

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

Perceptions

Internal (deep) culture (90%)

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

Difficult to observe

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?

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