

## Representing the Concept of Culture: Has the Time Come to Replace the Layered Onion?

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### Abstract

On the heels of the GLOBE publications, a flurry of debate has ensued between cross-cultural researchers. An issue of contention included the correlation of 'should be' vs. 'as is' measures and outcomes. This debate included a cry of clearly defining the concept of culture. Social scientists generally agree the word "culture" presents definitional problems, is difficult to measure, and operates in a complex context with institutional, geographic, economic, and other factors. The underlying intent of this paper is to answer the question, 'What is culture?' This paper offers a theoretical mental model of culture and a synthesized definition.

### Introduction

In a recent issue of the Journal of International Business Studies (2006, v. 37), a great deal of space was devoted to dialogue between Geert Hofstede and the GLOBE authors. Among this debate was a commentary by P. Christopher Earley who stressed the importance of clearly defining the concept of culture in any culture-based research effort. Anthropologists, psychologists, and social scientists agree that the word "culture" presents definitional problems, is difficult to measure and to quantify, and operates in a highly complex context with psychological, institutional, political, geographic, and other factors (Harrison & Huntington, 2000; Schein, 2004). The purpose of this paper is an attempt to amalgamate the theoretical definitions of culture that have guided empirical researchers over the last several decades. Included in this offering is a representative model of the causal relationships of various aspects of culture. In order to avoid the pitfalls identified by Schein (2004), Earley (2006), Harrison and Huntington (2000), and many others, this paper presents a concept of culture as a means of settling on a definition to help guide future researchers. The underlying intent is to answer the question, 'What is culture?' This paper concludes with a suggestion for a mental model of culture and a synthesized definition necessary to guide future research as suggested by Earley (2006).

### Review

#### The Concept of Culture

Recently, a great deal of space in an issue of the Journal of International Business Studies (2006, v. 37) was devoted to dialogue between Geert Hofstede and leading authors of the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) study. Among the debate between Hofstede and the GLOBE authors, there also exists a commentary by P. Christopher Earley. Earley (2006) stressed the importance of clearly defining the concept of culture in any culture-based research effort. Anthropologists, psychologists, and social scientists agree that the word 'culture' presents definitional problems, is a fuzzy concept to grasp, is difficult to measure and to quantify, and operates in a highly complex context with psychological, institutional, political, geographic, and other factors (Harrison & Huntington, 2000; Schein, 2004). Therefore, the literature review begins with the onerous task of defining 'culture'.

*What is 'Culture'?* According to the American Heritage Dictionary (2006, Houghton Mifflin), culture is

- a. The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.
- b. These patterns, traits, and products considered as the expression of a particular period, class, community, or population: *Edwardian culture; Japanese culture; the culture of poverty.*
- c. These patterns, traits, and products considered with respect to a particular category, such as a field, subject, or mode of expression: *religious culture in the Middle Ages; musical culture; oral culture.*
- d. The predominating attitudes and behavior that characterize the functioning of a group or organization.
- e. Development of the intellect through training or education.
- f. Enlightenment resulting from such training or education.

At first glance, there are many interesting words that are included in this dictionary's definition: behavior, beliefs, thought, expression, patterns, traits, attitudes, and training. The definition provided above can be synthesized into the following: 'The predominant and totality of behavior patterns, beliefs, and attitudes that characterize the functioning of a group and are passed from one to another through training or education.' [Emphases added]. The key words are behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes. These same words are used in most of the definitions gleaned from the literature and discussed herein.

Adler (2002) cites J. W. Symington's September 23, 1983, New York Times article "Learn Latin America's Culture" as defining culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any capabilities and habits acquired by a ... [person] as a member of society" (p. 16). This is consistent with the dictionary definition given earlier but does not satisfy the need for this study.

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) credit E. B. Tylor with the introduction of the word "culture" into the English language in 1871, although it did not make its way into any British or American dictionary until more than fifty years later. Accordingly, Tylor's definition was a derivation of the contemporary use of the word "civilization" and was defined as "...that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952:81). One can see the all-encompassing nature of Tylor's 1871 definition as it includes that which is visible about a culture (e.g. *art, law, and customs*) and that which is invisible about a culture (e.g. *knowledge, belief, and morals*). As the history of the concept of culture is traced, one sees that the debate over both

the visible and the invisible facets of culture has not been fully adjudicated.

From their 1952 analysis, Kroeber and Kluckhohn synthesized 162 definitions of the word culture into the following:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action, [Emphasis added] (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952:357).

Similar to Tylor, Kroeber and Kluckhohn include both visible and invisible manifestations of culture. However, Kroeber and Kluckhohn actually label these manifestations as 'behaviors' and 'values' respectively. Furthermore, cultural behaviors are observed through 'artifacts' and these behaviors are chosen (i.e. 'selected') from ideas which have attached values. The references to 'products of action' and 'elements of further action' imply a cyclical nature to culture. Scholars have been debating whether 'values' or 'behaviors' are proper measurement of the concept of culture ever since (see for example Glazer (2000), Hofstede (1980; 2001; 2006), House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta (2004), House, Javidan, Dorfman, & de Luque (2006), Javidan, House, Dorfman, Hanges, & de Luque (2006), Shweder (1991; 2000), and Weisner (2000)).

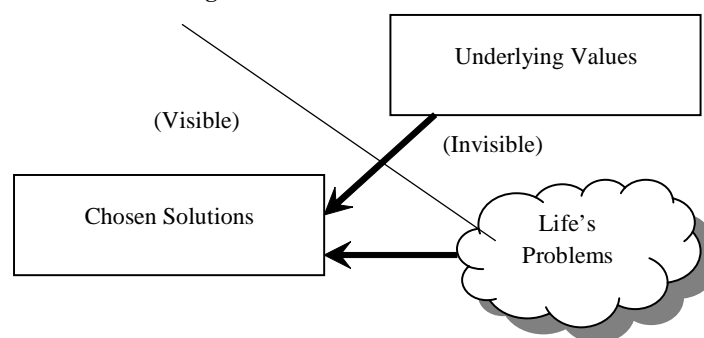
Artifacts and behaviors (the visible aspects of culture) have collectively been referred to as *objective* aspects of culture, while norms, beliefs, assumptions, and values (the invisible aspects of culture) have collectively been referred to as *subjective* aspects of culture. As is true with the definition offered by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1952), most definitions of culture in the literature have been broad and encompass both objective and subjective aspects of culture. Initially, Kroeber and Kluckhohn's definition seemed tipped toward value-based assessment of culture as they also added "...the essence of culture is values", (p. 102, emphasis added). Five decades later, Miroshnik (2001) and Adler (2002) accredit Kroeber's and Kluckhohn's definition as one of the most comprehensive and generally accepted and that it has become the basis of all future definitions of culture.

After Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952) definition, it did not take long before anthropologists began to struggle with the idea of conceptualizing culture as either an assessment of values or an assessment of behaviors. Only six years later, Kroeber and Parsons (1958) suggested a more behavior-based definition of culture as "transmitted and created content and patterns of values, ideas, and other symbolic-meaningful systems as factors in the shaping of human behavior and the artifacts produced through behavior" [Emphasis added] (Hofstede, 1980:25). And so the debate began and has been the fodder of discussion ever since. Do values define culture? If so, can values be properly measured? Or, is it only through behaviors that culture can be measured? Are behaviors the result of values and beliefs? What is an appropriate visualization of the relationships between values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors? The debate has been expanded to include methodology and research design to the extent that publications have been devoted to methodologies of cross-cultural studies (Bearden, Money, & Nevins, 2006; Blodgett, 2008; Cavusgil & Das, 1997; Hofstede, 2006; House, et al., 2004; House, et al., 2006; Javidan, et al., 2006; Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2006; Leung, 2006; Orr & Hauser, 2008; Smith, 2006; Tang & Koveos, 2008).

One reason that may have contributed to the popularity of the definition provided by Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) is that it endears itself to both camps: those that believe culture can be assessed only through the observation of behaviors (Shweder, 2000; Weisner, 2000) and those who believe culture can be assessed through the administration of survey instruments to unearth underlying values (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; House, et al., 2004; Trompenaars, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). There are also those who believe both methods are necessary in order to fully understand the culture of human groups (House, et al., 2004). House & Javidan (2004) have defined culture as, "Shared motives, values, beliefs, identities, and interpretations or meanings of significant events that result from common experiences of members of collectives that are transmitted across generations" (p. 15). Interestingly, House and Javidan's definition does not mention 'attitudes' even though many have thought that attitudes are what cause one's behaviors (for example, see Adler (2002)). However, due to context, situations, and the varying nature of one's attitudes, it has been said a given attitude can predict only a small amount of behavior (Holt, 2007). Therefore, attitude seems to be out of place when assessing the collective nature (e.g. culture) of a group.

Even a seemingly easy task of defining the concept of culture has spurred much debate. The collective discipline of cultural studies, including measurement and assessment, has been mired in murkiness mostly due to how difficult it is to understand, define, and describe the concept of culture. Navigating these waters of cultural studies is not an easy task. See, for example, the heated debate on this topic in a recent edition of the *Journal of International Business Studies* (2006, v. 37). The goal for the current paper is to develop a final definition of the concept of culture including a graphical model illustrating the relationships between values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors.

*Solving Problems.* There has been much written about the idea that culture is a given group's means of coping and dealing with its environment. Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) are the first to suggest a value-based theory whereby there are a limited number of common human problems which any collective group of people must solve. Accordingly, the scope of the problems and the available solutions are limited in number and universally known. Different cultures make different choices when solving these problems. The choices that are made reflect the group's underlying espoused values. It is in assessing and measuring these choices that allows researchers to compare and contrast cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Trompenaars, 1993). As a group makes choices about what is preferred and how to solve life's problems, it is conveying the espoused values of the group. Figure 1 illustrates this relationship.

**Figure 1: Problems and Solutions<sup>1</sup>**

Within Figure 1, the visible aspects of culture include the chosen solutions. Solutions will manifest as behaviors and other artifacts as will be further explored below. The underlying values are invisible aspects of culture. Life's problems include those that are visible and those that are invisible; hence, the 'visible-invisible' demarcation line also bisects the cloud of life's problems. This idea of how a group makes choices based on preferences (i.e. 'should be') compared to the current state or condition (i.e. 'as is') is a significantly contributing concept in the GLOBE study (Hofstede, 2006; House, et al., 2004; House & Javidan, 2004; Javidan & House, 2001; Javidan, House, Dorfman, Hanges, & de Luque, 2006; Triandis, 2004a). Further, that "culture" is really the community-specific idea of what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient concerning the group's interaction with their environment and that to be a member of that community one must subscribe to the socially inherited customs about truth, goodness, beauty, and efficiency (Shweder, 2000). In this regard, Hofstede (2001:5) defines values as "a broad tendency to prefer certain states of affairs over others." This is not fundamentally different from the approach House et al. (2004) offered in the GLOBE study measurements, yet this idea of comparing respondents' assessment of 'as is' vs. 'should be' is one source of contention between the two camps (Earley, 2006; Hofstede, 2006; Javidan, et al., 2006; Smith, 2006).

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) introduced the concept of culture resulting from a society's chosen solutions to life's problems. Further to their theory, the actual number of 'problems' facing a group was theorized to be limited to the following five (Holt, 2007). These five are introduced here to establish historical perspective and influence of future definitions of the concept of culture.

1. What is the relationship between the group and its environment - one of mastery, harmony, or subjugation?
2. Are people fundamentally good, evil, or capable of both (i.e. a mixture of good and evil)?
3. On what aspect of time should we primarily focus - past, present, or future?
4. What is the primary activity for members of the group - to grow (i.e. acquire knowledge), to achieve, or to be expressive?
5. How should people relate to each other - by hierarchy, as equals, or by one's merits?

This list of five universal 'problems' has gone through changes over the last 50 years. The issues most debated within the literature are the number of actual problems, the means to measure each 'problem', and the actual available solutions within each problem (Adler, 2008; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; House, et al., 2004; Schein, 2004; Trompenaars, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998).

**Objective Culture.** 'Objective' culture includes the visible aspects that set one group of people apart from another. Hofstede proposes that the 'visible' and 'invisible' aspects of culture can be likened onto an onion. Analogous to peeling away the 'layers' of an onion, one eventually gets to the core of culture. The outer layers are observable aspects of culture and therefore, Hofstede (1980; 2001; & Hofstede 2005) collectively refer to these layers as "practices". Within these outer layers are the group's symbols, heroes, and rituals. These observable behaviors of a given group of people are manifested through observable 'artifacts' (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Kroeber & Parsons, 1958; Schein, 2004). However, the meaning and interpretation of these observable behaviors is dependent on the context of the group.

At the outermost layer of Hofstede's onion lies "symbols". At this layer, cultural manifestations are superficial and include language, jargon, gestures, dress, hairstyle, pictures, and other outwardly observable symbols of a culture. Symbols are easily developed or easily disappear, and that is why they appear in the outermost layer of the onion, (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This is very similar to the "artifacts" described within various definitions above. At the next layer of Hofstede's onion, he describes heroes as actual persons, alive, dead, imaginary, or real who possess highly prized characteristics which help shape cultural behaviors. Heroes are not as easily replaceable as symbols and, therefore, are at a more inner layer. Nevertheless, heroes are still at an overtly observable level (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

The third observable layer within Hofstede's onion is that of rituals. These are described as socially essential activities that help bind individuals together within the norms of the group. Hofstede (2001) considers these activities unnecessary and therefore only carried out for the sake of being a ritual. In addition to social and religious ceremonies, Hofstede (2001) includes ways of greeting other group members within this layer. As is true for symbols and heroes, at least to Hofstede (2001), rituals are also 'observable' practices. Within this context of cultural manifestation, symbols, heroes, and rituals are the practices of a given culture.

These three outer layers of Hofstede's onion are the observable 'visible' manifestations of culture. The acceptance and interpretation of these three layers is attributed to the core of Hofstede's model: values (Hofstede, 2001; 2005). It is at the core of Hofstede's cultural onion where the most interesting measurement lies. As Hofstede (2001; & Hofstede 2005) gives us that values are at the core of the cultural manifestation onion, he also describes a method to measure the core values of a distinct cultural group.

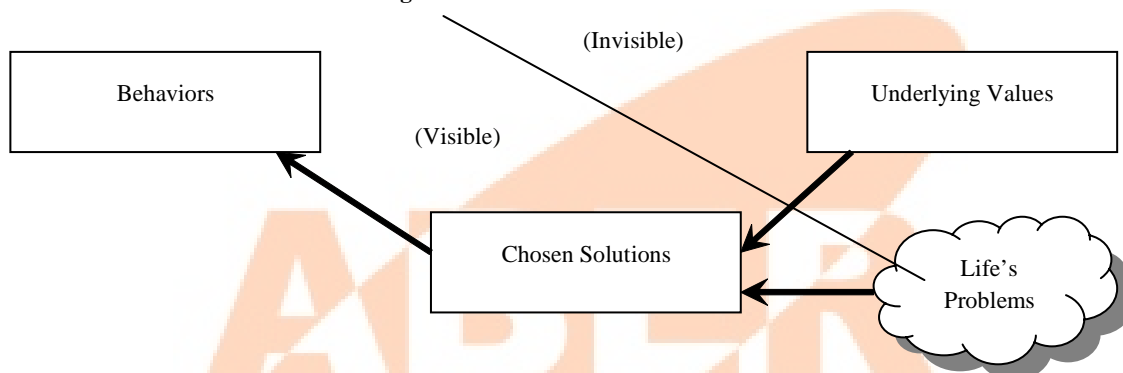
In a very similar fashion to Hofstede's onion, others have illustrated the manifestations of culture at various levels or layers (Schein, 2004; Trompenaars, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). They offer that the outer layer contains artifacts and products which are explicit

in nature and context. This outer layer is what can be seen and heard about a group of people. In the middle layer is where norms, espoused values and rules that govern behavior exist. The deepest layer contains underlying assumptions or taken-for-granted assumptions and beliefs. This deepest level has been likened on to Hofstede's core level of 'values' (Schein, 2004). Within this context, Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) used scenarios to measure the manifestation of a group's values and underlying assumptions as they advocate that 'culture' is a group's answer to environmental dilemmas.

There are those who stress the importance of behaviors in any model that properly describes the concept of culture. Schein (1985; 1992; 2004) advocates a definition of culture on three levels (from visible, superficial levels to deeper, invisible, and unconscious levels): (i) behaviors and artifacts; (ii) beliefs and values and (iii) underlying assumptions. While some scholars espouse the behavior-based definition of culture (Shweder, 2000; Weisner, 2000), Hofstede (1980:25; 2001:9) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" and goes on to say, "Culture, in this sense, includes systems of values; and values are among the building blocks of culture." [Emphasis added] (1980:25). Later researchers have credited Hofstede's definition as the way in which managers frequently interpret culture; and that values do, indeed, guide social action (Adler, 2002; Adler, 2008; Miroshnik, 2001; Weisner, 2000).

The debate has intensified over the measurement of culture in recent years. In one camp, Geert Hofstede steadfastly defends his approach of assessing values through questionnaires while Peter Dorfman, Mansour Javidan, Robert House, Richard Shweder, and others have been critical of using only value-based questionnaires. The intensity of this debate is summarized, albeit rather tongue-in-cheek, in the title of Peter B. Smith's commentary in the *Journal of International Business Studies* (2006, v. 37): "When elephants fight, the grass gets trampled: the GLOBE and Hofstede projects". With this in mind and to satisfy the quest for an inclusive definition of culture, an appropriate addition to the model presented earlier in Figure 1 is in order. This addition, as seen in Figure 2, is necessary due to the need to include 'behaviors' as an integral part of the concept of culture (House, et al., 2004).

**Figure 2: Values-Choices-Behaviors<sup>2</sup>**



As is consistent with the collective definitions above, underlying values influence a group's preferred choice in solving a particular problem. These choices are manifested through the collective behaviors and illustrate the group's choice between what is right or wrong, good or bad (Adler, 2008). What is observable is the actual action as a result of a particular choice. This is what Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) described as 'behavior'. Not all researchers have suggested that values define or constitute a culture. Citing Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Weisner (2000) suggests that Kluckhohn did not consider value systems as determinative of a culture. Nevertheless, Weisner did concede that values influence one's behaviors. How does one separate culture from non-cultural practices that make people different? For many researchers, the answer lies in assessing values (Glazer, 2000; Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). This will be critical as one goal for this paper is to develop a mental model of the relationships between values, norms, beliefs, and behaviors - the common elements in the previously explored definitions of culture.

*Subjective Culture.* The 'invisible' nature of culture has often been referred to as culture's subjective aspects. These have included espoused values, beliefs, norms, motives, interpretations, and underlying assumptions (Hofstede, 2001; House & Javidan, 2004; Schein, 2004; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). The debate has long lingered as some authors emphasize analyzing the subjective nature of culture (Hofstede, 2001; Schein, 2004; Triandis, 2004a) while others advocate equal treatment of both subjective and objective manifestations (House, et al., 2004; House & Javidan, 2004). Holt (2007) reported that the idea of measuring attitudes is an idea that has come and gone due to their varying nature and complexity. Instead, in order to measure the subjective nature of culture, scholars turned to shared values. Values are less likely to change and 'shared' values are a much better assessment of a group's culture. Transcending generations, some have offered that values are so engrained in a group that the local cultures of parts of the world today (circa 2009) can be traced back to the value systems of the Roman Empire (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Compared to attitudes, core values are less likely to change and are more finite in nature. These core values are consistently hypothesized as universal and, further, that they directly influence the ways in which a group can interact with its environment to solve problems (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; House, et al., 2004; Trompenaars, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). A difficult aspect within much of the previous research is that the definitions of these core values and the means of measuring them have been hotly contested in the literature (Earley, 2006). This adds to the murkiness of this review as previously discussed. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that values are at the heart of any study of culture. The use of values is due mostly to how a group uses them to judge what is expected or forbidden, what is right or wrong, and what is good or bad. 'Values' influence what is considered acceptable behavior within the group. Values cannot be directly observed but are manifested through choices and behaviors (Adler, 2002; Holt, 2007).

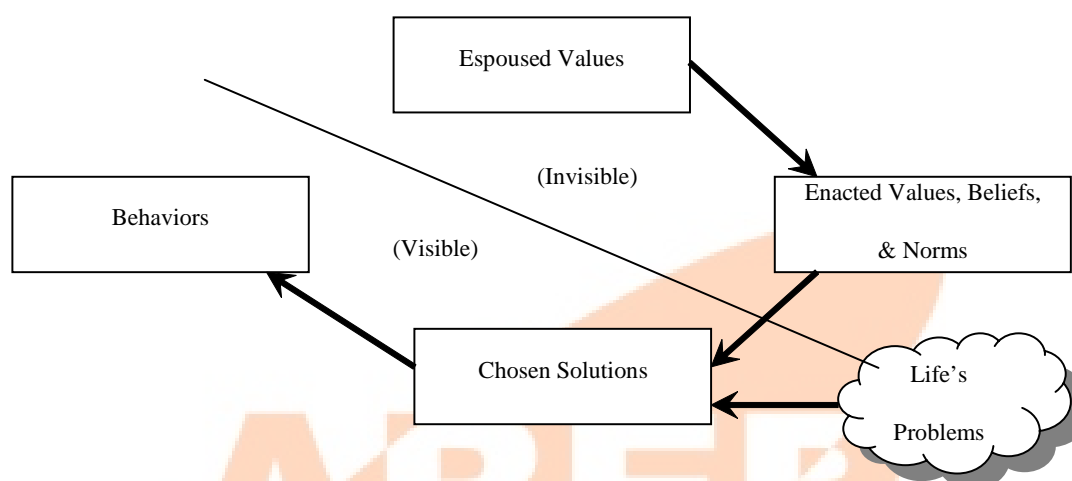
For many researchers, there is emerging general consensus that espoused values are the essence or core of culture (Adler, 2002; Adler, 2008; England, 1978; Glazer, 2000; Hofstede, 1980; House, et al., 2004; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Schein, 1985; Schein, 1992; Schein, 2004; Triandis, 2004a; Trompenaars, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). However, not all researchers agree that 'espoused' values are the driving factor or influencer of behaviors. For example, Denison (2000) challenged Schein's original model (1985) which stated 'espoused'



values were determinant of behaviors. Denison suggested that 'enacted' values are a more logical part of the causal relationship because 'enacted' values are what people act upon when making choices and determining the appropriate behavior for a given situation or problem. Schneider (1988) builds on Schein's model by explaining that the underlying assumptions prescribe ways of perceiving, thinking, and evaluating the world, self, and others. Hansen and Brooks (1994) explain that all cultures operate from conceptual models by creating belief systems to filter expectations from appropriate and inappropriate behavior.

England (1978) studied personal value systems of managers in five countries. His conclusion stated that values are similar to attitudes but are more deeply embedded in the personality and more permanent. Therefore, values influence attitudes and exist at a deeper level than attitudes and beliefs. Varying levels of values will influence attitudes and beliefs which, in turn, influence behaviors. However, as reported earlier, Holt (2007) offered evidence that measuring attitudes was problematic and complex. Specifically, it may be that attitudes reside within individuals rather than the collectivity of the group. Therefore, and combining the ideas put forth earlier by Schneider (1988), Hansen and Brooks (1994), England (1978), and Denison (2000) concerning how 'espoused' values influence 'enacted' values and beliefs, results in an updated model as shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3: Values-Beliefs-Choices-Behaviors<sup>3</sup>**



The idea that espoused values are the essence of culture is shared by many researchers (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005; House, et al., 2004; Schein, 2004; Trompenaars, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). This is meaningful as this review focuses on offering an inclusive definition of culture and a meaningful theoretical model of both the 'as is' and 'should be' manifestations of culture. It should be pointed out that there are those who believe there is something even deeper than 'espoused values'. Trompenaars (1993) and Schein (2004) call this unconscious level 'underlying assumptions'. However, both authors also discuss measuring culture through espoused values so it seems they themselves liken these underlying and taken-for-granted assumptions to Hofstede's espoused values (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001). Schein (1985) suggests that underlying assumptions are at the unconscious level. If so, measurement would be difficult if not impossible.

*'Should Be' vs. 'As Is'.* The debate over the best model to represent 'culture' is far from settled. In fact, the GLOBE project adds fuel to the debate by simultaneously assessing both the objective and subjective aspects of culture. Using two different groups of respondents from each society, the GLOBE project had one set of scales for assessing the 'should be' (i.e. subjective, values-based) aspects of culture and another set of scales for assessing the 'as is' (i.e. objective, behavior-based) aspects of culture. The GLOBE authors make repeated points concerning this very issue and how Hofstede's model confusingly combines the subjective and objective aspects into one. Contrasting their approach with Hofstede's, GLOBE claims that both practices (i.e. behaviors) and values of culture were measured in their 'as is' (i.e. behaviors) and 'should be' (i.e. values) scales respectively. Of course, Hofstede challenged this concept and questioned what GLOBE really measured (Hofstede, 2006). This debate is unsettled. GLOBE also contrasted their scales with those of Schwartz (1992; 1994) but they limit the comparison to the 'should be' aspects of Schwartz's model due to Schwartz's focus on values and not behaviors (Hanges & Dickson, 2004; House, et al., 2004; Schwartz, 1992; Schwartz, 1994). It is worth noting that, as far as the 'should be' aspects of culture, not all of the GLOBE scales correlated with the Hofstede and Schwartz models, even though the GLOBE literature review and scale development was grounded on the basis of similar theories. A key difference between Hofstede and GLOBE is the operationalization of the constructs (e.g. differences in measurement).

*Culture's Sustainability.* Early scholars have spoke of culture as the way of life of a group of people which included stereotyped patterns of learned behavior which are handed down from one generation to the next through means of language, behaviors, standards of right vs. wrong, knowledge, skill, and imitation (Barnouw, 1963; Dresser & Carns, 1969; Foster, 1962). An important part of this definition is that social scientists began to discuss the idea that the culture of a group is transmitted to future generations. This adds a key component to the concept of culture: sustainability. This is an important aspect in any quest for a causal relationship between values, beliefs, and behaviors. As one enters a group (through immigration or birth), assimilation begins. It is in this process of observing others' behaviors that one begins to build a knowledge base of acceptable behaviors.

For the members born into a group, anthropologist Thomas Weisner (2000) suggests that cultural education begins in the womb as parents imagine a world of wonderful opportunities for the unborn offspring with parental hopes that the yet-to-arrive child will develop a sound personal value system. Further, many suggest that culture is, to some degree, inherited and that some inborn personality traits such as bravery, generosity, and good-heartedness are predetermined (Weisner, 2000; Whiting, 1996). Transcending management and anthropological studies, the science of early childhood development has also tackled the role and importance of culture in the development of the child and the importance of

each generation passing cultural knowledge on to the next. Too, each generation adds new information and experiences which are passed on to succeeding generations. Within the discipline of Education, it is widely accepted that children do not invent their own knowledge and understanding, but rather they appropriate the body of knowledge which is accumulated in their culture.

"The idea that culture influences cognition is crucial because the child's entire social world shapes not just what he knows but how he thinks. The kind of logic we use and the methods we use to solve problems are influenced by our cultural experience ... A child does not become a thinker and a problem solver; she becomes a special kind of thinker, rememberer, listener, and communicator, which is a reflection of the social context....Thus the cultural history of our ancestors influences not just our knowledge but our very thought processes." (Bodrova & Leong, 1996:10-11)

In regard to passing cultural building blocks on from one generation to the next, anthropologists believe that nonverbal communication methods are more important than verbal education and that cultural traits are amenable to direct parental influence. For some, actions speak louder than words and to fully understand a culture, one must analyze practices (Shweder, 2000; Weisner, 2000). Future researchers expanded upon this idea that culture is shared by all, or almost all, members of a social group and is passed on to younger members by the older members of the group in the form of morals, laws, and customs. Collectively, these shape the behavior of societal members by structuring one's perception of the world (Adler, 2002; Brown, 1976).

*A Conceptual Model and Definition of Culture.* From the above analysis, there are key components of the definition of culture including values, attitudes, beliefs, choices, and behaviors. These, too, have distinctive characteristics and form definite causal relationships in a cyclical model. Figure 4 illustrates these causal relationships.

**Figure 4: Culture's Cycle<sup>4</sup>**

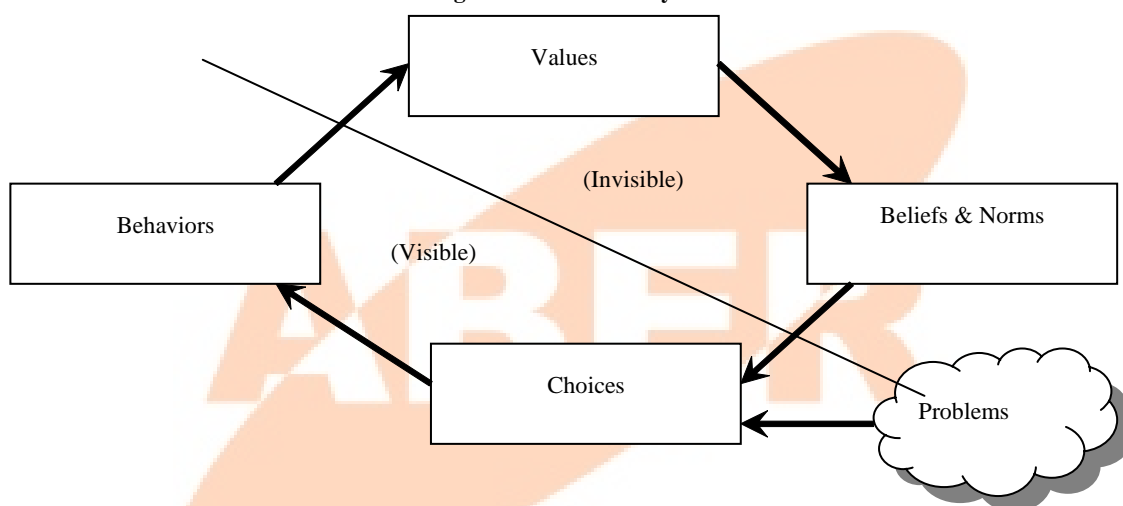


Figure 4 was derived from the collective definitions provided earlier. Although homage was paid to Denison (2000) in regard to 'espoused' values vs. 'enacted' values, the causal relationship presented in Figure 4 moves first from 'values' to 'beliefs and norms' to avoid confusion. Relying on values, beliefs, and norms, the group is required to choose between the available choices when solving life's problems. The preferences of the group are made known through behaviors (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Trompenaars, 1993; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). It is through watching and imitating that new members of the group develop an understanding of the underlying values and assumptions of the group (Barnouw, 1963; Dresser & Carns, 1969; Foster, 1962). And hence, the cycle is complete.

From the previous analysis of the concept of culture, definitions from the literature are synthesized into the following:

Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another. At the heart of this collective programming is a system of values. These values are among the building blocks of culture and influence the norms, beliefs, and choices necessary to address the problems presented by the environment. The causal relationships between values, norms, beliefs, choices, and behaviors collectively make up the culture of one human group. This collective programming is generally passed from established members of the group to new members of the group.

This definition and model encompasses the theory that cultures have inherent stability and sustainability which can last for many generations. In this regard, cultures are slow to change (Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede, 2001; House, et al., 2004; Schein, 2004; Trompenaars, 1993).

## Conclusion

This paper was intended to offer an updated cyclical model of culture that combines the 'should be' nature of values and beliefs with the 'as is' manifestation through choices and behaviors. Figures 1 through 4 are offered as visual representations of the causal relationships between values, beliefs, norms, choices, and behaviors as groups navigate societal or group problems. A definition of culture was also offered in an attempt to amalgamate past empirical research into a single comprehensive definition that represents the cyclical model. This effort was motivated by the timely suggestion from Earley (2006) that researchers must properly define [and represent] the concept of culture when undertaking cross-cultural research.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Derived from Adler (2008); Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961); Hofstede (1980a, 2001); House et al. (2004); Javidan and House (2001); Javidan et al. (2006); Triandis (2004a) and Trompenaars (1993a)

<sup>2</sup>Derived from Adler (2008); Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961); Kroeber and Parsons (1958); Hofstede (1980a, 2001); House et al. (2004); Javidan and House (2001); Javidan et al. (2006); Schein (1985, 1992, 2004); Triandis (2004a) and Trompenaars (1993a)

<sup>3</sup>Derived from Adler (2002, 2008); Denison (2000); England (1978); Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961); Kroeber and Parsons (1958); Hansen and Brooks (1994); Hofstede (1980a, 2001); Holt (2007); House et al. (2004); Javidan and House (2001); Javidan et al. (2006); Schein (1985, 1992, 2004); Schneider (1988); Triandis (2004a) and Trompenaars (1993a)

<sup>4</sup>Derived from Adler (2002, 2008); Barnouw (1963); Bodrova and Leong (1996); Brown (1976); Denison (2000); Dresser and Carns (1969); England (1978); Foster (1962); Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961); Kroeber and Parsons (1958); Hansen and Brooks (1994); Hofstede (1980a, 2001); Holt (2007); House et al. (2004); Javidan and House (2001); Javidan et al. (2006); Schein (1985, 1992, 2004); Schneider (1988); Shweder (2000); Triandis (2004a); Trompenaars (1993a); Weisner (2000); and Whiting (1996)