

1.3

The culture iceberg

Aims

- To explore how features of cultures range from the easily recognisable to the almost imperceptible.
- To develop an awareness of this range.

Procedure

- 1 Ask students what they know about icebergs in order to elicit the fact that a large part (about seven eighths) is normally below water level. They may observe similar characteristics in, for example, people (some have well-hidden characteristics) or families.
- 2 Check that students understand the significance of the illustration and then present task 1, which deals with national culture in general, rather than one specific culture. Ask them to put each of the components from the list into one of the categories A, B and C. They should work in pairs or small groups to complete the task.
- 3 Take each section – A, B and C – separately, asking a spokesperson from each group to run through their list, and ask for comparisons and comments from other groups.
- 4 Now do task 2, which relates this topic to a specific culture. Form groups to examine one particular culture (the members may be from that culture or not, but should have some experience of it). They should list at least two components from each category which are important in that culture.
- 5 Ask a spokesperson from each group to briefly summarise what the group has discussed. Invite comment and discussion.
- 6 Brainstorm task 3, which will collect any elements identified in the discussions which do not appear in the list.

Outcomes

The categorisation of components should produce a certain amount of agreement, with plenty of scope for differing interpretations and consequent discussion.

This is one possible categorisation:

- A** artefacts, directness of speech in business, driving habits, greetings, emotion shown in public, physical gestures
- B** balance between work and home, corruption, family life, gender – roles of males and females, humour, organisation of companies, personal friendship, press and other media, punctuality in business, social life: public and private
- C** democracy, social organisation and class, treatment of outsiders/foreigners, values and beliefs.

Development

Tasks 2 and 3 give students the opportunity to think about the characteristics of different national cultures. This could lead to work on profiling different cultures (see Linked activities below).

They could also give rise to thinking about the difference between profiling your own culture as opposed to profiling cultures to which you do not belong, for which the Linked activities below will also be a useful follow-up.

Linked activities

1.4, 1.5, 3.3, 3.4

Further reading

Other models which help to visualise culture include Hofstede's pyramid, see pp. 14–17 in

Culture's Consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions and organizations across nations, by Geert Hofstede, 2001 2nd Edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications

and the onion diagram in

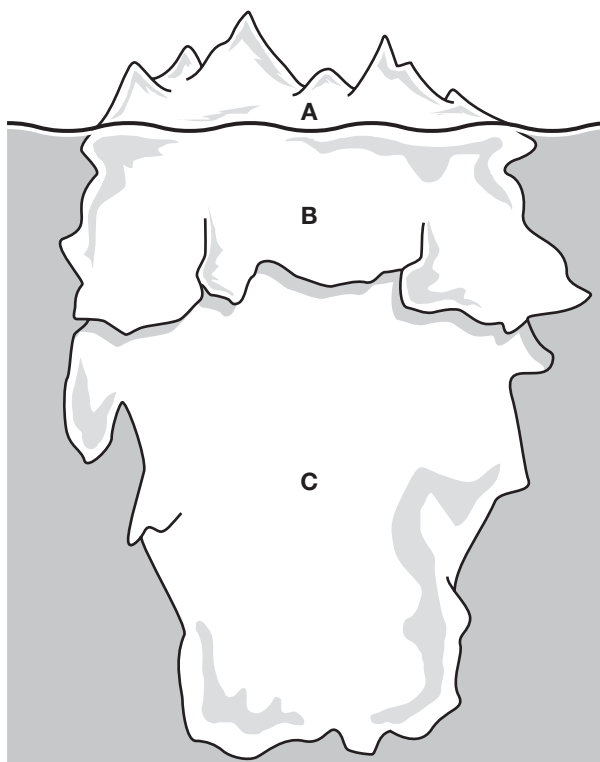
Culturally Speaking: Managing Rapport in Talk Across Cultures, by Helen Spenser-Oatey, 2001, New York: Continuum International Publishing Group.

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When you observe people from a certain culture, some characteristics – such as dress and the way people greet each other – are easy to see. Others are not so easy.

Culture is sometimes compared to an iceberg, some of which is visible, but much of which is difficult to see, or invisible.



1 Look at the list of components of national culture, and place each one in one of the three categories:

A things which you can recognise quite easily

B things which take some time to recognise

C things which you recognise only when you are very familiar with a culture.

Artefacts: art and architecture	<input type="checkbox"/>	Humour	<input type="checkbox"/>
Balance between work and home	<input type="checkbox"/>	Organisation of companies	<input type="checkbox"/>
Corruption	<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal friendship	<input type="checkbox"/>
Democracy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Physical gestures	<input type="checkbox"/>
Directness of speech in business	<input type="checkbox"/>	Press and other media	<input type="checkbox"/>
Driving habits	<input type="checkbox"/>	Punctuality in business	<input type="checkbox"/>
Emotion shown in public	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social life: public and private	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family life	<input type="checkbox"/>	Social organisation and class	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gender – roles of males and females	<input type="checkbox"/>	Treatment of outsiders/foreigners	<input type="checkbox"/>
Greetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	Values and beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 Are any of these more important than others in understanding a particular national culture with which you are familiar?

3 Add any other elements which you think are important in defining a national culture you know.