

## What is culture?

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# What is culture?

- Culture is not an easy concept to tackle down. For decades, authors from diverse fields have been trying to define what culture is and, as a result, literature offers an array of definitions.
- Let's take a look at some of the most popular theories ahead.



# A. Culture as knowledge

The anthropologist James Bradley offered us a definition which relates culture to knowledge:

“Culture is the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior.”

James Bradley



# B. Culture as the software of the mind

Geert Hofstede was one of the first scholars to hold a large scale study in order to find out how cultures differ. He defines culture as:

“...the collective mental programming of the people in an environment. Culture is not a characteristic of the individuals; it encompasses a number of people who were conditioned by the same education and life experience. When we speak of the culture of a group, a tribe, a geographic region, a national minority, or a nation, culture refers to the collective programming that these people have in common; the programming that is different from the other groups, tribes, regions, minorities or majorities, or nations”.

- Geert Hofstede, 1980, p. 43



# B. Culture as the software of the mind

According to Hofstede, culture is acquired / learned from very early age and, therefore, is heavily loaded with values which are unlikely to be changed later. He also defends that culture is shared by members of a community, a tribe, a geographical location, etc. and that it is transgenerational, meaning that it is passed on to future generations and “is often difficult to change; if it changes at all. It does so slowly.” (1980, p. 43)



# B. Culture as the software of the mind

For Hofstede, culture is:

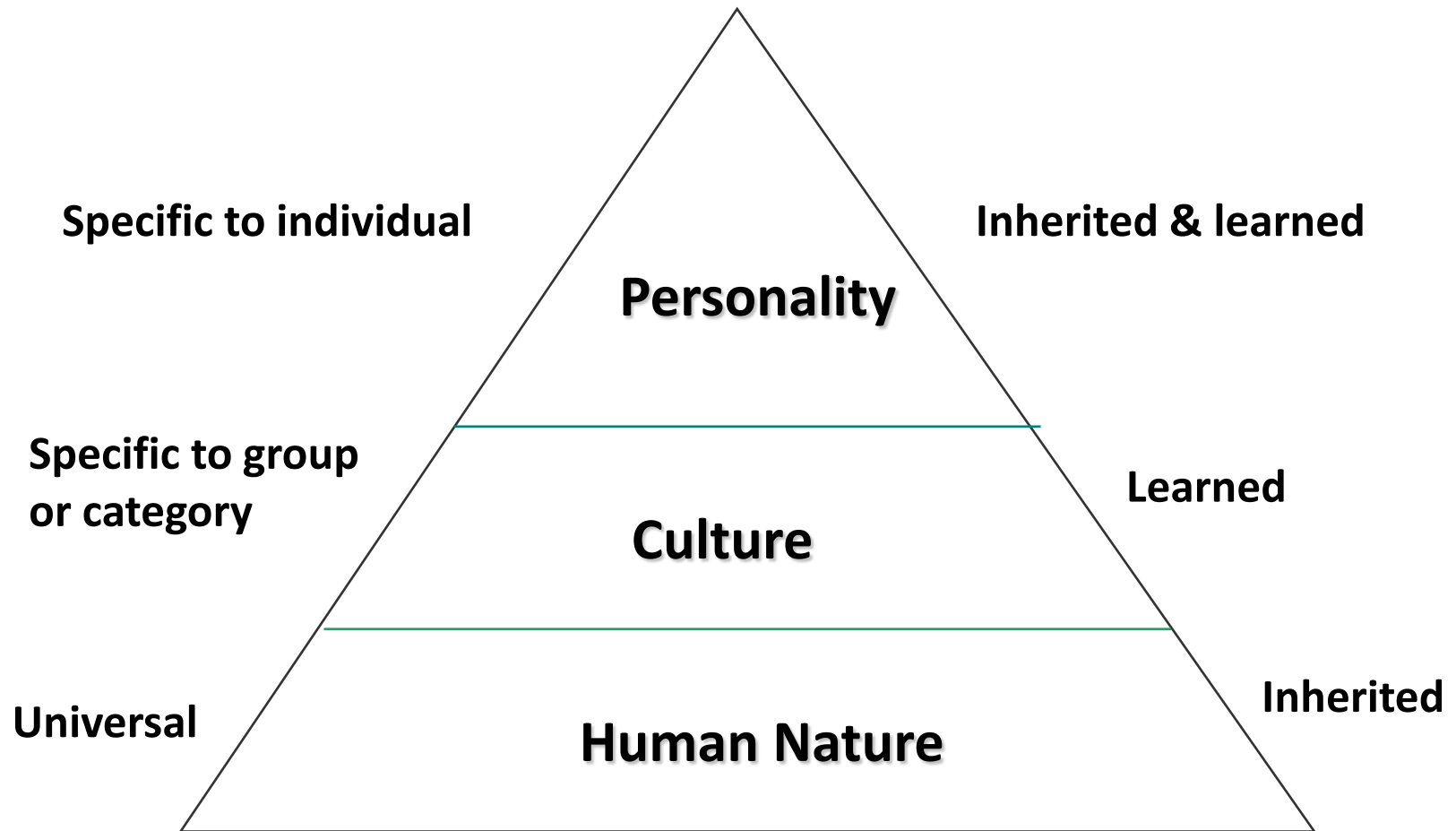
Learned: culture is acquired from  
very early age

Shared: people as a member of a  
community, a tribe, an organization

Transgenerational: culture is passed on to  
future generations and changes very  
slowly



# B. Culture as the software of the mind



# C. The Iceberg of Culture

We saw in the warm-up activity of this unit that culture can manifest in many different ways.

In his book entitled *Beyond Culture* (1976), the anthropologist Edward Hall calls our attention to the hidden dimensions of culture and defends that, while some aspects of culture are visible, many are intangible and remain invisible.



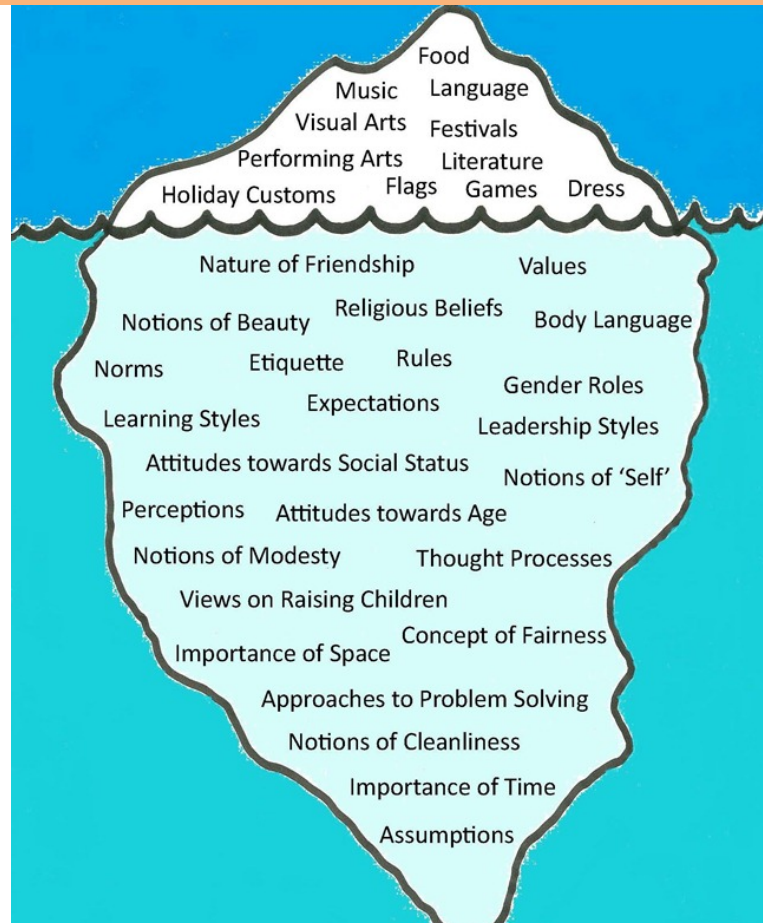


# C. The Iceberg of Culture

Hall then uses an analogy of culture as an Iceberg to illustrate its hidden and unhidden dimensions:



# C. The Iceberg of Culture



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# C. The Iceberg of Culture

See [this video](#) to know more about the Cultural Iceberg



# C. The Iceberg of Culture

Therefore, beyond what eyes can see, there is much more involved in intercultural encounters and one should always be aware of the influence of such 'hidden' forces in any intercultural situation.



# C. The Iceberg of Culture

Besides the Iceberg analogy, Hall also offers us interesting insights on how cultures can differ. We are going to talk about these and other kinds of cultural differences in our next unit.

