



more about the  
seven dimensions  
of culture

## The three layers of culture

**There are many interpretations of culture. We look at culture from a special perspective. We like to compare culture with an onion. Culture, like an onion, consists of layers which can be peeled off. In culture, we can distinguish three layers:**

The outer layer is what people primarily associate with culture: the visual reality of behavior, clothes, food, language, housing, etc. This is the level of explicit culture.

The middle layer refers to the norms and values which a community holds: what is considered right and wrong (norms) or good and bad (values). Norms are often external and reinforced by social control. Values tend to be more internal than norms. Society doesn't have many means of controlling their enforcement. Values and norms structure the way people in a particular culture behave. But they are not visible, despite their influence on what happens at the observable surface.

The inner layer is the deepest: the level of implicit culture. Understanding the core of the culture onion is the key to successfully working with other cultures. The core consists of basic assumptions, series of rules and methods to deal with the regular problems that it faces. These methods of problem-solving have become so basic that, like breathing, we no longer think about how we do it. For an outsider these basic assumptions are very difficult to recognize.

Every culture has developed its own set of basic assumptions. These basic assumptions can be measured by dimensions. Each dimension is like a continuum. Cultures differ in how they deal with these dimensions, but they do not differ in needing to make some kind of response.