

## Cultural Evolution

**Culture** is the substrate of ideas, beliefs, and values, which give rise to behavior. At a deep level, culture is the worldview, cosmology, or story that gives meaning to our lives and explains our place in the cosmos. Culture is a form of human memory, a memory forged through eons of experience and interplay with our environment.

The attached “Iceberg of Culture” is a visual way to understand culture. We are aware of the meaning of some of our cultural behavior, but most of the content of culture resides in deep values so pervasive as to be unnoticeable.

As we humans have experienced the cosmos in deeper and more extended ways, our ideas, beliefs and values have evolved, incorporating greater and greater complexity. However, because evolution is fundamentally conservative, culture has a conservative momentum. In times of great or rapid change, cultural lags-becomes non-adaptive. This cultural lag can be dangerous if not fatal.

### Elements of Cultural Evolution

**The individual** is the basic unit of cultural evolution. As individuals change their beliefs about their story, culture also changes. In order for cultural *change* to become cultural *evolution*, the human needs to be *reconnected* (religio).

**The community** has two roles in cultural evolution. The first is to be a support in the personal reconnection process. The community is important for this because it can provide a place where we can experience ourselves in new ways in a place where the values are different from those in the popular culture. The second role the community plays is to amplify the values, attitudes and actions of its members so they have greater effect. This collectivization also permits actions that would not be possible by one or few individuals.

For a community to function well requires shared experiences, out of which come shared understandings, out of which come shared commitments to values, attitudes, and actions. With this base, the community can be in a state of flow and can vectorize its energies to leverage its actions.

**The society** is the third dimension in which to influence the direction of cultural change. Any organization interested in cultural evolution must choose the areas in which it will operate because the possibilities are too vast for any one organization to cover all of them. At this level, the work of Everett Rogers on the adoption of a new innovation is an important source for determining what kinds of actions to take. (See his book *The Diffusion of Innovations*). Some lessons that can be drawn from his work are the rate of adoption of a new idea depends upon

how much it is perceived as a better idea than the current situation; that a large part of the population (70%) must be exposed to the new idea to have it spread through the society; and that only 20% needs to adopt the idea for it to become unstoppable. Therefore, actions taken should meet the criteria of making a new idea attractive, exposing large numbers of people to it, and focusing on those most likely to adopt it.