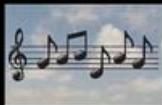




You talk about a culture's dance or music. You might talk about their dress or their celebrations. You might talk about their food.



How would you define "culture"?



And you wouldn't be wrong, but they are some of the visible aspects of a culture.



But there's more to it than that...

"Culture" is often compared to an iceberg, where only 10% is visible and the other 90% is hidden from sight.



And it's usually the "hidden" parts that are the most interesting....and can cause the most confusion.

Those "hidden" parts are the values, beliefs, and attitudes that are learned from the group(s) we live, work and socialize with.

They are the "rules" the group operates under!

So you are not born with culture - you learn it- and it's our script for carrying out our life - it's our "normal".

CULTURE
"The way we do
things around here!"

"Culture" should not be confused with race, ethnicity, or ancestry as it's not always about where a person is from.





One of the hidden aspects of a culture is time.

Do all cultures think about "time " in the same way?

No, they don't!

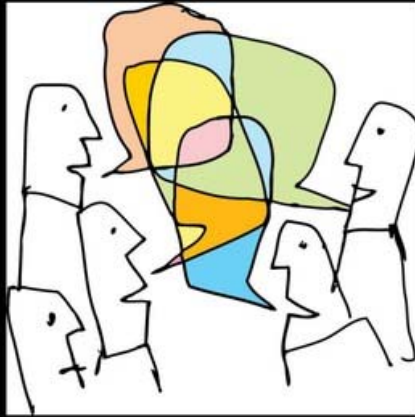
In some cultures one is expected to arrive AT the appointed time, for an appointment or party.

In other cultures one is expected to arrive at least one hour AFTER the appointed time.

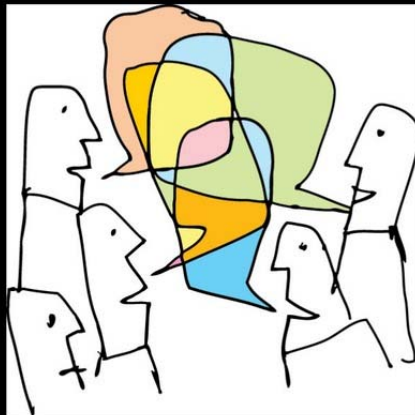
Some cultures are very formal in their day-to-day interactions, especially with elders or those in authority.

People in this type of culture would never call their professor by their first name, speak quietly to a neighbour in class or even speak out in class unless called on.





Some cultures value direct communication (or saying exactly what you mean), while others value an indirect communication style (or talking around a issue with lots of hidden meaning)

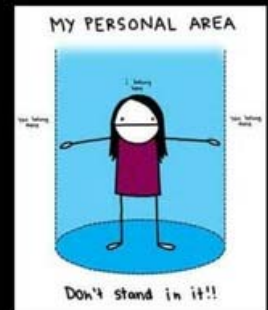


Some cultures don't like to give feedback that might be interpreted as critical or negative (Canadians are generally thought to be this way), while other cultures value blunt and to the point feedback.

Other differences include:

- attitudes about personal space, or the meaning of certain facial expressions & gestures,

- how we greet strangers or how we greet friends,



All these things AND MANY MORE may differ from culture to culture.

These different values and behaviours are a part of that culture's "common sense" because they have grown up with these things as their "norms".

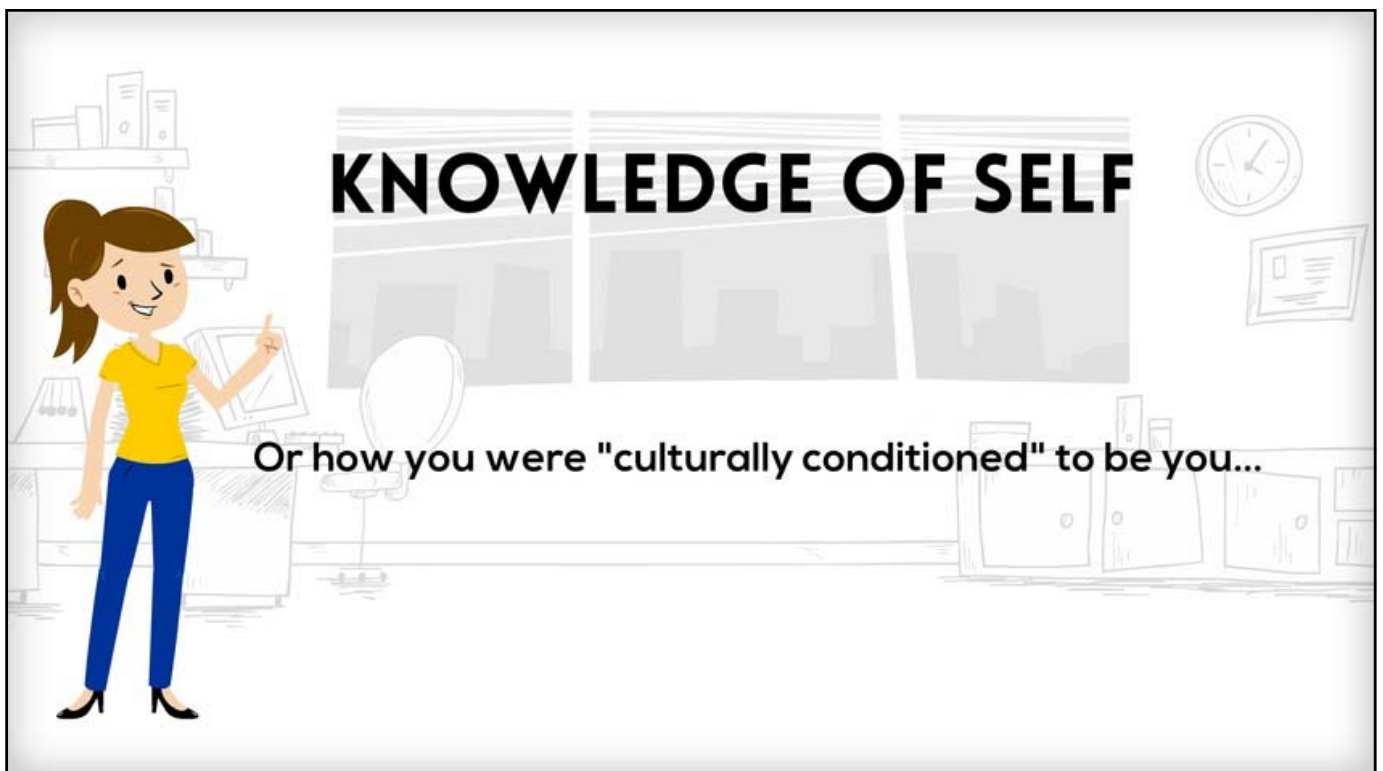
With all of these "hidden" differences, it's no wonder miscommunication often takes place...


Cultural Differences



Having an awareness that cultures differ, beyond the differences that we can see, is the first step towards becoming "interculturally competent" and important to keep in mind when crossing cultures.








Remember we said that “culture” is the shared values, beliefs, and attitudes that you learn from and share with the group you live with.

And that you are not born "with" culture. You learn the "rules" or "norms" of a culture from its existing members.



So the first "group" that you learned from was your family...your parents, siblings, grandparents and extended family.






Consider this...

When you are at home and sitting down for a family dinner, do you always sit in the same place at the table?

Do you even eat at the table? Maybe your family eats more informally... maybe on the sofa in front of the tv?


Does music play a big role in your family? Does everyone bring out their guitars when you all get together?




Does your family love to play cards or board games? Is there always a puzzle on the go?




Or do they prefer the outdoors or sports. Do they like to go for hikes, ride bikes or play touch football in the back yard?



These are just a few examples of what makes up the "culture" of your family, and speaks to their values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.




Now I want you think about other families you know, and compare them to yours.




I'll start...I like going to my friend Em's house because her mom always bakes. My mom doesn't so that was cool, and different from my family.

Everyone in my family plays an instrument or sings...and we jam at every family function. My friend Sam loves to come to my place during the holidays.



Jodi lives with her two dads. One of her dads is an artist so he collects weird things like bottlecaps and broken glass to use in his art. Their house is filled with unusual things.



Stepping outside of our "family" culture gives us the chance to learn about other families, and appreciate the things that make them, and ours, unique.

And then you started school
and had to learn a whole
new set of cultural "norms".

When you started kindergarten, you had to learn to
raise your hand if you wanted to use the washroom,
and to ask or answer a question.



Once you learned the "rules" you soon adjusted to your
new environment and its "norms".

And then you had to do that again when you arrived at Queen's.



One of the first things you had to do was learn the "Oil Thigh".



Then you had to figure out the room numbers in Mac-Corry



and to rush the field at the Homecoming game.

Soon these new "rules" were just common sense...or something that everyone knew.

That's the way it works with national culture too.

Our Canadian cultural values and norms are so ingrained in us we often don't realize that folks from different cultures might think and act differently.



We might assume that everyone thinks about and does things the same way that we do, and that would be a mistake.

Ok, so how would you describe Canadian culture?

Kind of hard to do because we live it so unconsciously.

Here are some things that newcomers have said about Canadians.

Canadians smile a lot and are very friendly

Accept differences and are truly multicultural

Are so polite it is hard to know what they really mean or really think

Are time keepers and rule followers



Canadians live in a beautiful and clean country, and value the environment

Move out of the family home as soon as they can

Have very progressive Human Rights Laws

Avoid disagreement or argument..are peace keepers

Jealously guard personal space

They talk a lot about their own abilities and accomplishments



Do all those statements apply to you? Of course they don't. We are all individuals with different personalities and come from different "family cultures". But many of those statements do apply to the broader "Canadian culture".

All of the things we have talked about here have helped shape you into the person you are...which would be very different if you had grown up in another family or country.



