

**A CULTURAL COMPARISON OF COMPETENCY PROFILES
AMONGST GERMAN, US AND AUSTRALIAN MANAGERS**

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Introduction

The importance of understanding differences in national profiles when developing theories about the nature of effective management has attracted the attention of an increasing number of organisational researchers since Hofstede published his original and seminal work, *Culture's Consequences*, in 1980. In the United States in particular, Hofstede's cross-cultural comparative analysis provided researchers of the time with a definitive framework for benchmarking western-style organisational practices against those of Japanese firms, for example. Parallelling this, Boyatzis's (1982) research into managerial competencies was initiated at a time when the United States was awakening to its diminishing world competitiveness in relation to Japan's

emerging economic ascendancy. Subsequent investigations into managerial effectiveness in the United States, Britain and Australia have concentrated on identifying specific sets of broad skills categories of relevance to the general practice of management (Barge & Hirokawa, 1989; Cockerill, 1989). These efforts have led to the development of generic competency elements which can be grouped into broad domains of managerial endeavour, providing meaningful frameworks for assessing managerial competence. Whilst these frameworks have proven useful within the context of the nation of their origin, insufficient work to date has been produced in terms of establishing genuinely generic elements which might underpin managerial effectiveness at the international level.

The United States, Australia and Germany: Some Initial Observations

The authors considered it useful to begin an international comparative analysis of the competency framework mentioned above, by selecting three countries which share a number of documented similarities, while at the same time possessing certain important differences. Accordingly, the United States, Germany and Australia were selected. The United States has the world's largest economy with a GDP of US\$ 6,737 billion, while Germany's GDP of US\$ 2,075 billion makes it the third largest economic player on the world stage. Australia's GDP of US\$ 321 billion is also not insubstantial, giving it a ranking of 15 in world terms, ahead of other influential economies such as Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore (Bevan et al., 1996).

In terms of the index of economic freedom, published annually by the Heritage foundation, countries are ranked on the basis of ten indicators of how government intervention can restrict the economic relations between individuals (Bevan et al., 1996: 27). Hong Kong and Singapore have historically been considered to enjoy the greatest freedom in terms of trade policies, taxation laws, and foreign investment rules. The United States is ranked 7th in the world on this index, while Germany and Australia are both ranked 17th, indicating relative economic freedom by world standards. The United States and Germany have two of the largest industrial outputs in the world in dollar terms (ranked two and three respectively, behind Japan, ranked first). Australia ranks 13th on the world stage in terms of its industrial output. The US

and Germany also have two of the largest world outputs of chemicals, machinery, textiles, processed food, cereal, meat, and rubber. Australia has one of the largest world outputs of commodities such as raw wool, lead and zinc, and shares high output status with the US in the production of aluminium, copper, and precious metals such as gold and silver (Bevan et al., 1996).

Of the three countries in question, the US alone is a world leader in the production of oil, natural gas, cotton, wheat, and energy. All three nations are amongst the top ten producers of coal in the world, and both the US and Australia are amongst the top ten in terms of energy consumption per capita. Germany's per capita consumption of energy places it 21st in world terms. All three nations have high tertiary enrolment figures, by world standards, when calculated as a percentage of the relevant age group (USA: 76%, Australia: 40%, Germany: 36%) and high mean years of schooling (US: 12.4 years, Australia: 12 years, Germany: 11.6 years). All three nations also enjoy reasonably high levels of life expectancy; Australia: 78.3 years, Germany: 76.8 years, US: 76.8 years (Bevan et al., 1996).

In summary, all three nations are highly educated and enjoy leadership status in key areas of economic performance on the world stage. It is of interest and importance, therefore, to investigate the perceptions of managers from each of these nations, in order to pinpoint noticeable similarities and apparent differences, with a view to developing clearer insights into the potential links between management imperatives and national competitiveness.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

As a means of gaining some preliminary insights into the potential parameters of difference amongst managers from the United States, Australia and Germany, Hofstede's research into national variations across cultures was examined. Hofstede (1980) conceived of culture as a construct which manifests itself in an organisation as a result of the organisation's location within a particular society. On the basis of an extensive analysis of 88,000 responses to a questionnaire survey of IBM employees in 66 countries, Hofstede argued that there are four discrete dimensions of culture.

These are: *individualism* (the extent to which people are oriented towards self-interest versus an orientation towards the interests of a wider group of which they are a part), *uncertainty avoidance* (the extent to which people seek to minimise uncertainty versus the extent to which they are tolerant of ambiguity), *power distance* (the extent to which relationships between superiors and subordinates are distant and formal versus close and informal), and *masculinity* (the extent to which success is defined in terms of assertiveness, challenge and ambition, rather than in terms of cooperation, interdependence and nurturing). On the basis of his research, Hofstede demonstrated that countries differ significantly in their ‘scores’ along each of these dimensions.

Three important limitations to Hofstede’s original work, however, have been pointed out (Sondergaard, 1994). Firstly, the limitations of collecting data from employees of a single organisation in order to develop inferences about national cultures have been noted (Robinson, 1983: 112). Secondly, it has been suggested that the dimensions derived from Hofstede’s analysis may be artifacts of the period in which the surveys were conducted (Warner, 1981: 76;). Thirdly, questions have been raised about the validity of inferring values from attitude surveys alone (Schooler, 1983: 167). Sondergaard (1994) notes that despite these criticisms, Hofstede’s work is widely acknowledged, receiving no less than 1063 direct references in international journals between 1980 and 1993, and has provided a basis for 61 replicative studies. More importantly, his work has been acknowledged to have been based on a rigorous research design, a systematic data collection, and a coherent theory to explain national cultural differences (Sondergaard, 1994).

Comparative scores along the four cultural dimensions, derived from Hofstede’s original research for the US, Germany, and Australia are presented in Table 1. In terms of the dimension of power distance, the United States, Australia, and Germany are all fairly low rating countries, in comparison to other nations surveyed. This indicates a significant tendency towards greater equality among organisational members in these countries. According to Hofstede’s data, scores on this dimension separate the European and Anglo countries generally, from much of the rest of the world (Smith, 1992:41). This observation suggests that the power relations in US, German and Australian organisations may share more similarities than differences, and

that the managerial priorities of each nation may be expected to reflect the influence of this relatively small power distance.

TABLE 1
Hofstede's Original Culture Scores: US, Australia, Germany

	USA	AUS	GER
power distance	40	36	35
uncertainty avoidance	46	51	65
individualism-collectivism	91	90	67
masculinity-femininity	62	61	66

Managers from each of these three countries often meet with larger power distances abroad, but do not find great difficulty in adapting to their subordinates' expectations of greater dependency (Hofstede, 1989: 392). These same managers can experience some discomfort in countries with extremely small power distances, however, such as Denmark or Sweden, because they tend to encounter a lack of respect for managerial prerogatives (Hofstede, 1989: 393). It is therefore reasonable to assume that managers from each of the three nations under investigation are likely to reflect at least moderate preferences for adherence to some measure of formal authority. In terms of the relative prioritisation of managerial competencies, it will be instructive to observe aggregated rankings among managers from the US, Germany and Australia along dimensions such as *coordination across internal boundaries*, and *establishing coordinating mechanisms within one's sphere of influence*.

The dimension of uncertainty avoidance, according to Hofstede (1989: 393), determines the cultural need for structure. In *weak* uncertainty avoidance cultures, individuals are uncomfortable with rigid systems consisting of entrenched hierarchies and strict rules. They are more attracted to flexible, open systems which make innovation, improvisation and negotiation necessary features of managerial effectiveness (Hofstede, 1989). In terms of Hofstede's original data, both the USA and Australia are considered to be weak on uncertainty avoidance, with scores of 46

and 51 respectively, whereas Germany is classified as falling into the range of medium uncertainly avoidance, with a score of 65. Germany's somewhat higher score on this dimension indicates a greater need for establishing and adhering to formal rules in order to maintain order. There is also a greater emphasis on the attainment of expertise as a measure of individual effectiveness in the organisational arena. This is highlighted by the following observation:

“The highly skilled and responsible German workers do not necessarily need a manager, American-style, to “motivate” them. They expect their boss or Meister to assign their tasks and to be the expert in resolving technical problems. Comparisons of similar German, British and French organizations show the Germans as having the highest rate of personnel in productive roles and the lowest in both leadership and staff roles” (Hofstede, 1993: 81-94).

In terms of the perceptions of managers surrounding managerial competencies, then, it may be expected that US and Australian managers will place higher priorities on interpersonal and team leadership competencies - such as *the ability to negotiate effectively* and *the ability to motivate others* - than their German counterparts. At the same time, the German managers may be expected to rate technical competencies - such as *having a knowledge of management information systems* and *information technology* - more highly than managers from either the USA or Australia.

The dimension of individualism-collectivism shows an even greater difference between the perceptual orientations of German managers on the one hand, and US and Australian managers on the other. Individualism distinguishes countries in which employees view their individual identity as paramount, as opposed to countries where individuality is defined predominantly by one's obligations to a particular group (Smith, 1992: 41). Hofstede's original data shows the United States and Australia to be the two most individualistic countries in the world, with scores of 91 and 90 respectively. Germany's score on this dimension is a more moderate 67; placing it 14th in Hofstede's world rankings on individuality.

The extremely high scores attached to the USA and Australia indicate a very deep cultural need to explain every act in relation to individual self-interest. It may be expected, therefore, that managerial competency elements such as *achievement-orientation* and *self-development initiative* will be regarded as very necessary in the eyes of managers from these countries. Germany's more moderate ranking along this dimension, indicating a less extreme tendency for individual self-interest to dominate, may point to a greater focus leveled towards other dimensions of managerial competence, such as *problem-solving ability* or *product/service knowledge*.

The dimension of masculinity-femininity indicates a high level of similarity among the three nations under investigation. Hofstede referred to 'masculine cultures' as those where values such as assertiveness, ambition, and competitiveness are highly prized. He distinguished these from 'feminine cultures' where cooperation and interdependence are more highly valued (Smith, 1992: 41). The USA, Germany and Australia are all well above average in their orientation towards the masculine end of the spectrum, indicating a tendency towards viewing performance and results as important, and seeing ambition as providing the necessary drive for achieving success.

In summary, Hofstede's (1980) research shows the three nations to be very similar in terms of their cultural orientations on the dimensions of power distance and masculinity-femininity. Differences emerge, however, when we compare these countries along the dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and individualism-collectivism. Germany is higher than either the US or Australia on uncertainty avoidance, and is considerably less individualistic in outlook than either of these nations. These differences are likely to reveal themselves in the perceptions of managers from each nation concerning the relative importance of certain specific management competency elements. In particular, Germany's somewhat higher uncertainty avoidance may predispose managers from this nation towards emphasising more formal coordinating mechanisms in the organisational context. Additionally, Germany's less individualistic tendencies may manifest themselves in a less noticeable preoccupation with interpersonal dimensions of managerial competence, and a more pragmatic outlook on technical and problem-solving competencies.

Investigating Managerial Competencies Across Nations

As a result of a year-long review of the international literature on managerial competency frameworks, the authors conducted a content analysis on 24 of the most extensive studies identified. This analysis originally yielded 99 competency elements of relevance to effective modern management practice, and was reported in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* (Hunt & Wallace, 1997). Further analysis of the competency elements from the above study has enabled the authors to refine this list to 91 items, whilst retaining its comprehensive nature. This framework has been tested on a wide range of managers in Australia over the past three years, providing encouraging results in terms of the perceptions of managers surveyed as to the importance of each of the competency elements identified. In addition, the authors have used factor analysis to uncover competency groupings pertinent to specific and universal domains of managerial endeavour (Wallace & Hunt, 1996).

The current study takes this investigation a step further by probing the perceptions of managers from the United States, Germany and Australia as to the relative necessity of each of the 91 competency items. More specifically, the following research questions are addressed: How necessary is each competency element perceived to be by US, Australian, and German managers, respectively? Does the perceived necessity of competency elements vary according to national grouping? Which particular competency elements show the greatest variations in perceived necessity according to national grouping? Do these variations reflect the differences along cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede?

Method

To test the research questions, a survey questionnaire of practising managers in the United States, Germany and Australia was undertaken. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 91 competency elements according to how necessary they were perceived to be in relation to their current organisational position. A 5-point Likert-type scale was employed, using the following anchors: (1) not at all necessary, (2) occasionally necessary, (3) moderately necessary, (4) considerably necessary, (5)

absolutely necessary. Relevant demographic questions were also included in the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to indicate their job-title and current managerial level (junior, middle, or senior management). The questionnaire was forwarded to 785 managers throughout the United States, Germany and Australia. After standard follow-up procedures and inspection of completed returns, 400 questionnaires were retained for analysis, giving an overall response rate of 50.9%. In the case of the Australian sample, 590 questionnaires were distributed to managers across a wide range of medium and large organisations from the service and manufacturing sectors (finance, telecommunications, and automotive industries); 288 useable questionnaires were returned, giving a 48.8% response rate. Responses according to managerial level were as follows; junior 33%, middle 33%, senior 34%. In the case of the US sample, 120 questionnaires were distributed to managers in a range of medium and large organisations from the service and manufacturing sectors (finance, education, telecommunications, automotive and computer industries); 58 useable questionnaires were returned, giving a response rate of 48.3%. Responses according to managerial level were as follows; junior 38%, middle 45%, senior 17%. In the case of the German sample, 75 questionnaires were distributed to a random selection of junior, middle and senior managers from a multinational telecommunications company, at corporate headquarters in Munich. Useable returns totalled 54, giving a 72% response rate. Responses according to managerial level were as follows: junior 37%, middle 24%, senior 39%. Data were subsequently analysed through SPSS descriptive and multivariate analysis procedures.

Results

How necessary is each competency element perceived to be by US, Australian and German managers, respectively?

The rankings of the 91 competency elements for each nation are presented in Tables 2, 3 and 4. On the whole, the mean scores attached to each competency are very high in the case of the Australian sample. The first 37 competencies have a mean score greater than 4.00, indicating a perception that they are all considerably necessary. Indeed 89 of the 91 competencies have a mean score greater than 3.00 in the

Australian group of respondents, indicating a wide acceptance that all but two of the competencies listed are at least of moderate importance.

TABLE 2
Competency Rankings- German Cases

1. personal time management	4.35	47. persuading & influencing superiors	3.28
2. accurate problem diagnosis	4.25	48. forging alliances (external)	3.26
3. capacity for innovative thinking	4.28	49. participating in team situations	3.24
4. problem solving ability	4.28	50. tolerance of ambiguity, uncertainty	3.23
5. analytical capacity	4.19	51. persuading & influencing subords.	3.22
6. personal integrity	4.17	52. vision for organisation's future	3.15
7. professionalism & self confidence	4.17	53. forecasting	3.11
8. verbal communication	4.15	54. facilitating group interaction	3.07
9. judgement and perceptiveness	4.11	55. ethical and social responsibility	3.02
10. ability to withstand great pressure	4.11	56. political acumen	3.02
11. avoid. spontan. decis. w/approp.	4.07	57. situational leadership	3.02
12. environmental awareness	4.06	58. underst. political implicat. of decis.	3.02
13. diplomacy	4.04	59. evaluating staff performance	3.00
14. co-ord. across internal boundaries	3.98	60. underst. HR implicat. of decisions	3.00
15. evaluation of alternatives	3.94	61. forging alliances with superiors	2.98
16. identifying opportunities	3.94	62. self-development initiative	2.96
17. written communication	3.93	63. est. co-ord. mechanisms (internal)	2.96
18. negotiating effectively	3.89	64. recognising performance - subords.	2.96
19. achievement orientation	3.85	65. financial management	2.96
20. ability to learn from past failures	3.81	66. building team morale	2.94
21. awareness of interpersonal differ.	3.81	67. individ. consideration to subords.	2.91
22. cross cultural awareness	3.79	68. understanding info. technology	2.87
23. capacity to initiate change	3.78	69. short term planning	2.85
24. flexibility in decision making	3.78	70. forging alliances with colleagues	2.85
25. problem identification (internal)	3.76	71. persuading & influencing peers	2.85
26. enthusiasm, commitment, drive	3.74	72. resolv. conflict w-peers, superiors	2.83
27. sensitivity to national differences	3.74	73. product/service marketing	2.81
28. identifying deg. of urgency - decis.	3.69	74. building teams	2.78
29. leading and conducting meetings	3.65	75. financial accounting	2.78
30. delegating effectively	3.63	76. quality monitoring	2.78
31. underst. financial implic. of decis.	3.63	77. developing org. wide strategies	2.74
32. development of med. term plans	3.61	78. problem identification (external)	2.72
33. attendance, punctuality, time usage	3.59	79. product/service distribution	2.69
34. capacity to take the initiative	3.56	80. est. control systems (internal)	2.54
35. effective risk taking	3.50	81. resolving conflict among subords.	2.50
36. motivating others	3.50	82. designing and reviewing org. units	2.48
37. product/service knowledge	3.46	83. sales and advertising	2.44
38. participating in meetings	3.44	84. market research	2.33
39. self-awareness	3.41	85. operations scheduling	2.33
40. coaching and developing others	3.41	86. productivity monitoring	2.26
41. making spontaneous decisions	3.41	87. succession planning	2.17
42. organisational awareness	3.35	88. industrial relations	1.81
43. presenting to corporate meetings	3.35	89. purchasing	1.80
44. awareness of organisation mission	3.33	90. inventory administration	1.67
45. knowledge of rel. positions in org.	3.33	91. facilities & equipment maintenance	1.56
46. cost accounting	3.33		

The German sample of managers appears to be far more discriminating. This is evident from Table 2, where just 13 items have a mean score greater than 4.00, and 60 items have a mean score greater than 3.00. The table of rankings in this case suggests that as

many as 31 competency items are viewed as being less than moderately important to the German managers.

TABLE 3
Competency Rankings - Australian Cases

1. personal integrity	4.69	47. development of medium-term plans	3.89
2. ability to learn from past failures	4.54	48. ethical and social responsibility	3.88
3. verbal communication	4.54	49. environmental awareness	3.87
4. problem solving ability	4.53	50. situational leadership	3.85
5. underst. financial implic. of decis.	4.51	51. persuading and influencing peers	3.84
6. professionalism and self-confidence	4.50	52. individ. consideration to subords.	3.84
7. personal time management	4.48	53. financial management	3.82
8. self-awareness	4.44	54. forecasting	3.82
9. accurate problem diagnosis	4.41	55. persuading and influencing subords	3.78
10. achievement orientation	4.38	56. productivity monitoring	3.78
11. judgement and perceptiveness	4.37	57. cost accounting	3.76
12. enthusiasm, commitment and drive	4.36	58. evaluating staff performances	3.76
13. capacity to initiate change	4.35	59. tolerance of ambiguity	3.72
14. attendance, punctuality, time usage	4.34	60. facilitating group interaction	3.72
15. flexibility in decision-making	4.28	61. knowledge of rel. positions in org.	3.71
16. ability to withstand great pressure	4.28	62. forging alliances (external)	3.69
17. identify opportunities	4.25	63. persuading & influencing superiors	3.66
18. awareness of organisational vision	4.22	64. forging alliances with superiors	3.66
19. capacity to take the initiative	4.21	65. est. control systems (internal)	3.65
20. negotiating effectively	4.19	66. developing org. wide strategies	3.64
21. vision for organisation's future	4.19	67. resolving conflict among subords.	3.60
22. problem identification (internal)	4.18	68. leading and conducting meetings	3.58
23. diplomacy	4.18	69. est. co-ord. mechanisms (internal)	3.54
24. product/service knowledge	4.15	70. facilities & equipment maintenance	3.52
25. capacity for creative thinking	4.15	71. making spontaneous decisions	3.52
26. building morale in team situations	4.13	72. financial accounting	3.51
27. coaching and developing others	4.12	73. effective risk-taking	3.50
28. understanding HR implic. of decis.	4.12	74. resolv. conflict w-peers, superiors	3.48
29. short term planning	4.11	75. problem identification (external)	3.41
30. motivating others	4.11	76. industrial relations	3.40
31. awareness of interpersonal differ.	4.08	77. underst. political implicat. of decis.	3.40
32. self-development initiative	4.08	78. product/service marketing	3.37
33. analytical capacity	4.06	79. operations scheduling	3.31
34. delegating effectively	4.06	80. avoid. spontan. decis. w/approp.	3.29
35. identifying degrees of urgency	4.05	81. product/service distribution	3.24
36. understanding info. technology	4.04	82. succession planning	3.23
37. written communication	4.03	83. purchasing	3.20
38. participating in meetings	3.99	84. cross cultural awareness	3.17
39. quality monitoring	3.98	85. political acumen	3.10
40. co-ord. across internal boundaries	3.98	86. designing and reviewing org. units	3.10
41. evaluation of alternatives	3.98	87. market research	3.09
42. organisation awareness	3.96	88. presenting to corporate meetings	3.07
43. recognis. perfor. levels in subords.	3.95	89. sales and advertising	3.03
44. participating in team situations	3.94	90. inventory administration	2.99
45. forging alliances with colleagues	3.90	91. sensitivity to national differences	2.97
46. building teams	3.90		

The competency rankings for the US managers are presented in Table 4. The first 31 items have a mean score greater than 4.00, indicating a high level of importance attached to each of these. Indeed 74 of the 91 items have a mean score greater than 3.00, indicating a general acceptance of the necessity of over 80% of the competencies.

TABLE 4
Competency Rankings - United States Cases

1. professionalism & self confidence	4.51	47. effective risk taking	3.75
2. verbal communication	4.49	48. awareness of org. mission	3.72
3. ability to withstand great pressure	4.38	49. ethical and social responsibility	3.70
4. accurate problem diagnosis	4.38	50. individ. consid. to subordinates	3.70
5. judgement and perception	4.38	51. making spontaneous decisions	3.67
6. ability to learn from past failures	4.34	52. underst. financial implic. of decis.	3.67
7. persuading & influencing superiors	4.34	53. political acumen	3.61
8. problem solving ability	4.33	54. environmental awareness	3.59
9. enthusiasm, commitment & drive	4.31	55. forging alliances (external)	3.59
10. personal integrity	4.30	56. underst. HR implications of decis.	3.56
11. capacity to take the initiative	4.23	57. underst. political implic. of decis.	3.56
12. identif. deg. of urg. for decisions	4.21	58. development of medium term plans	3.51
13. flexibility in decision making	4.20	59. understanding info. technology	3.51
14. identifying opportunities	4.20	60. est. co-ord. mechanisms (internal)	3.47
15. achievement orientation	4.18	61. problem identification (external)	3.47
16. analytical capacity	4.18	62. evaluating staff performance	3.46
17. personal time management	4.18	63. resolv. conflict w/peers, superiors	3.46
18. motivating others	4.18	64. facilitating group interaction	3.41
19. problem identification (internal)	4.15	65. knowledge of rel. positions. in org.	3.39
20. participating in meetings	4.15	66. presenting to corporate meetings	3.39
21. tolerance of ambiguity	4.11	67. resolving conflict among subords.	3.36
22. capacity to implement change	4.11	68. forecasting	3.33
23. capacity for innovative thinking	4.08	69. developing org. wide strategies	3.31
24. written communication	4.08	70. product/service knowledge	3.30
25. persuading and influencing peers	4.08	71. quality monitoring	3.30
26. co-ord. across internal boundaries	4.03	72. establish. control systems (internal)	3.29
27. evaluation of alternatives	4.03	73. vision for organisation's future	3.21
28. short term planning	4.03	74. cross cultural awareness	3.08
29. forging alliances with superiors	4.02	75. designing organisational units	2.97
30. participating in team situations	4.00	76. productivity monitoring	2.97
31. persuading & influencing subords.	4.00	77. avoid. spontan. decis. w/approp.	2.88
32. leading and conducting meetings	3.98	78. operations scheduling	2.72
33. delegating effectively	3.97	79. financial management	2.72
34. self awareness	3.92	80. sensitivity to national differences	2.61
35. recog. perform. levels in subords.	3.92	81. cost accounting	2.61
36. forging alliances with colleagues	3.90	82. succession planning	2.54
37. attendance, punctuality, time usage	3.90	83. financial accounting	2.44
38. negotiating effectively	3.89	84. facilities and equip. maintenance	2.36
39. diplomacy	3.87	85. market research	2.30
40. situational leadership	3.87	86. product/service marketing	2.26
41. building morale in team situations	3.85	87. product/service distribution	2.22
42. building teams	3.84	88. industrial relations	2.05
43. coaching and developing others	3.84	89. purchasing	2.03
44. self development initiative	3.80	90. inventory administration	1.95
45. awareness of interpersonal diff.	3.79	91. sales and advertising	1.92
46. organisational awareness	3.77		

Does the perceived necessity of competency elements vary according to national grouping?

Variations in the listed rankings of competency elements according to national groupings are apparent from Tables 2, 3 and 4. Visual inspection of the mean scores attached to each competency element in these tables reveals numerous 'differences' in perceived levels of importance. For example, *avoiding spontaneous decisions where*

appropriate, has a mean score of 4.07 in the case of the German sample of managers; a mean score of 3.29 in the Australian sample; and a mean score of 2.88 in the US sample. Drawing upon the observations of Hofstede noted earlier in this paper, the authors attention was directed towards items which might confirm some of the particular ‘differences’ attributed to German managers, when compared with their US and Australian counterparts. The mean scores attached to the following competencies seemed to suggest significant differences amongst the three countries; *building teams*, *building team morale*, *facilitating group interaction*, *forging alliances with superiors*, *sensitivity to national differences*, *avoiding spontaneous decisions where appropriate*, and *tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty*. In summary, the rankings alone reveal quite a number of apparent differences in the perceived importance of certain competency elements.

Which particular competency elements show the greatest variations in perceived necessity according to national grouping?

TABLE 5
Twenty One of the Most Discriminating Competencies Across National Groupings

Variable	F	Sig. of F	Mean Score AUS	Mean Score USA	Mean Score GER
building team morale	25.53571	.000	4.13	3.85	2.94
building teams	18.71677	.000	3.90	3.84	2.78
providing individualised consideration to subordinates	13.90313	.000	3.84	3.70	2.91
motivating others	9.77286	.000	4.11	4.18	3.50
facilitating group interaction	9.63744	.000	3.72	3.41	3.07
avoiding spontaneous decisions where appropriate	16.04761	.000	3.29	2.88	4.07
flexibility in decision making	9.45148	.000	4.28	4.20	3.78
tolerance of ambiguity	7.41803	.001	3.72	4.11	3.23
short term planning	44.17178	.000	4.11	4.03	2.85
establishing control systems	23.64015	.000	3.65	3.29	2.54
self awareness	39.97470	.000	4.44	3.92	3.41
self development initiative	36.54967	.000	4.08	3.80	2.96
persuading / influencing peers	26.00650	.000	3.84	4.08	2.85
forging alliances with colleagues	23.16344	.000	3.90	3.90	2.85
persuading / influencing superiors	11.36797	.000	3.66	4.34	3.28
forging alliances with superiors	9.91833	.000	3.66	4.02	2.98
persuading / influencing subords.	7.34190	.001	3.78	4.00	3.22
sensitivity to national differences	12.08842	.000	2.97	2.61	3.74
cross-cultural awareness	7.76996	.001	3.17	3.08	3.79
understanding information technology	28.34856	.000	4.04	3.51	2.87
understanding financial implications of decisions	27.48951	.000	4.54	3.67	3.63

MANOVA procedures were used to more formally test potential differences in perceived level of necessity across national groups in the sample data set. Utilising Sig. of F values of .000 and .001, as many as 61 variables emerged with significant differences. Rather than produce an exhaustive tabulation of these results, the authors thought it would be constructive to conduct a more thorough visual inspection of the comparative mean scores of these 61 competencies. This procedure was undertaken in the context of the discussion developed in the first part of this paper, where several national differences were foreshadowed. The results of this inspection, together with the F and Sig. of F values attached to each item are presented in Table 5.

Discussion

Several findings emerge from the results of this survey. Firstly, the list of 91 competencies is perceived by Australian and US respondents to contain a greater number of necessary elements, than is the case with respondents from the German sample. This might indicate that German managers are more discerning than their Australian and US counterparts in attaching high levels of importance to a wide range of features pertaining to managerial work. It may also be indicative of the degree to which US style management education has been successful in both the United States and Australia in sensitising managers to the wide ranging nature of modern managerial endeavour.

Secondly, the results of this survey indicate a wider range of differences in the relative importance attached to individual items than was initially anticipated. The number of competency items showing significant differences across national groupings may well be an artifact of the variations in cross-national sampling. Although attempts were made to minimise differences in variables such as organisational size and type of industry, the responses received were not entirely reflective of these efforts. Nonetheless, bearing in mind Hofstede's contention that culture is a construct which manifests itself in an organisation predominantly as a result of that organisation's location within a particular society, it is not unreasonable to accept the emergent

differences along individual competency items at face value; as reflections of national differences in approaching the complex task of management.

Examining Table 5 which presents twenty one of the most discriminating variables across national groups, several thematic differences emerge. These are; the relative emphasis placed on leadership and team-building competencies, the degree of flexibility in decision-making, the emphasis on planning and control, the relative concern with persuasion and influence strategies, sensitivity to national differences, understanding information technology, and the regard for financial implications of decisions.

In attempting to develop a picture of the dimensions of effective management practice, it is useful to search for competency elements which may be grouped together as clusters, representing broad domains of organisational and managerial endeavour. As indicated earlier, previous research by the authors (Wallace & Hunt, 1996) has established an empirical foundation for the adoption of a framework consisting of six competency units or clusters. This framework accounts for 82 of the 91 competencies under investigation in the present study. The framework is presented in Tables 6, 7 and 8, together with the relative mean scores attached to each competency element, capturing the aggregated perceptions of German, Australian and US managers respectively.

Do these variations reflect the differences along cultural dimensions identified by Hofstede?

One of the most important competency groupings is that of 'Leadership and Team Building'. It centres around team management skills which incorporate what Hofstede alludes to as US style motivation competencies. In terms of the list of 91 competency elements, these include items such as *building team morale*, *building teams*, *providing individualised consideration to subordinates*, *motivating others*, and *encouraging participation and facilitating group interaction*. Table 5 shows that each of these competency elements attracts a higher level of perceived importance from Australian and US managers than from their German counterparts. As noted earlier, this may be indicative of the more pragmatic approach to managerial tasks on the part of Germans

TABLE 6
German Managers: A Summary of the Six Managerial Competency Units and Elements Derived from the Factor
Analytic Results

Future Orientation and Strategic Management		Problem Solving, Decision Making, & Self Mngt.	
Capacity for innovative thinking	4.28	Personal time management	4.35
Analytical capacity	4.19	Problem solving ability	4.28
Environmental awareness	4.06	Accurate problem diagnosis	4.25
Coordination across internal boundaries	4.04	Personal integrity	4.17
Capacity to initiate and implement change	3.78	Verbal communication	4.15
Understanding financial implications of decisions	3.63	Judgement and perception	4.11
Developing medium term plans	3.61	Evaluation of alternative actions	3.94
Effective risk taking	3.50	Written communication	3.93
Awareness of organisational mission	3.33	Flexibility and adaptability in decision making	3.78
Vision for organisation's future	3.15	Problem identification in sphere of influence	3.76
Forecasting	3.11	Identifying degrees of urgency in decisions	3.69
Political acumen	3.02	Attendance and punctuality	3.59
Understanding financial management	2.96	Capacity to take the initiative	
3.56			
Development of organisation-wide strategies	2.74	Making spontaneous decisions	3.41
Problem identification outside sphere of influence	2.72	Self awareness	3.41
Design and review of organisational units	2.48	Modifying leadership style contextually	
3.02			
Knowledge of industrial relations	1.81	Ethical and social responsibility	3.02
Aggregated Mean Score	3.32	Self development initiative	2.96
		Short term planning	2.85
		Aggregated Mean Score	3.69
Administrative & Operations Management		Political Skills - Persuasion & Influence	
Product / service knowledge	3.46	Projecting appropriate image - self confidence	4.17
Cost accounting	3.33	Identifying opportunities	3.94
Understanding information technology	2.87	Negotiating effectively	3.89
Product and services marketing	2.81	Projecting appropriate image - personal drive	3.74
Quality monitoring	2.78	Leading and conducting meetings	3.65
Financial accounting	2.78	Participating in meetings	3.44
Product / services distribution	2.69	Presenting to corporate meetings	3.35
Sales and advertising	2.44	Persuading and influencing superiors	3.28
Market research	2.33	Forging alliances with influential outsiders	3.26
Operations scheduling	2.33	Persuading and influencing subordinates	3.22
Productivity monitoring	2.26	Understanding political implications of decisions	3.02
Succession planning	2.17	Understanding HR implications of decisions	3.00
Purchasing	1.80	Forging alliances with superiors	2.98
Inventory administration	1.67	Forging alliances with colleagues	2.85
Facilities and equipment maintenance	1.56	Persuading and influencing peers	2.85
Aggregated Mean Score	2.48	Aggregated Mean Score	3.38
Leadership and Team Building		Organisational and Environmental Awareness	
Delegating effectively	3.63	Cross-cultural awareness	3.79
Motivating others	3.50	Sensitivity to national differences	3.74
Coaching and developing others	3.41	Organisational awareness (structure, culture)	3.35
Participating in teams	3.24	Knowledge of related positions in the organisation	3.33
Facilitating group interaction	3.07	Aggregated Mean Score	3.55
Evaluating staff performance	3.00		
Recognising subordinate performance	2.96		
Building team morale	2.94		
Providing individualised consideration	2.91		
Resolving conflict with peers and superiors	2.83		
Building teams	2.78		
Resolving conflict among subordinates	2.50		
Aggregated Mean Score	3.06		

* Variables within each cluster are arranged in descending order according to mean scores.

TABLE 7
Australian Managers: A Summary of the Six Managerial Competency Units and Elements Derived from the
Factor Analytic Results

Future Orientation and Strategic Management		Problem Solving, Decision Making, & Self Mngt.	
Understanding financial implications of decisions	4.54	Personal integrity	4.69
Capacity to initiate and implement change	4.35	Verbal communication	4.54
Awareness of organisational mission	4.22	Problem solving ability	4.53
Vision for organisation's future	4.19	Personal time management	4.48
Capacity for innovative thinking	4.15	Attendance and punctuality	4.48
Analytical capacity	4.06	Self awareness	4.44
Coordination across internal boundaries	3.98	Accurate problem diagnosis	4.41
Developing medium-term plans	3.89	Judgement and perception	4.37
Environmental awareness	3.87	Flexibility and adaptability in decision making	4.28
Understanding financial management	3.82	Capacity to take the initiative	
4.21			
Forecasting	3.82	Problem identification within sphere of influence	4.18
Development of organisation wide strategies	3.64	Short term planning	4.11
Effective risk taking	3.50	Self development initiative	4.08
Problem identification outside sphere of influence	3.41	Identifying degrees of urgency in decisions	4.05
Knowledge of industrial relations	3.40	Written communication	4.03
Design and review of organisational units	3.10	Evaluation of alternative actions	3.98
Political acumen	3.10	Ethical and social responsibility	3.88
<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	3.82	Modifying leadership style contextually	
3.85			
		Making spontaneous decisions	3.52
		<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	4.21
Administrative & Operations Management		Political Skills - Persuasion & Influence	
Product /service knowledge	4.15	Projecting appropriate image - self confidence	4.50
Understanding information technology	4.04	Projecting appropriate image - personal drive	4.36
Quality monitoring	3.98	Identifying opportunities	4.25
Productivity monitoring	3.78	Negotiating effectively	4.19
Cost accounting	3.76	Understanding HR implications of decisions	4.12
Facilities and equipment maintenance	3.52	Participating in meetings	3.99
Financial accounting	3.51	Forging alliances with colleagues	3.90
Product and services marketing	3.37	Persuading and influencing peers	3.84
Operational scheduling	3.31	Persuading and influencing subordinates	3.78
Product /services distribution	3.24	Forging alliances with influential outsiders	3.69
Succession planning	3.23	Persuading and influencing superiors	3.66
Purchasing	3.20	Forging alliances with superiors	3.66
Market research	3.09	Leading and conducting meetings	3.58
Sales and advertising	3.03	Understanding political implications of decisions	3.40
Inventory administration	2.99	Presenting to corporate meetings	3.07
<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	3.48	<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	3.87
Leadership and Team Building		Organisational and Environmental Awareness	
Building team morale	4.13	Organisational awareness (structure, culture)	3.96
Coaching and developing others	4.12	Knowledge of related positions in the organisation	3.71
Motivating others	4.11	Cross-cultural awareness	3.17
Delegating effectively	4.06	Sensitivity to national differences	2.97
Recognising subordinate performance	3.95	<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	3.45
Participating in teams	3.94		
Building teams	3.90		
Providing individualised consideration	3.84		
Evaluating staff performance	3.76		
Facilitating group interaction	3.72		
Resolving conflict among subordinates	3.60		
Resolving conflict with peers and superiors	3.48		
<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	3.88		

* Variables within each cluster are arranged in descending order according to mean scores.

TABLE 8
US Managers: A Summary of the Six Managerial Competency Units and Elements Derived from the Factor
Analytic Results

Future Orientation and Strategic Management		Problem Solving, Decision Making, & Self Mngt.	
Analytical capacity	4.18	Verbal communication	4.49
Capacity to initiate and implement change	4.11	Judgement and perception	4.38
Capacity for innovative thinking	4.08	Accurate problem diagnosis	4.38
Coordination across internal boundaries	4.03	Problem solving ability	4.33
Effective risk taking	3.75	Personal integrity	4.30
Awareness of organisational mission	3.72	Capacity to take the initiative	
4.23			
Understanding financial implications of decisions	3.67	Identifying degrees of urgency in decisions	4.21
Political acumen	3.61	Flexibility and adaptability in decision making	4.20
Environmental awareness	3.59	Personal time management	4.18
Developing medium-term plans	3.51	Problem identification in sphere of influence	4.15
Problem identification outside sphere of influence	3.47	Written communication	4.08
Forecasting	3.33	Short term planning	4.03
Development of organisation wide strategies	3.31	Evaluation of alternative actions	4.03
Vision for organisation's future	3.21	Self awareness	3.92
Design and review of organisational units	2.97	Attendance and punctuality	3.90
Understanding financial management	2.72	Modifying leadership style contextually	
3.87			
Knowledge of industrial relations	2.05	Self development initiative	3.80
<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	3.49	Ethical and social responsibility	3.70
		Making spontaneous decisions	3.67
		<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	4.10
Administrative & Operations Management		Political Skills - Persuasion & Influence	
Understanding information technology	3.51	Projecting appropriate image - self confidence	4.51
Product / service knowledge	3.30	Persuading and influencing superiors	4.34
Quality monitoring	3.30	Projecting appropriate image - personal drive	4.31
Productivity monitoring	2.97	Identifying opportunities	4.20
Operational scheduling	2.72	Participating in meetings	4.15
Cost accounting	2.61	Persuading and influencing peers	4.08
Succession planning	2.54	Forging alliances with superiors	4.02
Financial accounting	2.44	Persuading and influencing subordinates	4.00
Facilities and equipment maintenance	2.36	Leading and conducting meetings	3.98
Market research	2.30	Forging alliances with colleagues	3.90
Product and services marketing	2.26	Negotiating effectively	3.89
Product / services distribution	2.22	Forging alliances with influential outsiders	3.59
Purchasing	2.05	Understanding HR implications of decisions	3.56
Inventory administration	1.95	Understanding political implications of decisions	3.56
Sales and advertising	1.92	Presenting to corporate meetings	3.39
<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	2.56	<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	3.97
Leadership and Team Building		Organisational and Environmental Awareness	
Motivating others	4.18	Organisational awareness (structure, culture)	3.77
Participating in teams	4.00	Knowledge of related positions in the organisation	3.39
Delegating effectively	3.97	Cross-cultural awareness	3.08
Recognising subordinate performance	3.92	Sensitivity to national differences	2.61
Building team morale	3.85	<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	3.21
Building teams	3.84		
Coaching and developing others	3.84		
Providing individualised consideration	3.70		
Evaluating staff performance	3.46		
Resolving conflict with peers and superiors	3.46		
Facilitating group interaction	3.41		
Resolving conflict among subordinates	3.36		
<i>Aggregated Mean Score</i>	3.75		

* Variables within each cluster are arranged in descending order according to mean scores.

generally, and is reflected in Hofstede's classification of Germany as medium on uncertainty avoidance, whereas both the USA and Australia are classified as weak on uncertainty avoidance.

With respect to decision-making, one particular competency element considered to be of much greater importance to managers from the German sample is *avoiding spontaneous decisions where appropriate*. This again differentiates the German respondents from their US and Australian counterparts, indicating that spontaneity is not universally viewed as an element intrinsic to managerial effectiveness. Moreover, *flexibility in decision making* and *tolerance of ambiguity* are regarded as significantly more important by Australian and US executives, than by the German managers in this sample. All this points to an emerging picture of a clear preference for established order over the potential uncertainties of spontaneity, amongst German executives. This result also helps to explain the popularity of entrepreneurial management competencies in both the United States and Australia, where ideational fluency and business venturing skills are well documented. Additionally, it offers some insight into why these same competencies may be less highly regarded in the German context.

Interestingly, the results of this study indicate that despite the apparent preference for avoiding spontaneity on the part of German respondents, there is no corresponding emphasis on formal coordinating mechanisms. Table 5 shows that both *short-term planning* and *establishing control systems* are more important managerial competencies to US and Australian managers. This suggests that managers from the more highly individualistic nations may find it necessary to provide countervailing organisational forces in order to harness collective effort effectively. According to *The World Competitiveness Yearbook, 1996*, Japan and Germany have two of the highest 'collaborative behaviour scores' in the world (60 and 46 respectively), whereas the USA and Australia have much lower scores (33 and 28 respectively). It may be that the German managers in this sample simply take cooperative effort for granted in the organisational arena, and therefore don't view *team building* or *establishing control mechanisms* as intrinsic to competent managerial performance.

The highly individualistic focus inherent in the national cultures of the United States and Australia is sharply reflected in this study, through the ratings obtained along the following competencies; *self-awareness* (AUS: 4.44, USA: 3.92, GER: 3.41) and *self-development initiative* (AUS: 4.08, USA: 3.92, GER: 3.41). These scores indicate a heightened preoccupation with the self, and in particular, the development of the self, on the part of US and Australian managers. This helps to explain the exponential growth of the management education and training industries in these nations. In contrast to this, Hofstede notes that business schools in particular, and the management training industry specifically, have a comparatively low profile in Germany (Hofstede, 1993: 83).

Perhaps the most revealing competency grouping of all, however, is that of 'Political Skills' which encompasses persuasion and influence strategies. Table 5 lists five key competencies from this domain, and presents the relatively high ratings attached to each of these by US managers. In particular, the competency element *influencing superiors* is considered to be vital by US managers (mean score: 4.34), whereas it is attributed a more moderate level of importance by Australian (3.66) and German (3.28) managers.

In terms of the increasing focus on the globalisation of business management, it is instructive to examine the degree of emphasis placed upon understanding national differences. Table 5 shows that *cross-cultural awareness* is significantly more important to German managers than to the US or Australian respondents in this sample. Additionally, *sensitivity to national differences* is considered to be considerably necessary in the perceptions of German managers, and far less necessary in the eyes of Australian and US managers. This particular difference may be reflective of a greater exposure to people from a wide variety of countries amongst Europeans, and may also hint at the comparative isolation of both the American and Australian continents. This result is a little surprising, however, because neither the US nor Australia are normally considered to be insular or parochial by world standards. Indeed both nations have reasonably multi-cultural societies. Australia's proximity to South East Asia, in particular, has made for increasing interchanges with the newly emerging economies of the Asia-Pacific region. Ultimately this result suggests that the

US and Australian managers in this study don't regard an awareness of national differences as particularly necessary to managerial effectiveness. This may be reflective of the growing acceptance of a genuinely generic brand of management which is largely independent of national peculiarities.

In terms of the more technical elements of managerial activity, Table 5 shows that *understanding information technology* is attributed a high level of importance by Australian managers, a moderate level of importance by US managers, and a lower level of importance by German managers. This result is a little surprising, given the German reputation for technical proficiency and technological excellence, but is perhaps reflective of the rapid adoption rates of new computer technologies in the USA and Australia over the past three to five years. Australia's comparatively small slice of global capital, in particular, has made it necessary for its managers to seek to heighten their competitive advantage in world terms by moving rapidly into the information age.

The final theme emerging from an examination of the noticeable differences in mean scores along competency elements, is that of *understanding financial implications of decisions*. Whilst all three nations view this competency element as an important one, the ratings attached to it by Australian managers in this sample are significantly higher than those of either the US or German respondents. An earlier study by the authors, comparing the perceptions of managers from Australia and Brunei, noted a similarly high rating on the part of Australian managers with respect to understanding financial implications of managerial decisions. There is an emerging picture of the Australian manager holding in high regard those competencies relating to sound financial decision making. This may be the result of the tight economic climate which has prevailed for the past six years in Australia, profoundly influencing the organisational arena, mandating high levels of financial responsibility in the wake of serious downsizing initiatives in both the private and public sectors. Greater capital reserves in both Germany and the USA may have protected managers in these nations from some of the shock waves of such radical cost cutting at the organisational level.

Concluding Observations

This study was undertaken as a pilot exercise, and as such, provides the foundation for a more substantial comparative international exercise. Further research, however, needs to be conducted in order to consolidate and expand upon these initial findings. It is important to note that the current study relies upon aggregates of managerial perceptions from three nations; it doesn't control for differences between organisations, or for different response rates according to managerial level. Future studies would need to ensure greater levels of comparability in response rates according to organisational type and managerial level. Further to this, a larger sample would enable factor analyses to be conducted separately for each managerial level and for each national grouping, permitting further scrutiny of the six domains of managerial competence presented in Tables 6, 7 and 8. In addition, it is worth noting that the present study has relied upon secondary data with respect to national cultural differences. It would be useful to collect fresh data on cultural perceptions in subsequent studies, together with data on the perceived importance of each of the 91 managerial competencies, from the same group of managers. And finally, the present study is limited to a comparison of three nations, two from the Anglo grouping of countries, and one from the Germanic grouping. Ronen and Shenkar (1985) have identified nine national groupings according to cultural value similarity; Anglo, Germanic, Nordic, Near Eastern, Arab, Far Eastern, Latin American, Latin European, and Independent. Future research could expand the scope of the current study to incorporate one or two countries from each of these groupings, thereby testing the generic nature of the 91 competencies across the globe.

To summarise, the results of this study provide a preliminary picture of several of many interesting differences apparent amongst German, Australian and US managers. They give an indication of the richness and complexity of managerial endeavour, and provide some initial insights into how dimensions of national culture might influence a manager's perceptions about what is important in the context of managerial effectiveness. These insights may be of particular value to expatriate managers, because they bring to light a number of important limits to the concept of universalism as applied to managerial effectiveness. While support for some aspects of Hofstede's

research into cultural differences is presented, there remain a number of issues which appear to contradict traditional national stereotypes, or at least to indicate the layers of complexity inherent in unravelling managerial identities along nationalistic lines. Overall, this study provides a useful platform for further research in this area.

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