




TAHMID
CHOWDHURY
— COACH & WRITER —


CUBE Model Self- Assessment

For the full version, check out my book
'Make Diversity Matter to You'.

TAHMID CHOWDHURY

 www.tahmidchowdhury.co.uk

 tahmid@chowdhury.co.uk

 UK: +447785185230 BE: +32456356204

 <https://www.linkedin.com/in/tahmidchowdhury/>

CUBE model

To help you better understand your own opinion on Diversity I will be introducing to you the 'CUBE' Model. This is a framework I created to help you think about the different areas of your own life and how they have been affected by the circumstances of your life.

'CUBE' spells out:

Culture

Upbringing

Bias

(Lived) Experience

The model serves as a prompt for you to better understand yourself.

The question of how your culture or upbringing has shaped you may not have crossed your mind, apart from perhaps when you have travelled abroad and noted how different people do things elsewhere.

You can work through this model yourself individually or by sharing it with a partner. I have used this model in workshops which have resulted in very rich conversations. You can find a copy of this online handout of this model by heading to my website <https://tahmidchowdhury.co.uk/resources/>

You can also use it to look at life through the lens of someone who you know well but who comes from a different background. You will likely get some way through to thinking about their life in a way you have not before. You will also probably find that there are gaps that you will simply not know about.

This can be an excellent prompt to having that conversation and building that understanding for yourself. Moreover, by doing this exercise, it can be a great way to have a conversation that you may have felt uncomfortable to do so otherwise.

Culture

Culture can be defined in many ways. Here, we mean the culture that you experienced when you were growing up. In particular, the things that explicitly influenced you (e.g., music influences, shift in generational culture as you were growing up) but also the more implicit things.

For example, what was the general expectation in society for you when growing up? Were you expected to grow up and get married? If you were the male, were you expected to be the breadwinner to pay the bills? If you were a woman, was it to take care of the children?

The aim of examining culture is to better understand what particularly affected you from a societal perspective when growing up.

I experienced a mix of cultures as a second-generation British-Bangladeshi. I had both the cultural influences of the UK where I spent the majority of my life and where I went to attend University, but I also was impacted by Bangladeshi culture – close knit-families and traditional structures.

I also experienced a very different way of how society was structured when living in Bangladesh for two years in my youth, such as a stricter style of schooling, the regularity of domestic servants in households, the large-style celebrations of public holidays and the rich mixture of different foods and cuisines.

On top of this, as a second-generation migrant, I have had a different experience from my parents. There is a tension I felt of not belonging in either ‘culture’ as I am not quite British enough to be British, nor am I Bangladeshi enough to be Bangladeshi (e.g., my Bengali fluency is poor, and the way I think, act and speak betray my western upbringing). This particular mix of cultures has therefore had a profound impact on my view of life.

So, bringing this back to you, how has your culture affected you? You do not need to have an overly elaborate answer like mine but thinking about this question might be the first time you have done so in a deeper way. The point of this is not to have the most whacky and wonderful tale, but rather to identify that culture *has* had an effect on you, and the likelihood is that the way you feel is very different to others – whether they be from the same culture or a different one.

Questions to consider:

What is your culture?

How has your culture defined you?

How important is your culture to you?

How do you feel about other cultures?

Upbringing

Upbringing examines your unique experience of growing up. This is probably one of the more straightforward sets of questions, as it essentially looks at how you were raised, and how much that affected you in terms of your ambitions and goals, but also your character and values.

You may have come across the idea that much of what forms us stems from our upbringing. From a diversity perspective, it helps explain why we think how we do, and why we may act in a certain way which is very different to someone with the same background.

Think about the values that were instilled into you, either implicitly, or explicitly by your parents and wider family. For some, this may be based upon religious messaging based upon your parent's faith, but it is also likely shaped by their own experiences.

For example, was there an implicit understanding you should follow your father's footsteps into the societal trade? Did your parents have a difficult time financially, so emphasised the importance of finding a good job to ease your future burdens?

The questions could go on infinitely; ultimately, you will know your upbringing best. So, try and examine how this has formed you as a person and how much this has shaped your thinking. From a diversity perspective, understanding how much this has shaped your personal view of the world can go a long way in understanding the importance of family and upbringing for others.

For example, many BAME individuals are often told that they will need to work twice as hard as their white counterparts, and as such, there is this pressurised mentality that they internalise. This can manifest itself in individuals with a particularly keen work ethic, but also lead to an inferiority complex, and higher rates of imposter syndrome.

If you are a manager, understanding these perspectives can be invaluable for motivating your employees. Even if you are not a manager, being a friend or colleague who understands these issues will deepen your relationship and build your emotional intelligence when dealing with others.

For me, my upbringing was particularly pronounced in the expectation of me to be religious, follow my family traditions (e.g., arranged marriage) and follow wider expectations upon me in terms of areas such as excelling in school and grades. I reflect that the intended effect was quite different to the actual effect it had on me - it pushed me more towards a rebellious mindset when I was younger.

Questions to consider:

How were you brought up?

How has this framed your beliefs?

How might this be similar/ different to others?

Bias

When we talk about bias, we are talking about the preference for or against something. In this context, we are examining how people in their nature prefer interacting with certain groups.

Most often, this is a tendency to spend time with people who are like us, leading us to have a certain aversion – whether consciously or unconsciously – to having the same interactions with someone from a different group.

Bias can sound like a quite heavy or loaded term, but it is an important concept when relating to diversity. These invisible biases play a part in understanding why individuals from diversity groups can often feel excluded from groups, when from your perspective there may be no direct reason for them to not feel included.

It is the reason why BAME individuals and women can often feel far more excluded in the workplace, as they feel different and so are far less comfortable operating around others when they are in the minority group.

Everyone has biases to some level, and a lot of these come from our upbringing. Growing up in a South Asian household myself, I grew up with explicit negative views of black people coming from comments around me in my family.

Many years later, this shaped me to have negative assumptions about their abilities in the workplace, particularly those from older generations. This is something I had to actively identify and work on to overcome a bias in myself. Likewise, there were similar internalised views of women I held from my background.

Bringing this back to you, perhaps the easiest way to understand the concept of bias is to think of examples of when you were negatively affected by one. You may not have been in lots of cross-cultural dialogue where these issues were discussed, but you are likely to have found yourself in a situation with the opposite sex.

If you are a man, perhaps you have heard the opposite sex presume that you are unable to express yourself emotionally or presumed to react negatively by displaying violence or aggression. You may have also internalised the belief from growing up that you must be the breadwinner and that you must follow the family career. Perhaps you have had none of these experiences, but something else entirely.

If you are a woman, there are probably more obvious examples that you can call upon. These range from the idea about whether you can have a career whilst having a family, being expected to be feminine in actions or being asked to smile more, catcalling and harassment either in the street or in the workplace.

Take an example where people have made assumptions based upon whether you are a man or a woman that has made you uncomfortable. Take a moment to explore how this feels in more detail. You will probably find this experience may bring up quite negative emotions about how frustrating it is that others presume to know you without asking you.

In terms of diversity, many presumptions or stereotypes can have profound effects on individuals from these groups. These can have very negative impacts on their livelihoods and careers. Innocent and accidental stereotyping include throwaway remarks to women that they will not be interested in their careers after starting a family or greeting a black man as a security guard rather than the CEO (which has happened!).

It can be helpful to open a dialogue with someone from a different group who will most likely have a plethora of stories once you dig deep enough.

Some of the experiences I have shared from the workplace included getting a new job on promotion but not being introduced to the team. I then saw a new white colleague joining the next week and getting a full introduction.

Soon after starting the role, I met the head of my team who told me I would be okay because it was a discreet role. When I asked my white colleagues they never had anything like that - It was not the most motivating pep-talk I have ever had!

Questions to consider:

What does bias mean to you?

What negative stereotypes have you observed?

How might you have suffered any biases against you as an individual?

What biases might you have of others?

(Lived) Experience

The final part of the model looks at experience or lived experience. The idea behind this is to bring the other parts of the model – culture, upbringing, bias – together. Lived experience examines how these have played out in practice when looking at people's lives.

The key behind this is understanding the stories behind the different elements of diversity, and how it has affected us in the real world.

My family particularly emphasised academic achievement, a typical expectation within South Asian households. I was fortunate that my family were successful, as such I had a wealthy upbringing meaning I went to a fee-paying Methodist school. I had access to wider opportunities and extracurricular activities.

It also meant I went to a predominantly white, Christian school whilst being brought up in a Muslim, Bangladeshi household. Whether it was a mixture of being different or teenage angst, I grew up with a desperate desire to fit in. This was particularly felt when I saw people starting to go out and party, which I was simply not allowed to do.

Nonetheless, it did also allow me to go to university, including a year abroad in France and later a Master's in Belgium – here I gained a wider perspective of different cultures and for the first time genuinely questioned the idea of being seen as 'British' by continental Europeans who went on to ask me about the bland English food I would eat. I would have to explain to them that I would have curries as my meals for most of my upbringing.

Fast-forwarding to the start of my career, I entered the workplace with the expectation that work was broadly meritocratic. At the time, I thought of diversity as an odd corporate buzzword.

Quickly though, my assumptions of an egalitarian, meritocratic system were shattered when I saw how often workplace behaviours were dysfunctional, with the BAME staff often being left behind in junior positions.

My life was a complex mix of privileges and disadvantages. This has been a particularly useful exercise for me as it has allowed me to understand things better in terms of why I may have felt like an outsider, but also appreciate the privileges I had of a good education that many others were not afforded.

If I had not been in a school that pushed for academic excellence, I may have attained a far worse grade or perhaps not attended university at all. My life journey would have been very different

Lived experience is a particularly useful concept when discussing diversity. It allows us to look at the wider picture. Quite often we go into a workplace and look to initiate diversity schemes, but we often vastly underappreciate the experiences people have before we meet them to build up a wider picture of who they are. Looking through this lens also helps humanise the subject, which builds a better empathetic connection with one another.

As before, I invite you to look at this for yourself. If helpful, write your personal story on a notepad and examine what were the advantages and disadvantages you faced. Take a moment to think about how these have shaped your own life, and how it has developed to where you are now.

You can go as broad or as narrow as you want, though for you to make the most out of doing this, I suggest you give yourself a relatively rigorous examination. Watch out for assuming that certain things such as going to university or even having a stable household are the norm for everyone.

Questions to consider:

How has your background affected you to where you are today?

What differences might this have had compared to someone else from a different background?

has your background come up in your workplace/personal life? If so, how?

CUBE model questions

To recap, below is a non-exhaustive list to get you thinking more about each of the different elements mentioned within the model. The questions are very open-ended, and the point of this is to answer how you feel this best fits you.

I recommend you take a notepad and work through the questions at a pace that suits you. It is helpful to reflect on the question before answering, but equally do not agonise over the perfect answer either. If there are other questions that you want to explore, do feel free to do so.

If you are finding it difficult to ask some questions, try asking yourself how someone from a different background would answer this for you. (You can even ask someone you know well to do this for you to compare the results).

A fun exercise that I have used within a workplace setting is sending people off into small groups to ask each other these questions. It is highly effective and brings together a rich set of conversations that otherwise would not have happened.

Culture

What is your culture?

How has your culture defined you?

How important is your culture to you?

How do you feel about other cultures?

Upbringing

How were you brought up?

How has this framed your beliefs?

How might this be similar/ different to others?

Biases

What does bias mean to you?

What negative stereotypes have you observed?

How might you have suffered any biases against you as an individual?

What biases might you have of others?

(lived) experiences

How has your background affected you to where you are today?

What differences might this have had compared to someone else from a different background?

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