



***A Beginner's Guide to the Deep Culture Experience: Beneath the Surface* by Joseph Shaules**

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***Reviewed by Katrin Volt at [diversophy.com](http://diversophy.com)***

Shaules' new book about the deep culture experience is an enjoyable read. It looks at this hidden part that makes or breaks our intercultural experience. According to Shaules, deep culture is "at the core of intercultural experiences." The author's personal accounts and stories add life to the book and make it easy to follow. This book is useful for students and business people who are going abroad or are already living in another country as well as those interested in learning about deep culture.

*A Beginner's Guide to the Deep Culture Experience: Beneath the Surface* consists of eleven chapters. Chapters look at deep culture from different perspectives, e.g., personal experiences, the human evolution and the role of culture; the brain and the unconsciousness; Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity; stages of dealing with cultural difference (*resistance, acceptance, adaptation*), etc. There is also a chapter on people who have contributed to the field of deep culture and intercultural experience (e.g., Boas, Mead, Piaget, Freud, Jung, Hall, etc.).

Are we aware of our deep culture processes? Not necessarily. According to Shaules, deep culture occurs outside of awareness, but intercultural situations make us cognizant of our unconscious preferences and assumptions. He adds that we never really lose our cultural programming, so it is important to be able to observe and know our own cultural preferences and how to deal with them in intercultural situations.

Having a deep culture experience means we learn about ourselves when we communicate with others. People can choose to be open and curious or closed and ethnocentric. That means it is up to us how far we go in the learning process. We can have a surface experience (people say "hello" to strangers) or deep (not easily visible, e.g. what "yes" means, etc.) culture experience.

I would like to point out Chapter six, which I found most interesting. This chapter describes the relationship between culture and thought; deep culture and the brain; the unconscious mind and the deep culture learning. It conveys the message that a lot of what we do is unconscious and we should stop flying on "autopilot" – for example, deliberately change our routines to learn new cultural patterns. According to Shaules, an understanding of "how the unconscious mind works can be a powerful tool of cultural learning for sojourners." Shaules points out that deep culture affects some of our most fundamental thought processes and especially here operates beyond our awareness.

Adapting into a new culture can put a lot of stress on individuals. For example, not speaking the local language or not knowing how to communicate and behave with the locals can be quite taxing. This can result in feelings of inadequacy, for example. Shaules describes three different categories of adaptive stress: *culture surprise, culture stress, and culture shock*. He defines *culture shock* as a stage when the person has reached his or her adaptive limits. As a result, on one extreme the person may retreat, feel

lonely, or have a feeling of giving up (e.g. there's too much for the person to deal with, they don't know what is expected or how to go about their tasks). The opposite and more helpful approach is to open up to new challenges and take them on. When stressed, people go back to their preferred way of behaving and doing things. Feeling uncomfortable is part of deep culture learning; hence, we should step back and reflect on our discomfort, as its cause may lie simply in our cultural conditioning.

Shaules shows how we manage the three possible reactions to adaptive demands: *resistance*, *acceptance* (recognizing the demands as valid but choosing not to change), and *adaptation*. He sees these as being at the core of developing intercultural sensitivity. He also emphasizes that just *adapting* is not a positive behavior on its own but needs to be accompanied with open-mindedness and a non-judgmental attitude. The ability to suspend judgment and to look at the world from another person's perspective is essential to cultural learning.

The question people often ask is how to define a successful intercultural experience. Chapter seven looks at deep culture and intercultural sensitivity in practical terms. Shaules suggests using Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity for understanding where we are at in our cultural learning. The model encompasses six stages that we go through as we learn to deal with cultural difference (from ethnocentric to ethnorelative). Shaules pays tribute to Edward Hall and *The Silent Language*, published in 1959. Hall has defined cultural understanding as, "a way to experience another group is to understand and accept how their minds work."

It is not enough to make assumptions about what another person might like but to learn to accept the other person and his or her way of doing things. Shaules adds that deep culture learners have the ability to change behavior but maintain an underlying self that remains stable.

The last chapter gives advice on the deep culture journey and lists some internet sites to peruse if one is going local for a short time. Shaules also emphasizes the importance of learning to speak the local language and using it to function in another society, as this in itself can be a powerful deep culture learning experience.

The appendix provides a deep culture learning profiler, a graphic overview of the cultural learning process. In addition, the author lists further reading on the deep culture and the related concepts discussed in the book. Shaules suggests that the key is to accept the local culture and adapt without losing one's own identity. He also uses the term "bodymindfulness"- an awareness of our physical and emotional states. He cautions people against judging themselves too harshly, as this leads to more judgments. Deep culture is all about learning about others and growing as a person.

I found the book both intriguing and helpful; it gives the reader solid insights into the complex process of deep culture learning and how to go about it. As Shaules points out, the deep culture journey starts with entrance into a new reality. Are you ready for this?