Can We ‘Flip The Iceberg’?  
Considering A New Approach To Intercultural Dialogue And Training

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Reviewing “what is culture?” and the interaction of its visible and invisible elements

What is culture?

• “Customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group.”
  --Webster’s Tenth Collegiate Dictionary

• “… System of shared assumptions, beliefs and values. It is the framework from which we interpret and make sense of life and the world around us.”
  --Paul Hiebert, Cultural Anthropology, 2d ed.

The role of the visible and invisible layers of culture  
A look at Drs. Robert Kohl/Gary Weaver’s cultural iceberg

Historically, the visible elements of culture have been used to both express and identify the invisible layers. In today’s world, the visible expressions of culture are becoming more uniform throughout the world but the elements in the invisible layer are much slower to change. The result is more confusion between people because what they expect the person to be when they first meet isn’t necessarily how/who the person is.
The stress for many people in today’s globalizing world, particularly those who grew up among many cultural worlds, is not from the multiplicity of cultures they experience but comes when they try to repatriate or fit into some other cultural box others expect them to belong to but which is being defined in racial, nationalistic, or other more traditional ways of defining “culture”.

Ironically, when people are in the foreigner or mirror box, who they are inside matches what others expect them to be when looking from the outside. Their identity is clear and life is relatively simple. When, however, they are in the hidden immigrant or adopted box, life can become quite complicated. Who others expect them to be is not who they are because they have learned their cultural cues amid and among various cultural groups.

Another challenge for all in today’s highly mobile world is that they may be changing boxes as their mobility takes them from one cultural community or environment to another. Depending on their circumstances, some never know what it is to live in either the Foreigner or Mirror boxes where identities are relatively clear but may always be in one of the more ambiguous boxes of the Hidden Immigrant or Adopted. The reality of the challenges many face begins to grow.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts to give CCKs and CCAs is to acknowledge the reality that this world of multiple cultures they have experienced is a valid place of belonging, even if not rooted in one geographical place or ethnicity. Need to stop “pathologizing” the issues but begin to perhaps define new norms.

**What these patterns of cultural identity/relationship can lead to**

- *Hidden Diversity*— a diversity of experience that shapes a person’s life and world view but is not readily apparent on the outside, unlike the usual diversity markers such as race, ethnicity, nationality, etc
Common reactions as people try to sort out identity issues...

• “Chameleon”—tries to find “same as” identity
• “Screamer”—tries to find “different from” identity
• “Wallflower”—tries to find “non-identity”

Your turn:
- Tell your story as it relates to box
- Consider how this factor of HD has potentially impacted your interactions with others

In the end, even parents and children in the same family may not necessarily share...

• A common sense of national identity
• A similar sense of “Where is home?”

Other fallout ...
• ATCKs/ACCKs and spouses/significant others from the same passport country may not realize they have a truly cross-cultural relationship
• Those in the workplace may make wrong assumptions about fellow employees which can lead to unnecessary friction

Why this happens...
• The traditional ways of defining diversity....
  • Race
  • Gender
  • Socio-economic
  • Ethnicity
  • Nationality
  • Sexual orientation

  • Are they generally in the visible or invisible portion of the iceberg?

Important to remember....
• Diversity is not simply a difference in the visible layers of culture
• True “inclusion” isn’t about fixing the “look”
• We can look for the sameness despite the many differences
• We need to know the person’s story to know him/her
Why we need to recognize “sameness” in order to truly embrace “difference”
- Starting with “difference” can lead to further alienation
  - Have to maintain “difference” to maintain identity
    - Can keep us from truly partnering
    - Keeps “us/them-ness” at the forefront

What happens if we start with “sameness” — the fundamental sameness that all people of every culture are made as human “persons” in the following ways?
- Relational
- Emotional
- Creative
- Intellectual
- Volitional
- Spiritual
- Physical
- Unified
- Valuable

Because of being a person, people of all backgrounds or cultures (including you) need...
- Meaningful relationships
  - A place to be understood
  - A place to belong

- A place to express full range of emotions
- A place to explore new ideas and think without shame
- A way to create something new—physically, intellectually, or both
  
  What people of all backgrounds or cultures (including you) need...
  - A place to make choices

- A sense of significance

- A way to develop strengths—to be successful

- A safe, nurturing physical environment

- Some understanding/explanation of the mysteries of life that are beyond our physical realm

Why we need to recognize this “sameness” in order to truly embrace “difference”
- Starting with this fundamental “sameness” leads us to understand that various cultures and/or individuals truly do express the same thing in different ways
  - Note: This type of “sameness” doesn’t mean all our experiences are “the same”
Given these human needs, why is it that a cross-cultural move is hard for anyone of any culture?

- Cultural practices and responses are often a “short-hand” method for meeting these needs!

What happens if any of these needs aren’t met?

**Where does commonality begin?**
 Where do you think this list goes in our cultural pyramid? At first I thought here.

![Cultural Pyramid Diagram]

But then we still have to go through all the differences before we come to where we can connect as fellow human beings.

**What happens if we flip the iceberg?**
Why might this approach work?

How does this help us understand the second (and thus the third) layer) better?

● Before I know anything about you, your culture, your story, I already know there are places I can relate to you

● Because I know your actions and behaviors are coming from the same place mine are – as an expression of some part of our shared humanity, I can dare to dialog even when I disagree with you

● If I can dialog with you, I can get to know you at the deeper levels of culture, you will know me there

● If I know you at this level and you know me, we will know not only where we are alike but where we differ rather than pasting over the differences

● If we know where we differ, we can decide to negotiate at that point if we want to

● If the differences are too many, we can realize these differences may not be able to operate in the same space, but we can agree to disagree as persons and still be friends

● It can get us past one of the greatest myths of our day, the “myth of moral neutrality” (John Patrick, M.D., medical ethicist)

Planning a training from this model

● How would you approach designing a program for all using the “flipped iceberg” model?
  ● Recognize/name relevant shared experience of top layer
● Deal with the realities of unseen middle layer
● Express through the bottom visible layer

One example

- ASH School in Hague decided to introduce a transition program for the entire staff, parents, and students at their school.
  - They have over 40 nationalities (and thus cultural groups) in their school
  - They recognized all in their school – staff, parents, children – from every background were impacted by transition
  - They started a group to try and form a model for dealing with transitions for all
  - They soon realized most of their committee members were from the Western countries
  - They wanted to know how the effects of transition were expressed by others or how they found ways to deal with it so invited a wider cultural group to become part of discussion – not because of the externals of culture but wanting to know more of the unseen realities of how this experiences played out for them
  - To get to know one another at this level, they took day long retreats for the committee
  - In the end, they knew each other as persons, understood how the same experience might look in different cultural expressions, and when they had their “culture days” when students wore clothes from passport countries, brought in their different foods, etc., it was an expression of fundamental sameness expressed in different ways rather than a dividing line

Second example

Patrick McLaurin, the recently deceased Director of Diversity and Multinational People Strategies, Booz Allen Hamilton Corp. grew up as a military child and lived in various cultures. He was becoming a leader of using this wider approach to diversity training programs before his death last March. For more information, see www.bah.com

"Diversity of thought and approach helps us become more well-rounded and multi-faceted. The investment is well worth it, because ultimately we'll deliver better results that endure for our clients."

Hall of Fame Profile: Patrick McLaurin, Leadership & Diversity

As Director of Diversity and Multinational People Strategy at Booz Allen Hamilton, one of the world’s largest management consulting firms, Dr. Patrick McLaurin dedicated himself to promoting corporate diversity. In the process, he was able to showcase Booz Allen Hamilton’s diversity efforts, particularly a Board Diversity Initiative that he led...

Hall of Fame Profile: Patrick McLaurin, Leadership & Diversity

The MWorld article prompted McLaurin to refine his ideas, take stock of his expertise, and differentiate himself in the field of corporate diversity. He created a thought leadership platform around the concept of “global talent management” that distinguished him and his firm as innovators in this growing sector.

While the following statement operates from the term “how we differ…”, the reality is that they have chosen these basic “sameness” positions that everyone has…all of us have an ethic identity, an economic reality, childhood experiences, etc…by looking at the broader picture, all are invited to the discussions rather than it becoming some sort of “us/them” discussion. Also, as seen above, Dr. McLaurin valued highly the differences in how people thought, not just looked.
At Booz Allen, diversity encompasses all the ways we differ from each other, including but not limited to:

- Ethnic Identification
- Income
- Parental Status
- Learning Disabilities
- Education
- Childhood Experiences
- Veteran Status
- Marital Status
- Parental Status
- Age
- Economic Status
- Thinking Style

**Methods used at Booz Allen to look at these things**

- Monthly diversity book clubs
- Professional development workdays
- Seminars

**Closing tips**

- How to get going
  - Do what you can do even when there’s much you can’t
  - Take the opportunities given
  - Find a way to try to connect to the needs and hearts of people, not only their minds
  - Learn from others in what you do but also be “yourself”
    - No one has lived your life before or will again
    - Because of that you have something to offer that no one else can give—DARE TO GIVE IT!

And you have and are!

I’m proud of you!