

## Authority Differences Between Colombians and Australians in the Workplace

The most striking difference that I have observed between Colombia and Australia in the workplace is their Attitudes Towards Authority. Having been an employee in Colombia for over 10 years, I became accustomed to follow instructions and executing tasks the way my superior instructed. I was surprised when in my first job in Australia, my supervisor not only created an atmosphere of open dialogue in the workplace and was willing to take my observations into account, but also shared the company's challenges even during the interview prior to any formal commitment.

Upon recognizing the Hofstede's principles (Matusitz & Musambira, 2013), I have come to realize that these differences could be attributed to the cultural dimension of Power Distance. In Colombian culture, there exists an acceptance of unequal distribution of power, this is accompanied with the idea that we need to accept and unequivocally respect the decisions made by our superiors. On the other hand, within Australia society, hierarchy does not impede to talk directly with superiors, gain access to the information about the company or participate in the company's decisions. These first-hand experiences I have encountered are confirmed by the Geert Hofstede comparison tool (Hofstede, 2023), where Colombia scores 67 and Australia scores 38 for the Power Distance indicator, reflecting that in Colombia the gap between employees and superiors is nearly twice as it is in Australia.

Another notable difference I have come across involves the manner how we address our superiors in Colombia. In the workplace and even outside of it, we incorporate titles like "engineer" or "doctor". This custom persists even in rural areas, where bosses usually are landowners that might not have professional education, yet we add titles like "Don" (influenced by our Spanish heritage) or "patron" to demonstrate respect. This marks a remarkable difference to Australia where the norm is to address each other by our first names, no matter the rank or position.

Considering all these insights, I think that adapting my cultural principles to the Australian workplace would have positive personal outcomes, not only because I will improve my communication skills by increasing my possibilities to talk, but also because I will remove preconceptions on hierarchies and fear of power that I used to have in Colombia. However, these words have given rise to a question: If I shift my mindset parameters, how can I readjust to Power Distance where I come back to Colombia once again?.

## References

- Matusitz, J., & Musambira, G. (2013). Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Technology: Analyzing Hofstede's Dimensions and Human Development Indicators. *Journal of Technology in Human Services*, 31(1), 42–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228835.2012.738561>

Hofstede, G. (n.d.), *Country comparison Graphs*, <https://geerthofstede.com/country-comparisongraphs/>