Teaching "Culture" and Cultural Norms

Working in an unfamiliar cultural context and in a cross-cultural team are two of the most important aspects of the IDDS experience – and perhaps also the most challenging. To prepare participants, IDDS 2014 directly incorporated these themes into the first week's curriculum, with a presentation on **culture**, a breakout discussion and panel on **gender**, and an activity on **empathy**.

The reactions were mixed. Participants agreed that the **topics were important**, but that the **execution could be improved**. In particular, participants preferred interactive sessions over presentations, and tangible examples over simplified discussions.

"So refreshing to have engineers/designers talk about empathy!! So important!!"

"Talks like empathy should be brought out by group facilitators through a couple powerful stories or anecdotes, not long presentations."

"We are all intelligent human beings and do not need a PowerPoint and Kilimanjaro analogy to understand that respect and open-mindedness are of the utmost importance when living in a culture that is not your own. The information was important, but the manner of communication was slightly belittling."

Culture consists of **concepts**, **values,** and **assumptions** about life that guide behavior and are widely shared by people....[These] are transmitted generation to generation, rarely with explicit instructions, by parents...and other respected elders.
—Richard Brislin & Tomoko Yoshida

Baseline article by Geert Hofstede on the 5 dimensions of Culture: https://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html

Power Index
Masculinity and Femininity
Uncertainty Avoidance
Long Term vs. Short Term Normative Orientation
Indulgence vs. Restraint

At the end of the day, culture comes down to:

Behaviors / Practices
Beliefs
Customs
Values

This is the cultural iceberg. If not introduced well – it will come off as patronizing.

At IDDS we usually take time to talk about the top 10% (and we should), but we rarely take time to dedicate a session to the other 90%. **This session is to help you talk about the other 90%**
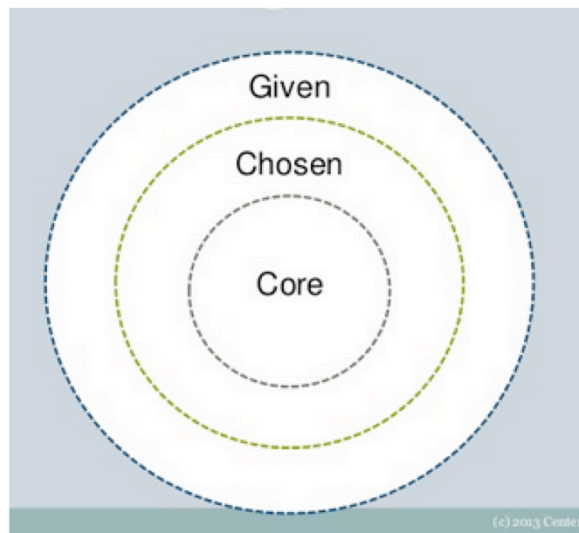
From a Great Medium Article here: https://medium.com/@noelito/cooperative-by-design-137662808566#.kg0zf2f3g

What?

How?

Why?

Social Identity Mapping Activity

From the Center for Creative Leadership:
http://www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/community/SocialSlides.pdf

This is a great activity to run with participants to understand the greater depth at hand.

Draw 3 circles on your paper. Write in the outer circle pieces of your identity that were "Given" to you (i.e. things that you were born with or born into, things that you had no control over the decision, etc.). In the middle circle, list the pieces of your identity that were "Chosen" (i.e.. Things that you chose about your identity and/or how you live, etc.). In the last circle write out 3-5 of your Core values or beliefs.

Share in pairs. Share as much as you feel comfortable.

Have a few people share out with the larger group if they feel comfortable.

Connections to draw---

We differ in our what and how, but tend to connect on our **Why.**

The goal Is Understanding

In trying to appreciate the differences between your culture and the local one, you may feel that you're supposed to like and accept all these differences. **Cultural sensitivity, however, means knowing about and respecting the norms of the local culture, not necessarily liking them.** You may, in fact, be frustrated or even offended by certain acts. In some cases, increased understanding will lead to greater respect, tolerance, and acceptance; in others, it just leads to enhanced awareness.

Keep in mind, too, that **culture is just one of numerous influences** on behavior. People can differ from each other in many other aspects as well.
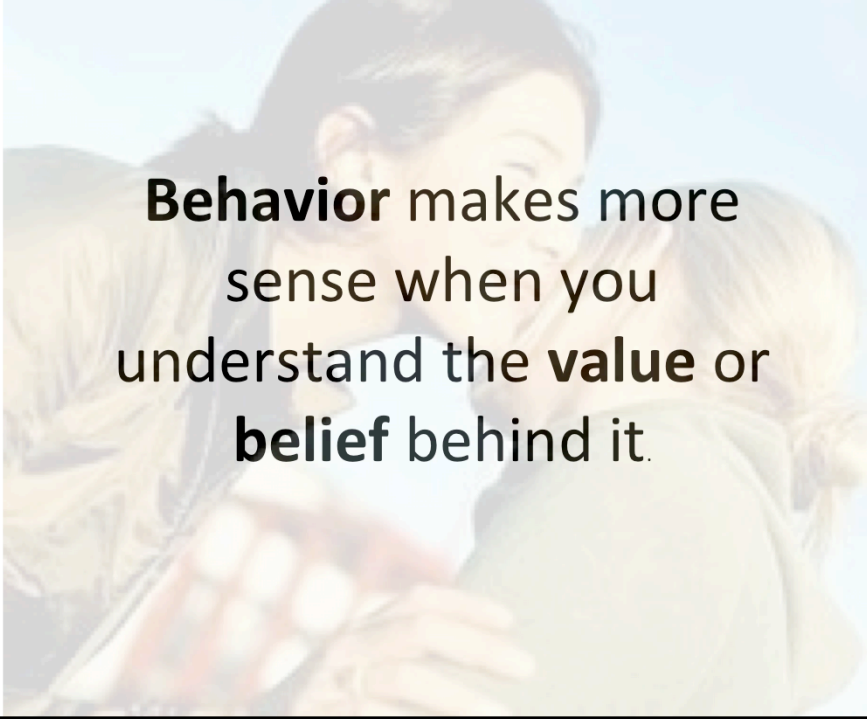
Some values are universal, some cultural, some personal --- but most are a mix.

For this activity you can designate each corner of the room, read a statement aloud, and have participants stand by which corner they think this statement describes. What you'll find quickly is that many are blended. There is no right or wrong answer, it's simply to help us highlight the differences of perceptions and understand the assumptions we have.

Example Scenarios:
_____ Liking spicy food.
_____ Respecting older people.
_____ Taking care of the land.
_____ Wanting a better cookstoves
_____ Considering snakes to be "evil."
_____ Men opening doors for women.
_____ Preferring playing soccer to reading a book.
_____ Feeling sad at the death of your mother

What are other examples?

Ex. How do people view greeting with a kiss if I'm from a culture that doesn't normally kiss? How do people view kissing if I'm from a culture the greets with a kiss? What are the deeper values or beliefs behind both? Are they different are they similar?
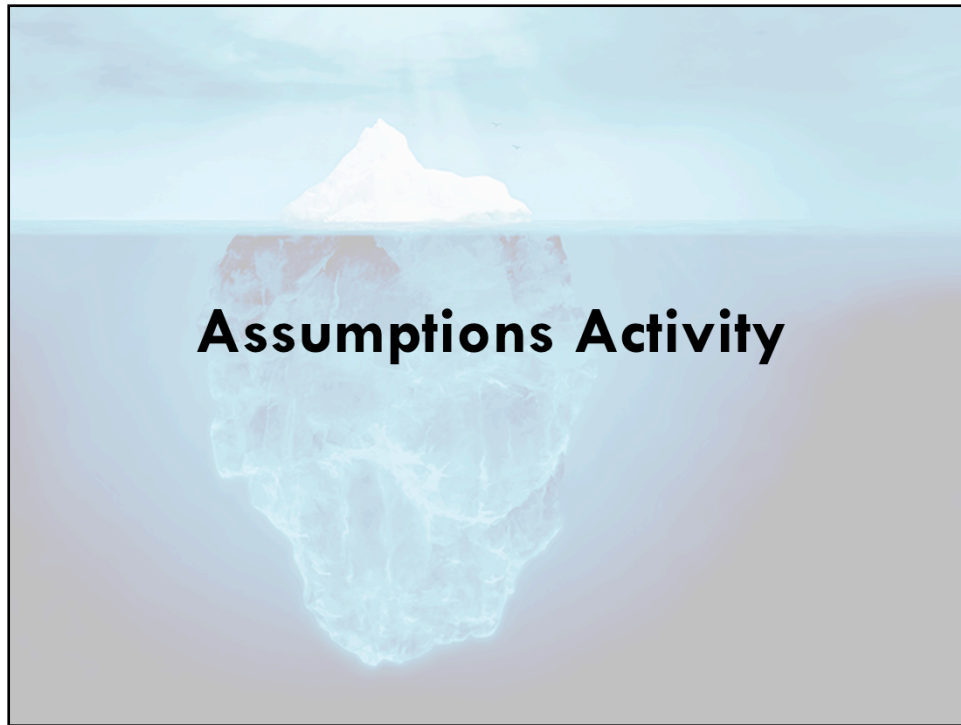
Here's an activity to begin thinking about our assumptions and how that affects our perceptions.

To begin thinking about culture, read carefully the following statement that describes a classroom in a developing country as seen by an American observer.*

"Teachers' frequent use of corporal punishment discourages students from actively participating in the classroom. Students are expected to sit rigidly in their seats and speak only when spoken to. Conditioned in this way, it's not surprising they don't feel free to speak out in the classroom; their shyness, however, should not be mistaken for lack of interest."

If you read between the lines, you see that the writer makes a number of assumptions about children, students, teachers, and the way people learn. Before reading further, list as many of these beliefs or assumptions as you can in the space below.

Topical Norms to Be Aware Of

Gender + Sexuality
Ethnic Diversity
Communication Styles
Power Distance
Time vs. Relationships
Spirituality + Religious Beliefs
Cross-Cultural Adjustment

Talk with the team to see which of these is most relevant to spend time talking about in a large group during your summit. You won't have time to do all in depth, so you'll have to prioritze which ones are most necessary for your summit.

Gender we need to talk about at all summits.

Gender Session Ideas

- Fishbowl Dialogue
- Panel
- Role Play
- Small group discussions

Important to have a session on this at every session (even if only 30 min, but 1 hr is preferable).

Discuss through questions and allow assumptions/values to percolate.

Sample discussion questions:

1. What has your experience been like as male and female?

2. What do you appreciate about the way your culture views gender and what would you wish to see change (if any)?

3. How would you wish to see the other gender support you in that change (if at all)?
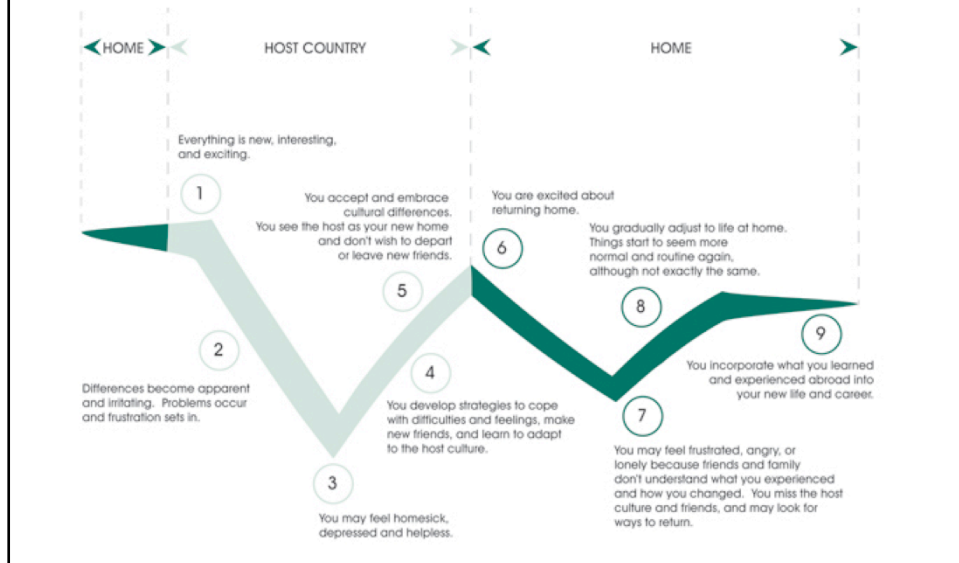
This is the cultural adjustment and readjustment cycle. I will share at the beginning of the summits and it will be good for one of you to share at the end of your summit – so we are aware of the cultural adjustment cycle and how it affects us, our projects, our views, and maybe even our values and believes.

Past IDDS Cultural Sessions

- IDDS Zambia Language Session

- IDDS Colombia session

- Cultural Jeopardy

- Working Styles Worksheet

- IDDS Lahore Empathy Night

Most of our past sessions have been about the top 10% (behaviors and practices such as food, music, languages, etc.)

All available in a google folder here: https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0BzseySE04NKPflE3Mmo4UDA5Wkg0Z0ZLTk1BSmx5S0Utd1ZDQkpPdVQ1T1NCNzNlZG9rT1U&usp=sharing

But there have been a few that end up going a bit deeper and integrated in the curriculum at different point.

Other Resources Available

- [Peace Corps Culture Matters Manual](#)
- [The Hofstede Center](#)
- [Oxfam Gender and Training Manual](#)
- YouTube!!! ☺

- Debora/IDDS Amazon: Thinking of making videos of the community and sharing with participants to show beforehand

Great to use your blog/FB adn share videos, music, language, etc. before an IDDS. Be aware of participants who are not online and how they can get access to the information too (if necessary)