Running head: CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE

Cross-Cultural Competence: What Role Does it Play Within the Military?

Elizabeth Culhane, Ph.D.
JHT Inc.
Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI)

Patrice Reid, Ph.D.
Defense Language Office

Loring J. Crepeau, Ph.D.
DEOMI

Daniel McDonald, Ph.D.,
DEOMI

For additional information contact:

Elizabeth Culhane

Research Psychologist

Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute

366 Tuskegee Airmen Drive, PAFB 32925

Elizabeth.trame.ctr@patrick.af.mil

Cultural knowledge and linguistic ability are some of the best weapons in the struggle against terrorism. Mastering these weapons can mean the difference between victory and defeat on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan.

Representative Gabrielle Giffords
Commencement Address at the Defense Language Institute
August 2009

Cross-cultural competence (3C) has been conceptualized in many ways, but most definitions center on the ability to quickly understand and effectively act in a culture different from one's own (Abbe, Gulick, & Herman, 2008; McDonald, McGuire, Johnston, Semelski & Abbe, 2008; Selmeski, 2009). It is a vital element for military and civilian personnel who must frequently interact with people from other cultures, both here in the United States and when deployed or assigned to operate in other countries. Cross-cultural competence can prove to be very advantageous, as it equips individuals with the requisite knowledge, skills, abilities, and personal characteristics that enable them to function properly in culturally diverse situations. Furthermore, 3C provides the individual with the conscious knowledge of when and how to switch from an "automatic home-culture international management mode" to a more "culturally appropriate, adaptable mode" (Zakaria, 2000). Thus, 3C helps mitigate undesirable and costly outcomes by developing critical skills, including those needed for conflict resolution, communication, stress coping, language acquisition, tolerance for ambiguity, and adapting to living in other cultures (McDonald et al., 2008). The current paper addresses how 3C can enhance proficiency in cultural interactions and improve readiness in operational environments, as well as provide insight into some of the current efforts being employed in the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) to address such demands.

Given the ever-changing global landscape and the adaptive nature of military operations in dynamic and asymmetric warfare environments, 3C has emerged as a vital asset that equips

military personnel to optimally execute mission objectives abroad (Reid, Steinke, Mokuolu, Trejo, Faulkner, Sudduth, McDonald, 2012). Many leaders in the DoD have recognized the need and critical importance for our military personnel to be cognitively, socially, and culturally adept to effectively meet the changing needs and growing spectrum of varied missions our Armed Forces currently face. The emergent nature of these missions has increased the need for adaptive interpersonal interaction and skills, despite the continuous advancement of technology that serves to maximize the distance between our Service members and adversaries who threaten them. Still, the U.S. will likely face missions within the next decade that increasingly involve efforts focused on stabilization, reconstruction, security operations, and humanitarian endeavors. These types of missions often require increased interaction between ground personnel and those from other cultural backgrounds, including both allies and adversaries. Given this reality, the demonstrated need for our personnel to communicate, negotiate, and influence members of various cultures—and the agencies involved with these missions—is equally critical as the military's ability to effectively "aim and fire."

Today's military must therefore be poised to perform the complex range of missions they must face on a daily basis. The combination of language, regional expertise, and cultural (LREC) capabilities has become increasingly important, given the increased need for allied forces at the ground level to interact with the local populace. According to the Defense Secretary, Leon Panetta (2011), LREC capabilities are critical, given that military and civilian personnel must have the "ability to effectively communicate and understand the cultures of coalition forces, international partners, and local populations." The DoD has therefore placed considerable emphasis on the education and training of LREC capabilities to meet these demands. At the same time, it has proven especially difficult to predict the locations and intercultural partnerships that
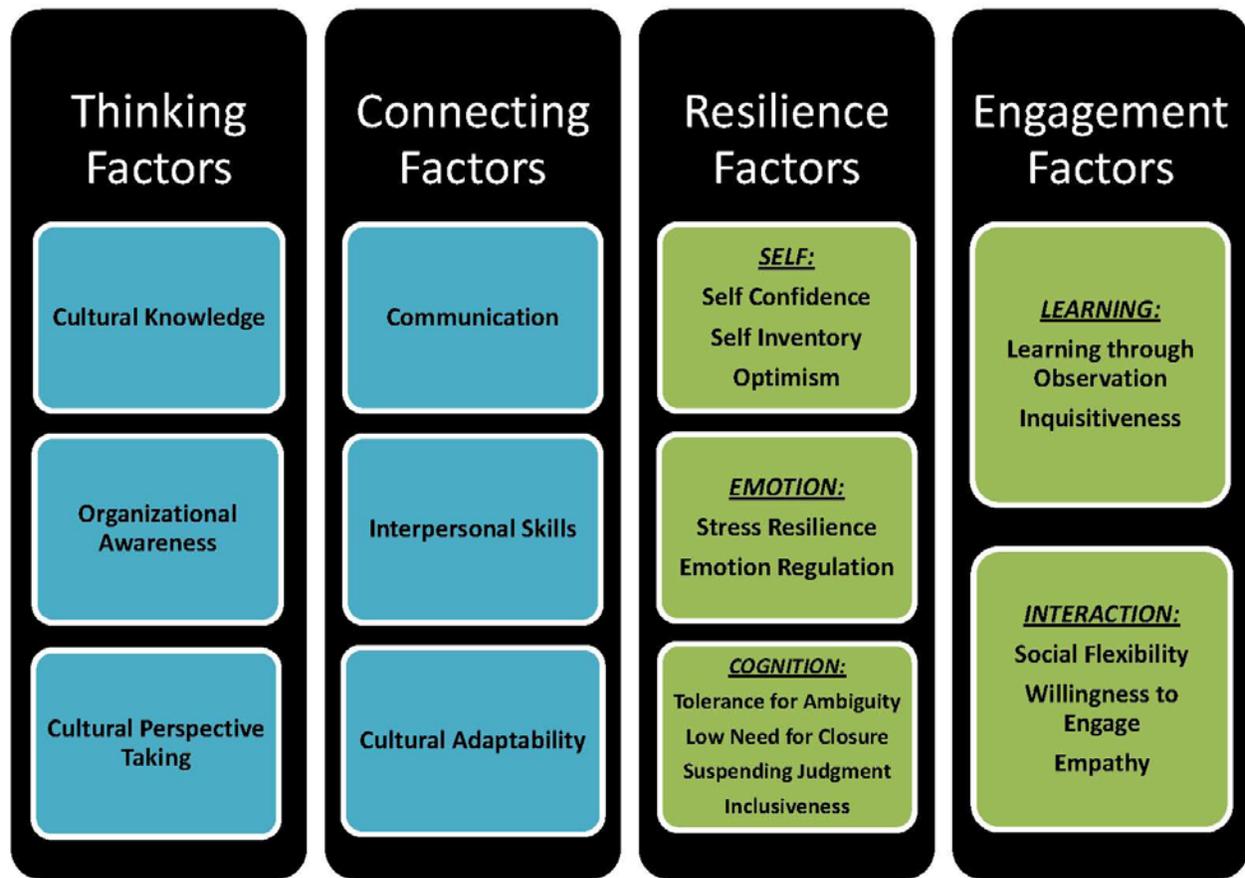
would benefit from this type of specialized training. Thus, the DoD has sought to establish and execute policies and procedures that ensure providing the requisite education, distributed training, and awareness, while underscoring the importance of an individual's ability to adapt to rapidly-changing operational demands.

Defining and Developing a Cross-Cultural Competence Framework

Cross-cultural competence covers a broad domain of individual qualities and capabilities deemed critical to mission performance in novel cultural settings.   It is best described as a "set of cultural behaviors and attitudes integrated into the practice methods of a system, agency, or its professionals that enables them to work effectively in cross-cultural situations" (National Center for Cultural Competence, p. 9). Similarly, the Defense Language Office conceptualizes 3C as a "set of culture-general, knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes (KSAAs) developed through education, training, and experience that provide the ability to operate effectively within any culturally complex environment. [Cross-cultural competence] is further augmented through the acquisition of cultural, linguistic, and regional proficiency and by the application in cross-cultural contexts."

In line with this reasoning, researchers from the Naval Air Warfare Command Training Systems Division (Johnston, Paris, McCoy, Severe, & Hughes, 2010) and the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute (DEOMI) developed a 3C framework possessing a set of core competencies and core enablers. Specifically, the researchers identified six core competencies and 13 core enablers (see Table 1) deemed to be germane to the development of 3C, based on an extensive analysis of the research literature, and by refining competency definitions found in previously identified 3C learning statements (see Johnston et al., 2010; McDonald et al., 2008). The core competencies that include *thinking* and *connecting* factors are cognitive, behavioral,

and affective in nature. The *thinking* factors include declarative, procedural, and conceptual

knowledge, as well as critical thinking skills (Johnston et al., 2008). Conversely, the *connecting*

factor represents the social engagements aspect, which relies on human interaction. The core

enablers, on the other hand, are those personal characteristics that predispose individuals to act in

a certain manner. These enablers are also considered pre-competence/motivating factors that

influence job success in cross-cultural contexts, and facilitate the development of the core

competencies (Johnston et al., 2010). The core enablers are divided into two factors: *resilience*

and e*ngagement*. The *resilience* factors allow an individual to recover from, or easily adjust to,

change or stressful circumstances (Johnston et al., 2010). Similar to the *connecting* factor of the

core competencies, the *engagement* factor goes beyond resilience by facilitating proactive

interactions in diverse contexts (Johnston et al., 2010). This model has helped provide a

framework for understanding the interplay between malleable, state-like capabilities and the

more immutable trait-like characteristics—the latter of which can be used to select more

qualified individuals into leadership positions where these talents can be leveraged.

Table 1. Cross Cultural Competence Framework

Thinking Factors	Connecting Factors	Resilience Factors	Engagement Factors
Cultural Knowledge	Communication	SELF: Self Confidence, Self Inventory, Optimism	LEARNING: Learning through Observation, Inquisitiveness
Organizational Awareness	Interpersonal Skills	EMOTION: Stress Resilience, Emotion Regulation	
Cultural Perspective Taking	Cultural Adaptability	COGNITION: Tolerance for Ambiguity, Low Need for Closure, Suspending Judgment, Inclusiveness	INTERACTION: Social Flexibility, Willingness to Engage, Empathy

Complementary to this effort, McDonald (2008) proposed a model of concentric circles, also known as the "3C Bulls-Eye," that depicts how cross-cultural competence permeates different organizational levels, beginning with the self, and expanding outwards to the adversary (see Figure 1). McDonald (2008) posits that the acquisition of 3C begins with the self by understanding your own beliefs, values, and biases to better appreciate other cultural identities. Subsequently, individuals must work with a team of other people—even within the U.S.—who come from different regions and backgrounds. In order to communicate effectively and lead these groups, one must possess adequate 3C to work with those who are different from themselves. Cross-cultural competence is also important in fostering partnerships with coalitions

and host nations. The accepted practices, behaviors and mission goals may differ across Forces and, in order to coordinate and integrate these commands, success will be dependent on addressing, understanding, and adapting to these cultural differences. Finally, 3C is imperative at the operational, strategic and tactical levels; knowing the adversary's culture provides the insight needed to effectively negotiate and stabilize the current operational environment.
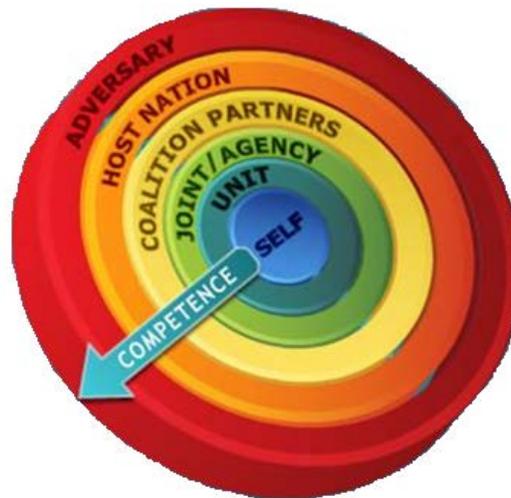

Figure 1. McDonald's (2008) "3C Bulls-Eye" Model

Cross-cultural competence is recognized as a critical capability that helps personnel become mission ready and meet the challenges of this decade. It is useful in day-to-day operations, and plays a critical role in leadership functions as it promotes effective cross-cultural interactions and lends to effective behavioral skills for communicating with other cultures. Leaders are commonly tasked to lead teams in a variety of missions, forcing them to meet operational needs, and to perform effectively in cross-cultural environments. Thus, leaders must be able to engage socially across cultures, thereby creating alliances, reading intentions, and building trust, all while understanding, and influencing individuals and their motivations (Laurence, 2011). Furthermore, leaders can use 3C to integrate, tolerate, and bridge differences that allow for communication pathways and perspectives to be brought together when executing

military missions. Finally, 3C helps to hone leader capabilities such as systems thinking, strategic agility, forecasting team strengths, building strategic networks, and ultimately planning, preparing, executing, and assessing operations.

The Leadership Competency Model developed at Central Michigan University (2004) includes the following competencies: self-management, leading others, task management, innovation and social responsibility. It can be used simultaneously with the 3C framework described above, allowing for a complete understanding of how leadership affects cross-cultural contexts; this model is shown below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Leadership Competency Model and 3C Framework
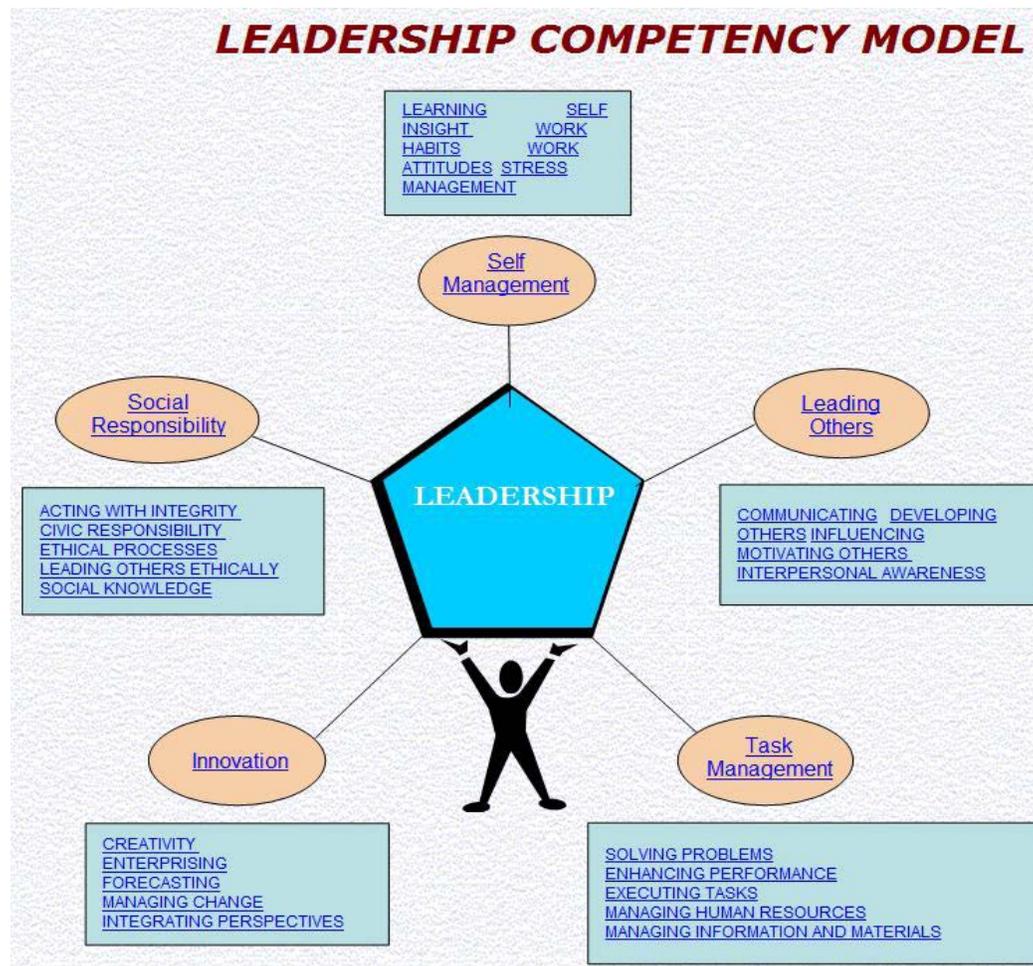
Distributed Training and Cross-Cultural Simulation in the Military

Many organizations, including the military, are moving in the direction of distributed training, specifically for 3C. The U. S. Office of Performance Technology, in collaboration with the U. S. Internal Revenue Service, has developed a cross-cultural distributed training model that integrates multiple learning technologies, including: computer-based training, interactive video tele-training, knowledge management centers, web-based information delivery systems, and electronic performance support systems. The overall objective for developing these types of training programs is to improve the quality of cross-cultural training, reduce operational cost, increase training availability, and promote continuous learning (Distributed Training, 2005).

The U. S. military has also focused on increasing their distributed and online cross-cultural training in an effort to provide access to the vast number of military and civilian personnel working abroad. Distributed training provides military personnel with the opportunity to receive this method of training on demand, making it virtually accessible anywhere and anytime. This form of training helps ensure that military personnel do not encounter a predicament where they lack the requisite information or critical capabilities needed to succeed and advance in that cultural context.

DEOMI has been at the forefront of integrating 3C and online training, using simulation and avatars. DEOMI opened a simulation laboratory in 2009, which primarily seeks to establish a center of excellence for simulation research and development in the areas of military equal opportunity, equal employment opportunity, diversity, and 3C. At present, DEOMI serves as a test-bed and transition partner for emerging technologies in these research areas, delivers training solutions within DEOMI and across the military in support of mission readiness. In addition,

DEOMI evaluates the effectiveness of recently-developed tools, and provides recommendations that can be applied in the field and fleet. Some of the most recent tools provide interactive scenarios, avatars and simulation, automatic feedback, and branching techniques. For example, the VECTOR (Virtual Environment Cultural Training for Operational Readiness) training tool is frequently utilized primarily for such purpose. VECTOR provides a training platform, coupled with highly-engaging 3-D virtual environments, avatar-based scenarios and traditional web-based tutorials to teach a broad range of culture and interpersonal skills.

Future Directions

Institutionalizing 3C may require an organizational cultural change using a multi-pronged approach through functions that include recruiting, selection, promotions, systems development, research, training, education, and mission operations for success. Ultimately, successful institutionalization relies on securing sufficient priority within the strategic plans, policy, and doctrine–along with the budgets that support them. Furthermore, successful implementation requires a valid measurement strategy, both at the individual and organizational level, where a demand signal notifies operational requirements. This feedback system allows for agile and rapid adjustment, ensuring "institutional adaptability." To assist with meeting such operational requirements, the DoD recently launched its cross-cultural competence portal, located at www.defenseculture.org. This website provides a number of resources, including:

- education and training (culture clips, e-Learning, simulation training, and additional resources)
- individual- and unit-level assessments
- information pertinent to leaders at the regional and operational levels
- current and emerging research

- current events and other additional resources

In sum, training our forces in 3C using distributed training and other experiential learning methods can save money, time, and lives, since 3C provides individuals with the means for a culturally appropriate, adaptable, and acceptable mode of management; an aid to improving coping mechanisms associated with culture shock and unexpected events; a means for reducing the uncertainty of interaction with foreign nationals; and a means of enhancing the expatriate's coping abilities, by reducing stress and disorientation (Zakaria, 2000).

References

Abbe, A., Gulick, L.M.V., & Herman, J. (2007). *Cross-cultural competence in army leaders: A conceptual and empirical foundation.* Report prepared by the United States Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences, Arlington, VA.

Abbe, A. (2008). *Building cultural capability for full-spectrum operations*. A report prepared by the United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences.

Central Michigan University (2004). *Leadership Central: Leadership competency model.* Retrieved from http://www.chsbs.cmich.edu/leader_model/CompModel/EDUMAIN.htm

Laurence, J. H. (2011). Military Leadership and the Complexity of Combat and Culture. *Military Psychology, 23*(5), 489-501.

Johnston, J. Paris, C., McCoy, C., Severe, G., & Hughes, G. (2010). A framework for Cross-cultural competence and learning recommendations. Paper submitted to Defense Language Office. Rosslyn, VA.

McCloskey, M. J., Grandjean, A., Behymer, K. J. & Ross, K. (2010). Assessing the Development of Cross-Cultural Competence in Soldiers. United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. *Technical Report 1277.*

McDonald, D. (2008). A brief note on the multi-layered nature of cross-cultural competence. (DEOMI Technical Report No. 22-08). Patrick A.F.B., FL: DEOMI

McDonald, D.P., McGuire, G., Johnston, J., Selmeski, B., & Abbe, A. (2008). *Developing and managing cross-cultural competence within Department of Defense: Recommendations for learning and assessment.* Paper submitted to Deputy Under Secretary of Defense (Plans). Washington, DD: OSD.

National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Child Development Center. *Achieving cultural competence: A guidebook for providers of services to older Americans and their families.* January 2001.

National Air Warfare Center Training Systems Divisions (NAWCTSD) (2010). *A Framework for Cross-Cultural Competence and Learning Recommendations.*

Reid, P., Steinke, J. C., Mokuolu, F., Trejo, B., Faulkner, D., Sudduth, M., & McDonald, D.P. (2012). A proposed developmental sequence for cross-cultural competence training in the Department of Defense. A report prepared by the Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute for the Defense Language Office.

Semelski, B. (2009). Proceedings from the 7th Biennial Equal Opportunity, Diversity, and Culture Research Symposium. Patrick Air Force Base, FL.

Sudduth, M. M. (2011). *Leadership in Cross-Cultural Contexts.* Retrieved from http://www.defenseculture.org/LeadershipGeneralDocs/CCC_Leadership/Leadership_in_ Cross-Cultural.pdf

Distributed Training. In Training by Design. (2005). Retrieved from http://www.trainingbydesign.com/Distributed.htm.

Zakaria, N. (2000). The effects of cross-cultural training on the acculturation process of the global workforce. *International Journal of Manpower, 21*(6), 492–511.