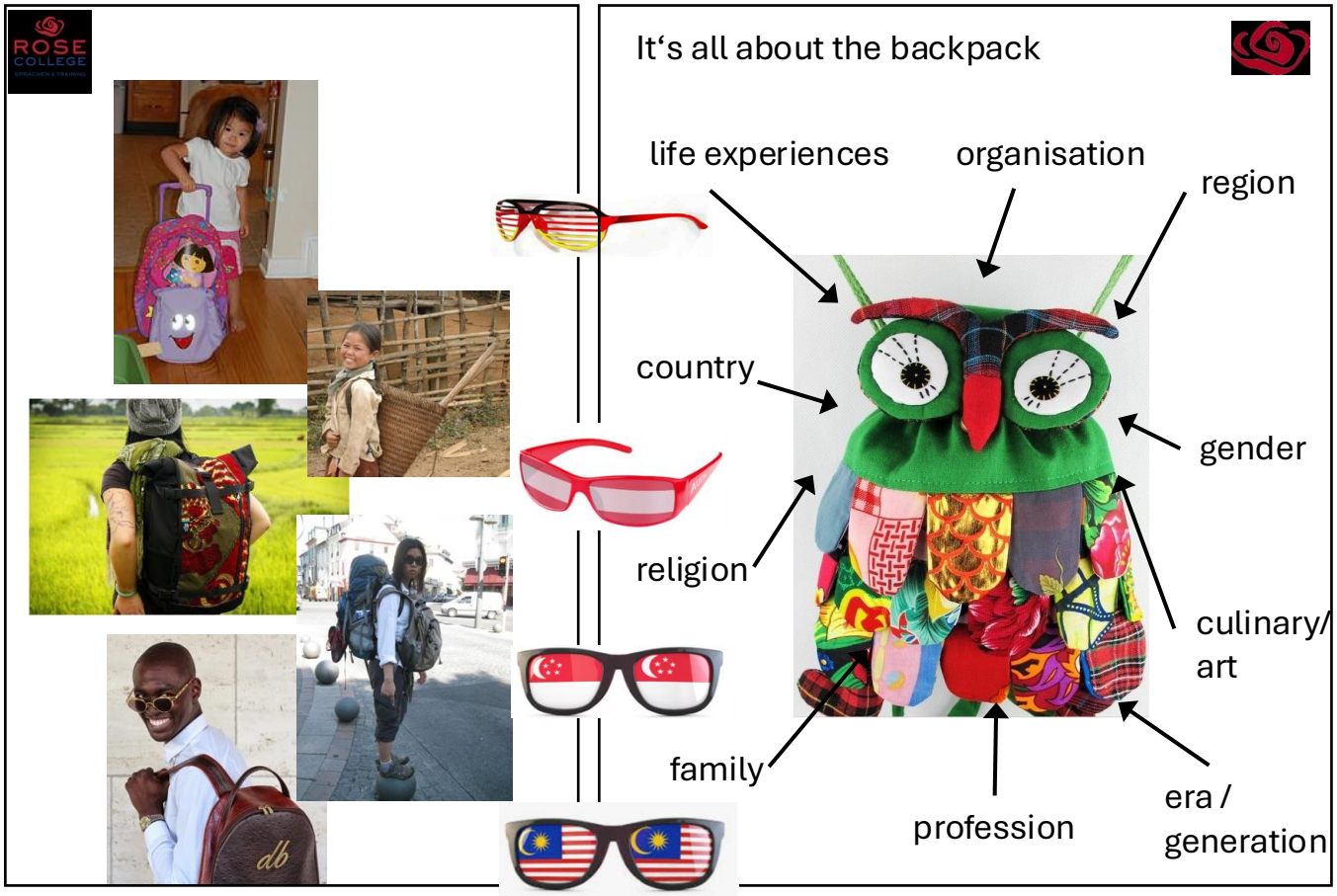

What is culture: Some definitions

Cyriac Roeding: Culture is a reference / framework for decisions.

Alexander Thomas: Culture is an orientation system that is passed on from generation to generation and helps us to master the challenges of our surroundings.

Fons Trompenaars: A fish only discovers its need for water when it is no longer in it. Our own culture is like water to a fish. We live and breathe through it.

Geert Hofstede: Culture is the programming of the human mind by which one group of people distinguishes itself from another group. "Software of the mind".

Bary Tomalin: Culture is the way we do things here.

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Culture is often defined by national culture. In fact, each of us is part of multiple cultures that influence us.
Depending on context, we navigate between the different collectives we are a part of. Sometimes we adapt more to a group, sometimes less. All of it together forms our identity, orientation, stability.
When we meet other people, we first look for commonalities. Once we've found them, we can build trust. Psychological tests have shown that we see somebody in a positive light that resembles us in some aspect.
In intercultural context, commonalities aren't often visible straight away. Differences are more visible. This means that we need to look harder for commonalities to build trust.
Tip: Take time to build relationships with your international partners. Talk about family, everyday topics, hobbies…

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The intercultural lens

Our knowledge is shaped by culture, and hence is our perception. This knowledge inventory gathered throughout life filters information and influences the way we see things. This is our cultural lens.
Psychological studies have shown that we can mainly see what we know and what we like. We filter out what we don’t know or don’t like.
There is no neutral perception. Cultural differences are the source of diverse interpretations.

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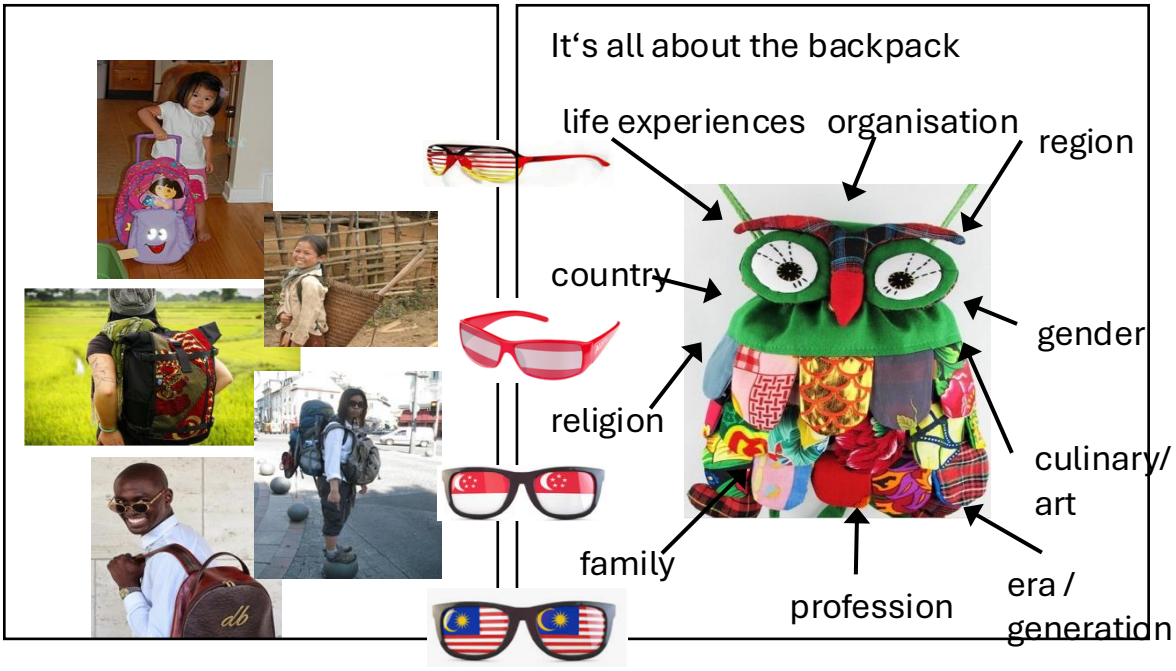
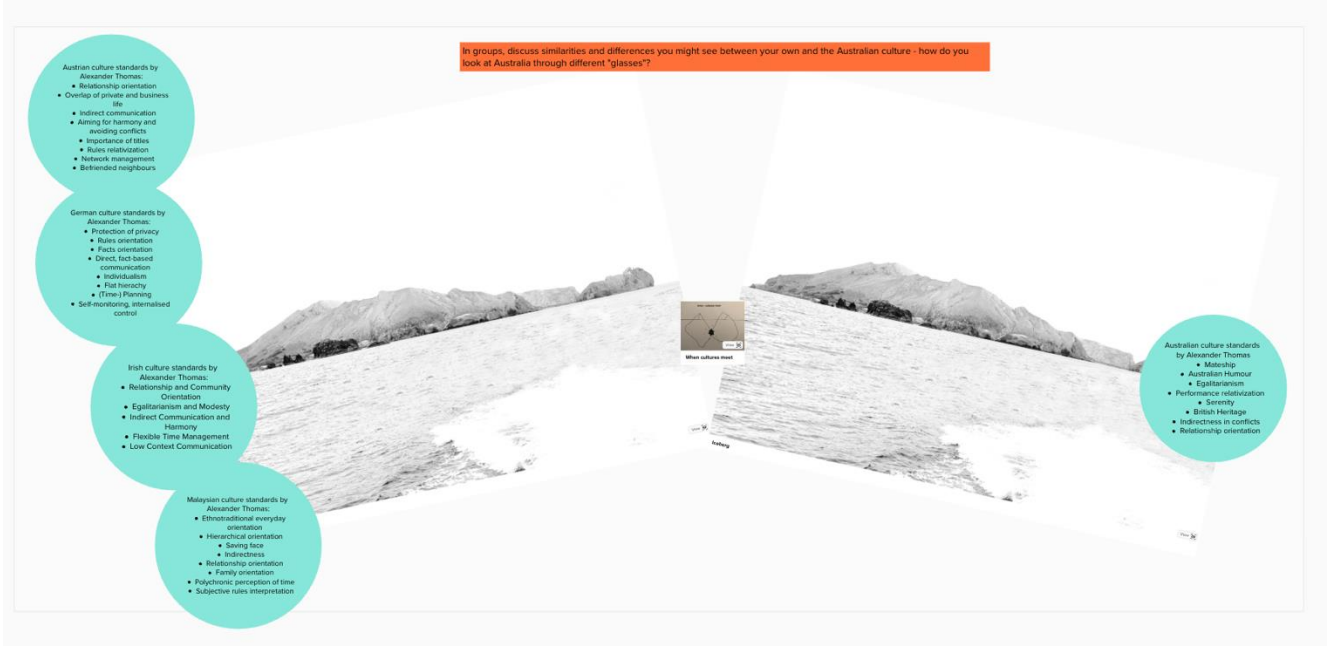
The intercultural lens





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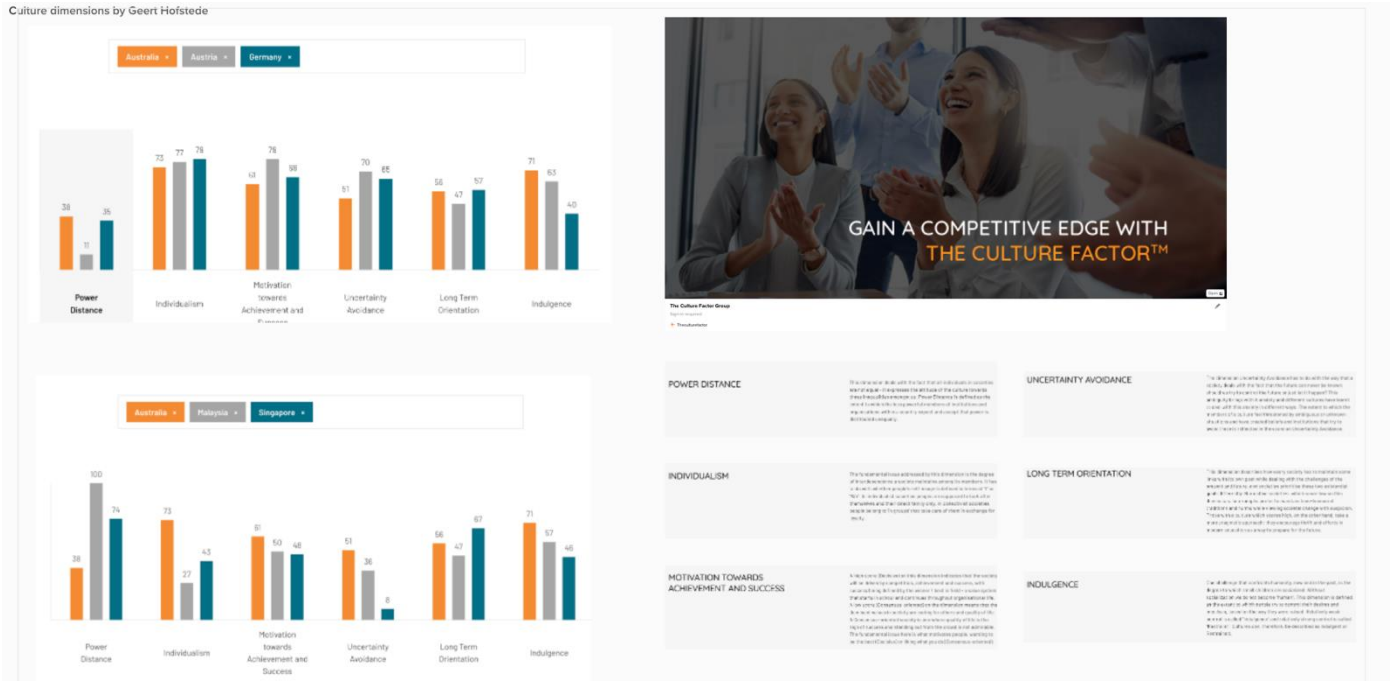
Culture dimensions by Geert Hofstede



Reference:
https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool

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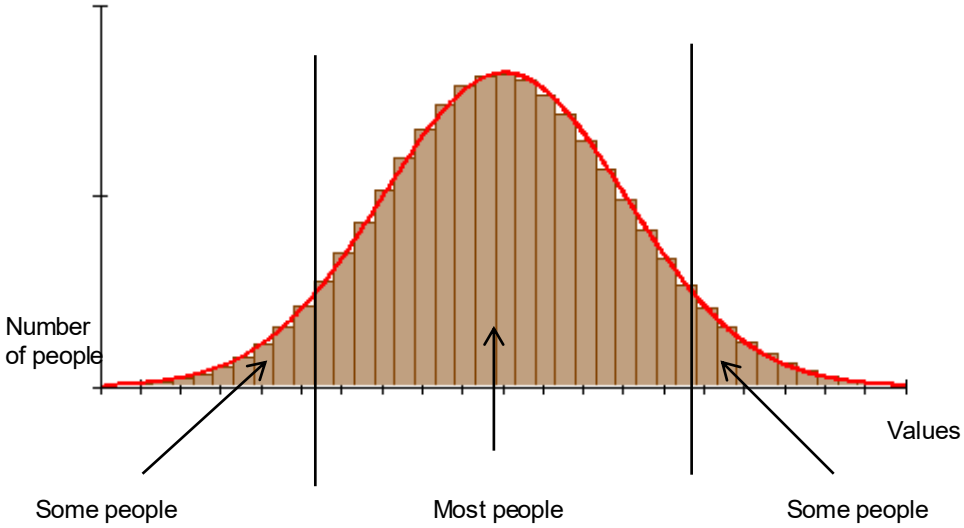
Stereotypes: Cultural profiles yes – blanked judgments no!!



From Nancy Adler: Communicating across Cultural Barriers:
Stereotyping involves a form of categorization that organizes our experience and guides our behavior toward ethnic and national groups. Stereotypes never describe individual behavior; rather, they describe the behavioral Communicating across Cultural Barriers for members of a particular group.
Stereotypes, like other forms of categories, can be helpful or harmful depending on how we use them. Effective stereotyping allows people to understand and act appropriately in new situations.
A stereotype can be helpful when it is
• Consciously held. The person should be aware that he or she is describing a group norm rather than the characteristics of a specific individual.
• Descriptive rather than evaluative. The stereotype should describe what people from this group will probably be like and not evaluate those people as good or bad.
• Accurate. The stereotype should accurately describe the norm for the group to which the person belongs.
• The first best guess about a group prior to having direct information about the specific person or persons involved.
• Modified, based on further observation and experience with the actual people and situations.

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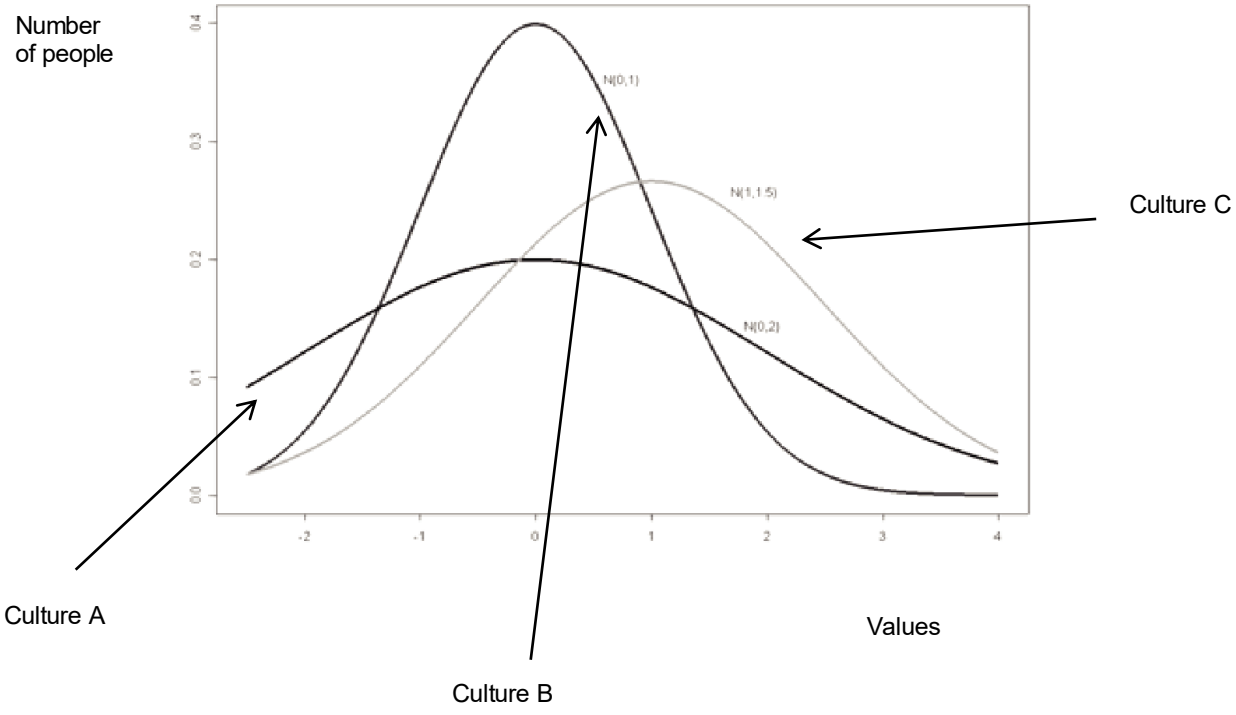
Cross-cultural misperception



From Nancy Adler: Communicating across Cultural Barriers:
Do the French and the Chinese see the world in the same way? No. Do Venezuelans and Ghanaians see the world in the same way? Again, no. No two national groups see the world in exactly the same way.
Perception is the process by which each individual selects, organizes, and evaluates stimuli from the external environment to provide meaningful experiences for himself or herself. For example, when Mexican children simultaneously viewed tachistoscopic pictures of a bullfight and a baseball game, they only remembered seeing the bullfight. Looking through the same tachistoscope, American children only remembered seeing the baseball game. Why didn't the children see both pictures? The answer lies in the nature of perception.
Perceptual patterns are neither innate nor absolute. They are selective, learned, culturally determined, consistent, and inaccurate.
• Perception is selective. At any one time there are too many stimuli in the environment for us to observe. Therefore, we screen out most of what we see, hear, taste, and feel. We screen out the overload and allow only selected information through our perceptual screen to our conscious mind.
• Perceptual patterns are learned. We are not born seeing the world in one particular way. Our experience teaches us to perceive the world in certain ways.
• Perception is culturally determined. We learn to see the world in a certain way based on our cultural background.
• Perception tends to remain constant. Once we see something in a particular way, we continue to see it that way.
• We therefore see things that do not exist, and do not see things that do exist. Our interests, values, and culture act as filters and lead us to distort, block, and even create what we choose to see and hear. We perceive what we expect to perceive. We perceive things according to what we have been trained to see, according to our cultural map.

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Are you a peach or a coconut?

(by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner)

From Harvard Business Review: https://hbr.org/2014/05/one-reason-cross-cultural-small-talk-is-so-tricky

In peach cultures like the USA or Brazil people tend to be friendly ("soft") with new acquaintances. They smile frequently at strangers, move quickly to first-name usage, share information about themselves, and ask personal questions of those they hardly know. But after a little friendly interaction with a peach, you may suddenly get to the hard shell of the pit where the peach protects his real self and the relationship suddenly stops.

"On the other hand, coming from a peach culture as I do, I was equally taken aback when I came to live in Europe 14 years ago. My friendly smiles and personal comments were greeted with cold formality by the Polish, French, German, or Russian colleagues I was getting to know. I took their stony expressions as signs of arrogance, snobbishness, and even hostility.

So what do you do if, like me, you're a peach fallen amongst coconuts? Authenticity matters; if you try to be someone you're not, it never works. So go ahead and smile all you want and share as much information about your family as you like. Just don't ask personal questions of your counterparts until they bring up the subject themselves."

In coconut cultures such Russia and Germany, people are initially more closed off from those they don't have friendships with. They rarely smile at strangers, ask casual acquaintances personal questions, or offer personal information to those they don't know intimately. But over time, as coconuts get to know you, they become gradually warmer and friendlier. And while relationships are built up slowly, they also tend to last longer.

Coconuts may react to peaches in a couple of ways. Some interpret the friendliness as an offer of friendship and when people don't follow through on the unintended offer, they conclude that the peaches are disingenuous or hypocritical.

"And for my coconut readers, if your peach counterpart asks how you are doing, shows you photos of their family or even invites you over for a barbecue, don't take it as an overture to deep friendship or a cloak for some hidden agenda, but as an expression of different cultural norms that you need to adjust to."

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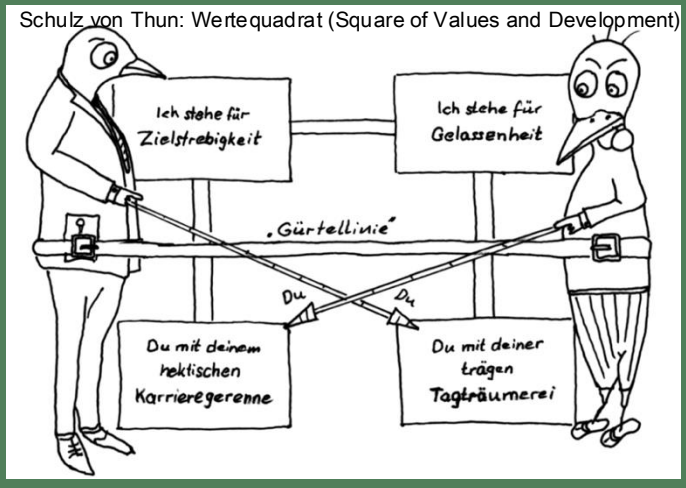
Are you a peach or a coconut?

(by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner)

Coconut
- Reserved, needs time to warm up with strangers
- Private and public life are strictly separated
- Social distance determined by profession, social role and status (Sie)
- Close, very intimate sharing of experiences with friends

Peach
- Extroverted with strangers
- Open and curious
- Makes —friends‖quickly
- Talks openly in public
- Private and public topics and behaviour are interwoven (profession, family, free time)

Schulz von Thun: Wertequadrat (Square of Values and Development)



Source: Heather Robinson of http://www.culturaldetective.com/

Coconut thinks peach is

Negative stereotype	Positive stereotype
Superficial	Informal
Childish	Open
Not to be taken seriously	Friendly
Slippery	Enthusiastic
Uncommited	Flexible
Blah, blah, blah	Humorous

Peach thinks coconut is

Negative stereotype	Positive stereotype
Overly reserved	Reliable
Stiff	Clear
Pompous	Trustworthy
Harsh	Orderly
Unfriendly	Honest
Aggressive	Punctual

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Are you a peach or a coconut?

(by Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner)

Peaches effective with coconuts:

Active

Do your homework
Present only the facts – no opinion or personal stories
Present in a logical sequence
Offer as many empirical measures as possible
State your case dispassionately
Stop talking when you have presented your case
Give them time to think before asking for a response

Passive

Don‘t take criticism personally

Coconuts effective with peaches:

Active

Start softly, e.g., ask them how they are, what they did on the weekend, etc.
Acknowledge them/compliment them on s omething you sincerely appreciate about them
Tell them who is effected by the issue and how tell them how you feel about the issue
Look at them
Smile

Passive

Let them talk

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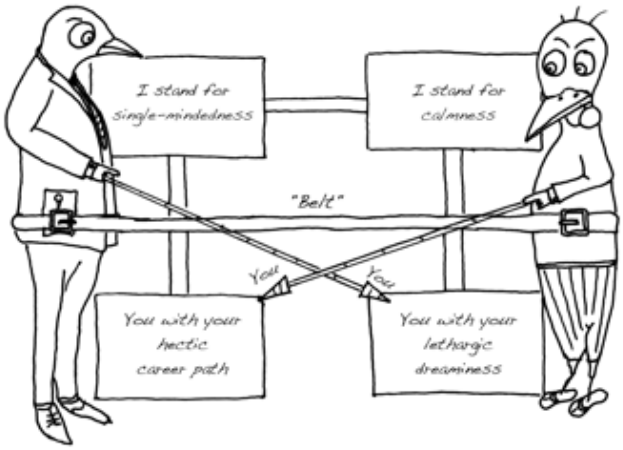
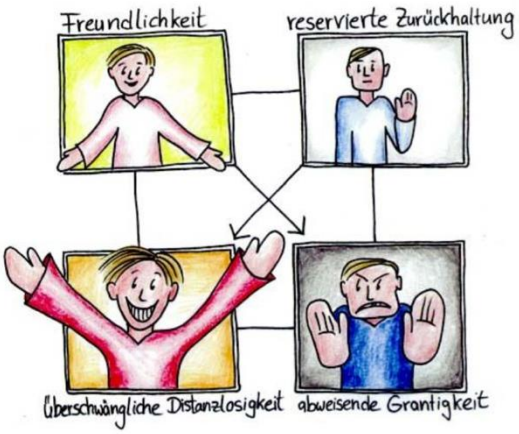
Square of Values, Virtues and Development

by Friedemann Schulz von Thun





Friedemann Schulz von Thun's Value and Development Square is a communication model. The premise is that every value (every virtue, every leading principle, every human attribute) has a constructive effect only in connection with a positive contrasting value, a "sister-virtue". Without this balance, a value is easily devalued to an exaggeration of itself.
Thriftiness is a positive attribute, stinginess is not. You need a bit of generosity to balance stinginess, and a bit of thriftiness to avoid extravagance, always depending on your point of view.

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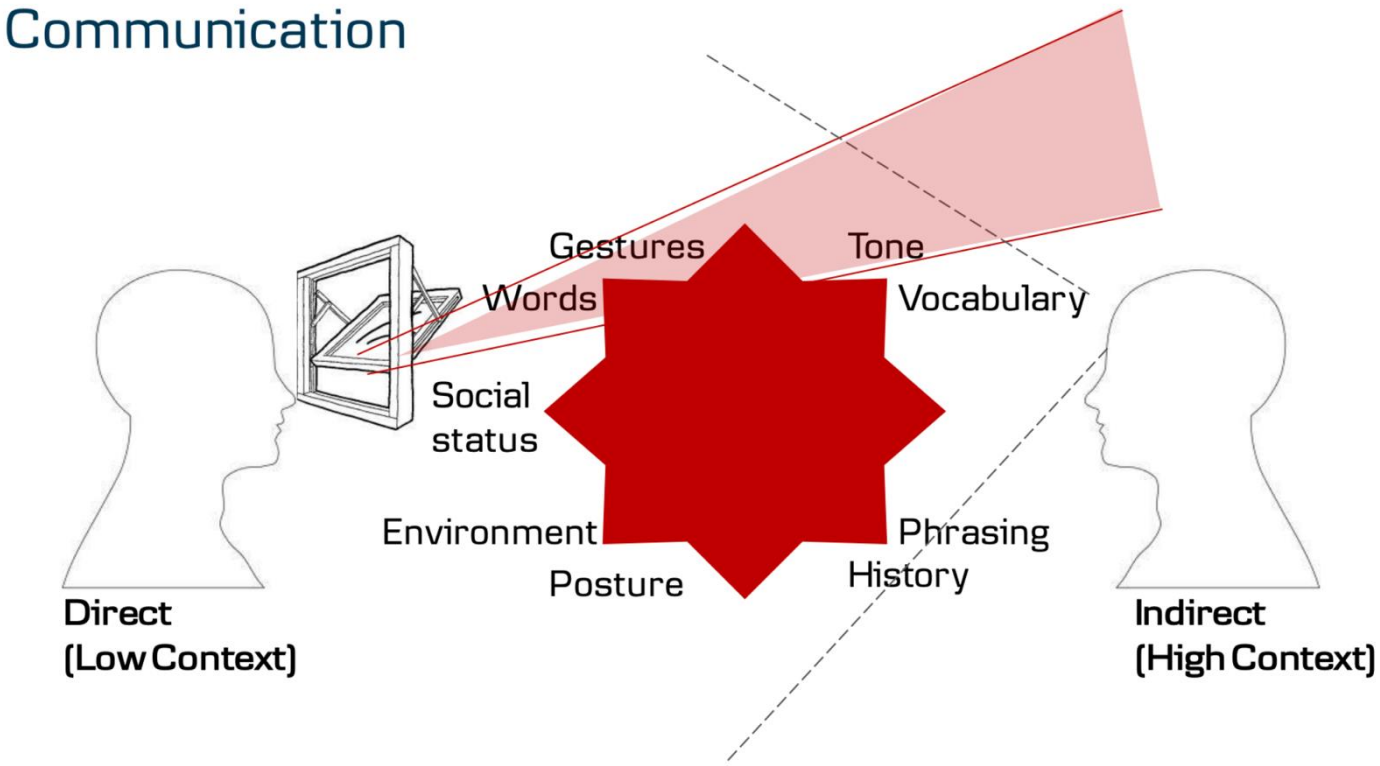
High context and low context

(By Edward T. Hall)



Adapted from "Managing intercultural Differences, by Claire B. Anderson

In a low-context society, communication is meant to be clear, to the point, and transparent. Low-context communicators say precisely what they mean. Words carry meaning and the speaker assumes others have a low shared understanding of the context of the conversation. That means the speaker is obligated to explain very explicitly and clearly what they mean. Low-context communication is often identified as a direct communication style. Meaning lies predominantly in what is said, written and spoken communication often have the same value in carrying meaning.

In a high-context society, speakers and listeners assume that there is a great deal of shared context and mutual, unspoken understanding. Communication is layered, nuanced, and implicit. The speaker doesn't have to say exactly what they mean because gestures, tone of voice, facial expressions, and even status and environment add meaning to the message. This means that high-context communication is often identified as an indirect communication style. Meaning lies in what is said, how it is said, who is saying it, and even by what is left unsaid. In other words: silence has meaning.

Text from: https://whatisculture.org/?page_id=77

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Richard D. Lewis: How different cultures perceive time

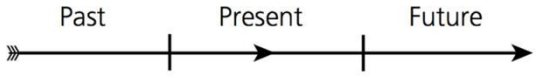

Figure 4.1: American flow of time. Richard Lewis

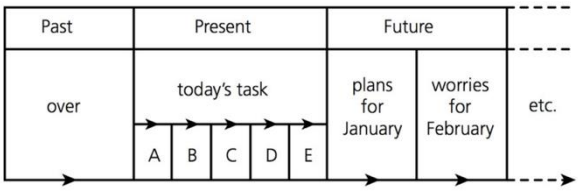

Figure 4.2: Carving up American time. Richard Lewis

The American concept of time **is the most expensive**, as anyone who has had to deal with American doctors, dentists or lawyers will tell you.

For an American, time is truly money. In a **profit-oriented society, time is a precious, even scarce, commodity**. It flows fast, like a mountain river in the spring, and if you want to benefit from its passing, you have to move fast with it. **Americans are people of action; they cannot bear to be idle. The past is over, but the present you can seize, parcel and package and make it work for you in the immediate future.**

The Americans are not the only ones who sanctify timekeeping, for it is practically a religion in Switzerland and Germany, too. These countries, along with Britain, the Anglo-Saxon world in general, the Netherlands, Austria and Scandinavia, have a linear vision of time and action. **They suspect, like the Americans, that time is passing (being wasted) without decisions being made or actions being performed**.

Text from: https://www.businessinsider.com/how-different-cultures-understand-time-2014-5

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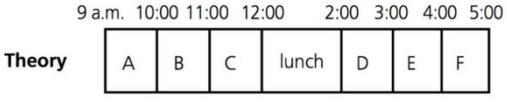
Richard D. Lewis: How different cultures perceive time

Figure 4.4: How the Spaniard actually sees. Richard Lewis



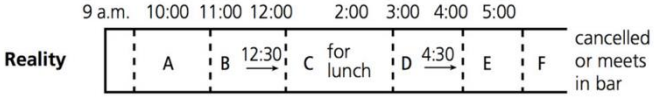


Figure 4.5: Spanish schedules: in theory, in reality. Richard Lewis

Southern Europeans are multi-active, rather than linear-active. **The more things they can do at the same time, the happier and the more fulfilled they feel.** They organize their time (and lives) in an entirely different way from Americans, Germans and the Swiss. Multi-active peoples are not very interested in schedules or punctuality. **They consider the present reality to be more important than appointments. In their ordering of things, priority is given to the relative thrill or significance of each meeting.**

Spaniards, Italians and Arabs will **ignore the passing of time if it means that conversations will be left unfinished. For them, completing a human transaction is the best way they can invest their time.**

The business we have to do and our close relations are so important that it is irrelevant at what time we meet. The meeting is what counts.

In countries inhabited by linear-active people, time is clock- and calendar- related, segmented in an abstract manner for our convenience, measurement, and disposal.

In multi-active cultures like the Arab and Latin spheres, time is event- or personality-related, a subjective commodity which can be manipulated, molded, stretched, or dispensed with, irrespective of what the clock says.

Text from: https://www.businessinsider.com/how-different-cultures-understand-time-2014-5

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Richard D. Lewis: How different cultures perceive time

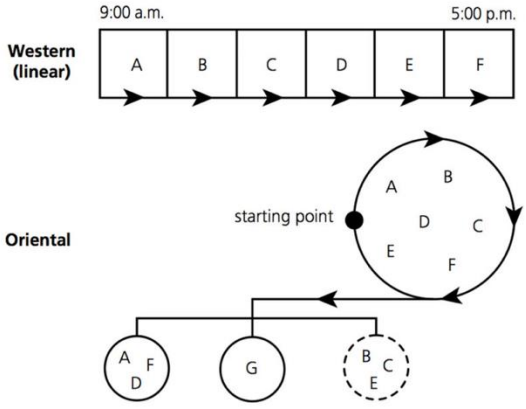

Figure 4.6: Western action chains/Asian reflection. Richard Lewis

Western action versus Asian reflection. The American, German and Swiss go home satisfied that all tasks have been completed. The French or Italian might leave some "mopping up" for the following day. The Thai attitude toward time can be seen as a **pool one could gradually walk around**. This metaphor applies to most Asians, who, instead of tackling problems immediately in sequential fashion, **circle around them for a few days or weeks before committing themselves. After a suitable period of reflection, tasks A, D and F may indeed seem worthy of pursuing. Tasks B, C and E may be quietly dropped. Contemplation of the whole scene has indicated, however, that task G, perhaps not even envisaged at all earlier on, might be the most significant of all.**

In some Eastern cultures, time is viewed neither as linear nor event–relationship related, but as **cyclic**. Each day the sun rises and sets, the seasons follow one another, the heavenly bodies revolve around us, people grow old and die, but their children reconstitute the process. We know this cycle has gone on for 100,000 years and more. Cyclical time is not a scarce commodity. **There seems always to be an unlimited supply of it just around the next bend. As they say in the East, when God made time, he made plenty of it.**

In a Buddhist culture (e.g., Thailand, Tibet), not only time but also life itself goes around in a circle. Whatever we plan, however we organize our particular world, generation follows generation; governments and rulers will succeed each other; crops will be harvested; monsoons, earthquakes and other catastrophes will recur; taxes will be paid; the sun and moon will rise and set; stocks and shares will rise and fall. Even the Americans will not change such events, certainly not by rushing things.

Text from: https://www.businessinsider.com/how-different-cultures-understand-time-2014-5

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Richard D. Lewis: How different cultures perceive time

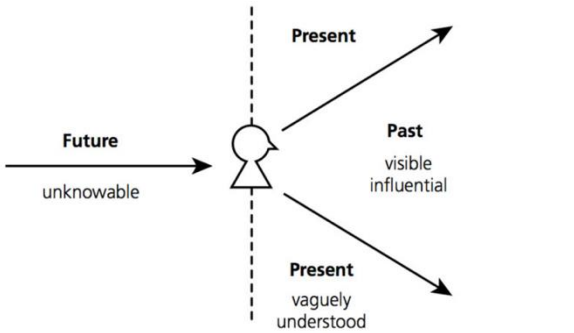

Figure 4.7: Malagasy concept of time. Richard Lewis

The Malagasy consider **the future unknowable. It is behind their head where they do not have eyes. Buses in Madagascar leave, not according to a predetermined timetable, but when the bus is full.**

The situation triggers the event. Not only does this make economic sense, but it is also the time that most passengers have chosen to leave. **Consequently, in Madagascar stocks are not replenished until shelves are empty, filling stations order gas only when they run dry, and hordes of would-be passengers at the airport find that, in spite of their tickets, in reality everybody is wait-listed. The actual assignation of seats takes place between the opening of the check-in desk and the (eventual) departure of the plane.**

Text from: https://www.businessinsider.com/how-different-cultures-understand-time-2014-5

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Edward Hall, Gert Hofsteede, Fons Trompenaars, Erin Meyer: perception of time in different cultures

Edward Hall (1914-2009)
is recognized as the founding father of intercultural communications. In his most popular book, The Silent Language, Hall explains his concept of chronemics (how our relationship to time affects communication) and sites many cross-cultural comparisons, among others in planning of buildings and cities.

- **Monochromic time:** In monochromic cultures things happen sequentially and great attention is paid to planning and scheduling.
  -> Examples: Australia, US, UK, Germany
- **Polychromic time:** In polychromic cultures many things happen at once and there is less emphasis on „getting things done" linearly.
  -> Examples: Italy's „L'arte di arrangiarsi" (the art of getting by, the art of making do, i.e. talent of survival mixed with staying grounded and authentic), Spain, Brazil, Argentina.

Geert Hofstede (1928-2020)
is a Dutch social psychologist who focuses his work on the study of cultures across nations and developed the concepts of **short-term** (fast results) and **long-term** orientation (over generations).

Fons Trompenaars (1952-)
is a Dutch organizational theorist, management consultant, and author in the field of cross-cultural communication. He is known for the development of his model of national culture differences, which has seven cultural dimensions:

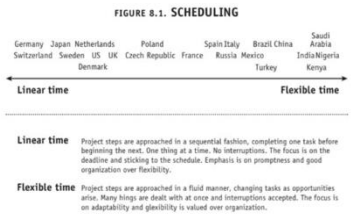
Sequential / linear
Time is linear and can be measured. Schedules, timeliness are more important than relationships.

Synchronic / cyclical
Time is circular and consists of events happening simultaneous Time „breaths". It is more impor to dedicate time to people and

ur

be

punctual.



Erin Meyer (1971-)
Author of "The Culture Map" looks at time as **linear vs flexible**. See image to the right.

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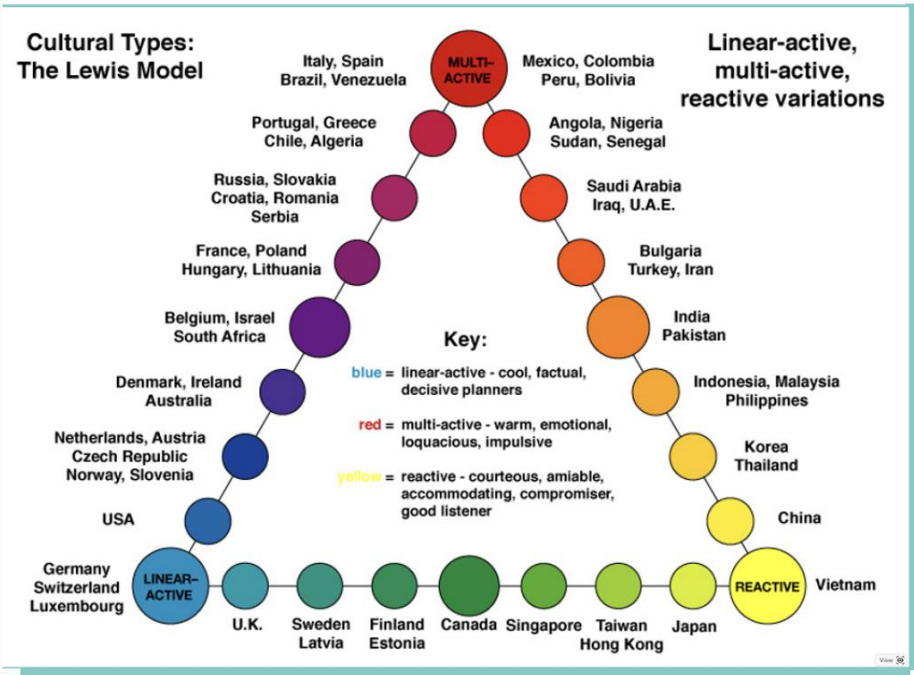
Richard Donald Lewis

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.

1.	Germans, Swiss	Linear-active
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

1.	Japanese*	highly re-active
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

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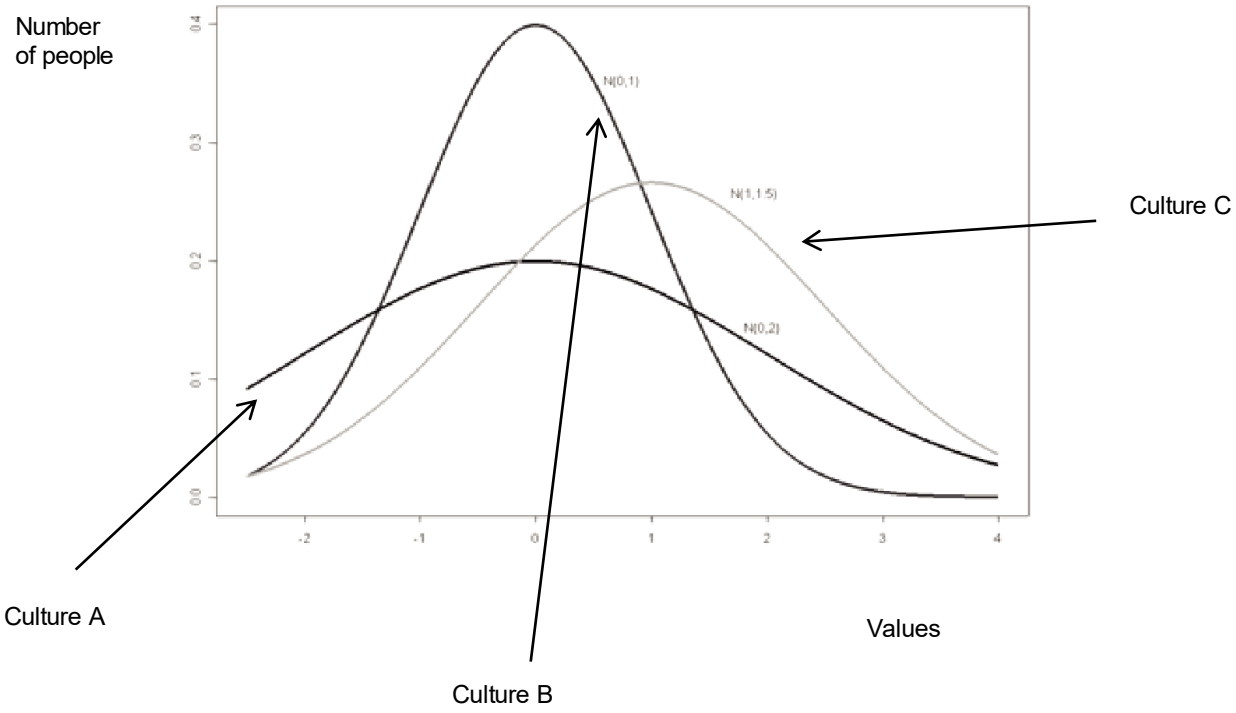
Alexander Thomas: Cultural standards



According to Thomas, cultural standards are the central characteristics of a culture. They function as an orientation system for perceiving, thinking and acting. Cultural standards can be understood as all kinds of perception, thinking, judgements and actions, that are considered normal, natural, typical and compulsory by the majority of the members of a certain culture. Individual and public behaviour is evaluated and regulated on the basis of these standards.

Routine

Once socialized, cultural standards are generally no longer consciously perceived by the members of a cultural group. They are routinized and only become apparent in overlapping situations with cultural standards of other cultural groups.

Different categories can be assumed for the classification. These categories can be described as normal, typical, still acceptable or to be rejected. A clear classification into the categories is possible because the cultural standards consist of a central norm and a tolerance range. The central norm indicates the ideal value of behavior that is shared by most members of the cultural group. The tolerance range, on the other hand, constitutes the deviation from the central norm that is still acceptable. The deviation arises from strongly heterogeneous views, which can also prevail within a cultural group. Cultural standards can include clear rules of behavior in addition to general values.

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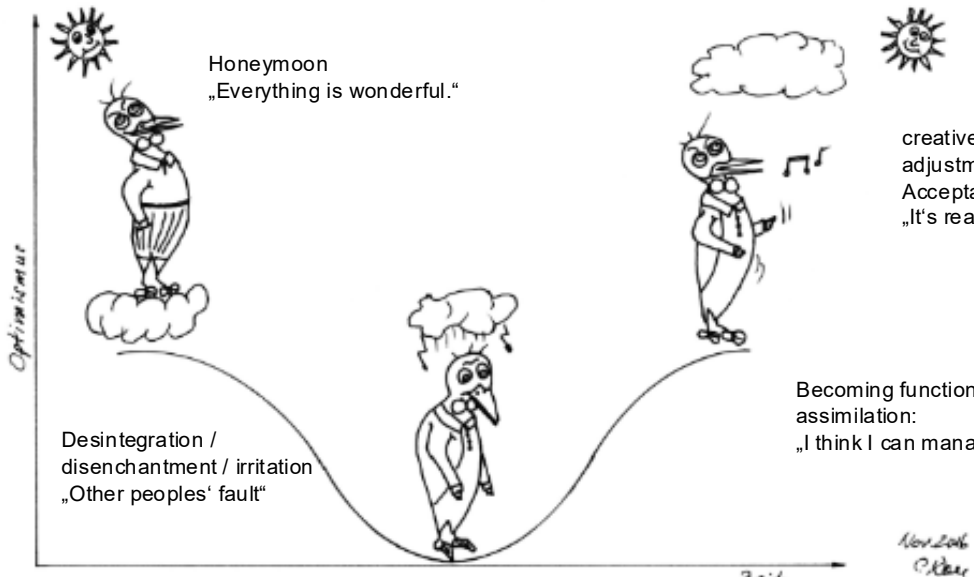
Culture Shock Curve

Willingness
to adapt



Honeymoon:
New experiences are exciting, you feel fortunate for having the opportunity of moving overseas. People are friendly and you smile a lot, you are in control, your own sense of culture is not threatened.
-> Be a tourist! Send postcards home while You‘re feeling so positive. Book a holiday six Months ahead for you to look forward to. Make contacts through clubs and associations Sign up for actuvities, join a language course

Creative independence:
You are generally successful in communications with locals, enjoying bein where you are, adapt at finding things, no longer stereotyping, understanding local customs.
-> Review your lifestyle for areas that need improving, if leaving, tie up any loose ends and farewell people properly, maintain key relationships.

Desintegration:
Daily frustrations can build into disillusionment, the big things of home loom large. Discussions with other expats reinforce the difficulties of the new culture. Self-doubt and depression may set in.
-> Look after yourself, treat yourself to a massage, exercise, avoid alcohol and over-eating, keep a journal, get out and be with people, continue language practice, keep busy, set daily goals, and make the effort to achieve them. List the goals you had for your Time overseas and get started.

Becoming functional:
Feeling in control and positive again about being where you are. Self-understanding and more tolerance of others, a sense of comfort operating in the host culture. You‘re helping others get through their adjustments.
-> Try new things and explore the culture, practice the language, buy some local home furnishings, do the things you intend to do while in this country before it‘s time to leave.

Reintegration:
A sense of standing up to the things and people that are frustrating you, racial generalisations and rejection of host culture, determination to work things out and get things done.
-> Build your network of friends, take that you booked before, continue language study, spend time with people to enjoy being there.

Source: Marx, E., Breaking through Culture Shock

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Case study

Intercultural Case Study: Project Planning & Decision-Making

Teams involved: Germany, Austria, Australia, Ireland, Malaysia

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 Irish and Malaysian partners....

Scene 1 – Kick-off Meeting

- The Austrian project leader presents a 120-page plan with milestones, responsibilities, approval steps, safety requirements, and risk analyses.
- The German specialist insists this should be the baseline plan with strict change control, especially for technical, safety, and regulatory topics.
- 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 Irish manager smiles at the joke, but also points out: "The detail is useful, but maybe we need a shorter working version everyone can actually use."
- 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 fully valued. Australians feel the planning may become too heavy for day-to-day coordination. The Irish side sees value in both approaches but worries that the group may confuse a full reference plan with a practical working tool. Malaysians see the jokes as potentially dismissive of formal process and senior approval.

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: "Let's check the options first. If there's an approved alternative supplier, we can keep the unaffected work moving."
- Ireland: Suggests checking quickly whether another supplier is available, but also asks what contractual, safety, or quality approvals would be needed before switching.
- Malaysia: Warns against bypassing the director, worried about damaging trust and causing loss of face.

Tension escalates:

- The DACH side worries that moving too quickly could create technical, contractual, or coordination risks.
- Australians feel the others are turning every adjustment into a major escalation, even when a practical workaround may be possible.
- The Irish side feels the group is creating a false choice between bureaucracy and improvisation.
- Malaysians worry about hierarchy, trust, 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" and argue that the team should focus on workable next steps rather than reopening the whole plan each time something changes.
- Irish colleagues initially use humour to reduce tension, but become uncomfortable when humour starts to sound dismissive of real concerns.
- Malaysians express discomfort about open disagreement, preferring to take issues offline with senior figures.

Tension becomes visible:

The conflict is not simply about planning versus no planning. Everyone agrees that the project needs structure. The disagreement is about how much detail should guide day-to-day decisions, when a change needs formal escalation, and how much flexibility the team should allow once work is underway.

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: "We shouldn't hold up the whole site if only one part is affected. Let's document the issue, get the right technical input, and see which work can continue in the meantime."
- Irish manager: "Can we separate what can reasonably move ahead from what needs formal approval? That way, we don't ignore the process, but we also don't stop more than necessary."
- 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 may initially interpret the Australian approach as too informal.
- Australians see Germans/Austrians as rigid when every adjustment seems to require another formal approval loop.
- Irish colleagues see both sides as partly right, but become frustrated that the team struggles to distinguish between practical flexibility and decisions requiring formal accountability.
- 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?

Open Resolution Directions (Contextual)

Scene 1 – Kick-off Meeting
Teams might explore how different levels of detail serve different needs. The German and Austrian colleagues may need the full plan for risk control, governance, technical quality, and accountability. The Australians may need a short, practical working tool for day-to-day coordination. The Irish colleague may help bridge these needs by suggesting a layered approach: a detailed reference plan, a shorter working version, and clear rules for when decisions need formal approval.
Scene 2 – Delivery Delay
The delay raises the question: When does a change need formal approval, and when is pragmatism acceptable? Different thresholds for risk become visible. The Australian response is not necessarily anti-process; it may be based on the assumption that practical alternatives can be checked quickly. The Irish contribution may be to ask what type of decision this is: technical, contractual, commercial, coordination-related, or merely operational.
Scene 3 – Escalation
The heated call highlights contrasting comfort levels with direct disagreement, humour, documentation, and maintaining harmony. Australians and Irish colleagues may both use humour, but not always in the same way. The group may need to reflect on when humour builds trust and when it starts to undermine seriousness or respect.
Scene 4 – On-Site Decision Point
The faulty component forces a choice: Stop the whole process until formal approval is complete, or continue with unaffected work while the issue is clarified? The group could reflect on how accountability, hierarchy, technical judgement, and practical progress shape such decisions.
The Irish perspective may help reframe the issue: not "process versus pragmatism," but "what can move now, what needs documentation, and what must be approved before we continue?"

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Contruction and trade

Intercultural lenses

From Austria/Germany

- Perception of Australians: Seen as too casual, too informal and sometimes not detailed enough. Humour, first-name culture and pragmatic problem-solving may appear careless or insufficiently structured.
- Typical irritation: "They are too relaxed. Do they really take the work seriously?"
- Learning potential: Germans/Austrians can benefit from separating informal style from actual work standards. The tone may be casual, but expectations around safety, reliability, performance and results are high.
- Key insight: It's not about perfect procedure for its own sake. It is about practical, safe and reliable completion. However, safety rules are not optional, especially in construction and trade contexts.

From Malaysia/Singapore

- Perception of Australians: Work culture may feel very informal and humorous, even with supervisors, clients or senior staff. 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 help build trust and rapport, while remembering that responsibility, accountability and performance are still expected.
- Key insight: Hierarchies are flatter in style, but not absent. First names and banter do not mean there is no hierarchy. Australians may still defer to bosses, clients or senior trades, especially in public.

Cultural Contrasts with Australia (Summary)

🇩🇪 Germany vs. Australia

👉 Germany: strong rule orientation, detail-focus, technical correctness, formal procedures.
👉 Australia: pragmatic, solution-focused, informal and humorous. Work may look relaxed, but expectations around safety, reliability and results are high.

🇦🇹 Austria vs. Australia

👉 Austria: structured planning, careful preparation, formal respect for procedures and roles.
👉 Australia: more informal tone, practical problem-solving, flexible communication. However, hierarchy still exists and safety procedures must be taken seriously.

🇲🇾 Malaysia vs. Australia

👉 Malaysia: hierarchy and authority are respected, communication may be more indirect, and senior approval can carry strong weight.
👉 Australia: hierarchy is often less visible because of first names, humour and informal speech. However, this does not mean hierarchy disappears, especially with bosses, clients or senior trades.

🇮🇪 Ireland vs. Australia

👉 Ireland: informal, humorous and relationship-oriented, with practical problem-solving and a strong ability to read the social tone.
👉 Australia: similarly informal and humorous, but often more direct and more explicit about performance, WHS, personal accountability and speaking up on site.

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Topic	Do's ✅	Don'ts ❌
Work attitude	Be practical, reliable and outcome-oriented. When a problem comes up, people expect you to help find a workable solution.	Don't mistake the casual style for low expectations. Poor workmanship, excuses or lack of ownership are not accepted.
Performance standards	Deliver what you said you would deliver. Be on time, prepared, productive and willing to help.	Don't assume "no worries" means nobody cares. Results, quality and reliability matter.
Safety culture	Take WHS seriously. Know the site rules, attend toolbox talks, wear PPE and follow instructions. If you are unsure, ask before acting.	Don't copy what you have seen on another site or assume "this is probably fine." Safety shortcuts can have serious consequences.
White Card	Be aware that construction work generally requires a White Card, also known as general construction induction training. Treat this as a baseline, not a formality.	Don't enter the construction context assuming previous international experience automatically replaces local safety induction.
Personal accountability	Understand that safety responsibility does not only sit with "management." Supervisors, officers and workers can all have duties.	Don't ignore unsafe behaviour because "someone else is responsible." In serious cases, consequences can include heavy fines or personal liability.
Drug and alcohol policy	Expect strict drug and alcohol rules on many worksites, especially in safety-critical environments. Testing may be part of workplace policy, particularly after incidents or where impairment is suspected.	Don't assume cannabis is treated casually. Recreational cannabis is illegal in most Australian states and territories, and a positive test can have workplace consequences.
Communication	Speak clearly, directly and simply. Confirm what needs to	Don't give long theoretical explanations when a clear

Topic	Do's ✅	Don'ts ❌
	be done, by when, and to what standard.	instruction or practical answer is needed.
Humour and banter	Light humour, self-irony and informal chat can help build trust.	Don't confuse banter with lack of seriousness. Also avoid jokes about safety, drugs, race, gender or someone's competence.
Hierarchy and respect	Use first names and keep the tone informal. Earn respect through reliability, competence and practical contribution. Speak up when safety, quality or delivery are at risk, but read the room.	Don't confuse informality and egalitarianism with absence of hierarchy. Australians may still defer to bosses, clients or senior trades, especially in public. At the same time, overemphasising titles or status can come across as arrogant.
Teamwork on site	Get involved, watch how the team works, ask practical questions and help where appropriate.	Don't stand back too much or behave as if hands-on work is beneath you.
Time and breaks	Be punctual and expect early starts. Breaks such as "smoko" can be important for team connection as well as rest.	Don't arrive late, disappear without communicating, or treat breaks as unimportant to the team rhythm.
Pragmatism vs. rules	Be pragmatic within safe and legal boundaries. Look for practical solutions that still meet safety, quality and compliance expectations.	Don't interpret pragmatism as permission to bypass safety rules, permits, site procedures or legal requirements.
Social interaction	Keep conversation relaxed and grounded. Sport, weekend plans, weather, travel and practical work topics are usually safe.	Don't be overly formal, withdrawn or intense. Avoid sensitive topics such as politics, religion or personal criticism unless the relationship allows it.

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Videoconference Etiquette in Australia

Checklist

Do's ✅	Don'ts ❌
Log in on time (1–2 minutes before is fine).	Don't be overly formal (titles like "Mr./Ms." or stiff, bureaucratic language).
Switch on your camera, unless it's a very large group.	Don't keep your camera off permanently, especially if the goal is building team relationships.
Address people by first name – colleagues and managers alike.	Don't give long monologues or dominate – equality is valued.
Start off casually and friendly – small talk about the weather, weekend, sports, or travel works well.	Don't speak negatively about managers or colleagues – Australians place high value on "mateship" (camaraderie).
Test your audio and tech beforehand (microphone, camera, internet).	Don't brag or emphasize hierarchy – quickly seen as uncollegial.
Smart casual look – a clean shirt or polo is often enough.	Don't communicate in overly complicated or indirect ways – clarity beats diplomatic detours.
Give everyone a fair chance to speak – don't interrupt, listen actively.	
Keep your wording short and direct, but stay friendly.	
Allow a bit of humor, as long as it's respectful.	

Intercultural lenses

Seen from Austria

Formality & Titles
Australians skipping titles and using first names straight away feels especially casual to Austrians. Titles like "Mag.", "Dr.", or "Ing." are taken seriously and show respect. Dropping them can feel dismissive

Dress Code
Australians showing up in polos may seem underdressed – Austrians often expect a jacket and shirt in professional contexts.

Communication Style
Australians' relaxed, humorous exchanges can feel less structured compared to the Austrian preference for clarity and thoroughness.

Hierarchy
Australians treat managers almost like equals, which may feel unusual in Austria, where formal respect for hierarchy is stronger. and on-time completion.

Seen from Malaysia

Formality & Respect
Australians' use of first names right away may feel overly casual to Malaysians, where polite distance shows respect.

Camera & Participation
Australians expect equal participation, which can feel demanding for Malaysians, where juniors normally wait to be invited to speak.

Humor & Casual Tone
Australians lighten meetings with humor, which may seem unprofessional to Malaysians in formal business contexts.

Hierarchy
Australian flatness in hierarchy can be perceived as disrespectful by Malaysians, who are used to strong deference to senior roles.

Seen from Ireland

Formality & Titles
Australians' quick use of first names usually feels familiar to Irish participants, as Irish workplace culture is also fairly informal. The main difference is that Australians may move even faster into a casual tone, even with senior managers.

Dress Code
A smart casual look in Australian video calls will usually not feel unusual to Irish participants. However, Australians may appear slightly more relaxed, and a polo shirt or casual shirt can still be seen as perfectly professional.

Communication Style
Irish communication often softens disagreement through humour, understatement or indirect wording. Australians tend to value short, clear and practical contributions, which may occasionally feel a little abrupt to Irish ears.

Hierarchy
Flat hierarchy in Australia will not feel completely unfamiliar from an Irish perspective. However, Australians may show even less interest in status, titles or formal positioning, and may expect everyone to contribute regardless of rank.

Seen from Germany

Formality & Titles
Australians dropping formal titles may come across as disrespectful to Germans, who are accustomed to 'Herr/ Frau' and professional titles.

Dress Code
Polo shirts can seem too informal to Germans, who typically associate professionalism with business attire.

Communication Style
Germans may perceive Australian conversation as too short and casual – lacking the detail and structured arguments they value.

Hierarchy
Flat Australian hierarchies may look like a lack of respect to Germans, who expect visible acknowledgment of authority.

Seen from Singapore

Formality & Respect
Singaporeans may view Australians' immediate use of first names as too informal, since respectful address is standard in Singaporean business culture.

Camera & Participation
Australians expect everyone to speak up, which can feel uncomfortable in Singapore, where juniors are more reserved in front of seniors.

Humor & Casual Tone
The casual humor Australians bring into business meetings can feel risky or distracting to Singaporeans, who often keep meetings serious and efficient.

Hierarchy
Australians treat leaders as peers, which can strike Singaporeans as a lack of proper respect for authority.

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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").	

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 Ireland 🇮🇪

- Australians' friendly and informal email style feels broadly familiar to us, as Irish workplace communication also often values warmth, humour and a personal touch
- The use of first names, even with managers or senior colleagues, is usually not surprising, although Australians may come across as even more direct and stripped-back in writing.
- Short emails with "Cheers", "Thanks" or "No worries" feel approachable, but at times they may seem a little too brief if more context or reassurance is expected.
- The relaxed tone and light humour can build rapport quickly, but Irish colleagues may still read between the lines more than Australians intend, especially when feedback or disagreement is expressed very directly.

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Presentation styles in different countries

Country	Presentation tendency	What works best
Germany	Principles-first	Start with context, logic, method, then conclusions.
Austria	Principles-first, but softer	Give context and rationale, with diplomatic tone.
Australia	Applications-first	Start with the point, practical relevance and examples.

Australian presentation style is usually practical, direct and applications-first.
Audiences often appreciate it when you get to the point early, explain why the topic matters, and quickly connect ideas to real examples, outcomes or next steps.

A typical effective structure is:

Step	Australian-style presentation
1	Start with the point or issue
2	Explain why it matters
3	Give practical examples or evidence
4	Show options or recommendations
5	End with clear next steps

The tone is often **informal, clear, grounded and low on self-importance**. Too much abstract theory, status signalling or overly polished "big talk" can feel less convincing unless it is quickly linked to practical value.

In one sentence:
Australians often want to know: *What's the point, why does it matter, and what can we do with it?*

Nature and what to be aware of

Situation	What to be aware of	Practical advice
Beaches	Rip currents are often a bigger everyday risk than sharks.	Swim **between the red and yellow flags**. If there are no flags, the beach is not supervised.
Heat and sun	Sunburn, dehydration and heat exhaustion can happen quickly.	Use sunscreen, hat, water, shade; avoid long walks in extreme heat.
Bushwalking / hiking	Getting lost, dehydration, injury, sudden weather changes.	Tell someone your route, carry water, wear proper shoes, check conditions.
Moving rocks, logs or garden debris	Snakes, spiders, scorpions or ants may shelter underneath.	Don't use bare hands. Wear gloves and closed shoes; move things carefully.
Reaching into dark spaces	Spiders, snakes or insects may hide in holes, sheds, wood piles or long grass.	Don't put your hands where you can't see. Use a stick or tool first.
Shoes left outside	Spiders or insects may crawl inside.	Shake shoes out before putting them on.
Snakes	Venomous snakes exist, but usually avoid people.	Don't approach or try to move them. Step back slowly and leave them alone.
Snake bite	Movement spreads venom faster.	Call **000**, keep the person still, apply pressure immobilisation if trained.
Spiders	Some species, such as funnel-web spiders, are medically significant.	Avoid blind reaching; use gloves outdoors; seek medical help for serious bites.
Crocodiles	Relevant mainly in northern Australia.	Obey warning signs. Never swim in crocodile habitat.
Marine stingers / jellyfish	Serious in tropical northern waters, especially in stinger season.	Follow local beach advice; use stinger nets or suits where recommended.
Sharks	Rare, but part of ocean risk awareness.	Swim at patrolled beaches, avoid swimming at dawn/dusk or near fishing activity.
Ticks and insects	Bites can cause irritation, allergic reactions or illness.	Use repellent, cover skin in bush areas, check yourself after walks.
Bushfires	Can affect travel, roads, air quality and safety.	Check fire danger ratings and local alerts before travelling.
Wildlife generally	Animals can bite, scratch or become stressed.	Don't touch, feed or corner wildlife. Keep a respectful distance.

Australia's natural environment is beautiful and best approached with respect, not fear. Swim between the flags, follow signs, avoid reaching into places you cannot see, and take sun, heat and water conditions seriously.

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Useful internet links

"Here Be Bogans": Four Miniatures of Sydney Stereotypes
https://bigthink.com/strange-maps/524-here-be-bogans-four-miniatures-of-sydney-stereotypes/

Geert Hofstede Culture Dimension
https://www.theculturefactor.com/country-comparison-tool?countries=australia%2Caustria%2Cgermany

Life Swap Episode 6 – Just Sharon
https://vimeo.com/128709025

Life Swap Episode 2 – The Tea Towel Stinks
https://vimeo.com/81393966

How good is Australia – Honest Government Ad
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6vvpQEaRdk

Australian values and workplace culture
https://www.migration.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-08/Australian-Values-and-Workplace-Culture.pdf

Life Swap Episode 9 – She'll be right
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiWgJcomGro

Slang: What Aussies call other Aussies
https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/history-culture/2013/05/slang-what-aussies-call-other-aussies/

Stella Ting-Toomey – Face negotiation
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQJcMas_dnw

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Useful internet sources

Fons Trompenaars: Riding the waves of culture – peaches and coconuts
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmyfjKjcbm0

Local lingo
https://www.australian-information-stories.com/australian-slang.html
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PWh9IGFbvls
https://nomadsworld.com/aussie-slang/
https://theconversation.com/togs-or-swimmers-why-australians-use-different-words-to-describe-the-same-things-52007

Australian food
https://australianfoodtimeline.com.au/tag/1770s/
Happy little vegemites: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h5r3HAJh8es
Tim Tam Slam: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8hEo4N8Nhs
https://nomadsworld.com/australian-food/
https://www.contiki.com/six-two/article/iconic-australian-foods/

Aboriginal culture
https://www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/culture-and-empowering-communities
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cf-dK8HFP2c
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUIgkbExn6I
https://www.britannica.com/topic/Australian-Aboriginal/Beliefs-and-aesthetic-values
https://www.geo.de/reisen/reise-inspiration/aborigine--wo-man-in-australien-die-kultur-der-aborigine-sehen-kann-30518590.html

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Useful internet sources

Presenting and business

https://erinmeyer.com/tailor-your-presentation-to-fit-the-culture/
https://culturalatlas.sbs.com.au/australian-culture/australian-culture-business-culture
https://business.gov.au/people/customers/communicate-with-customers
https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/minisite/static/4ca0813c-585e-4fe1-86eb-de665e65001a/fpwhitepaper/foreign-policy-white-paper/chapter-one-foundations-success.html
https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/free-resources/business/business/magazine/influencing-across-cultures

Nature, wildlife and what to be aware of

https://parks.qld.gov.au/before-you-visit/visit-with-care/be-wildlife-aware
https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/environment/docs/pa-gen-snakesafety.pdf
https://environment.qld.gov.au/wildlife/animals/living-with/snakes/frequent-questions
https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/beach-safety
https://www.surflifesaving.com.au/beach-safety/rip-currents/
https://australian.museum/learn/animals/spiders/
https://lifesaving.com.au/safety-info/marine-stingers
https://beachsafe.org.au/surf-safety
https://www.australia.com/en-ca/facts-and-planning/health-and-safety/

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