

Why is culture like an iceberg?

When we see an iceberg, the portion which is visible above water is, in reality, only a small piece of a much larger whole. Similarly, people often think of culture as the numerous observable characteristics of a group that we can *see* with our eyes, be it their food, dances, music, arts, or greeting rituals. The reality, however, is that these are merely an external manifestation of the deeper and broader components of culture -- the complex ideas and deeply-held preferences and priorities known as attitudes and values.

Deep below the "water line" are a culture's **Core values**. These are primarily learned ideas of what is good, right, desirable, and acceptable -- as well as what is bad, wrong, undesirable, and unacceptable. In many cases, different cultural groups share similar core values (such as "honesty", or "respect", or "family"), but these are often interpreted differently in different situations and incorporated in unique ways into our daily lives. Ultimately, our **Interpretations** of our core values become visible to the casual observer in the form of **Observable Behaviors**, such as the words we use, the way we act, the laws we enact, and the ways we communicate with each other.

It is also important to note that the core values of a culture do not change quickly or easily. They are passed on from generation to generation by numerous factors which surround us and influence us. These Formative Factors are powerful forces which guide us and teach us. The things our educators and parents teach us, the opinions and ideas we see and hear in the media, the way our laws and social norms structure our world -- all of these things (and many more) mold us and our cultural values. Cultural change is never quick and forces, ideas, and beliefs -- both new and old -- continually impact our way of seeing the world and deciding what matters to us (our **Core Values**), what that means in our personal and professional lives (our **Interpretations**), and how we ultimately act (our **Observable Behaviors**).

So, like an iceberg, there are things that we can see and describe easily... but there are also many deeply rooted ideas that we can only understand by analyzing values, studying formative factors, and in many cases, reflecting on our own core values.

