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UNPACKING CULTURE USING DELPHI

ABSTRACT
Following a phenomenological Expert Delphi Study of academics and practitioners, findings suggest that: a by-product of post-industrialism, Globalization, and Web2.0 is the value of investigating culture from an associated, rather than a disassociated state; cultural understanding and its application beyond simply defining and classifying has become the rate-determining step; and that national identity, whilst widely used, is not the most insightful unit. Furthermore, culture cannot be judged on a linear scale – it is dynamic, contextual, and perishable. For these reasons it is argued that when culture is measured, it should be viewed as something which is symbiotic and osmotic. The paper reports findings of field work done in decamping culture and branding with establishing their relationship and interdependence.

INTRODUCTION
This paper is the culmination of a reflective journey of debating with and challenging normative literature, academics, and practitioners – in order to move closer towards a consensus on two matters, within the discipline of business and management: (1) The most significant aspects of culture; (2) Key human traits that affect culture. Initial background studies find that corporate, departmental, and consumer culture are measured, linked to a national identity - but that of practitioners and academics happens less so. Instead, with academics and practitioners, this element is either overlooked, or conflated with organisational and consumer perspectives – suggesting a professional goal of personal aculturalism or neutrality. Academics and practitioners of varying years of experience within the fields of branding, advertising, public relations and marketing were surveyed over 16 months of iterations – using a mixed methods approach, which followed the structure of an Expert Delphi Technique.

The field of Branding was chosen to investigate culture, as brands are a human phenomenon: offering a cultural zeitgeist, which fuses heritage with the contemporary; they are cogent meaning and language shapers; they have risen into becoming collaborative cultural artefacts and units of social capital; and they continue to cross borders, joining communities. By extension, those engaged in branding are considered to be the most informed of the varying degrees and nuances of culture on several levels. A novel approach within this study is the encouragement of participants to reflect upon their personal and professional experiences, and definitions - longitudinally, anonymously and collectively. In addition, this was linked to their extended social biographical data, and those of others – through iterative rounds of communication, in order to arrive at a general consensus.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON CULTURE AND BRANDING
Looking at existing literature on culture of relevance to the field of business and management, these varying perspectives can be grouped into three paradigms: Classical Business and Management; Socio-anthropological; and, Consumption-based.

Business and management literature has sought to define culture according to systems and more particularly those inside and outside an organisation - in a competitive environment, and that govern commercial success. Hofstede (1994) chooses to focus on levels of human endeavour, grouping culture according to National level, Regional and or/ethnic and/or religious level and/or linguistic affiliation level, Gender level, Generation level, Social class level and, Organisational or corporate level, according to socialisation by their work.

More recently the work of Hofstede (1994) has faced some opposition. McSweeney (2002) challenges the notion of each nation having a distinctive, influential and describable culture. Fiske (2002) critiques the Oyserman, Coon and Kemmelmeir (2002) analysis of national and ethnic differences in individualism and collectivism, which revisited the Hofstede (1994) approach - where nations are treated as cultures, and culture is a continuous quantitative variable. Fiske (2002) argues that such approaches lead to conflations. These conflations he judges ignore contextual specify in norms and values; and reduces culture to explicit, abstract verbal knowledge.

Rohner (1984) notes that for many parts of the world concepts of *society* have become synonymous with those of a *nation.* Rohner (1984) goes further in asserting that the concept of a *nation* is a *Western* one, originating from circa the nineteenth century – where boundary setting has become more about political expediency, rather than to separate neighbouring societies. Therefore, I argue that analysing separable societies and sub-cultures linked to national identity, rather than simply nationality, becomes of more significance when attempting to understand culture, and especially for those outside of the West.
Holden (2002) comments on the fact that definitions of culture have only continued to increase, rather than generating a polarisation in thought. Over sixty years ago, Kroeber and Kluckhohn

(1952) registered 164 different definitions of culture. Of the many attempts to define culture, the Herskovits (1948) definition remains of value, which is simply that culture *"is the man-made part of the environment".* Smith and Bond (1998) explain that cultural definitions should include both material objects and social institutions – which points towards a tangible/intangible paradigm, manifest in: implicit, explicit and tacit nodes. Similarly, Schein (1985), as a social psychologist, makes a distinction between *visible* and *invisible* culture. However, these offer little guidance towards helping to decide what conceptual units allow for making the best cross-cultural comparisons. Because, values, norms, and practices may originate from different principles and assumptions – which may then limit the number of abstractions and generalisations possible. This is perhaps why defining culture beyond what could be seen as truisms or basic principles, continues to yield further definitions. However, the argument here is that it is should not be so much about defining culture according to a 'what is', but rather a '*how does*'?

In the face of these challenges, business and management scholars have explored anthropological perspectives. Ember and Ember (2007) suggest that the everyday usage of the term *culture* refers to a desirable quality, which is acquired. However in contrast, Linton (1936) argues that culture is the total way of life, rather than those parts, which are regarded by society as being higher and most desirable. Similarly, Usunier (2000) views culture as a *collective fingerprint,* where: Culture is the domain of pure quality; a set of *coherent* elements; is entirely qualitative; where there are no 'good' and 'bad' elements of a particular group; and, therefore can be no *globally* superior or inferior cultures. They signal a departure of more cultural approaches to marketing away from quantifiable hard-factors, which seek to rank and classify culture, or judge it according to good and bad. Harris and Johnson (2007) point to culture being governed by socially acquired lifestyle traditions, patterns and repetition. In addition, they go onto assert that culture is governed by both *society* [organised groups, who depend on each other] and *subcultures* [members who share certain cultural features that are significantly different from the rest of society]. With the advent of social media, social anthropology has come into vogue, and units of analysis have become smaller. Macro and micro factors are not enough and are now neighboured by Mezzo and Nano – with vertical and horizontal integration now becoming possible at the same time. Cultural networks being driven by technology as conduits, and big data is revealing new patterns.

Culture in this lens is linked to consumption and objects - and objects can be both physical and symbolic. Baudrillard (2005) seeks to understand objects not by their functions or categories, but rather by analysing the process where people relate to them, and subsequently the systems of human behaviour and relationships. This supports the socio-anthropological analysis of cultural 'artefacts'. Derrida (2005) writes that relationships are best understood through considering the politics of friendships. Here, I extend the definition of an 'object' to brands; and frame the system of human behaviour and relationships to meaning *culture.* Baudrillard (2005) states that traditionally, technology views objects as having *essential* and *inessential* structures and functions. In addition, he suggests that objects have a 'language' and 'speech' of sorts.

More than ever, objects are being synthesised to transcend both essential and inessential spheres – and so the separation of these structures is becoming progressively indistinguishable. An example that Baudrillard (2005) considers, is the car engine. Functionally, an engine has to serve a purpose. However, engines are tuned according to acoustics, which evoke psychological feelings of 'sportiness'. Also, furniture and interior decorations comparably fulfil emotional values, which are termed *presence.* These examples champion the importance of culture in creations; from their inception to consumption – *the man made part of the environment* (Herskovits, 1948).

Baudrillard (2005) also goes further, in considering *gadgets* - arguing that in the strictest sense, whilst they are objects of desire for many, they actually often fail to fulfil meaningful and sustained functional value. "Objects, from Baudrillard's perspective have a primary function of

personifying human relationships, 'to fill the space that they share between them, and to be inhabited by the soul' (2005: 14)". Therefore, brands are designed in the same manner as objects and or gadgets, and are being cultured to fulfil wider-ranging cultural obligations.

When examining culture and consumption, McCracken (1990a) broadens definitions further; to include the processes by which consumer goods and services are created, bought and sold. "McCracken asserts that, 'the social sciences have been slow to see this relationship, [between culture and consumption], and slower still to take stock of its significance. They have generally failed to see that consumption is a thoroughly cultural phenomenon…consumption is shaped, driven, and constrained at every point by cultural considerations. The consumer goods on which the consumer lavishes time, attention, and income are charged with cultural meaning. Consumers use this meaning to entirely cultural purposes' (1990b: xi)".

McCracken (2008) also cites the postmodern phenomenon of *Diderot effect* (Diderot, 1964)*,* which asserts that cultural consistencies exist when a collection of consumer goods are ascribed a characteristic meaning. An example, which McCracken (2008) provides, is of 'yuppies' that consume *BMW, Burberry,* and Burgundy wine. "More recently, McCracken also observes that in a postmodern society culture is founded in transformational activities: 'It is possible we are witnessing the creation of a global self and an expansionary individualism…Individuals claim many identities and a certain fluidity of self – this much is accepted by postmodern theory. (We now accept that identity has less and less to do with things that remain identical)' (2008: 293-294)".

Gilmore and Pine II (2007), ascribe this movement in business, which is consumer-driven, to the pursuit of *authenticity.* With such informed and individualistic consumers and stakeholders, McCracken (2009) also argues that living, breathing corporations can maintain success, relevance and control through appointing *Chief Cultural Officers.* In the McCracken (2009) thesis he highlights that cultural understanding is of the utmost importance to brands; and that if understood fully, brands will resonate so strongly that they become part of the cultural fabric of society.

Therefore, the work of cultural anthropologists and philosophers are highlighting that cultural insight can be unearthed through observing participants' consumption of commodities (physical and symbolic), and most notably now, brands. "Furthermore they appear to support a point made by de Mooij that, 'Instead of causing homogenization, globalization is the reason for the revival of local cultural identities in different parts of the world.' (2011: 5)". For example, it would also appear that with branded denim being sold at a high price tag - whilst looking old, worn and distressed (an approach championed by *Diesel*)*,* indicates that brands and commodities are attempting to embed themselves seamlessly within existing cultural usage, whilst also commanding a premium for the privilege, as reported by Miller (1995). It is this embedding process which is helping to support the argument that brands are orchestrating many aspects of modern culture, as opposed to 'hitting notes' in pre-existing cultural musical scores.

It appears that the gaps and challenges can be grouped broadly into two areas. Firstly, what a brand [as a cultural artefact and manifestation of culture] is and how it should be defined; and secondly, significant contributions which take a more emic ethnocentric standpoint that is linked to socio-cultural international branded interactions. Holt, Fournier, Keller, Klein, Muniz and O'Guinn, each of whom are key figures in current brand management literature, write about the significance of culture and consumers – and it has to be said largely on the North American experience, like McCracken. But it appears now that more of consumers' culture is defined by their brand consumption, and less so by their cultural underpinnings, related to aspects such as: race, ethnicity, religion and national identity. However, whilst this literature offered knowledge and guidance on consumers, brands, branding, and management: seldom is empirical data used

that captures the views and experiences of brand managers, and the various layers of their own personal cultural experiences - despite them being significant, as the brands' guardians.

Furthermore, with culture being seen to influence brands, branding and brand managers – only recently has the link with culture and brands being researched in more detail, over the past ten years. For example, where and at what level does culture play a part? Often, corporate culture and consumer culture are discussed, with brands being a component – however, the inference is that these are separate types or interpretations of culture. As Brands and Culture are found to be linked symbiotic entities, they mean more than simply business and commerce: as they are human expressions and a means by which individuals communicate, form attachments and build relationships. Therefore, whoever participates and consumes has the potential to derive various forms of value (Fournier 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Fournier and Avery 2011a, 2011b). Managing them is a collective and collaborative diffused obligation, which stretches outside of the hands of their creators (businesses). Brands and Culture are artefacts and fingerprints, as asserted by Holt (2004) and Usinier (2000) - which whilst being linked to a space and time, they do have the potential to live on. And, as they have the potential to live on, more future-spective work is needed which appraises: where, to what degree, how, and the role of the practitioner within a cultural paradigm.

Holt's body of work champions an anthropological and phenomenological approach; whilst Fournier focuses on relationships and where there are areas of contention, or developments linked to phenomena - such as globalisation and technological advancements in social media, which are changing relationship bonds and definitions.
Following the observations of Buruma and Margalit (2004) and Said (2003), Wilson (2011a) writes that established terms in existence such as: East and West; skin colour; ethnicity; pseudo-national/religious ethnicity – are often used to denote character traits. Within this there are problems and a legacy of cultural baggage, which is difficult to escapei. Postmodernist thought argues that these terms are being outdated rapidly, unless they are reframed and redefined. However their existence, despite perhaps migrating from their inception and heritage, unfortunately means that they still have a bearing on cultural study analysis. For if they are to be replaced, with what and how successful will the transmission of knowledge be?

Wilson (2011a, 2011b) reports of a phenomenon typified by events such as the election of Barak Obama, president of the United States of America - as a Christian, Black, mixed-race, African, Asian, African-American, European American, with Muslim heritage. Further evidence can be charted with drivers in the more recent Arab Spring of hybridized identities. As a result of this phenomenon, academics and practitioners have questioned more traditional views, classifications and dichotomies, which suggest in some ways that at their roots there is a tendency towards grouping according to being diametrically opposed and seeking dominance over an 'other'. Examples of these constructs are: the East and West; ethnicities; national identities; and religions [especially recently framing the dominant world influencing factors according to The West and Islam - as 'clashing civilisations']. And so, with such seemingly paradoxical terms in common use and with the advent of globalisation; economic migrancy; and resulting hyphenated and collaborative identities; traditional constructs perhaps create more problems than offer solutions.
Further to this, Wilson and Liu (2012), present the term *surrogacy* as a conceptual argument used to explain cultural melding and hybridization. Prior to the Wilson and Liu (2012) paper, the term surrogacy had scarcely been used in connection with strategic brand management approaches. Where it was, the term had been used to describe a new product or service brand, which draws from another brand within a corporate portfolio. The difference in their definition is that *surrogacy* is used to describe consumption. The focus of their work was examining the support of national sports teams and athletes. Their findings indicate that as a basic premise, ownership of any uniform largely suggests exclusivity and encouraged competition, which provides a good basis for examining hierarchies of exclusive preference and dynamism. Now it

appears that branded manufactures, teams, athletes and sponsors are also entering symbiotic brand relationships - where they actively seek publics, open to multiple adopted national and subsequent global identities.

Significantly, individuals are choosing to wear sporting merchandise, from an'*other*' nation, or region – whom they have no direct geographic or ethnic affiliation with. Rather, they are governed by a sharing of emotional and psychographic criteria, housed within a complex network of ascribing meaning to a coherent brand message. Here, individuals are seen to move towards embracing temporal identities, culminating in an adopted national identity, and created alter-ego, or avatar. The intention being that this represents a facet of their emotional state.

Whilst there may be several reasons for them doing so, for the purposes of their paper Wilson and Liu (2012) restrict the focus of discussion towards the desire for affiliation outside of their immediate socio-cultural settings. In doing so a long-term affiliation with an'other' nation was held to evolve and eventually assimilate itself into the consumer's host culture fluidly - highlighting the level of individual complexity, according to held values, traits and decision making.

RESEARCH METHOD
The Delphi technique was the chosen research instrument, as it encourages problem-solving and knowledge building best suited to tackling real-world and phenomenological problems - where there exists gaps in knowledge and differences in opinion. The justification comes from the fact that through iterative processes of galvanising consensus from within a group of experts, agreement on issues surrounding gaps, with in-depth coherent meaning can be achieved more easily. The rationale being that many minds are better than one (the researcher) during the preliminary problem solving stage. Furthermore, by using experts, the data collected is likely to be of a level and format suited to in-depth study.

A detailed empirical research methodological overview is presented in Figure 1 where Grounded Theory and the Delphi Study were both executed and linked, using the process of the Socratic method of elenchus.

[Figure 1 goes about here]

THE DELPHI STUDY APPROACH
From its roots, the Delphi approach attempts to predict what will happen in the future (Bowles, 1999) - through group discussions, orchestrated by a focal point of contact, concerning phenomena (and in some cases noumena), by means of collaborative mediation. In addition, the Olympic ideals of celebrating egalitarian competition of the finest specimens and the celebration of cultural heritage, offer an emotive backdrop to the narrative of Delphi ideals. Namely, the participation of experts. Furthermore, the concept of gestating and giving birth to 'something', provide insight into an underpinning mission, which is argued Delphinians seek to achieve.

The Delphi technique was popularised by the USA Air Force RAND (Research And Development) Corporation, in the 1950's, with 'Project Delphi' being used as an instrument to predict the outcome of Russian nuclear bomb strikes (Everett 1993). Such usage is indicative of its potential and ability to gather a spread of opinions, in response to current problems, from a panel, usually of informed experts.

The Delphi technique is used as a survey research method to structure group opinion and discussion (Bowling, 1997). "The Delphi technique is seen as a means by which one can 'obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts… by a series of intensive questionnaires interspersed with controlled opinion feedback' (Dalkey and Helmer, 1963:.458). Delphi is intended to capture the positive attributes of interacting individuals, such as

synthesising knowledge from a range of sources; and at the same time remedy negative aspects such as individual, social, professional and political conflicts. Furthermore, the Delphi method allows input from a greater number of participants than can feasibly and meaningfully be achieved through group meetings.

Bowles (1999) cites that there have been more than 1,000 research projects, which have used the Delphi technique, especially when looking to investigate practitioners' views, surrounding issues of topical interest. "Baxter, Cargill, Chidester, Hart, Kaufman and Urquidi-Barrau (1978) cite that the term 'Delphi' is now applied to the complete range of group communications, from the more structured, right through to face-to-face discussions. "Coates, Coates, Jarratt and Heinz assert that Delphi 'has become the most popular forecasting technique generally used in the United States by public and private institutions' (1986: 71)". "Linstone and Turoff suggest that it is a response to 'a demand for improved communication among large and/or geographically dispersed groups which cannot be satisfied by other available techniques' (1975: 11)".

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DELPHI TECHNIQUE

The Delphi procedure is characterised by four features: (1) *anonymity,* (2) *iteration,* (3) *controlled feedback,* and (3) the *aggregation* of group response, shown in Figure 2. Through these, individuals are more able to consider and express the merits of data and their judgments, away from spurious and invalid criteria, which are often driven by associated pressures linked to a lack of anonymity (Goodman, 1987).

[Figure 2 goes about here]

Consensus, which is a group judgment, is the result of: iterations; controlled feedback, orchestrated by the researcher; and the subsequent aggregation of data. These are held to be a collective obligation of the researcher and the panellists. Consensus consists of all group member's contributions, rather than just the most vocal. It is therefore seen as being an equal weighting of the group members' contributions, which may take the form of a statistical average. The advantage of this approach is that a spread of opinions can be used as an indication of strong consensus, which is otherwise often an untenable position in more quantitative studies.

However, this is not to say that Delphi studies avoid eliciting quantifiable responses – in fact the opposite is true. Delphi generates both qualitative and quantitative data (Stewart, 2001). In subsequent rounds, following more unstructured questioning, Delphi studies tend to encourage participants to quantify their qualitative opinions and judgments (Tritter, Dakin, Evans and Sanidas, 2003).

The data collected in this Delphi study was largely qualitative and based upon open-ended questions, in the interests of optimising volume of data collected and potential for data which necessitates iterations. However, in subsequent rounds, once approaching stability of responses in iterations, consensus, and data saturation: the decision was taken to use a quantitative approach to judging consensus – through registering graded vote scores. This was in the interests of providing more concrete proof, and evaluations as to: what degree, strength and distribution of consensus was present.

Examining subjects' biographical data, 24 individuals submitted biographical data, by email, in the form of open-ended responses to a Word document questionnaire. This signalled their formal acceptance to participate in the Delphi study. Shortly afterwards, Delphi questions were emailed, as a separate Word document.

 As Delphi study was governed by consensus through collective views and judgement: the decision was taken not to analyse individuals independent of each other - rather collective experience and biographical data was held to be of more significance. Furthermore, Delphi

panellists were notified of the rationale behind collecting biographical data and its subsequent treatment.

Having collected the biographical data, it was grouped as follows [Figure 3]

[Figure 3 goes about here]

DELPHI STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS
Academic achievements and years of experience
Collectively, over 80% of panellists were educated to postgraduate level and one quarter held doctorates [Table 1]

[Table 1 goes about here]

When reviewing years of experience: the majority of panellists possessed extensive relevant exposure to professional practice [Table 2].

[Table 2 goes about here]

As can be seen from the value indicating minimum years of professional experience: being in possession of a degree was held to be both a separate and supporting indicator of professional expertise, within the context of this Delphi study.
Furthermore, those selected with relatively little work experience, were chosen because of their specialism in marketing at degree level. These participants may be accustomed to answering questions on branding, and will also have had prior exposure to more recent academic business thinking concerning brands and their more recently observed link with culture. In addition, the Delphi iterations allowed panellists to absorb, reflect, learn and present opinions collectively, embracing both academic and practitioner erudition.
When further examining academic and practitioner expertise through documented job titles held to date [Table 3], several observations and findings resulted in professional expertise and excellence through career progression and the number of job titles held

Over 87% of subjects had first-hand management experience. For those that did not, they were able to project opinions concerning management - through academic study and experience of being managed. Furthermore, those that had been managers were comparably able to reflect upon their experiences of being managed. Management responsibilities and seniority are indicative of an ability to agenda-set and lead – which are valuable attributes when looking to unearth emergent thinking. In addition to being practitioners, a core contingent were found to be academics, lecturers and trainers. None of the academics, lecturers and trainers within the study had spent their entire careers exclusively in these roles. Rather, they had also spent time working in industry – and so were well placed in being able to articulate academic and practitioner perspectives. There appeared to be no sentiments expressed of an academic practitioner divide – and all participants used practical examples to illustrate their points. The only differences that existed were in the way that views were articulated, through technical terms and points of reference

Consultants, freelance journalists, editors and senior academics were able to write comfortably in a longhand style, which was encouraged and essential when conducting in-depth small sample qualitative studies. Furthermore, as independent advisors and experts, they had experience of disassociation and professional impartiality, when considering the practices of other brands, organisations and cultural approaches.

[Table 3 goes about here]

Examining gender differences was not a focus of the study. However, in the interests of upholding ideas of sexual equality, attempts were made to gather a panel of males and females [Table 4]. Furthermore, opinions concerning brands, management and culture were considered not to be subject to gender here.

[Table 4 goes about here]

However, it is conceded that had questions concerning gender in the Delphi study been included, particularly concerning management, it would be likely that differences would start to appear. This is due to extensive empirical data that exists, which reports of 'glass ceilings' affecting females in the workplace. And because of this, it was possible that females may have chosen to make references to gender specific issues if prompted.

Similarly, 'glass ceiling' is a term that acknowledges the barriers faced by other minority groups, according to: religion, race, sexuality, and disability. Comparably though, no such issues specific to discrimination were voiced, in the Delphi responses. It is judged therefore that due to the framing of the questions and the environment created: panellists understood here in the context of this study that culture, cultural attributes, and cultural experiences were to be positive traits, pluralist and universal.

Looking at exposure to international travel, as the research study considers the role of culture and the differences in norms, values and practices, which have led to gaps in understanding, varying approaches and relative culturally-based brand successes and failures: it is argued that panellists should have sufficient multi and cross-cultural experiences to draw from. To this end, it is judged that first-hand travel experiences are one indicator. Figure 4 and Table 5 highlight that collectively, the Delphi panel have travelled extensively for work purposes and a significant number have lived in different countries. It is also clear that panellists understood both questions to be asking different things, based upon the differences in values recorded.

[Tables 5 and 6 go about here]

From the data it is apparent that not all territories are represented, however these short fallings have been considered and answered as follows:

- There is strong representation in the emerging markets, in South America, Africa, Asia – where literature indicated that there are gaps in understanding and a paucity of academic literature available

- *Interbrand* (2011) 'Best 100 Global Brands 2011, and *Brand Keys* (2011) ' Top 100 Customer Loyalty Leaders 2011", point towards all of these brands hailing from North America; West, North and South Europe; and Asia. In further support, *Brand Finance* (2011) awards only two brands (from Brazil) in the top 100 of their 'Global Finance Top 500' rankings – with the rest comparable to *Interbrand* and *Brand Keys* being from North America; West, North and South Europe; and Asia

- 'The West', in North America; and West, North and South Europe are strongly represented by the panel

- Delphi participants should still be able to reflect upon factors similar and unique within the underrepresented territories - as experts and those who have travelled extensively.

Ethnic background, affiliations and languages spoken are important issues in the culture debate. Building on the cultural arguments, the three most significant factors, in addition to travel, were

held to be: Ethnic background and heritage; Social affiliations liked with ethnicity and nationality; and, Language proficiency, beyond English.

[Presented in Figure 5 and Table 6]

As the Delphi study relies on consensus and the preservation of *in vivo* responses, all participants and the researcher had to be able to speak at least one language. As has been stated, English was the chosen lingua franca.

In addition to the importance and merits of the cultural data collected in this study, we also found that:

- Most academic literature has been observed to classify and present participants either according to business, or consumer statutes – and rarely both. Here personal non-worked related and practitioner experiences have been collected, as they are judged to be strongly linked and potentially able to unearth further erudition

- Most cross-cultural business and management studies within the field group participants according to nationality, or ethnicity. Furthermore, there appears to be an absence of studies, which embrace hyphenated identities, which more accurately reflect cultural heritage and its influence on individuals. This is further compounded by the fact that globalisation, travel, migrancy, increased inter/multi-racial childbirth and consumption are observed to increase the significance of increasingly complicated hyphenated identities. Such multi/inter-racial ethnicity was present in the panellists' responses

- Beyond personally held ethnic and national heritage, social affiliations were held also to affect the mind-set and practices of individuals. This is especially as the preservation and assertion of a social affiliation indicates an interest and influence on individuals
- By allowing participants to define their own ethno-cultural identities, they are free to express themselves more fully, accurately, and without potential bias and influence through category coercion

- Multi-linguism is held to offer an indicator of potentially different cultural perspectives, resulting from rooted socio-linguistic factors and nuances. In addition, they equip individuals with the ability to understand cross-cultural issues in more detail. Furthermore, they may draw individuals away from premises of ethnicity and nationality yielding homogeneity, due to their commitment to an 'other' cultural-linguistic identity

- Collectively, they champion the argument for and necessity of rich mixed-methods research in the applied sciences.

[Figure 5 and Table 6 go about here]

As has been considered earlier, it appeared that participants had no direct interaction with Central Asia. When comparing values of travel against ethnic heritage and social affiliations, there appear to be differences. Drops in ethnicity and social affiliations in West, North and South Europe, and the Caribbean, Central and South America indicate that panellists exhibit economic migrancy to these regions; and in tandem that many of these individuals feel that they cannot claim ethnic and cultural heritage from these regions.

A large portion of panellists shares South/South East Asian ethnic heritage and/or social affiliations. However, even when considering the collective travel experiences of all panellists, and therefore not omitting their data, not all South/South East Asians have worked in Asia. This finding it is argued raises questions of research that examines ethnicity, or nationality, or

country of residence. Because it is questionable whether such data is rich enough to still yield sufficiently homogenous and generalizable findings.

Another key observation is that living and/or working in a country does not necessarily lead to the creation of social ethnic affiliations. This is perhaps because the personally held threshold of participants is much greater before they feel comfortable claiming a social bond. In contrast, it could be argued that despite extensive international travel, panellists only hold a finite number of ethnic social affiliations, which they judge to be significant, or enter their value systems. Summarising all of the points raised and findings: they outline that culture is acquired or created - and is transmitted subsequently through cycles of teaching and learning. It exists on multiple levels of abstraction. The most significant aspects of which are tacit - and therefore are understood best by those who are the most active in that collaborative process. Culture is a living breathing language, both verbal and non-verbal; and is symbolic. It is preserved when rooted in the here and now; and whilst it joins participants together, this presents anchors of understanding.

Having presented these differing approaches and perspectives, our recommendation is that, in a given scenario, culture should be analysed and understood on different interconnected levels – and the best way to do this is to participate. The following model [Figure 6] offers guidance as to how these levels can be categorised, and how they relate to each other.

[Figure 6 goes about here]

The diagram should be viewed as a Venn diagram model with 7 variables. In some situations, only one cultural frame of reference may predominate, for example local customs. However, in other instances, several variables may work in tandem or against each other. There may be a subculture, which draws from local customs; or a departmental culture, which clashes with organizational culture. Human actors move through these quadrants in a dynamic fashion, subject to intentions and interactions.

To this end, a mixed method approach to measuring culture using the Delphi technique and employing Socratic elenchi proved to be valuable. Through this approach, subtle nuances can be investigated qualitatively, using iterations that culminate in a consensus. Alongside this, opinions and judgements can be quantified and graded throughout – allowing for both longitudinal retrospective comparisons and future predictions.

CONCLUSIONS
Culture, spearheaded by brands, are seen to influence more that the organisation, product and service offerings – they are also affecting other areas of generalist human behaviour and interactions, such as: education; ethnicity; language; national identity; nations; international relations; religion; and ancient, modern and contemporary history. They are a 'quicksilver' which binds together a human equation of identity, understanding and communication.
It is also apparent that collectively, brands, branding and managers [be they professionals or consumers] have the power to shape perceptions of reality, which even have the potential to reverse the most dogmatic of views. Evidence of this most recently can be seen with how branded commodities have been used as part of an engineering process of being able to change historical perceptions. The Delphi panel observed how brand strength that has driven consumerism has removed, weakened, or overturned cultural barriers. Examples of which can be seen with German, Japanese and US brands entering markets where their previous records of political and humanitarian activities which have been far than favourable and culturally damaging, have been remedied and repaired.

With these observations in mind therefore, brands, branding and brand management are a culture of cultured activity – which now renders them inextricably linked with culture, but more

significantly human existence. A key finding and contribution of this study is the argument that culture and management cannot be fully investigated unless brands are also considered – as brands have become conceptually and irreversibly embedded within humans.

More so than ever as a by product of post-industrialism, Globalization, and Web2.0: cultural understanding and its application (rather than simply defining and measuring) has become a rate-determining step. There is more value in investigating culture from an associated, rather than a disassociated state. And, that national identity, whilst widely used and commonly accepted, is not necessarily the most insightful.

Furthermore, culture cannot be judged on a linear scale – it is dynamic, contextual, and perishable. For this reason it is argued that if culture is to be measured it has to be viewed as something which is symbiotic and osmotic.

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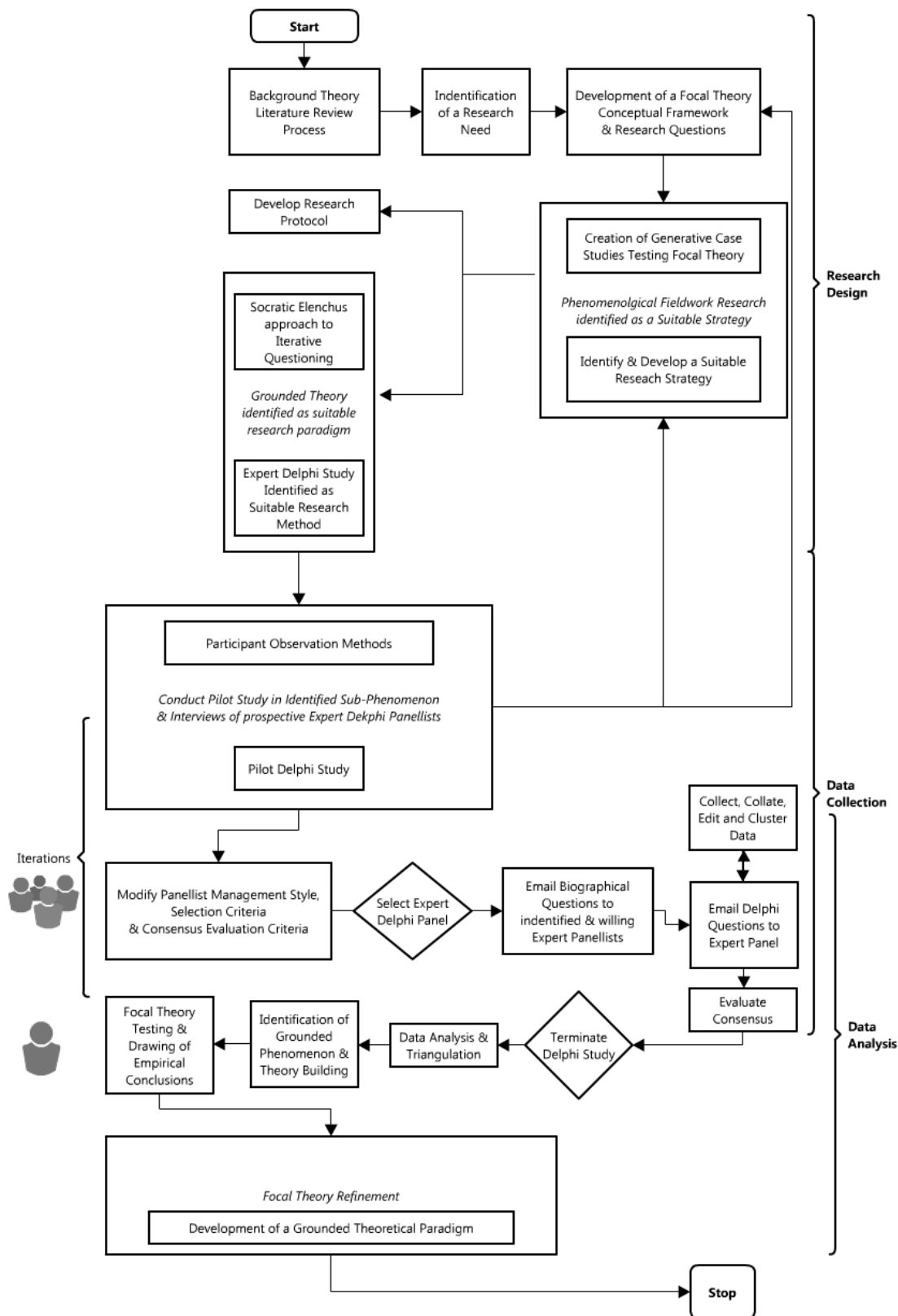
Figure 1. Overall research process followed
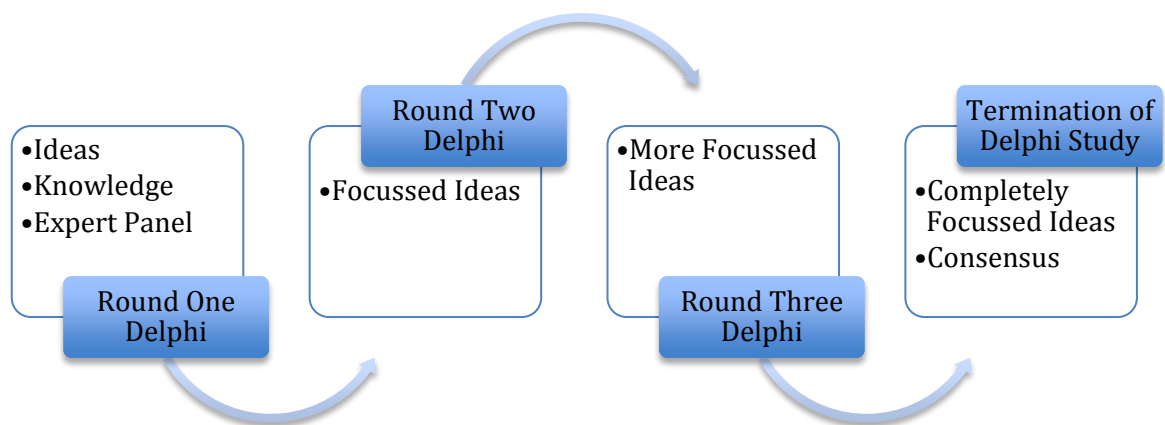
Figure 2. The Delphi Method process
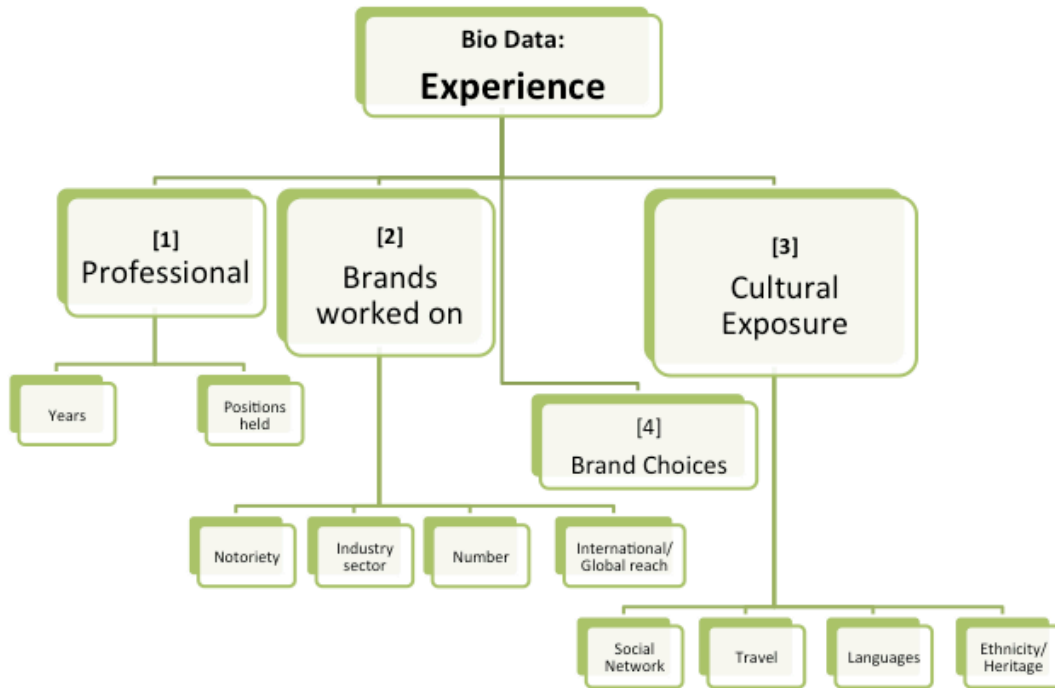
Figure 3. Delphi participants' biographical data grouping map

Qualification	Number of Panellists
Degree	24
Masters	14
Doctorate	6

Table 1. Delphi panellists' academic achievements

	Number of Years
Total Professional Experience of Delphi panel	367
Mean	15.29
Maximum	38
Minimum	2
Median	11
Mode	7

Table 2. Years of experience held by Delphi panellists

Job Title	Number of Panellists
Assistant, Secretary	4
Executive, Account Handler, Publicist	17
Researcher, Analyst	6
Lecturer, Trainer	8
Consultant	12
Freelance Journalist, Editor	3
Senior Academic	5
Manager	21
Director	9
Head	9

Table 3. Job titles held by Delphi panellists

Gender	Number
Male	15
Female	9

Table 4. Gender of panellists

Delphi participants' biographical data: Countries worked and lived in

	Africa	Americas (Caribbean, Central, South)	Americas (North)	West Asia	Central Asia	South/South East Asia	East Asia	West/North/South Europe	East Europe	Oceania
Countries lived in	3	2	5	9		11	6	34		1
Countries worked in	6	20	7	7		12	9	53	4	3
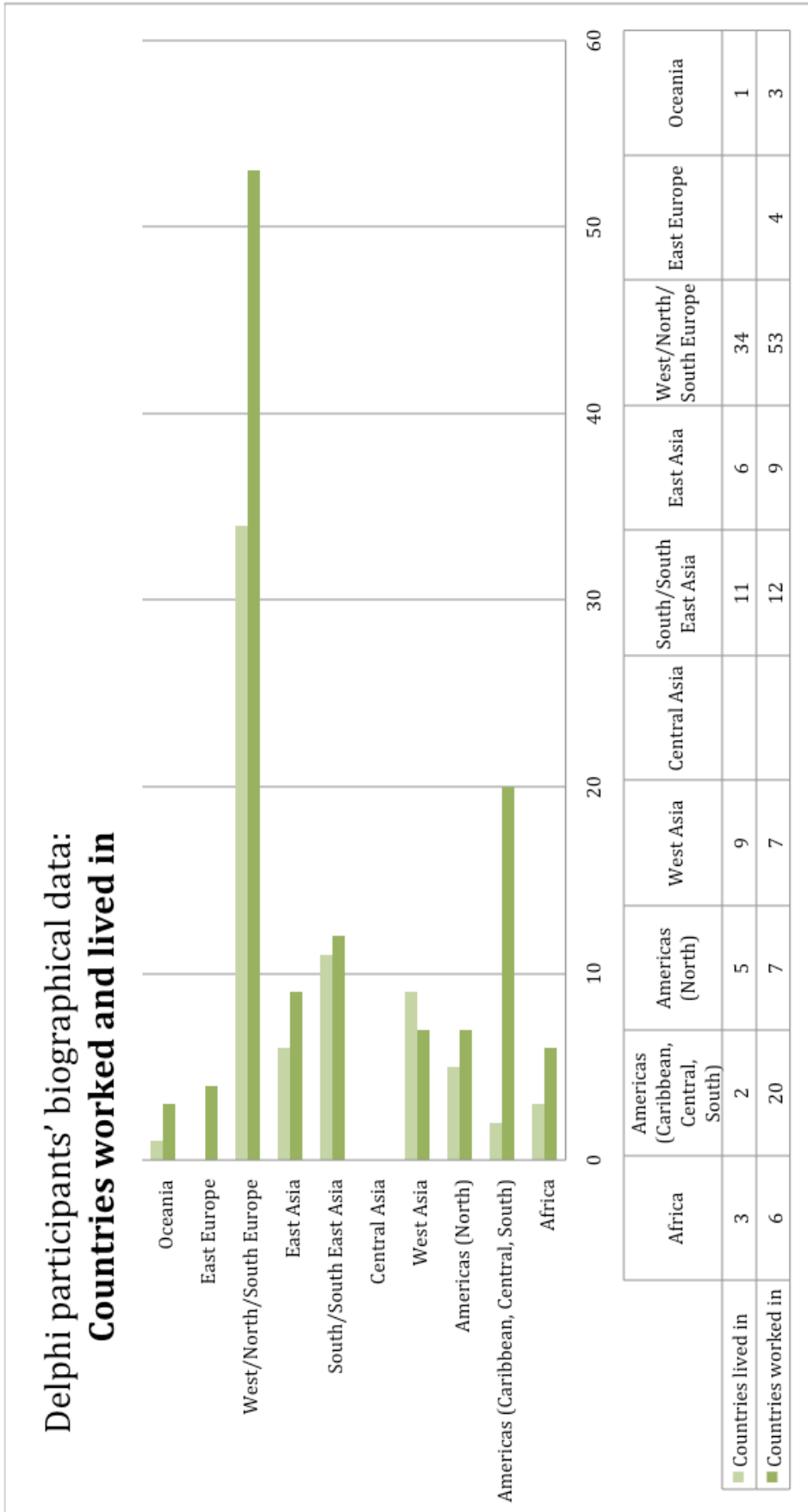
Figure 4. Delphi participants - countries lived and worked in

	Africa	Americas		Asia				Europe		Oceania
		Caribbean Central South	North America	West	Central	South South East	East	West North South	East	
Countries worked in	Africa Algeria Egypt (2) South Africa Sudan	Argentina (3) Bahamas (2) Barbados Brazil (2) Chile Cuba Curacao Falklands Jamaica (2) Mexico Peru Puerto Rico Tobago Trinidad Venezuela	North-America Bermuda Canada (2) USA (3)	Dubai (2) Israel Jordan (2) UAE (2)		India (6) Indonesia Malaysia Singapore (3) Thailand	Far East China Hong Kong (3) Japan (3) South Korea	Western-Europe Austria Brussels Czech Republic Denmark France (5) Germany (4) Greece Hungary Ireland Italy Netherlands (2) Norway Poland (2) Portugal (2) Scotland Serbia Spain Slovenia Sweden (2) Switzerland UK (20) Yugoslavia	Eastern-Europe Bulgaria Russia	Australia (3)
Countries lived in	Egypt (2) Sudan	Argentina Peru	North America USA (4)	Dubai (2) Iraq Israel Jordan (2) Kuwait Lebanon Saudi Arabia		India (7) Indonesia (2) Malaysia Singapore	China Hong Kong (3) Japan South Korea	Belgium (2) Czech Republic Denmark France (3) Germany (2) Hungary Italy Portugal Scotland Spain (2) UK (19)		Australia

Table 5. Delphi participants - countries lived and worked in

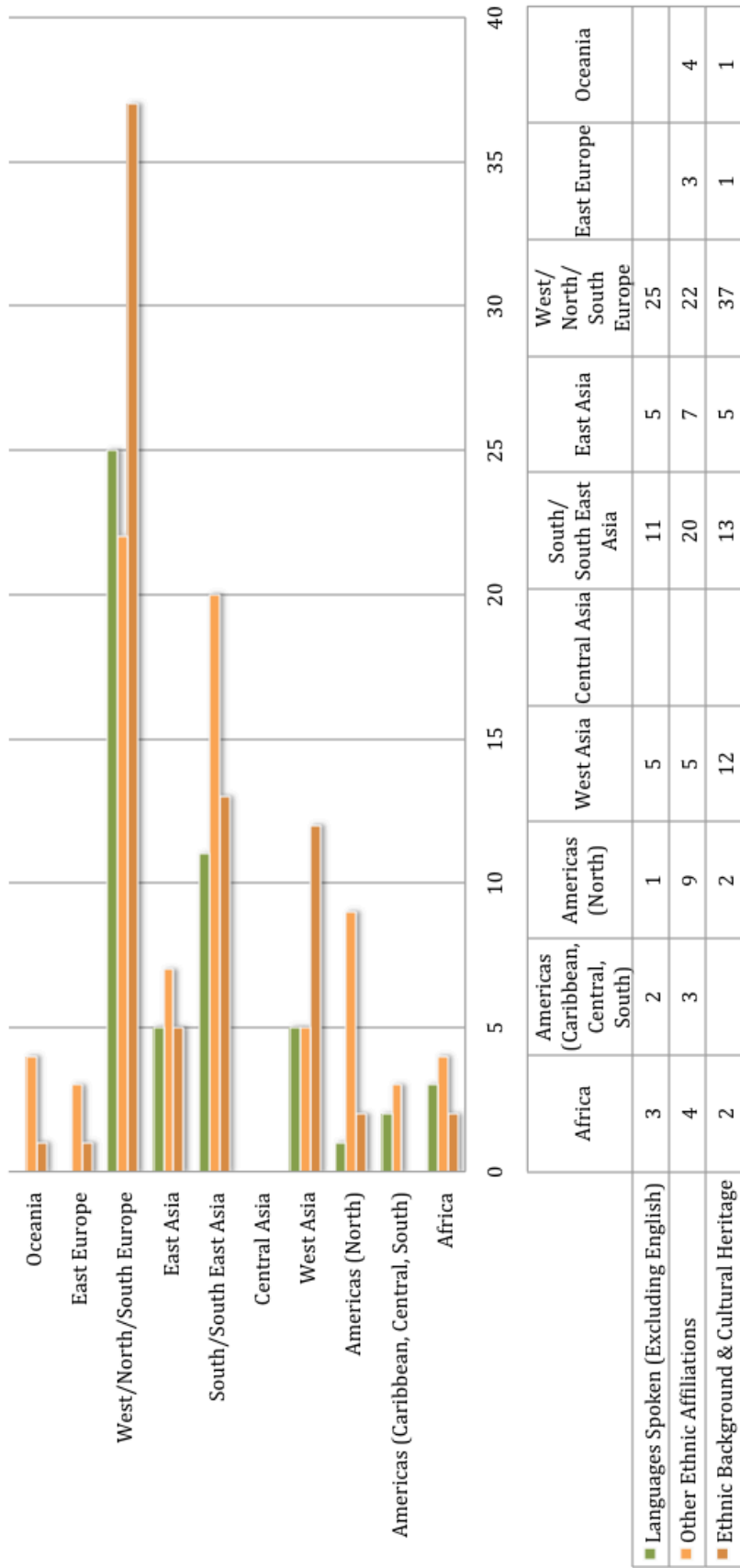Figure 5. Delphi participants - Ethnic background, affiliations and languages

Delphi participants' biographical data: Ethnic Background, Affiliations & Languages Spoken

	Africa	Americas (Caribbean, Central, South)	Americas (North)	West Asia	Central Asia	South/ South East Asia	East Asia	West/ North/ South Europe	East Europe	Oceania
Languages Spoken (Excluding English)	3	2	1	5		11	5	25		
Other Ethnic Affiliations	4	3	9	5		20	7	22	3	4
Ethnic Background & Cultural Heritage	2	2	2	12		13	5	37	1	1

	Africa	Americas		Asia				Europe		Oceania
		Caribbean Central South	North America	West	Central	South South East	East	West North South	East	
Ethnic Background & Cultural Heritage	Arab Egyptian		US American (2)	Arab Middle Eastern Armenian Emirati Iraqi Israeli (2) Jordanian Kuwaiti Palestinian Saudi-Arabian (2)		Bengali Burmese Indian (6) Iranian Malaysian (2) Singaporean South-Indian	Oriental Chinese (2) Hong Kong (2) Japanese	White (5) Belgian (2) British (10) Danish English (10) French (2) German (2) Irish (2) Italian Maltese Scottish	Russian	New Zealand
Other Ethnic Affiliations	African (2) Mauritian South-African	South American Columbian Mexican	White African-American Canadian USA (7)	Jewish Middle Eastern (2) Iraqi Palestinian		Burmese Filipino Indian (6) Indonesia Malaysian (7) Singapore (2) South-Indian (2)	Chinese Hong Kong Japanese (4) Korean	White Europe (3) Danish English (4) French (2) German (4) Irish (2) Italian Scottish Spanish UK (3)	Jewish Russian Slovakian	Australian (4)
Languages Spoken [English +]	[Arabic, French, Portuguese]	[English, Portuguese, Spanish]	[English, French]	Arabic (4) Hebrew		Bengali (2) Burmese Hindi (3) Indonesian Malay Malayalam Tamil Urdu	Cantonese Foochow Japanese Mandarin (2)	Danish English (24) French (11) German (5) Italian Norwegian Portuguese Spanish (4) Swedish		[English]

Table 6. Delphi participants - Ethnic background, affiliations and languages
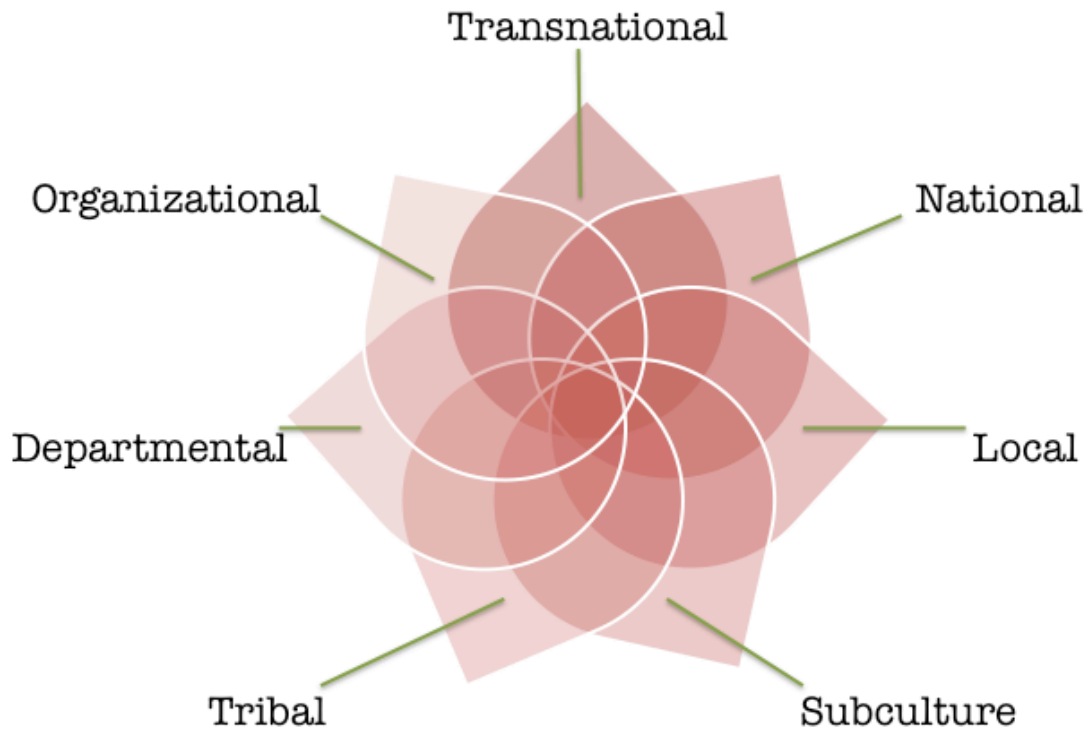
Figure 6. The Petals of Culture

i *"As 'The West' embarked on its path of enlightenment and discovery, the term Orientalism became applied progressively further East – necessitating the introduction of further descriptors, such as: the Near, Middle, and Far East. Furthermore, each of these terms represents the tip of an iceberg, rooted in subtexts, generalizations and for want of a better term, baggage. This is not to say that the 'Middle East' hasn't played a similar hand. Maghrib, the Arabic word for West, shares the same Arabic root word as those for: stranger, odd, sieve, exile, impetuous, violent, separate and sunset, amongst others. Comparably, it could be argued that the longest lasting legacy of colonialism and the slave trade, will be that black has become synonymous with ethnicity, despite 'black' not fulfilling the basic definitive requirements of ethnicity. Namely, a homogenous social group of people, sharing national and cultural traditions."* (Wilson, 2011a)