# Introduction

The integration of international students into the Australian workforce, particularly in the IT sector, hinges significantly on the understanding and adaptation to the local workplace culture. This report delves into the dynamics of the Australian IT industry's culture and its effects on international students. It aims to provide actionable insights and guidance to enhance their integration process.

# Overview of Australia's IT Industry Evolution

The Australian IT industry is growing but still lags behind global leaders like Japan and the USA. Australia will need 445,000 additional tech workers to meet international competition in 2030. Although growth is expected, there is a need to be cautious that the scale of the increase in the workforce might not match the level of skills, risking a $16 billion loss in their economy. Migrant workers, who make up about 45% of the tech workforce, experience severe problems in employment. Thirty-nine per cent have to wait over one year to get their first job, while nearly 20% describe their skills as underutilised (Australian Computer Society, 2023). The future shall also experience exponential growth of artificial intelligence transforming job roles and skill demands. Increased AI integration promises new opportunities, especially for international students with fresh perspectives and skills (Walsh, 2019). As the industry evolves, there is a growing need for professionals who can communicate effectively with AI tools, and communication skills are becoming increasingly important in the IT industry (Australian Computer Society, 2023).

# Australian Workplace Culture - Effective Communication

Effective communication in the Australian IT industry is critically hindered by language barriers and cultural differences, which pose significant challenges for international students and migrant workers. The industry's reliance on clear and precise communication is compounded by these workers often being limited in English, which not only affects their performance but also impacts team dynamics and project outcomes(Australian Computer Society, 2023).

The initial barrier for many international students is the language barrier. This issue is not only about speaking or writing in English but also about understanding English idioms, technical jargon and cultural differences in Australian business communication. The reluctance of international students to socialise with local students exacerbates the problem, as these interactions are essential to improving language skills and understanding the contextual use of English professionals. Instead, many international students tend to cluster with peers from similar backgrounds and languages, while providing a comfortable sense of community, and further limiting their exposure to language practice (Nguyen, 2020). Differences in accents add to the barrier of understanding. Indeed, employees from different cultural backgrounds acknowledge that many cases of misunderstanding, even the formation of misconceptions, are caused by differences in accent. Australian English has a unique pronunciation and intonation that can be challenging for international students (Pham, 2018). Australian employees are also adapting to the different accents of their international colleagues, which creates challenges for effective communication (Lakha, 2005). Therefore, international students have to communicate more diversely to overcome the language barrier.

Moreover, communication approaches differ across cultures, impacting workplace interactions and expectations. For example, many Asian cultures focus on a more implicit form of communication, where many information are not expressed directly. This sometimes causes confusion and misinterpretation among Australian colleagues, who are used to direct communication. The Australian workplace often values directness, whereas some cultures may view this approach as overly confrontational or disrespectful, leading to a cultural clash that can affect workplace harmony and individual job performance. The cultural perceptions of communication within the workplace also reflect deeper societal values that can impact interpersonal dynamics. Australians are often viewed as individualistic, with a communication style that is open and relatively informal. In this respect, Asian cultures may focus on harmony in a group and a subtler form of communication. These differences can lead to perceptions of Australians as aggressive or pushy, while Australians might view their international teammates as unpredictable or uncooperative (Loh et al., 2009). Therefore, recognising and adapting to these communication styles is essential for fostering a harmonious and effective multicultural workplace environment.

The problems of communication barriers are not just social but are deeply embedded in organisational structures, making it difficult for international students and workers to navigate. These individuals often struggle with asserting opinions, leading meetings, and managing projects due to cultural differences in communication styles (Arkoudis et al., 2009). The impact of these barriers affects not only personal experiences but also the operational efficacy of organisations within the Australian IT industry. As the industry globalises and increasingly relies on a diverse workforce, addressing communication challenges is critical for international talent (Lakha, 2005).

# Integration into the Australian Workplace

Understanding Australian workplace culture is crucial for international students to successfully integrate into the IT industry. In understanding local communications and cultural differences, international students are relatively better placed to interact with colleagues and make contributions to the team.

Firstly, international students must recognise the importance of clear and direct communication common in Australian workplaces. This includes not only improving English language proficiency but also learning to understand and use local idioms and professional jargon correctly. Actively engaging in social interactions with local peers is essential as it provides experience and a deeper understanding of how language is contextually used in the environment international students also need to step out of their comfort zones and interact with diverse groups, thereby overcoming language barriers and gaining confidence in their communication skills (Nguyen, 2020).

Moreover, international students must understand Australian IT workplaces' communication styles. Grasping this direct method of communication can help international students adjust their perceptions and reactions towards colleagues at work accordingly. In practice, international students can seek mentors in the workplace who can provide guidance and feedback in a professional setting and also establish professional relationships and networks that are crucial for career development.

In a way, international students adapt communication styles and norms to introduce valuable new perspectives from their backgrounds to teams. For example, international students are likely to point out that fresh perspective and heterogeneous problem-solving approaches brought into teams are bound to spur more ideas. Additionally, their openness to cultural learning can serve as a model, fostering mutual respect and integration. This not only contributes to their personal growth but also enhances cultural diversity in the workplace.

# Conclusion

The effective integration of international students into Australia's IT industry crucially depends on their ability to adapt to workplace culture and communicate effectively. By actively engaging with local peers and embracing Australian workplace culture, international students can overcome cultural and language barriers, and enrich the industry's diversity and competitiveness. Ultimately, international students can transform challenges into opportunities for growth, taking a critical step forward in the IT industry.

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