The Cultural Iceberg

In an iceberg, only about 10% of the iceberg is visible above the waterline.

The majority of the iceberg is hidden beneath the surface.

In 1976, Edward T. Hall suggested that culture was similar to an iceberg. He proposed that culture has two components and that only about 10% of culture (external or surface culture) is easily visible; the majority, or 90%, of culture (internal or deep culture) is hidden below the surface.

External (surface) culture (10%)

- Explicitly learned
- Conscious
- Easily changeable
- Objective knowledge

Behaviours

Traditions

Customs

Easily observable with touch, taste, smell, sound

Core values

Priorities

Beliefs

Attitudes

Assumptions

Internal (deep) culture (90%)

Perceptions

Difficult to observe

- Implicitly learned
- Unconscious
- Difficult to change
- Subjective knowledge

When one first enters into another culture, one is usually first interacting only with the top 10%—literally, the tip of the iceberg! Sometimes, people make assumptions or develop ideas about another cultural community without really understanding the internal or deep culture that makes up the majority of that culture's values and beliefs. What's in your cultural iceberg?

The Cultural Iceberg

art food dress/clothing greetings

dance

language

music

709 10%

world view

religious beliefs

authority

decision-making models

gender roles

ideas about leadership

concepts of time

concepts of justice

power

personal space

communication

body language

definition of sin

ideas about modesty

friendship

designation of status based on positions (e.g., age, gender, job)

pace of work

Bottom 90%

dating and courtship practices

cooperation /

competitiveness

notions of child-rearing (and how children behave in church)