



OD on the Edge: Insights from Consulting in Afghanistan

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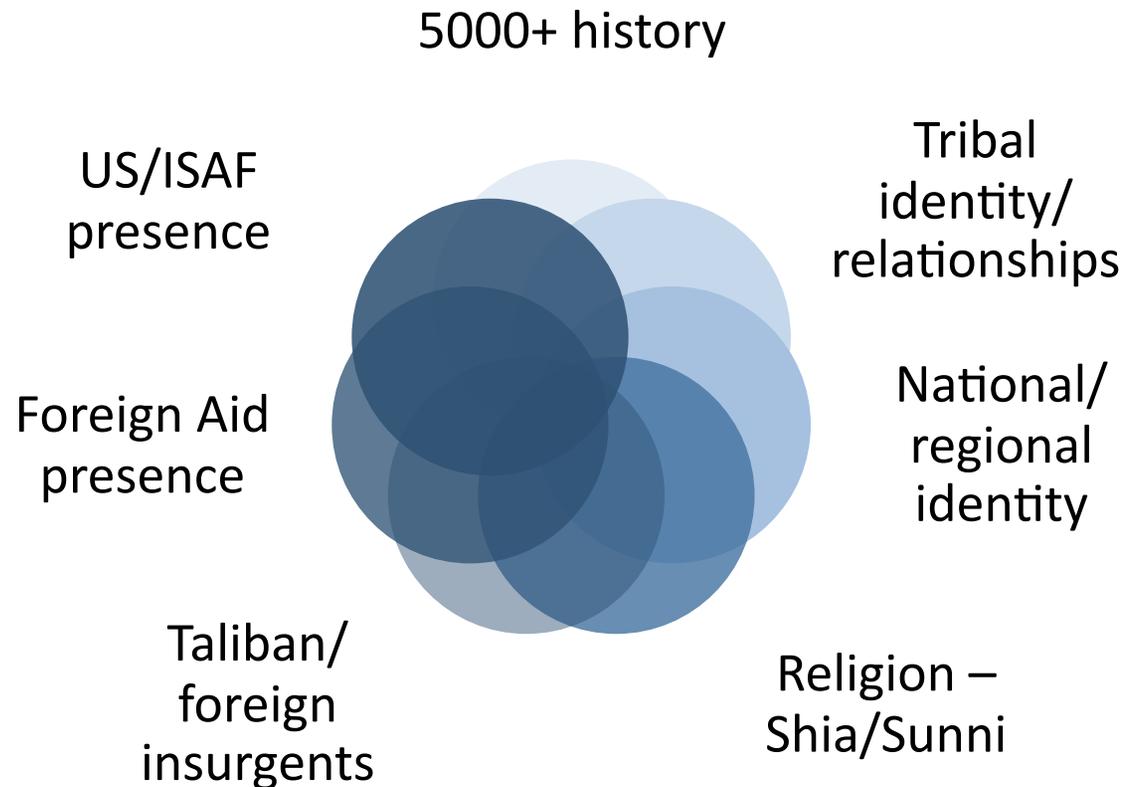
finding a way to add value

In a complex and unstable world

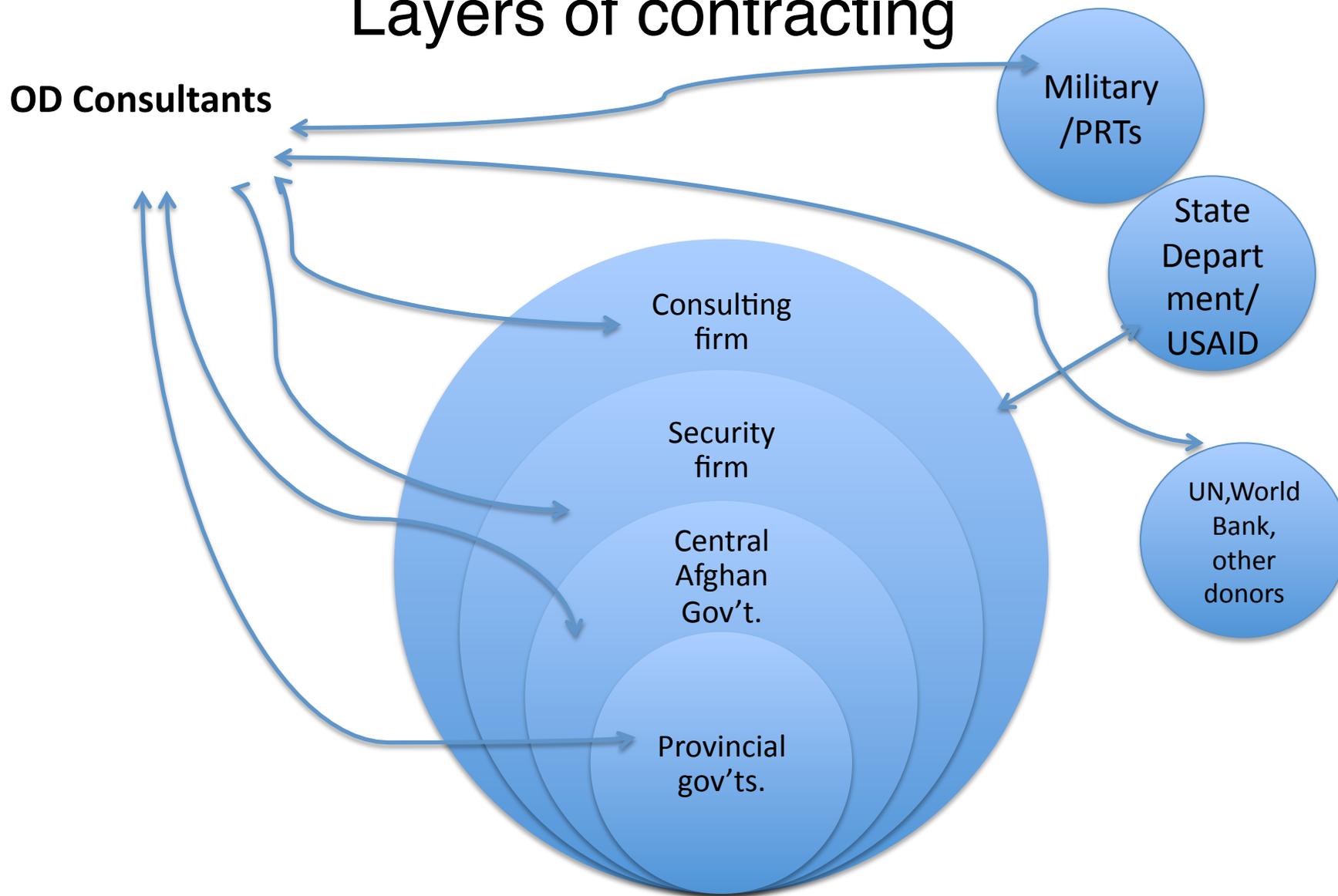
Outcomes

- Glean insights applicable to your own practices derived from two OD consulting projects, sponsored by USAID and UNDP, focused on the central government of President Karzai and on the provincial governments of Balkh and Herat in Afghanistan;
- Appreciate the many circumstances under which OD values might clash with client values, whether you are working domestically or internationally, and how you might still be effective despite these differences;
- Increase your awareness of what is essential and valuable about OD in a way that is applicable to any OD practice

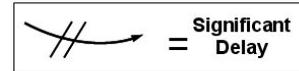
Layers of complexity



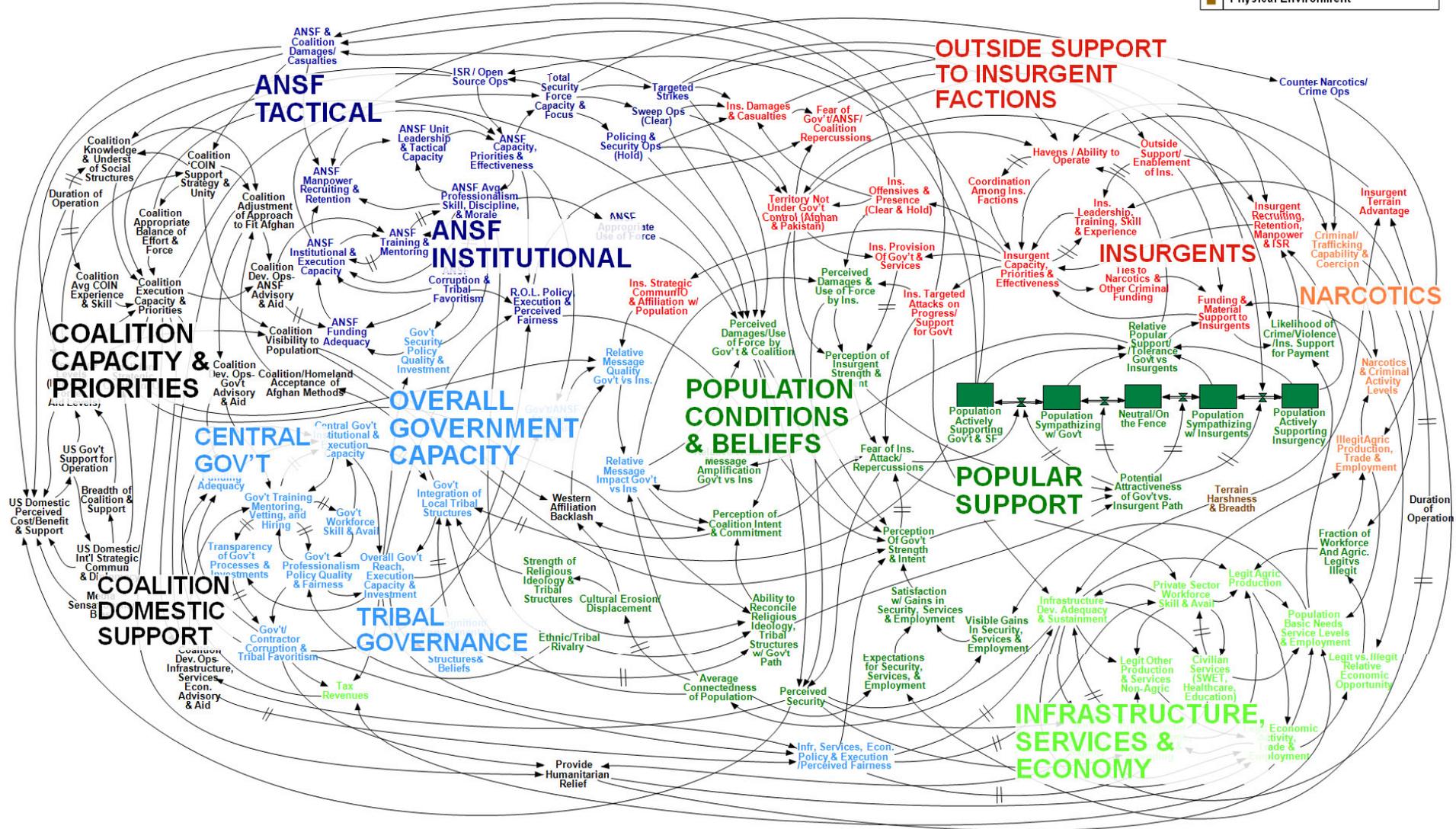
Layers of contracting



Afghanistan Stability / COIN Dynamics



- Population/Popular Support
- Infrastructure, Economy, & Services
- Government
- Afghanistan Security Forces
- Insurgents
- Crime and Narcotics
- Coalition Forces & Actions
- Physical Environment



WORKING DRAFT - V3

Flow

- I. Look at specific culture clashes between our approach as OD consultants and the ANC (“Afghan National Culture”) and its impact on the consulting process
- II. Mutually explore what is essential about OD in challenging or cross-cultural situations
- III. Ponder the broader implications for the practice of OD

Culture Clash



Power Distance (PD)

The extent to which less powerful members of society expect and accept that power is distributed unequally

Power Distance (PD)

Low - OD

- Inequality should be minimized
- Decision-making participative
- Social power is persuasive
- Rely on institutional power
- Authority more clear due to strong institutions

High - ANC

- Inequality/hierarchy should be preserved
- Decision-making autocratic
- Social power is coercive
- Rely on personal power
- Authority impermanent & insecure

Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)

Extent to which members of a culture feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations

Uncertainty Avoidance (UA)

Weak - OD

- Less stress is experienced
- Aggressive behavior frowned upon
- Future orientation possible
- Rules more open to interpretation
- Diversity of opinion welcome
- Emphasis on process

Strong - ANC

- Uncertainty felt as a continuous threat
- Aggressive behavior accepted
- Present orientation common
- Strongly reinforced rules
- Diversity of opinion a threat
- Emphasis on expertise

Individualism (IND)

- Individualist: the ties between individuals are loose, everyone is expected to look after him/herself, perhaps immediate family
- Collectivist: people from birth onward are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups which will protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty

Individualism (IND)

Medium Individualist - OD	Collectivist - ANC
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Task and relationships important➤ Individual differences valued➤ Systems-thinking valued (but not at the expense of the individual)➤ Performance/merit + social awareness a form of social currency	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Relationships over task➤ Tribal identity valued➤ Reputation a form of social currency

Masculinity (MAS)

- High MAS - emotional gender roles are clearly distinct – men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, women are supposed to be more modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life
- Low MAS - overlap of the emotional gender roles – both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender and concerned with the quality of life

Masculinity (MAS)

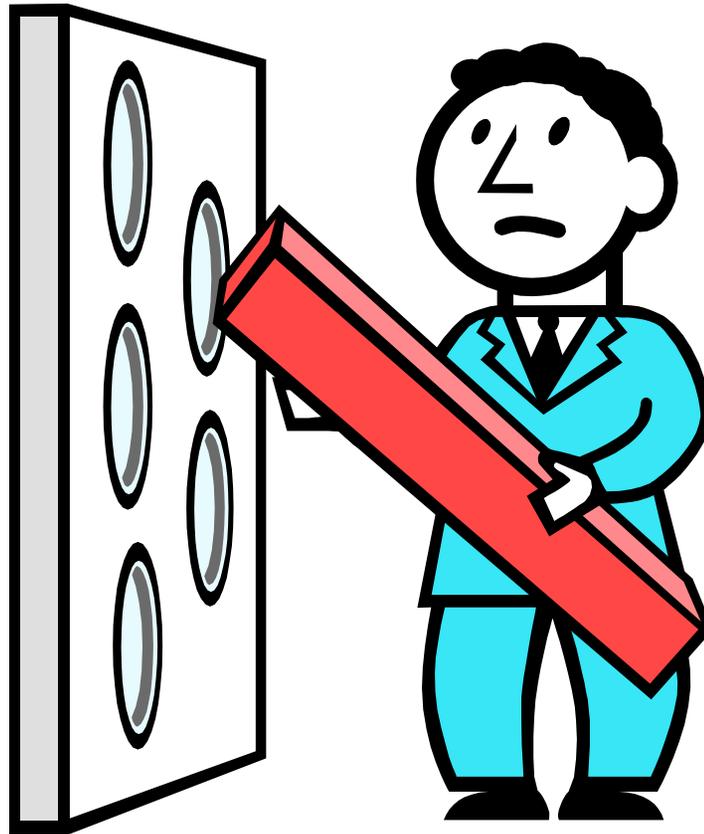
Low - OD

- Equality and non-differentiation between genders
- Nurturing linked to high performance
- Public expression of vulnerability valued

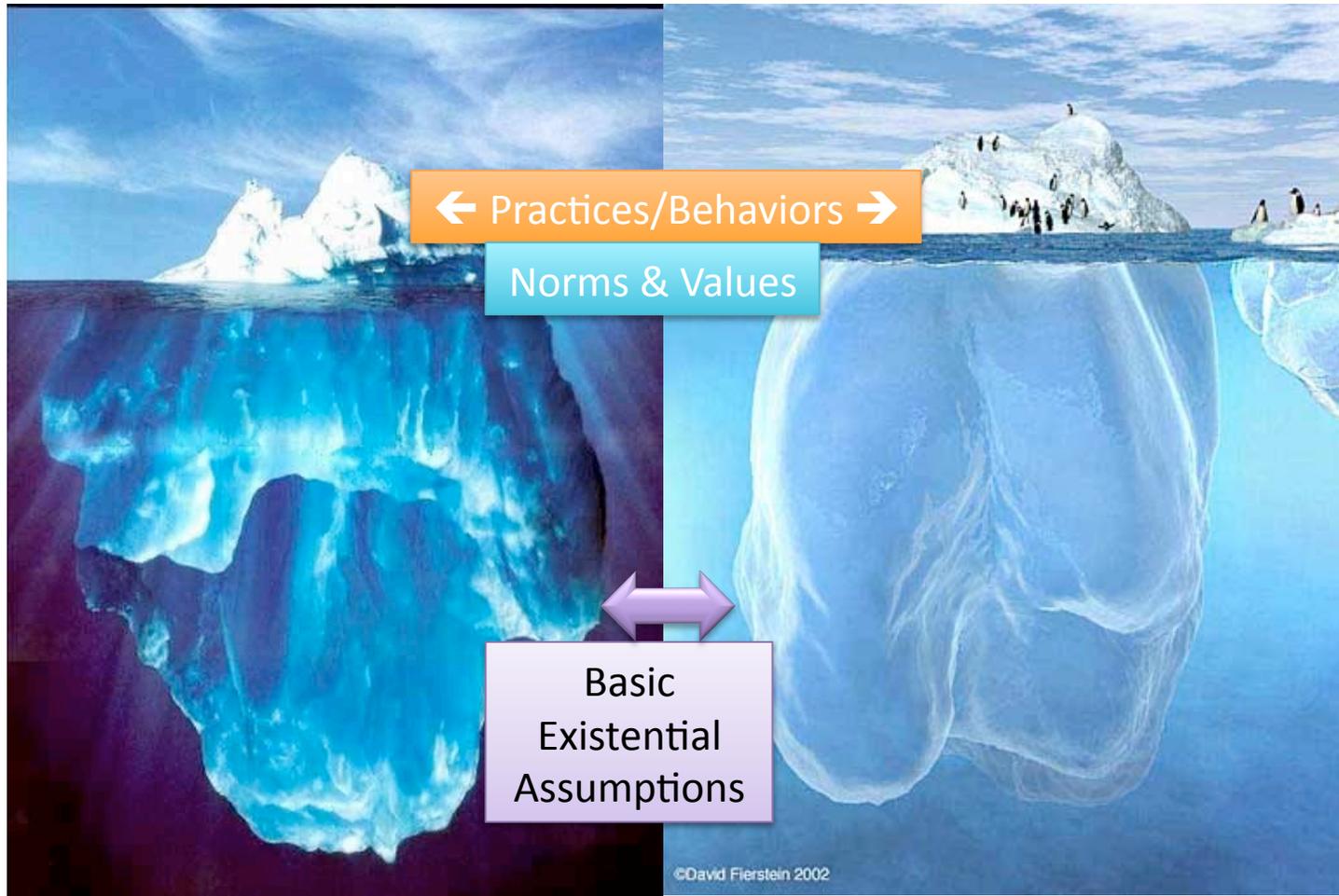
High - ANC

- Traditional gender roles reinforced
- Nurturing a role for women
- Public expression of vulnerability a liability

What aspects of OD may not work across cultures?



Culture clash . . .



Your examples of culture clash



Exercise in pairs

1. In silence, reflect on an experience as a practitioner where you felt overwhelmed or triggered by a clash of worldviews.
2. Describe it to your partner and share how you felt.
3. Once both have shared, brainstorm 3 lists:
 - a. How could you best take care of yourself in that situation?
 - b. How could you best build trust despite the culture clash?
 - c. What about OD do you think is essential and potentially effective across cultures?

OD Orientation: Awareness isn't enough – it's what you practice

The **embodied** discipline of OD beyond its tools and methodologies, which might not work in a particular culture

The Value of an OD Orientation

Common conditions in international development	What an OD orientation has to offer
Traumatized environments	An appreciative approach vs. a problem-solving orientation
Environments full of unknown variables, multiple languages/worldviews and shifting realities	Process orientation which invites discovery, learning and openness to the client environment
Working environments that frequently challenge the consultant's senses of identity, safety, and usefulness	A value of self-awareness on the part of the consultant which leads to resilience and more skillful consulting
Complex layers of stakeholders and contracts sometimes far removed from current reality	Rigorous contracting methodologies which encourage accountability and clear commitment on the part of consultant and client(s)
Rapidly changing environments	Action research, or some adaptation of it, which allows for ongoing evaluation rather than using only final evaluations, which limit a client's ability to adjust action mid-stream
Environments involving stakeholders of various ethnicities, classes, religions, identities, histories, world-orientations and values	A value of diversity and multiple world-views
Complex systems of donors and recipients layered with covert processes	A value of systems thinking and group dynamics which allow for greater understanding of, and skill intervening in, the dynamic layers of influences

When feeling undermined or triggered...

- We tend to rely less on information “out there” and more on our assumptions “in here” and ironically,
- If we’re not familiar with the territory that is “in here”, we’re less able to see “out there”
- In our confusion, we over rely on expertise and assumptions versus.....

PRESENCE

To the other

To ourselves

To what's happening



LOOK INSIDE

For filters, prejudices, assumptions, judgments



LOOK OUTSIDE

With curiosity, appreciation and compassion

Cultural sensitivity sets the stage for building trust...

**BUT HOW YOU “DO” YOURSELF
MAKES THE DIFFERENCE**

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