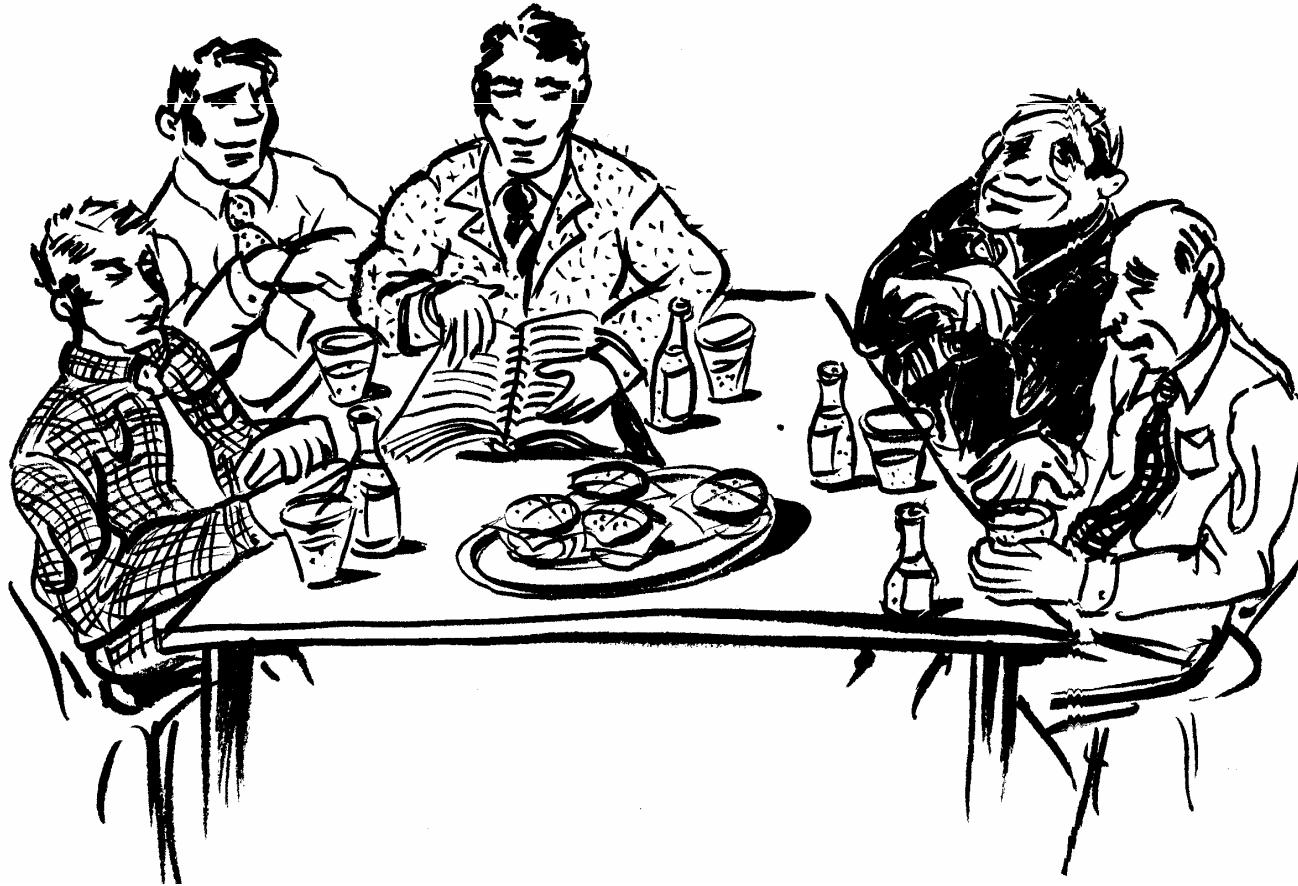


# Intercultural Communication - a moccasin and a twinkling star

Leaders Lounge, 3 December 2007

Dr. Christa Uehlinger

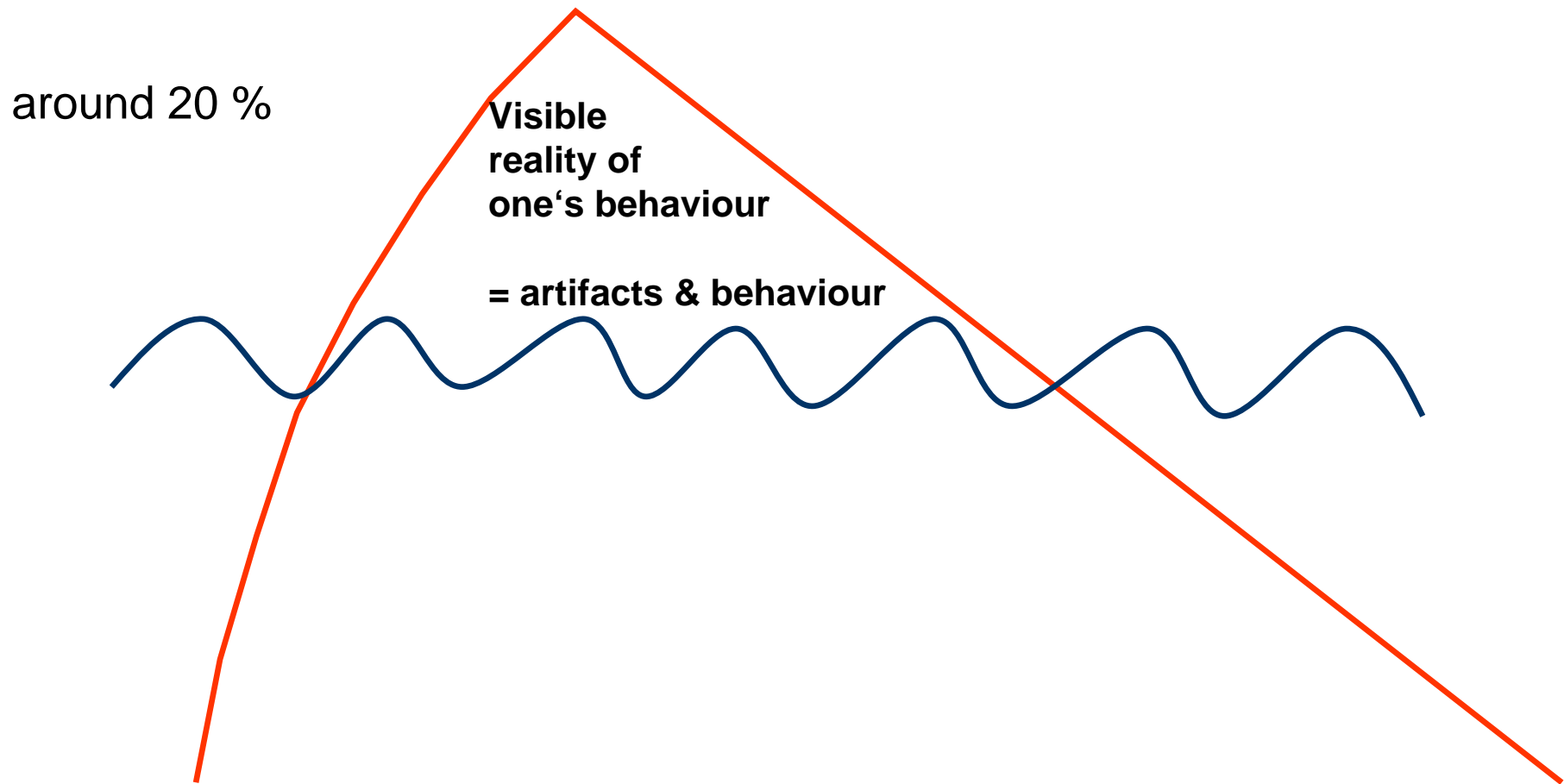
Let me tell you a story ...



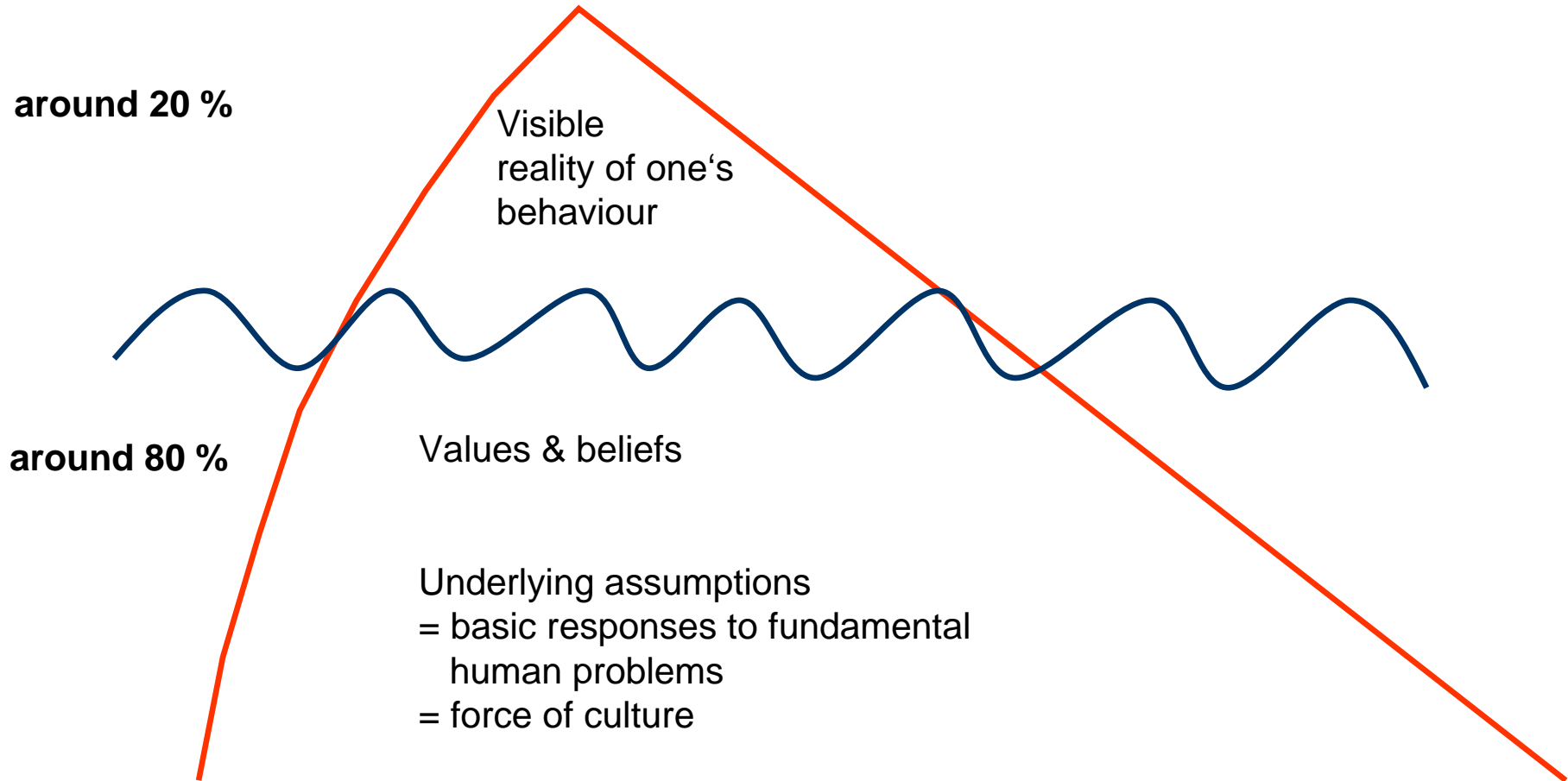
# What is culture?

- Culture=  
the **learned** and **shared values, beliefs** and **assumptions** of a group of **interacting people** which result in **characteristic behaviours**.
- A set of basic assumption – shared solutions to universal problems of external adaption (how to survive) and internal integration (how to stay together) – which have evolved over time and are handed down from one generation to the next.

# The Iceberg



# The Iceberg



We perceive the world continuously through our own cultural glasses ...



... so does everyone else, but simply through other glasses



## An illustration



Mary from the UK learnt

- It's good to be an individual
- Be self-reliant and stand on your own feet
- ‚Where there is a will, there is a way‘



Fatima from Morocco learnt

- To identify with her primary group
- You can always depend on others
- God's will is paramount („In Shallah“)

# A first recap

- Culture is **deeply rooted** inside us.
- Culture is **meaning** - about what meaning is given to things, actions and behaviours.
- Culture **directs** our actions and our perception.
- Culture must be considered as the **context** within which all transactions take place. It is not just another factor to put into equation. It is the dominant one!
- Cultural orientations are **neither right nor wrong** - they are simply different.

# The challenge

- Cultural frictions are normal, **BUT**
- Cultural malaise may go unrecognised. It may therefore be some time before cultural differences are surfaced and diagnosed.

# The cost

On individual level:

- expatriation: 10 -20 % of all US managers returned home earlier.
- of the one's who stayed: one third did not reach the targets.
- the biggest cause for assignment failure: inability to adapt.
- 20% of the employees who complete global assignments want to leave their company when they come home.

# The cost

On team level:

- Multicultural teams are either **highly effective or highly ineffective.**
- A project team consisting of 8 different nationalities met in South Africa for 3 weeks with the task to elaborate a strategy and an action plan for the new IT-approach in this local subsidiary. They did not know each other before. Returning home, the project manager commented: “We were **not able to co-operate** and did **not reach the target**. We were **too different** and fighting each other.”

# The cost

On organisational level

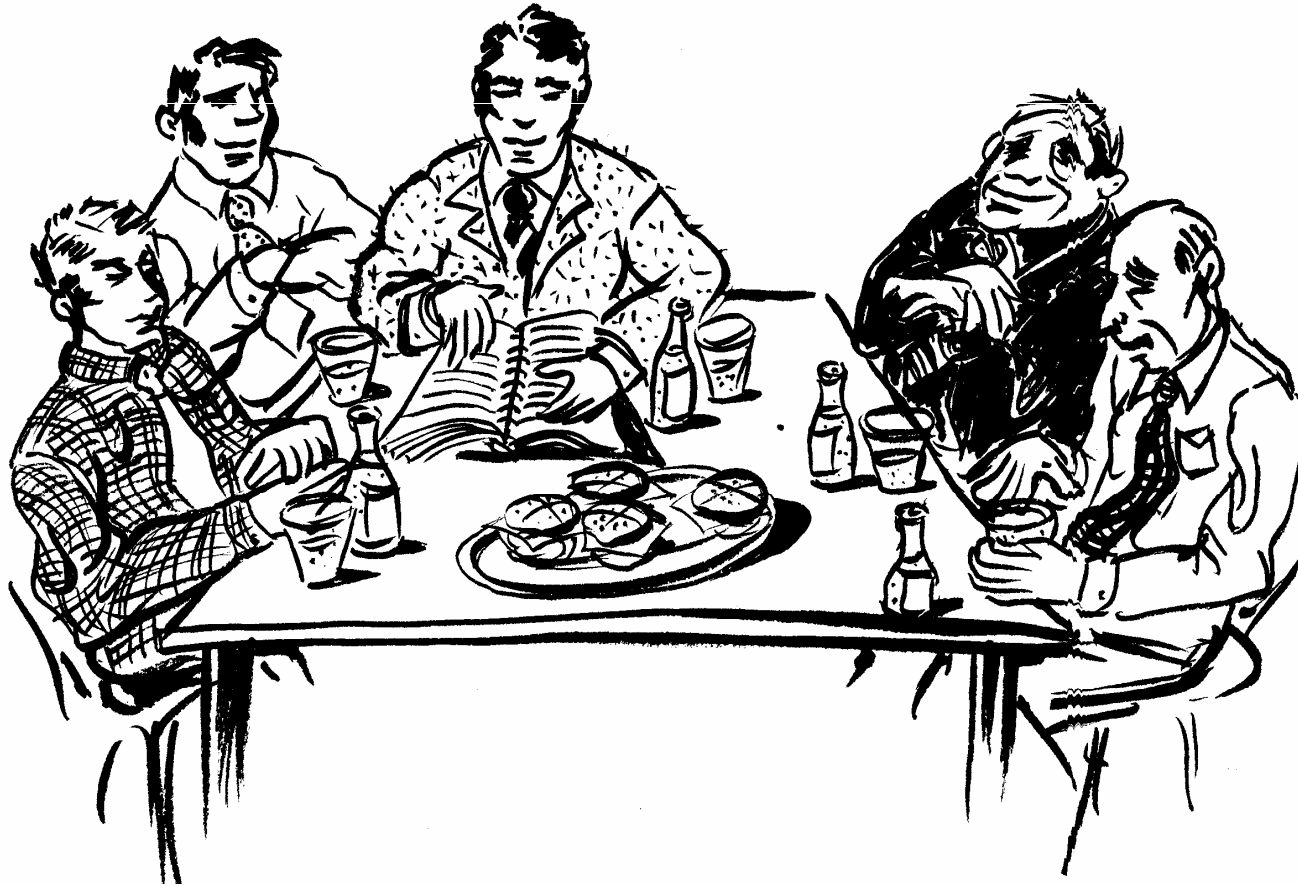
- 35% of senior executives ranked cultural differences as the number one problem in foreign acquisition

- P&G introduced Pampers in Japan and was delighted with the initial success. But the P&G marketing manager did not know that Japanese do their laundry daily and were using Pampers only at night.

Mooney, a Japanese company, introduced a disposable diaper with reusable parts, which appealed greatly to the saving-conscious Japanese. P&G's market share for disposable diapers dropped from 90 percent to 10% percent almost over night.

- We know, **BUT** ....

# Back to Poland ...



# Cultural Value Orientations help to understand

## **Individualism**

,I', personal freedom, self-responsibility, personal growth, competition, career

**vs.**

## **Collectivism**

,We', social responsibility, harmony, cooperation, selflessness, relationship

## **Status achieved**

,what you do', title as a specific label for a specific job in a specific place

**vs.**

## **Status ascribed**

,who you are', age, gender, family, social network, education, titles are important

## **Low power distance**

Interdependence between less and more powerful people, decentralised authority, decision making responsibility, subordinates expect to be consulted

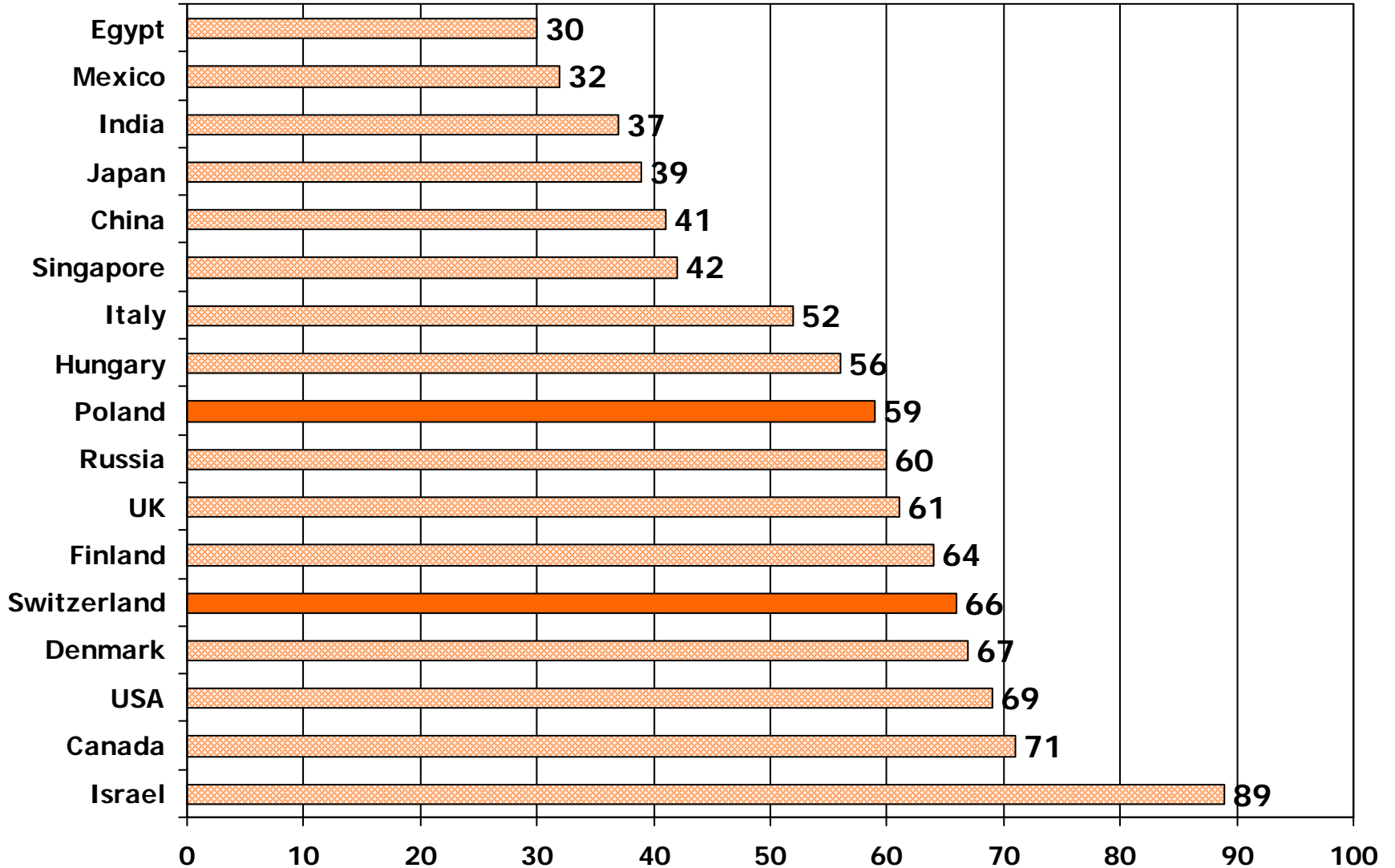
**vs.**

## **High power distance**

Powerful, dependent, centralised authority, many hierarchical levels, subordinates expect to be consulted, managers rely on superiors and formal rules

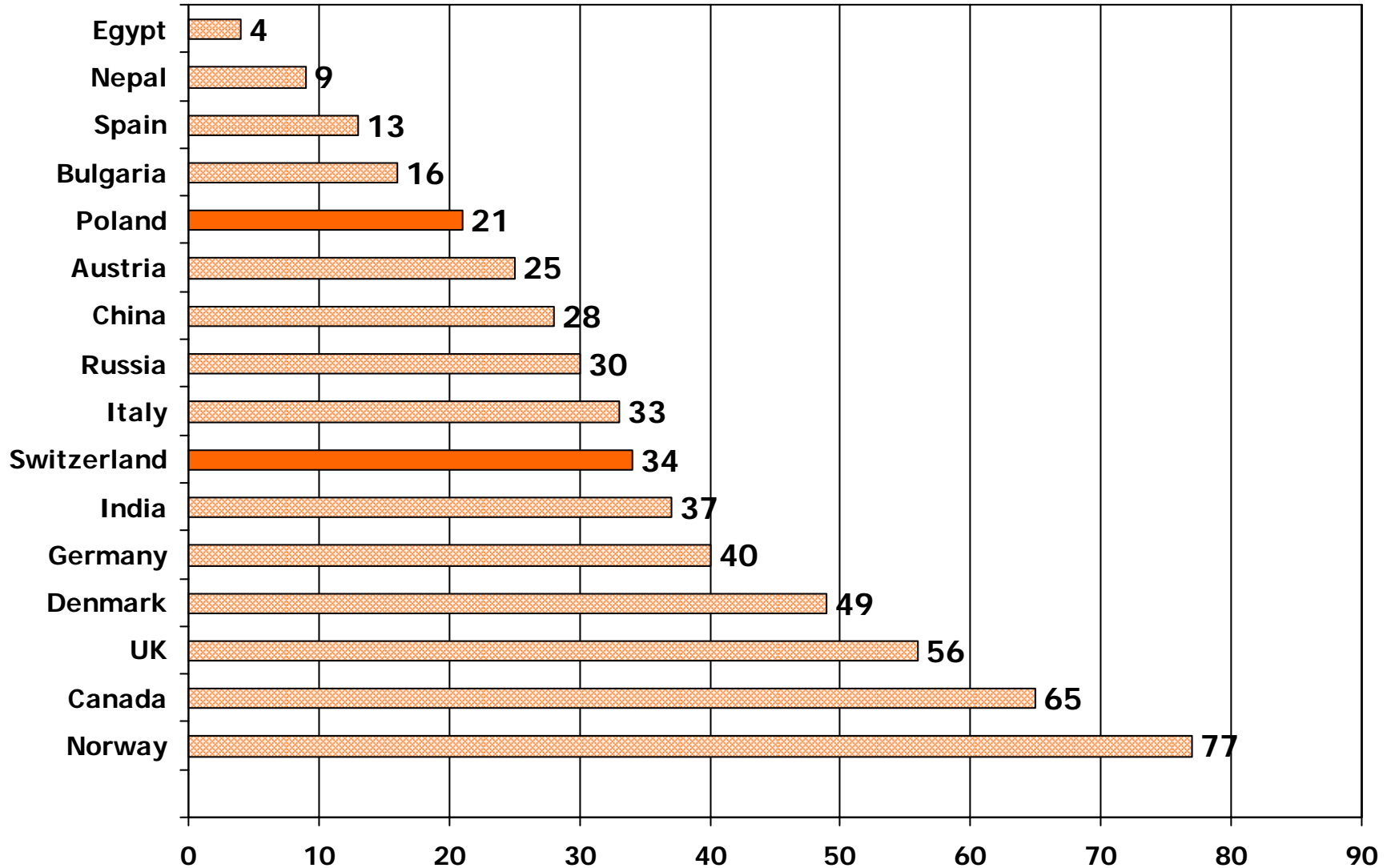
# The Individual and the Group:

% of respondents opting for individual freedom



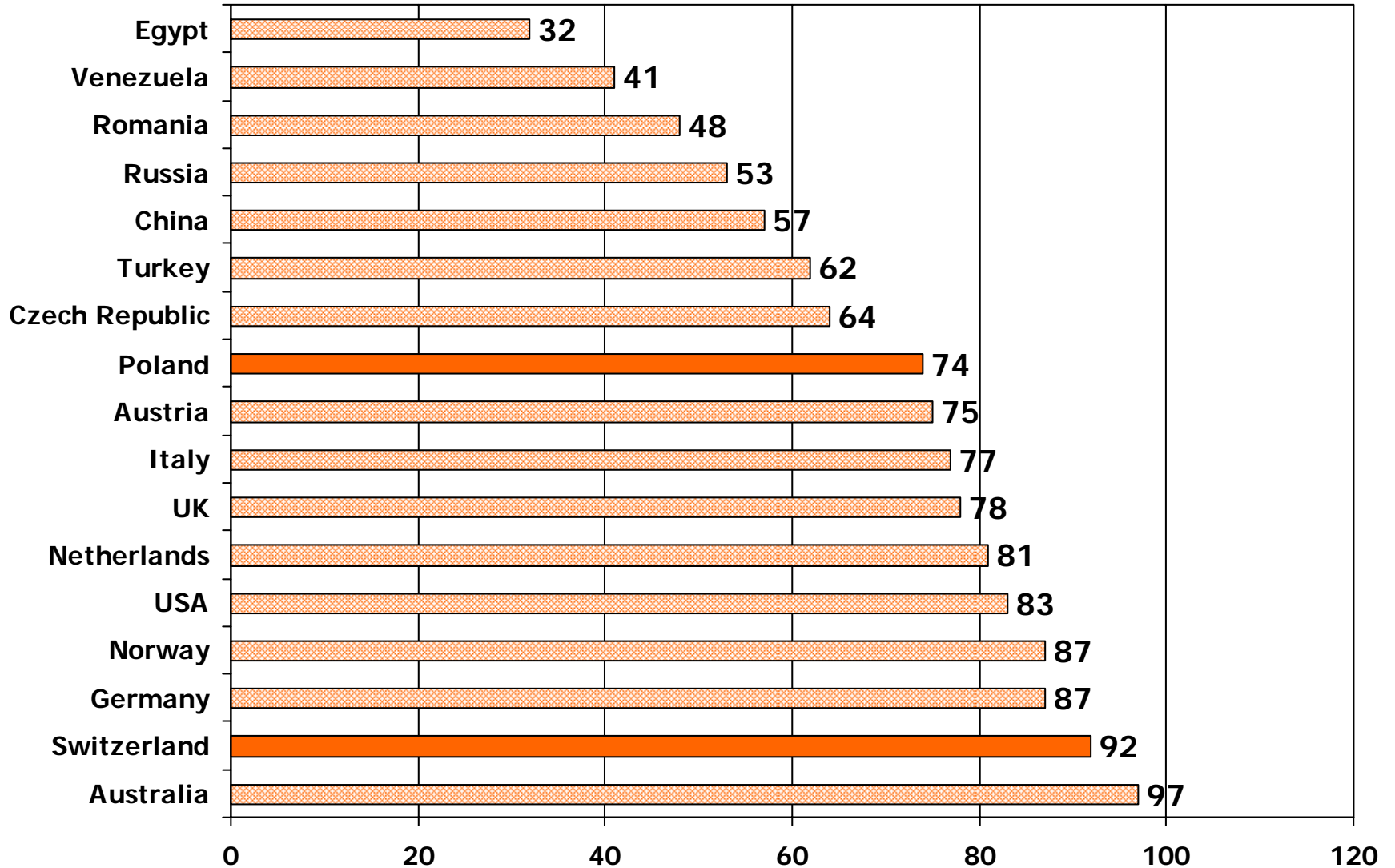
# Status: Acting as suits you even if nothing is achieved

% of respondents who disagree



# Power Distance: What makes a good manager

% of respondents opting to be left alone to get the job done



# Back to Poland ...



## A second recap

- Who wants to be **successful** in a multicultural environment, needs to **dive under** the surface, to learn about values.
- Only taking the **peak** of the iceberg into considerations is **not sufficient**.
- Culture can be a **powerful force** that can **undermine** or **propel** business **success**.

# What can YOU do?

On individual level:

- Intercultural assessments
- Training and coaching to develop the cultural fluency

# Some Quotes

- „I'm working internationally for more than 10 years. I know how to deal with cultural differences.“
- „We are an international company. Our employees know how to handle cultural differences.“

# What can YOU do?

On team level:

- Intercultural Team Assessments
- Training, coaching; ideally combined, **BEFORE** the team starts its work
- If possible: Think about if you really need a multicultural team for the particular task

# What can YOU do?

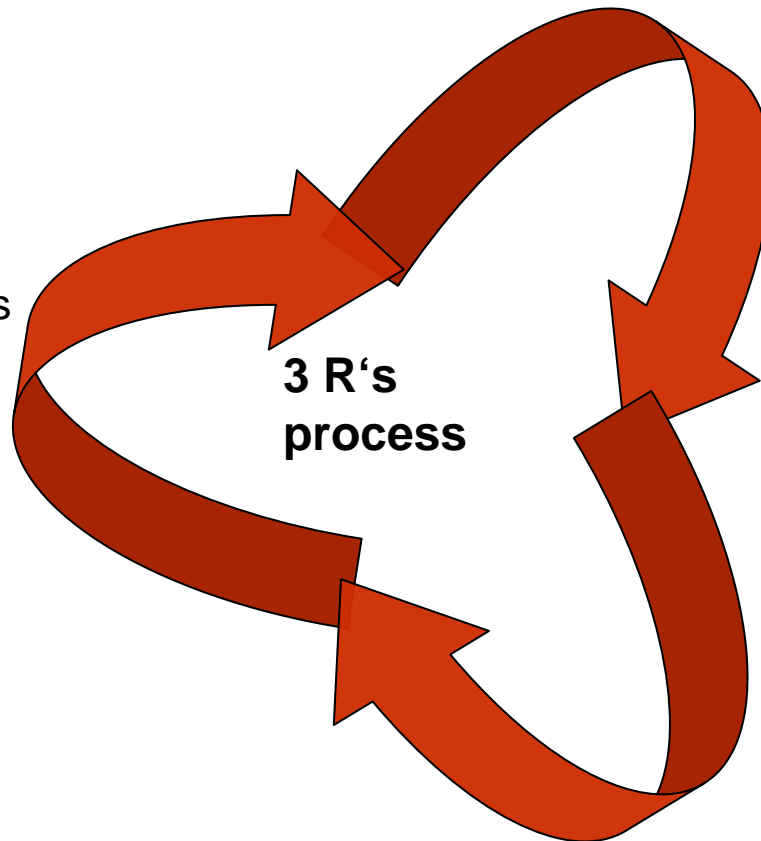
On organisational level:

- Develop the cultural fluency of the employees
- Think clearly about who is capable to work in an intercultural environment
- Cultural due diligence

# How to proceed: the 3 R's process

## 1st. Recognise

- Assess one's own cultural fluency
- Building awareness of one's own culture and values as well as one's own behaviour to improve cultural fluency
- Building awareness of other's cultural values and attitudes and their impact on daily life and work



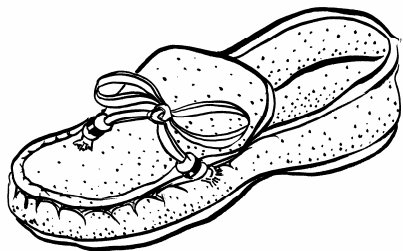
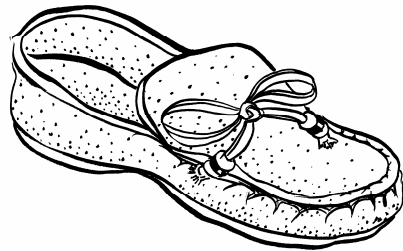
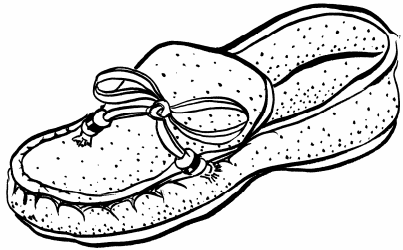
## 2nd. Respect

- Taking into account otherness and different business approaches non-judgementally

## 3rd. Reconcile

- Learning how to work with cultural differences effectively and how to use resultant synergies for added value
- Identifying potential cultural conflicts and how to prevent them

# The moccasin .....



*„Do not assume you know  
someone until you have worn  
their moccasins for at least half a  
moon.“*

*Native American Saying*

The twinkling star..



# Wish list

- **Full awareness of culture**

Culture is! It is not an additional factor to take into consideration or not. We are constantly and continuously swimming in the sea of culture, facing cultural dilemmas whether we like it or not.

- **Conscious dealing with values**

Diving into the sea of culture to use the full potential of intercultural interaction and not just scratching the surface.

- **Openness and respect for different business approaches**

Being open towards other approaches in all business situation and not just choosing the easier way assuming that your way is the only right one.

- **Space and time to let things unfold**

Invest time to harvest the potential of synergetic solutions to be able to co-operate interculturally in a sustainable way.



*I wish you a  
starry sky for  
2008 and a  
Merry X-mas !*