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ARMY LEADER DEVELOPMENT
FOR THE CROSS-CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

by

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Biography

Colonel James M. Lewis started his military career when he enlisted in the United States Air Force on 16 December 1986. He served four years, nine months active duty with an Honorable Discharge after Desert Storm in September 1991. In August 1992, a year after his discharge from the Air Force, he started his freshman year at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, majoring in molecular biology with a minor in anthropology, graduating with a Bachelor's of Science in May 1996. He simultaneously attended the Wisconsin Military Academy receiving his commission in the Wisconsin Army National Guard in June 1996. He resigned his commission as a Captain from the National Guard to accept an active duty commission (AGR) in the Army Reserve in October 2003. COL Lewis is an Army Civil Engineer with a two-year assignment in Athens Greece, a fifteen-month deployment to Iraq, and multiple short duty assignments to over twenty-two countries. Colonel Lewis's duty assignments include serving as an Engineer Platoon Leader, Engineer Detachment Commander, Engineer Company Commander, Brigade Liaison Detachment Executive Officer, Army Careers Division Deputy Battalion Commander, 412th Theater Engineer Command G5 Strategic Planner, 88th Regional Readiness Command Engineer Master Planner, and 88th Readiness Division Regional Engineer Division Chief. COL Lewis furthered his civilian education by attending Concord University School of Law, graduating in 2010 as a Juris Doctor with a concentration in Information Technology Law. He is also a resident graduate of the United States Army Command and General Staff College and is currently a resident student at Air War College, Air University, Maxwell Air Force Base, Alabama.

Abstract

This paper examines the challenges the United States Army faces working in diverse and complex cultural environments. With the advent of increased technology along with the changing political climate, the world is much more connected than ever before. Cultural understanding of world views, customs, religion, and language has become an unavoidable part of life . This essay presents an analytical framework to describe and gain an appreciation of intercultural communication.[1] This framework utilizes the Hofstede model of cultural dimensions, which gives us an understanding of the cultural aspects and tendencies of a nation.[2] This cultural model offers a framework to fill the gap in the Army's shortfall on cross-cultural communication training and helps us understand why Army leadership needs to develop a forward-looking training program. It is essential to understand why culture is significant and how it influences people to understand perception, behavior influences, and how it shapes personalities.[3] As stated in Buzzle, "Culture is related to the development of our attitude. Our cultural values influence how we approach living. According to the behaviorist definition of culture, it is the ultimate system of social control where people monitor their standards and behavior. Our cultural values serve as the founding principles of our life. They shape our thinking, behavior, and personality." [4]

Introduction

There are many practical reasons to study intercultural communication. Intercultural communication is "communication that involves cultural group membership differences."[5] It is all about learning the necessary skills to understand and manage cultural differences appropriately and effectively.[6] For example, people from two very different cultures may

approach problem-solving issues very differently. Furthermore, friendships and relationships between people of different cultures will have different expectations, desires, patterns, and end goals.[7] With the increase in Joint Military operations throughout various regions of the world and an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) global environment, Soldiers require a fundamental understanding of cultural dimensions. For the Army to be effective in today's multicultural operations, Soldiers need a mindset attuned to understanding the complex cultural environment in which they are expected to operate with skill sets to manage them. Leaders must understand how the local culture affects the environment and take this into account when executing military operations.[8] Only through proper cultural education and training to close the communication gap of understanding "how and "why" cultures operate can the Army significantly increase operational success. If the Army does not develop a more robust cultural awareness training program, the secondary and tertiary effects on Army actions will substantially affect operations in complex operational environments throughout the world.[9]

Thesis

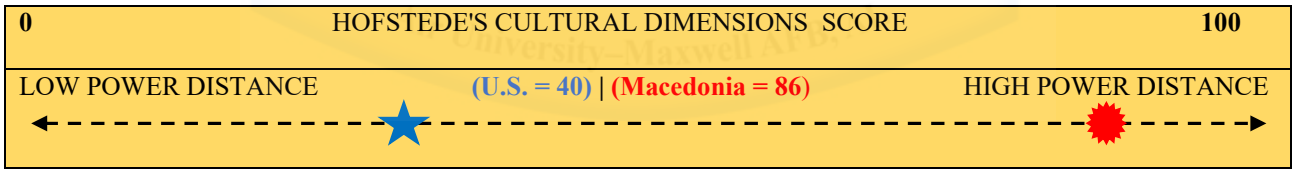
For the United States Army, cultural competence is an essential skill. With increased globalization and foreign missions, Soldiers will inevitably communicate with people who are culturally different.[10] As stated in the Department of the Army's Cultural Awareness Training Program, a Soldier needs to "understand the importance of collaboration among diverse organizations, and how individual and organizational actions affect strategic relationships."[11] This paper will cover the importance of cultural training and its impact on the future of the U.S. Army in today's joint operational environment and present a case study of a humanitarian Civil Assistance mission in the country of Macedonia using the Hofstede Model. Hofstede's model

describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior.

To illustrate the impact of cultural differences, this paper will look at a Humanitarian Civic Assistance (HCA) mission that the 412th Theater Engineer Command (TEC) conducted in the Slavic country of Macedonia. The purpose of this mission was to build and reinforce trust by generating positive public relations and demonstrating the goodwill of the American people.[12] The mission of the 412th TEC was to renovate a grade school in Negotino Macedonia. This HCA mission was one month in duration, required nine American Soldiers, and nine Macedonian Soldiers to work in cooperation. The American Officer in Charge (OIC) of the on-site project was a young female engineer First Lieutenant, and the OIC for the Macedonians was a combat-hardened special forces Sergeant Major. None of the American Soldiers had cultural training or a country orientation briefing before arriving in-country. The very first morning of the HCA project, the American Lieutenant and Macedonian Sergeant Major had a cultural head-on collision. This paper of "The American Lieutenant and the Macedonian Sergeant Major" is an excellent example of a case study because it illustrates intercultural conflict and how we can manage it by understanding the components of different cultures through Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions. In the case between the Lieutenant and Sergeant Major, we will look at what happened, why it happened, and how to avoid cultural conflicts by exploring five of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. An excellent place to start in understanding this case study is by looking at the country comparison (Culture Compass Scores) values of the Hofstede Model to compare and contrast Macedonia and United States cultures. Each Hofstede dimension is explained in the case study comparisons by scores from 1 for the lowest, to 100 for the highest.

Case Study: The American Lieutenant and the Macedonian Sergeant Major

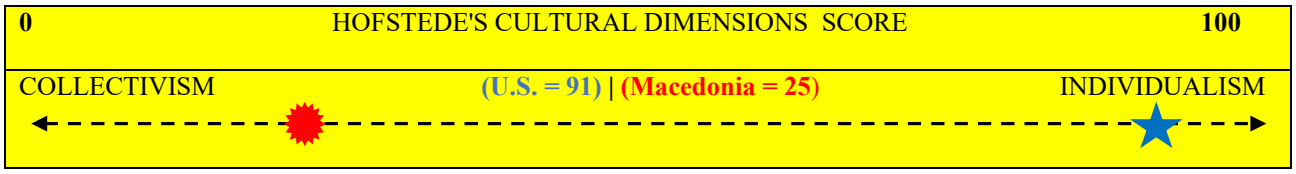
The first Hofstede dimension utilized in the present case study is *Low Power Distance vs. High Power Distance.* This dimension deals with the fact that not all individuals are equal in society.[13] As defined by Ting-Toomey and Gudykunst, "Power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally."[14] People in Low Power Distance cultures value equal rights and relationships based on performance. People in High Power Distance cultures accept unequal power distribution, hierarchal rights, rewards, and punishment based on gender, age, status, rank, title, and seniority.[15] Macedonia scores were high in this dimension, with an eighty-six indicating a high-power distance culture. In this culture, everybody has a place, and subordinates expect guidance and direction from an autocratic leader. The United States shows a much lower power distance, scoring at forty percent.



This much lower score for the U.S. indicates that there is a lesser degree a person can influence other people's behavior and that there are more equal rights and equal relations.[16] On the first morning of the HCA mission, the Lieutenant took a straightforward approach with the Sergeant Major, establishing herself as the person in charge of both American and Macedonian Soldiers. This cultural faux pas was the Lieutenant's first mistake, and it immediately caused difficulty between her and the Macedonians. The Lieutenant had an ethnocentric mindset, which is, as Ting-Toomey and Chung define as, "being stuck with our cultural worldviews and using

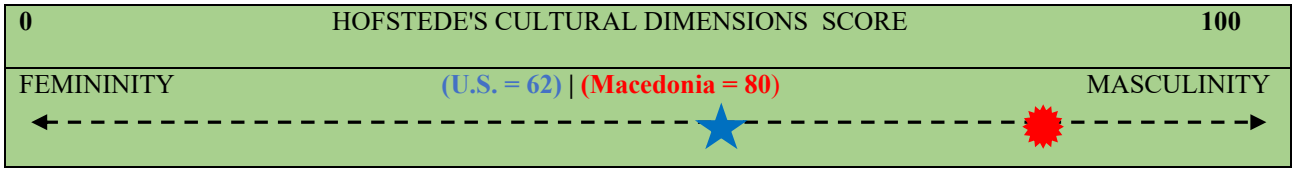
our own cultural values as the baseline standards to evaluate the other parson's cultural behavior."[17] She perceived that all cultures and militaries were the same and assumed that being an officer automatically gave her the right to authority, even over the Macedonians. The Macedonians opposed her position because they viewed the young Lieutenant lower in the hierarchical position due to her age and gender.

The second cultural dimension in our analysis is *Individualism vs. Collectivism.* The issue addressed by this dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members.[18] The Individualism/Collectivism dimension is the importance of the individual versus group interests. Individualism is a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals take care of mainly themselves and their immediate families. Its opposite, collectivism, is a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals of an in-group are looked after in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.[19] This dimension has to do with people's self-image of the "I" or "We." In a collective society, people belong to tightly woven in-groups, as pointed out by Kamwangamalu in African culture, "I am because you are, and you are because I am."[20] Macedonia has a lower percentage score of twenty-five, indicating that it is a very collective "We" society. In a collective culture, commitment to the group is fundamental, and individual interests are generally considered subordinate to that of group interests. The United States, in contrast, scores very high with a score of ninety-one indicating a robust individualistic "I" society in which individual interests and concerns are customarily prioritized over the group.



In this dimension, the Lieutenant took the "I" approach with the Sergeant Major by making it clear that "I" am in charge and will call the shots, rather than "We" will collectively work together to achieve a common objective. This misunderstanding set the tone for the rest of the mission, causing constant friction and pushback from the Macedonians. To further complicate the situation, the Lieutenant found herself pushed to the outside of an in-group that started to form between the Macedonian and the American Soldiers.

The third dimension of Hofstede's model is *Masculinity vs. Femininity.* The central issue here is what motivates people, wanting to be the best (masculine) or liking what you do (feminine).[21] This dimension shows us the different responsibilities in a culture based on gender roles. A high score (masculine) in this dimension indicates distinct gender roles with high values given to achievement, success, and assertiveness. On the other hand, a low score (feminine) indicates the societal characteristics of more fluid gender roles, modesty, and nurturing.[22] In this dimension, both the U.S. and Macedonian cultures scored relatively high with the U.S. at sixty-two percent, and Macedonia at eighty percent. In the traditional Slavic culture, men are in charge, make the decisions, and dictate the rules.

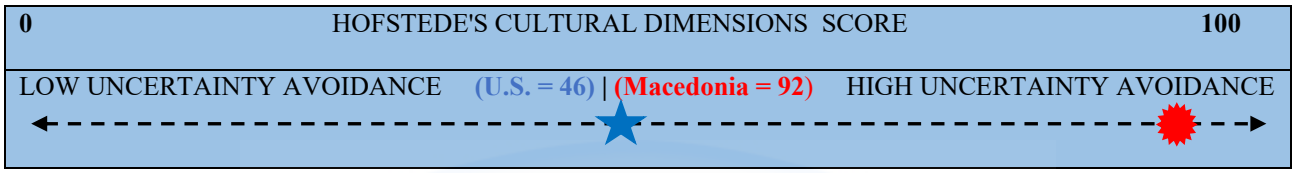


Another point is that there are very few women in the Macedonian military due to it being a highly masculine culture with women there working mostly in the humanities such as medicine, teaching, and art. In this part of the case study, it is essential to understand that the major problem here is the cultural differences between a dominantly male Slavic society to the

American society where there is a distribution of roles between the genders. The Macedonian military has less than ten percent of females out of a total number of eight thousand service members.[23] The United States, in comparison, has a much higher percentage of women with twenty percent in the Air Force, nineteen percent in Navy, fifteen percent in the Army, and nine percent in the Marine Corps.[24] The Lieutenant's lack of knowledge created tension with the Macedonian's because she failed to realize she was in a masculine culture. Whenever she tried to give direction or guidance, the Soldiers ignored her expecting direction from the Sergeant Major; additionally, in a masculine society, women are not typically engineers. This lack of respect for the Lieutenant jeopardized the mission by creating delays in getting material, delaying important information, and created a very laissez-faire attitude in the men. As mentioned earlier, the male American Soldiers quickly became a part of the Macedonian in-group. This in-group loyalty caused the Americans to also adopt the same attitude as the Macedonians, further complicating the situation.

The fourth dimension of Hofstede's Model is *High Uncertainty Avoidance vs. Low Uncertainty Avoidance*. "The Uncertainty Avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. In addition, its impact on rulemaking is taken into account."[25] The central issue here is how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known. This dimension is a question of if the culture tries to "control" the future, or simply lets things happen and accepts things for what they are. Countries that show high Uncertainty Avoidance, according to Hofstede, "embrace or avert an event of something unexpected, unknown, or away from the status quo. Societies that score a high degree in this index opt for stiff codes of behavior, guidelines, laws, and generally rely on absolute truth, or the belief that one lone truth dictates everything and people know what it is."[26] Countries with

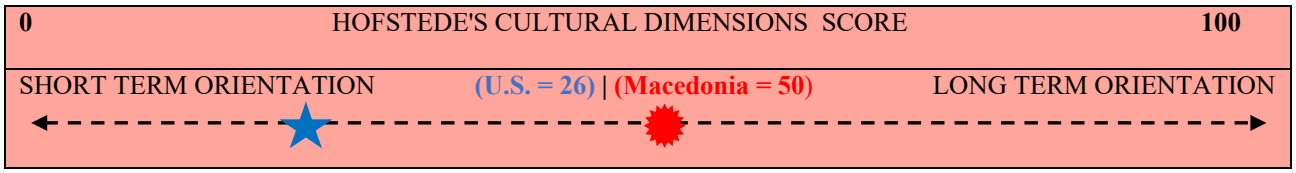
a low Uncertainty Avoidance maintain a more relaxed attitude in which Society tends to impose fewer regulations, ambiguity is tolerated, and the environment is more free-flowing. [27] This ambiguity, however, can cause a great deal of anxiety in high uncertainty avoidance cultures.[28] The Macedonian score in this dimension is ninety-two percent, showing it to be a high uncertainty avoidance culture. The United States has a greatly differing score of forty-six percent, indicating a high degree of acceptance for new ideas with a willingness for something new or different.[29]



The substantial cultural difference in uncertainty avoidance between the Lieutenant and the Sergeant Major created a complicated situation in delegating roles, responsibilities, and scheduling. In Macedonia, the Soldiers had distinct jobs with well-defined responsibilities; moreover, they had a very specific routine to follow to avoid any conflict or disrespect to the faculty, their team, and staff of the renovated school. Being unaware of Macedonian social norms, rules, formalities, and traditions, the Lieutenant tried to delegate what each Soldier would be doing and with whom they would be working, (e.g., one American with one Macedonian on a specific task). The Lieutenant had a schedule all planned out throughout the day, including a half-hour lunch break on the economy, with the duty day starting at 7:00 am and ending at 6:00 pm. The Macedonians, however, regularly began their duty day at 8:30 am and end at 3:30 pm. As part of the Macedonian social culture, they consistently have coffee and cigarette breaks throughout the day. The lunch break for the Macedonians was to be no less than an hour, and everyone was expected to eat together, including the school faculty (another sign of collectivism

and in-group belonging). Anything other than this would be considered rude, unorthodox, and offensive. The American Lieutenant's disrespect for this lunch custom, coupled with her ethnocentrism, caused her to only see the Macedonians as lazy and stubborn. The Macedonians, being highly social, felt offended because they wanted to take advantage of the frequent and long breaks to get to know the Americans. To them, the opportunity to build relationships was as or more important than the mission itself.

The fifth element of Hofstede's model to understand in the context of this case study is *Long Term Orientation vs. Short Term Orientation.* This dimension describes how every society has to maintain some links with its past while dealing with the challenges of the present and future.[30] This dimension is one of the most difficult to understand because of the broad differences between geographic regions of a given country, meaning, people can be in the same country, but have different cultures (e.g., Northern Americans "Yankees" vs. Southerners). Nonetheless, this element will be addressed to understand further the cultural differences that relate to this case study. Macedonia scores around fifty percent in the country comparison (Culture Compass Scores) values, which shows no clear preference for this dimension. Short-Term orientation in traditional Slavic cultures typically scores low on long-term orientation. As in this case study, the mission took place in a conservative rural village where people exhibited the cultural dimension of short-term orientation. The Macedonian Soldiers and villagers valued traditional methods, take a considerable amount of time in building relationships, and leisure time is significant. Short-term orientation also means that time is circular and that the past and the present are interconnected (i.e., what cannot be done today can be done tomorrow).



In comparison, the United States scored twenty-six, which also illustrates a short-term orientation culture; however, in this case, the Lieutenant and Sergeant Major were in total opposition to each other concerning their own cultures. The Lieutenant (long-term) had a fixed timeline and was persistent in keeping on schedule, which meant long days with only a short lunch break and very little time to socialize. The Sergeant Major (short-term orientation) held to tradition that required regular social breaks for coffee and cigarettes; everyone was required to have lunch together, with the expectation that everyone reciprocates greetings and favors. Furthermore, in contrast to the Lieutenant, the Macedonians were not concerned with the mission timeline because there is more value in the project or event than in time or punctuality.[31] The Lieutenant fostered virtues towards future rewards in perseverance and thrift, whereas the Sergeant Major fostered virtues in respect for tradition and fulfilling social obligations. This case study drives the point that intercultural misunderstandings and differences are not only theoretical, but can actually happen, and from this, we can learn that there can be practical solutions to real dilemmas. This lesson is why it is essential to provide cultural training to today's Army Soldiers.

The importance of cultural training

The critical ingredient to understanding other cultures is defined by journalist Brenden O'Brien as "the ability and willingness to objectively examine the values, beliefs, traditions, and

perceptions within our own and other cultures. At the most basic level, it is the ability to walk in someone else's shoes in terms of his or her cultural origins."[32] It is not enough to experience a culture to gain an understanding to develop intercultural competence, as illustrated in the case study. It is a misconception that being in a particular culture, and in contact with those citizens is enough to develop some competence and understanding. This is instead a rare exception rather than the rule. For cross-cultural skills to be beneficial, there must be an awareness of the elements of a culture as defined by Ting-Toomey and Chung as "patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, meaning's, and symbols that are passed on from one generation to the next and are shared in varying degrees by interacting members of a community."[33] As a leader and Soldier in the modern Army, it is necessary to consider what the Army does in the world and the impacts it has. With the increase in globalization and Army missions on both sides of the globe, it is also essential to evaluate the skills necessary for our Soldiers to operate in a diverse variety of environments.[34] In order for Soldiers to operate effectively across international borders, especially a joint cultural environment, Soldiers must have a clear understanding and perspective of the political, social, and cultural factors that can significantly influence the success of Army operations and foreign relations in various countries.[35]

As demonstrated in the case study, people have many different and diverse backgrounds that imprint an image in our minds as to how things should be. Many outside influences impact our perception of people and their cultures, such as religion, media, national threats, language, environment, customs, and politics. We cannot escape culture since culture is all around us and makes us who we are; it shapes our cognitive thoughts (mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through experience, and the senses)[36] that drive our perceptions of the world around us. As the world continually grows smaller, it is essential to understand that for

the United States to remain a world leader, the Army must be prepared to act and communicate to build trusting relationships with our neighboring countries.

Simply put, cultural education and training are essential to understanding other people's ways of thinking and behaving. Cultural education and training can help instill an appreciation that, in turn, may prevent misunderstandings, promote trust, positively affect productivity and efficiency, and gives the U.S. a competitive advantage in long-term benefits of friendship, trust, and cooperation.

Where the Army falls short on Cultural Training

The United States Army recognizes the value of diversity and promotes the development and training on diversity "to serve the American people, protect vital national interests, and fulfill national military responsibilities."[37] The Army's vision is to continue to remain the world's dominant political and social land power and to remain to be the "ultimate instrument of national resolve.[38] However, the Army falls short in understanding the importance of developing our Soldiers in cross-cultural competence across all branches to meet the Army's vision. Moreover, our leaders and Army institutions fail to see the importance of adequately training today's Army leaders and Soldiers to be competent representatives of our nation. The case study presented in this paper is a primary example that cultural training falls short in its context, or is not reaching all the Soldiers who need it to meet the Army's vision.

For example, the Army specifically designed current training programs for language and culture targeted only to specialized Soldiers in such fields as Public Affairs, Intelligence, and Civil Affairs. Also, cultural training for Soldiers on deployments rarely happens, and when it

does, it is in short briefings by non-commissioned officers (NCO) who may not truly understand all the cultural dynamics. These NCOs may lack the knowledge and understanding of the distinction between ethnocentrism "seeing our own culture as the center of the universe and seeing other cultures as insignificant or even inferior,"[39] and ethnorelativism, "an acquired ability to see many values and behaviors as cultural rather than universal."[40]

To further illustrate the Army's shortfalls, the Army fails to look at the actual training needs to be delivered and to who conducts the training, who develops the training material and environment, and what the actual training standardization is.[41] The current training for Soldiers in the above mentioned specialized skills may work well for those requirements and situations; however, it does not work for Soldiers in other Army occupation specialties (MOS) that end up on deployments and missions to a vast number of countries and cultures. Overall, the Army must understand the common training challenges and how to successfully develop and implement training that suitably focuses on all Soldiers and the appropriate cultures in which they will be operating. This training requires a thorough assessment to establish the proper principles, training objectives, material for the specific cultural environment, and proper implementation (i.e., exercise scenarios). This comprehensive training is essential to close the gap between cultures so that we may see other cultural values and behaviors outside our "center of the universe."

Recommendations

As stated in the Intercultural Competent Global Leader Management Essay, "Effective intercultural communicating or " cross-cultural communicating " is the ability to understand and to dialogue with other people from another civilization."[42] Since 9/11, the United States changed

dramatically; 9/11 events forced awareness of our vulnerability in security and a collective sense of tragedy from the attack that took place on our sovereign soil. This attack further impacted operations for the Army in Afghanistan and Iraq, driving the Army programs and policies to prepare Soldiers for operations in foreign cultures.[43] The challenges of preparing Soldiers for operations abroad have been an ongoing problem that requires a look at the very beginning of a soldier's entry into the Army. For example, as previously mentioned, specialty fields such as Civil Affairs and Special Forces are trained in the specialty region in which they operate. This branch-specific training does not address the training required for the general-purpose Soldier.[44] Even though there is no perfect solution to this cultural training problem, the Army can certainly better prepare Soldiers across the spectrum by implementing cultural training at the very beginning of both the enlisted Soldiers and commissioned officer's professional development. Whether enlisted or commissioned, the Army needs continuous training requirements to keep Soldiers ready and capable. However, cultural training is often overlooked, which is a crucial factor in enhancing the capability of the U.S. Army and its success in foreign missions.

Some solutions to help strengthen and develop our Soldiers and to better prepare them in today's VUCA environment is to start cultural training at the very beginning.[45] Even though the Army is continually facing resource constraints driven by budget and time, it would take little effort, time, and expense to implement a training program to indoctrinate Soldiers in the basics of cultural awareness. One simple proposed method of training could be the introduction of the Hofstede model. This model describes the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and how these values relate to behavior.[46] The model would provide a necessary foundation to bring Soldiers to an awareness and understanding of how cultures influence their members' beliefs, values, knowledge, and customs.

Furthermore, the Army can add electives to Professional Development Training for officers and NCOs, such as Captains Basic Course, Captains Career Course, Army Command and General Staff College, Army War College, Basic training, Army Technical Schools, NCO academies, and even yearly unit training requirements. In order for Soldiers to develop intercultural communication skills, the U.S. Army must start developing and preparing today's Soldiers through a standardized training program at the primary level. This fundamental training can be as simple as teaching the six cultural dimensions of Hofstede's Model.[47] Also, the use of case-based studies and incidents can provide relevant problem-solving opportunities to help in the training applications of cultural dimensions and how they apply cultural knowledge and skills to situations and events.[48] On the whole, by implementing even a fundamental level of training to Soldiers across the broad spectrum, the Army can have profound and lasting effects in not only the future of Army operations but in the future of U.S. foreign relations.

The impact of cultural training on the future of the Army

The Army has a very different culture from the rest of the civilian populous. Army culture has frequently had a very negative impact on the views and perceptions of Soldiers on different cultures in various deployments around the globe. Miller and Moskos argue that " there is a culture clash between deployed troops and the local civilian population that can exacerbate tensions and have negative consequences strategically, operationally, and tactically."[49] For instance, it is not uncommon for Soldiers to develop a fear or prejudice against certain people within a culture that poses a threat (e.g., WWII, Vietnam, Iraq, Iran). This can and will cause cultural clashes between Soldiers and individuals within the deployed culture. Cultural perceptions can also have the opposite effect where Soldiers entirely adopt a culture in which

they serve, taking on the empathies of that culture without a real understanding of the consequences. For example, during the U.S. involvement in Iraq in 2006, several Soldiers openly sympathized with Baath Party members and detainees held in Camp Cropper near Baghdad International Airport (BIAP). These Soldiers became so empathetic that they eventually converted over to Islam by adopting the Sunni faith.[50] Regrettably, these Soldiers, mostly the female Soldiers, ended up regretting their decision as they did not understand all the dimensions of the Sunni culture (Hofstede's Cultural Dimension of High-Power Distance and Masculine Society). These female Soldiers did not realize the restrictions Sunni women have according to beliefs in that they are considered inferior to men, treated unfairly, and are even oppressed legally.[51]

This example, along with the Macedonian case study, suggests some of the consequences of what happens when our Soldiers do not receive adequate training in cultural communication and understanding. The Army needs to take a serious look at training Soldiers to better prepare them for the cultural environment in which they operate. Training Soldiers is invaluable in that it builds confidence and loyalty to the unit and to allied and partner countries, and in the end, may help cultural mistakes that can have lasting effects in the future.

Conclusion

To summarize, there are many practical reasons for developing cultural competence. The more the United States Army is involved in foreign missions, the more critical it is for Soldiers to develop a perspective and understanding of other cultures. The U.S. Army must train Soldiers in necessary cultural skills to strengthen relationships with partners and allies to reinforce

stability through positive relations and goodwill. As with the American Lieutenant, in this case study, when someone steps into a foreign culture, things suddenly are different, driving the importance of knowing how to understand other cultures. Soldiers can manage cultural differences adaptively and creatively in a wide variety of situations.[52] By using the country comparison (Cultural Compass Scores) values of Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions as a starting point, anyone can evaluate their approach, "based on a general sense of how people in a particular society might think and react."[53] Cultural dimensions are only one framework among many ways of assessing a given culture and thus guiding better decision making. Only through cultural training can Soldiers properly be successful in situations that require an understanding of ethnicities and individuals. Understanding other cultures foster an understanding of why people act and do things in a certain way, and it brings a realization that there is more than one way of doing things. The Soldiers of today's Army are our diplomats, and they are our messengers and representatives at all ranks that support the Army vision and "ultimate instrument of national resolve."[54]

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