



**GUIDELINES
FOR COMMANDERS AND STAFFS:**

**OPERATIONALIZATION OF CULTURE
INTO MILITARY OPERATIONS
(Best Practices)**

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MNE-6, OBJ 4.3 “CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS”

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PREFACE

The present guidebook is the result of the MNE 6 objective 4.3 on “cultural awareness” research. It intends to present the main findings out of the campaign so as to provide commanders and staff members with ample guidelines to show ways on how to incorporate culture into military operations.

Due to the fact that the allied military structures, level of ambitions and idiosyncrasies are different through the Coalition, there are no unique solutions as far as the incorporation of culture into the decision-making process is concerned. That is the main reason why this handbook does not aim at providing detailed instructions or meticulous and exhaustive recipes on how to operationalize culture when it comes to military planning and further execution of operations. Thus, the guiding principles, hereafter set out, will have the purpose of pointing at the directions where all the thrusts and efforts should converge in order to ensure that the local culture will be properly considered, integrated and operationally incorporated into the military to successfully accomplish the mission.

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“I had never visited Indochina, nor did I understand or appreciate its history, language, culture, or values....When it came to Vietnam, we found ourselves setting policy for a region that was terra incognita.”

Former Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara

1. RELEVANCE OF CULTURE TO MILITARY OPERATIONS

a. Significance of culture

Currently, Coalition Forces are engaged in a type of operations that show a high intricacy with regards to the different actors involved, which configures a rather complex operational environment. It springs from the fact that the opposing forces and the population are intertwined in such a way that most of the times it is not easy to distinguish the pursued compliant attitude among the different stakeholders. In this sense, the human fabric in the battlefield represents as a reality a big challenge for the Coalition Forces Commanders, Staffs and militaries in general, as it frames a new setting different from the conventional battlefields, which is not easy to be properly approached.

Operating in such a scenario requires gaining the support of the population, and every effort produced must enable that goal to finally achieve the mission success. To do so will involve meeting permanently the populace requirements by better understanding their claims and needs. No matter where operations are located on the spectrum of violence, those operations are about people. Hostile, neutral, or friendly populace, at the end people are the center of gravity, driving Coalition and Opposing Forces' operational campaign, which is the whole planning and the campaign design.

As recent joint doctrine attests, Irregular Warfare “is about winning a war of ideas and perception. Its battles are fought amongst the people and its outcomes are determined by perceptions and support of the people”.

In this context, it will become paramount then to know and understand the local culture, not only from a superficial approach, but also from a deeper angle, so as to comprehend the dynamics and causes of local behaviours, attitudes and emotions, to be ultimately able to predict further reactions. Nevertheless, it is not not easy to determine the full dimensionality of the concept of “culture” as in the Academic world there is no an agreed definition since it is context dependent.

Nevertheless, we, militaries, are not anthropologists. We study the local culture as a means to carry out our objectives. Keeping this fact in mind, the key elements for the mission could be defined. This is the operationalization of culture, i.e. to identify relevant aspects of culture that influence military operations and help us understand the effects of our own decisions vis-à-vis the socio-cultural fabric of the operational environment. Operational Culture allows the militaries in conjunction with coalition

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and interagency partners to use knowledge of a foreign culture to understand social-cultural actions; influence the population, coalition partners, and the adversary; and to help legitimize coalition actions.

The degree of knowledge needed in the different echelons of command, levels of responsibility or positions within the Staff will vary. While for a private it could be enough to know how to avoid misunderstandings and offenses in their interactions with the population; an officer will be required to have additional deeper knowledge such as to correctly conduct activities within the Key Leaders Engagement (KLE) function or to incorporate cultural factors in the decision making process.

Therefore there is a need to combine existing know-how and experience-based common sense with a new framework which integrates culture into thinking styles, planning, and the conduct of operations at all levels. It will be the commander's responsibility to instill and use Operational Culture as part of his organization's best business practices for operational planning and decision making. But the key task is how to acquire the referred cultural knowledge.

b. Bloom's taxonomy for cognition

The idea of creating a taxonomy of knowledge was conceived by Benjamin Bloom in the 1950s, the assistant director of the University of Chicago's Board of Examinations. Bloom's taxonomy for cognitive learning is a long-established well-known model to educators. It depicts the learning passage from initial basic recognition of a subject to the advanced ability of evaluating information and creating ways to manipulate ideas into usable solutions (see model below, figure 1). Bloom's hierarchy has been adapted here as a kind of cognitive hierarchy to look at the way people think of, perceive, or learn about culture in an effort to achieve a deeper cultural understanding or competency as it pertains to the operational environment.

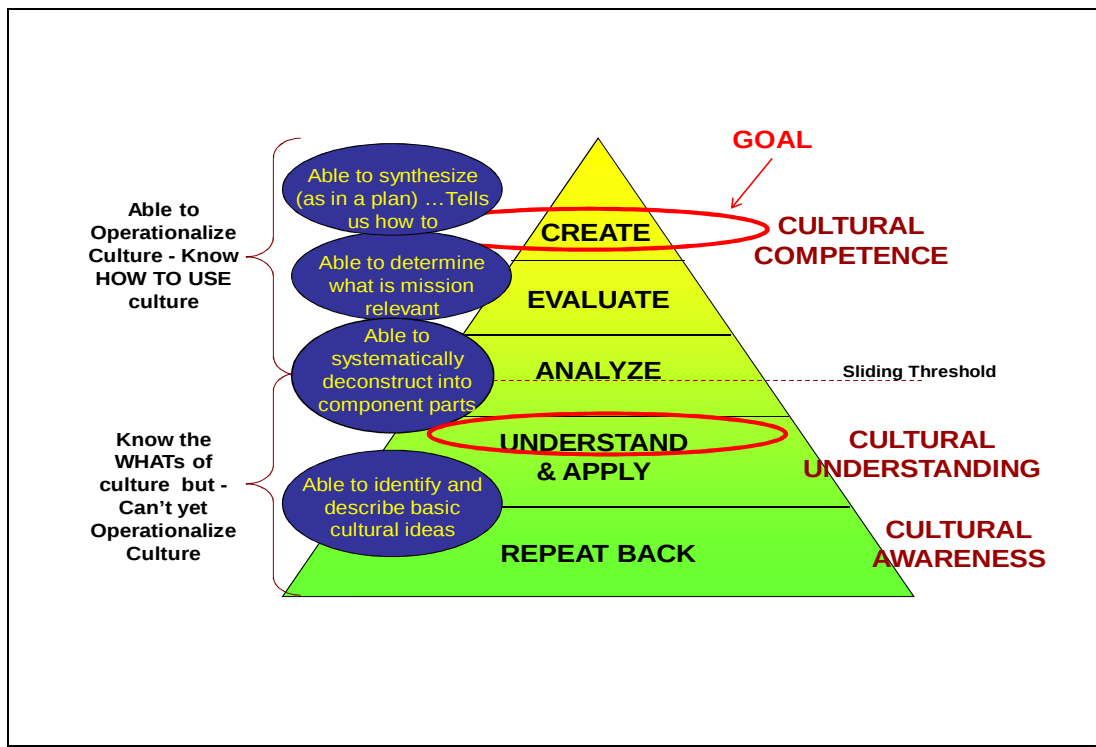
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Figure 1

The importance of Bloom's hierarchy rests on the creation of a scale to portray levels of a staff's abilities to use culture operationally. At the base of the scale stands the ability to identify and describe cultural awareness or cultural understanding. At the top rests the ability to use cultural information such as knowing how to synthesize it across Lines of Operation (LOOs) for use in a plan, the cultural competence. As an example, a team may benefit from being trained to understand that certain cultural ideas or terms apply to an operational environment. They may be able to recognize some of these terms and use them in the development of operational plans – to understand, apply, and repeat back. It does not necessarily mean that the team is capable of performing in-depth analysis and evaluation that permit them to determine operational relevance in certain bits of cultural information. Without analysis and evaluation, it is difficult to determine second and third level effects, or to break previous inaccurate perceptions. If they are unable to do this, they may be incapable of progressing to the highest step in Bloom's hierarchy, to create innovative plans that achieve the appropriate effect. At this stage is when the gap-fillers or enablers are required; in other words, personnel and/or procedures to attain the skills and knowledge to operationalize culture into the daily military practice.

c. Cultural Awareness versus cultural competence

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Consequently, acquiring cultural competence, more extensive than gaining cultural awareness or understanding - the first stages in the Blooms’ cognitive ladder, can be deemed as a deeper understanding of a foreign culture.

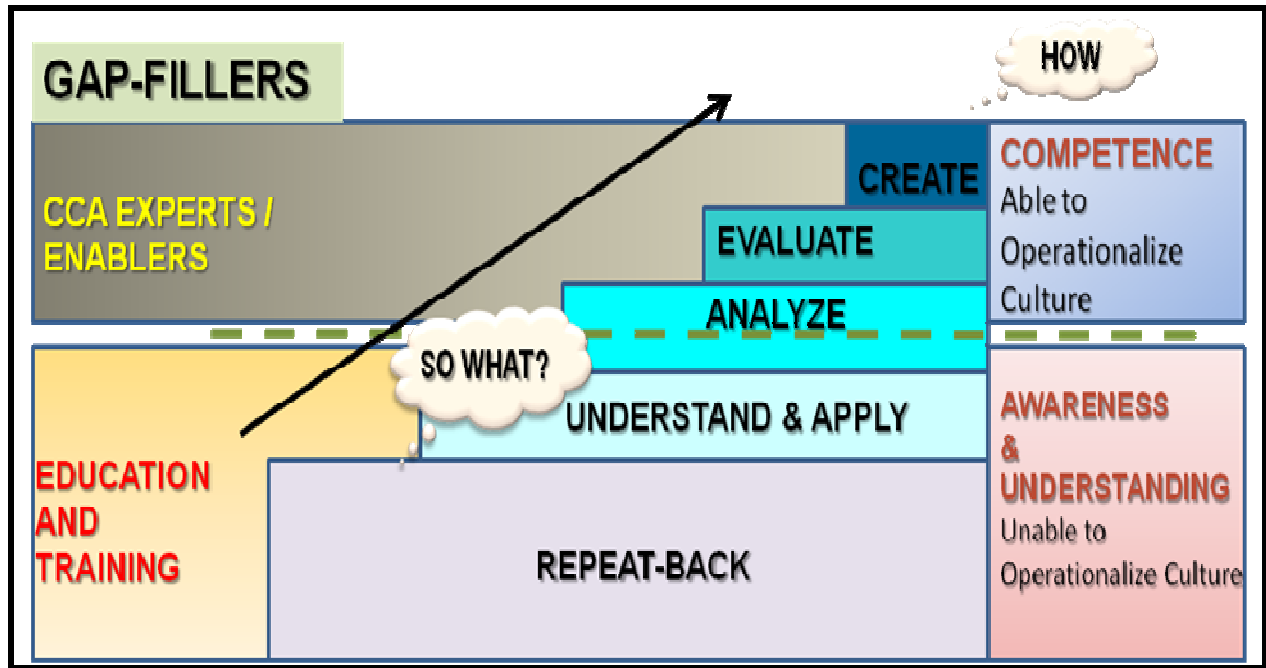


Figure 2

The focus on cultural knowledge needs to be seen as more than just the “so what” of socio-cultural information but more importantly on “how” this knowledge is fostered and institutionalized through systems and processes. Even with cultural information made available, the collective staff may still struggle to reach a higher level of cultural competence unless they possess the core cognitive competence that enables them to use or operationalize their cultural information.

As a consequence, a key operational challenge within our own military cultures involves the coherent incorporation of socio-cultural knowledge into the decision-making process (staff structure, planning and conduct of operations and knowledge sharing)

Socio-cultural competence or the ability to use or operationalize culture is the key to operational planning and decision-making, particularly when it concerns counter-insurgency operations. It depends not only on in-depth cultural expertise, but also on the ability to master the complexities of cultural integration into operational planning and conduct of operations. Knowing how to use culture is not intuitive. Basic cultural awareness, knowing and repeating back terms and buzz phrases (as shown by the bottom step rung in Figure 2) cannot be set as a standard for achievement of cultural operationalization. Cultural competence is required.

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Therefore, Bloom's Taxonomy for Cognition can help us explain the different stages in which the cultural knowledge and the skills to master that expertise may be structured. While there could be a great deal of awareness of cultural factors in the operating environment, many times that cultural awareness on its own, did not lead to the effective integration of relevant aspects of culture into the planning process, products and further conduct of operations. Therefore, cultural awareness and understanding are insufficient components upon which to build the broad cultural capability needed by coalition forces to meet current and future challenges. They are stepping stones toward cultural competence.

It will be the commander's task to ensure that his organization is both culturally aware and culturally competent in order to operationalize culture.

d. Functions applicable to integration of culture

Culture is a cross-cutting theme. Relevant cultural factors and information need to be synthesized across the Lines of Operations during the operational planning and decision-making processes.

Culture directly affects, is affected by, or is at least an indirect consideration associated with a diverse list of Joint Capability Areas. Examples include:

- **Force Support** - Force Preparation (Training, Exercising, Educating, Doctrine).
- **Battlespace Awareness** – Collection; Human ISR; Processing and Exploitation; Analysis and Production; Evaluation and Interpretation; Dissemination.
- **Force Application** – Maneuver to Influence; Security of Populations and Infrastructure; Engagement – Kinetic and Non-Kinetic.
- **Logistics** - Move and Sustain the Force; Supply; Installations Support and Services; Utility Operations; Operational Contract Support; Engineering; Combat Engineering; Installations support.
- **Command and Control** – Organize (Establish and Maintain Unity of Effort with Mission Partners, Cultivate Relations with Mission Partners, Cultivate Coordination with Partner Organizations); Structure Organization to Mission; Integrate Capabilities; Foster Collaboration; Understand (Organize Information, Develop Knowledge and Situational Awareness, Share Knowledge); Planning; Decision; Direction; Monitor (Assessment of progress).
- **Building Partnerships** – Communicate (Inform Audiences, Develop Objective Information, Persuade Partner Audiences, Identify Attitudes, Influence Adversary and Competitor Audiences); Shape (perceptions, will, behavior, and capabilities of partner, adversary and relevant populations); Partner with Governments and Institutions; Engage Partners; Develop

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Partnership Agreements; Provide Aid to Foreign Partners and Institutions;
Build the Capabilities and Capacities of Partners and Institutions;
Leverage Capacities and Capabilities.

- **Net-Centric** – Detect events; Analyze events; Respond to incidents.

At the staff level, it is important to note that there is a set of civil military activities and branches more closely related to and linked with the local population. These are Intelligence (INTEL), Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) (Civil Affairs in US Army), Information Operations (INFOOPS), Psychological Operations (PSYOOPS) or Public Affairs Office (PAO). For them incorporating culture into operations is vital, and they are the ones with whom the cultural SMEs are to interact most of times.

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“Knowledge of the cultural terrain can be as important as, and sometimes even more important than, the knowledge of the geographical terrain. This observation acknowledges that the people are, in many respects, the decisive terrain, and that we must study that terrain in the same way that we have always studied the geographical terrain.”

General David H. Petraeus

2. GAP-FILLERS/CULTURAL ENABLERS TO OPERATIONALIZE CULTURE

a. Gap identification

Despite efforts to create cultural integrators/enablers in the different Armies/Services, there exist little-to-no effective established systems for the integration of socio-cultural information into military operations. Instead, in Afghanistan for example, there seems to be multi-variant staff elements basing their views on the socio-cultural landscape, but with several variations in the scope and focus at the village, district or province micro-levels, i.e. segmented views on the human domain delivered by different branches, most of times insufficient and not appropriate to come up with an accurate and sharpen reading of the human granularity.

For that reason, some fillers are required to bridge that gap aiming at bringing commanders and planners up the cognitive ladder during the planning and conduct of operations (gap-fillers, see Figure 1). Those gap-fillers are Education & Training and the employment of some cultural SMEs, used as brokers and interfaces.

A cultural SME, used as an enabler, is to be educated and with the experience to operate at a higher cognitive level, to assist the staff in identifying relevant information and in applying that knowledge to the operational design. Further, if the staff has been previously trained in methodologies for using cultural information, they can make better use of the advice provided by the SME.

Education and Training will be tackled in the related chapter; therefore, let us see the different on-going initiatives as for the cultural SMEs.

Let us see those ones.

b. Foreign Area Officers

The Foreign Area Officers (FAO) or cultural advisers (CULAD) are the principal SMEs to the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) or assignment subordinate units on operational culture and planning related to their designated geographical region of expertise while serving as the cultural and sometimes language advisor to the commander. As SMEs, the CULAD advises commanders on the effective integration of operational culture into the Marine Corps planning process. The CULAD provides SME support on operational cultural planning considerations in support of deploying commanders.

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The main duties for them to accomplish are the following:

1. Advise the Commander on the cultural considerations of operational plans, and on the potential impact of the second and third order effects of operations on the people and their culture.
2. Serve as a Special Staff Officer and advise the Commander and his staff on the cultural implications of planned operations and assist in course of action (COA) development.
3. Advice to the Commander includes, but is not limited to, the conduct of Key Leader Engagements (KLE), use of interpreters, unit use of operational culture and language, and advice on training exercise content and scenario list development.
4. Participate in exercises, planning groups (i.e., EWS, CSC, SAW, etc), conferences and workshops in order to maintain professional competence in core skills.

c. Human Terrain Teams

Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) are five- to nine-person teams deployed by the Human Terrain System (HTS) to support field commanders by filling their cultural knowledge gap in the current operating environment and providing cultural interpretations of events occurring within their area of operations.

The goal of the HTS is to fill the cultural knowledge void by gathering ethnographic, economic, and cultural data on an area of operations and provide databases and tools to support analysis and decision making processes.

HTS is built upon seven components, or “pillars”: (1) human terrain teams (HTTs), (2) reach-back research cells, (3) subject-matter expert-networks, (4) a tool kit, (5) techniques, (6) human terrain information, and (7) specialized training.

The teams are composed of individuals with social science and operational backgrounds that are deployed with tactical and operational military units to assist in bringing knowledge about the local population into a coherent analytic framework and build relationships with the local power-brokers in order to provide advice and opportunities to Commanders and staffs in the field.

HTTs are regionally-focused, modular special staff that brings capabilities that exist outside of organic Battalion, BCT, and Division structure. They deploy as trained and organized teams, attached to USMC Regimental Combat Teams, Army Brigade Combat Teams, and Division, Corps, and Combined Joint Task Force level HQs. Each team is recruited and trained for a specific region, then deployed and embedded into their supported unit. The HTTs are comprised of a mix of soldiers and Department of the Army contractors that provide a blend of senior military specialists and academicians with strong social sciences credentials. An HTT

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integrates into the unit staff, conducts unclassified open-source and field research, and provides operationally-relevant human terrain information in support of the planning, preparation, execution and assessment of operations.

The main duties for them to accomplish are the following:

1. Conduct a Cultural Preparation of the Environment (CPE). This continuous process is similar to the traditional Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB), but instead of a focus on threats, the CPE is focused on the socio-cultural information of the area of operations.
2. Integrate Human Terrain information into the Unit Planning Processes. Once the team has developed a Research Design they formulate a collection plan that will meet the information requirements identified during the Research Design Development.
3. Provide support to current operations. During an operation being conducted by the unit, an HTT is invaluable. The team takes part in the operation by both monitoring events and on the ground assessments which then provide the Commander and staff with cultural decision/adjustment points and the outcomes of possible responses.
4. Evaluate the human terrain effects of the area of operations. During continuous full-spectrum operations the HTT is continually assessing what effect our operations, as well as threat operations, are having on the local population.
5. Support the unit by training all elements on relevant socio-cultural issues.

d. Red & Green Teaming and Re-framing/Profiling actors' analysis method

The concept has been originated by the Swedish Ministry of Defense. Initially coined as Red and Green Team during MNE4, the concept has evolved and included the development of a method to generate actors' analysis in order to become more holistic and comprehensive and engulf the different range of stakeholders that coalition's forces has to confront. It could be defined as a method to understand the mindset of relevant actors in an area of operation and to contribute to the staff's learning of the Operational Environment: the Red & Green teams give voice to the key actors in the operation and their main purpose is that of challenging Blue thinking. They discover hidden assumptions and mirror imaging. The method used by the Red & Green teams (Profiling/reframing) focuses attention on seeking to understand the actors' frames of references in order to come closer to how they might think, what they might want, how they could interpret our actions, and how else we could interpret their beliefs and action. As opposed to using Blue mindset and frames of reference to guess what other actors might think or do. This, in turn, lays a better ground for the development of potential Red or Green Course of Action.

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The theoretical framework of the concept relies upon social constructivism, organizational theories of learning, knowledge creation and organizational culture theories. It rests on the belief that cognition is not a representation of a reality that is “out there,” rather it is a creation and construction and that perception is filtered by the observers experience, culture, mindset, upbringing, habits. Knowledge is shared among people and tied to their perceptions and experiences. Such filters of perception might differ from place to place, from culture to culture; our frames of reference are not universal and their application to interpret the Operational Context might be misleading.

The focus is on acknowledging that other actors’ can think differently than we do and try to understand what drives their thinking, and what dynamics (particularly social dynamics) can drive the operational environment. It focuses on the population, the adversary, NGOs, other organizations other than the armed forces, etc. Red & Green teams use a method that was created to generate reframing. The method involves, first, taking a personal inventory of one’s own preconceptions regarding culture (self awareness); then, breaking those old cognitive anchors that are not appropriate or useful in order to understand the other actor’s frames of reference; and finally, establishing new conceptions that better enhance cultural awareness and competency as applied to operational planning and design. In turn, the Red & Green teams’ interaction with the staff aims at generating re-framing among staff members by challenging their assumptions and presenting them with alternative perceptions of “reality”.

By broadening the way the staff understands the Operational Environment, the engagement of Red & Green teams also contributes to a dynamic flow of ideas within the staff, mental agility and the development of broader and richer repertoires of action on Blue side. As postulated in the Law of Requisite Variety “the larger the variety of actions available to a control system, the larger the variety of perturbations it is able to compensate” (W.S. Ashby, see principia Cybernetica Web)

The main duties for Red & Green Teams:

1. Establish deeper self awareness of own frames and of how they influence perception of the Operational environment.
2. Red & Green teams shall strive to achieve reframing within the group, it is recommended that they use the profiling/reframing method to gather deeper understanding of how these actors might think, what is their frame of reference and mindset.
3. Red & Green Teams develop profiles of key actors: Red (enemy) and Green (all other relevant actors, including local population and other organizations).
4. Stemming from these profiles they develop alternative and unexpected ways in which actors’ might act, react, perceive Blue intervention.

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5. They shall contribute to reframing and learning in the Blue staff by pointing out when they are applying Blue categories to interpret a different context (mirror imaging).
6. The engagement of Red & Green teams is beneficial not only during Wargaming, but also during COA development and refinement, as support for Targeting, IOs, CIMIC, and later, for Force Tailoring, and so forth.
7. They develop challenging alternatives that must stimulate the staff: they do not find ultimate truths or function as oracles.
8. Ultimately, their “raison d’être” is raising the bar for Blue: challenging the Blue staff’s assumptions by presenting alternative perceptions of the current situation (the actors’ point of view) and, hence, stimulate them to develop novel and unexpected solutions.

e. Requirements for cultural experts

Regardless of the initiatives already exposed, no matter the cultural expert we resort to, the requirement is clear: an expert or a group of experts with social scientists among them capable to put the focus and lens through angles that militaries cannot do on their own. People who are able to anticipate 2nd or 3rd order effects before a decision is made or even to forecast how a situation might unfold.

Cultural SMEs are required to have not only the expertise on the cultural realm in the area of operations (AoR) digging down to the minimum detail in the human granularity, but also to hold military knowledge and skills, predominantly those related to military planning and staff working at all levels. However, there are different views on regarding the existence of social scientists within the team concerning the degree of cultural expertise to be held. Even though as stated above it is desirable to have a social scientist, an anthropologist if possible, in the team, it will frequently not be feasible. In such a case the cultural SME will be required to have a sound training in anthropological operational techniques, which can enable him to read and interpret the human domain.

A basic model might include, as a minimum, a cultural SME (Cultural Advisor — CULAD—) who has access to the socio-cultural information contained in databases and products made available to the staff from different sources (reach-back). It is crucial to count on powerful and quickly accessible data and knowledge bases outside the AoR but since the SME may need that enabler to provide the appropriate advice on the spot.

The following requirements can be considered the ideal ones for a cultural advisor, either one person or a team to hold:

- Previous military service (Planners Course, Command Staff, War College, etc.)

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- Experience in Peace Support Operations (PSO) and related organizations
- Familiarity with military relations and issues
- Minimum two year (2) field experience in cultural context Education/Training
- Post-graduate studies in cultural related field
- Ability to research regional events in native languages, identify areas of interest and propose content production that summarizes events, provides topic-oriented analysis and provides analysis of diverse topics using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

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“Minds are like parachutes, they work best when open”

Lord Thomas Dewar

3. BEST PRACTICES IN INTEGRATING CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS INTO PLANNING

a. Introduction

a.1 Traditional planning and irregular threats in the new operational environment

Commanders and staff should be aware that the planning system that we will describe and use in this chapter is mostly the traditional planning, which is high suitable against conventional enemies though it falls short when facing irregular threats or trying to plan full-spectrum operations in complex scenarios such as Afghanistan. It is assessed that none of the currently employed planning systems can deal properly with irregular or hybrid threats, and all military organizations acknowledge that their planning systems need to evolve in order to be really effective in the present operational conditions.

Also, it has to be acknowledged that most planning systems struggle to incorporate other actors different from the traditional Blue (us and allies) and Red (adversaries). Non-military actors in the framework of a Comprehensive Approach have to be taken into account as well as the local population, usually absent in the traditional planning checklists and templates. Not having even a standardized denomination, such actors are completely ignored in most traditional planning systems or are referred to in very vague terms when discussing the general situation of the operational environment. However, in real-life they are unanimously considered to be critical elements when confronting an irregular threat or carrying out a stability operation.

Numerous initiatives to improve the so called “traditional model” of planning are under way (the effects-based planning is perhaps the most spectacular, but not the only one) no complete agreement has been reached yet on what to change and how.

So, Commanders and staffs should make a candid assessment of the planning process in use and should make a wider interpretation of existing planning concepts in order to face current operational environments properly.

a.2 Different planning systems

Despite the best efforts of Alliances like NATO, most national armed forces plan in accordance with a national planning system which is also a product of the national military culture. Furthermore, in some countries there are even interoperability planning problems between the different national services, with joint planning processes only recently introduced or just absent.

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In a multinational environment, Commanders and staffs should be aware of the very real lack of standardization concerning planning processes and terms. One specific aspect of planning may be framed in diverse steps in the different planning systems. Some systems consider the “effects” while others do not; the respective role of the Commander and the staff in the planning process, and the latitude given to subordinate HQ, in theory as well as in practice, may also be quite different in accordance with different national military cultures. And, finally, it is not uncommon that different nomenclatures are used to refer to the same planning product, procedure or element in various planning systems. On the contrary, sometimes the same or a very similar terms are applied to refer to widely (or perhaps even worse, subtly) different concepts.

However, when coming to what is actually performed in each planning system, basically there is a recognizable general pattern, from the reception of superior orders at the beginning of planning until the decision of the Commander is made and the Concept of Operations (CONOPS), Plan or order is elaborated.

Concerning planning processes, Commanders and staffs should play on similarities, identify the differences and try to bridge them as best as possible.

b. How to best integrate CCA in the planning process

First of all, Commanders and staffs should acknowledge that “culture” is a major consideration to be studied in all military operations and proper attention should be devoted to it.

Also, a “holistic approach” to culture is needed in order to make it usable, relevant and effective for military planning. Everyone participating in a military operation should be concerned about culture. Culture is relevant for all, from high ranking decision makers to “strategic corporals”. The aim is that everyone has the ability to identify the cultural features of the operational environment relevant for the accomplishment of his/her mission. In short, everyone should be educated and trained and should have external “cultural support”, (if appropriate and available) in order to understand how culture may affect his/her specific duties. Without previous education and training, no attempt to integrate CCA into planning will be completely successful, although previous operational experience may help.

Commanders and staffs should be aware of the adequacy of their own education and training on this matter, as well as those of their subordinates, taking correcting measures as appropriate. Also, they should make sure that all the personnel in the HQ/Unit are able to appreciate the relevance of culture for their specific duties.

It is also clear that the role of the Commander is critical for successfully integrating culture into planning. The Commander, by his/her personal interventions along the planning process, is in the best position to guarantee that culture is properly

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acknowledged and considered during planning. A Commander with the proper level of cultural awareness and understanding will make his/her staff or Unit culturally sensitive and will be the best driving force to achieve the aforementioned aim.

Experience shows that if the socio-cultural domain is properly integrated in the military planning, it will most probably produce a better understanding of the operational environment and also a better informed decision-making. However, both the experience and also most of the literature concerning the use of culture by the military stress that we have to be cautious managing our expectations about the usefulness of introducing cultural factors into planning. Culture is about human beings and, as such, is both dynamic and environment- and context-dependant, which means that we may get a better general understanding of the actors in our operational environment, but we will not be able to “crack the code” of their behavior just by studying their culture. Human beings are predictable only to a certain extent and, if the context changes, we may get different reactions from people of the same culture. So, introducing culture in planning may help, but it will not solve our problems.

Also, it must be acknowledged that, to a certain extent, cross cultural awareness has always been present in planning. Concerning the dimensions of a culture, it can be said that at least three of them —physical environment, economy and political structure— have been consistently included in the traditional “situation analysis”. Conversely, although the social and moral dimensions may have been considered by some insightful Commanders and their staffs by using traditional planning systems, such dimensions have not been consistently present in planning plans as frequently as the former three.

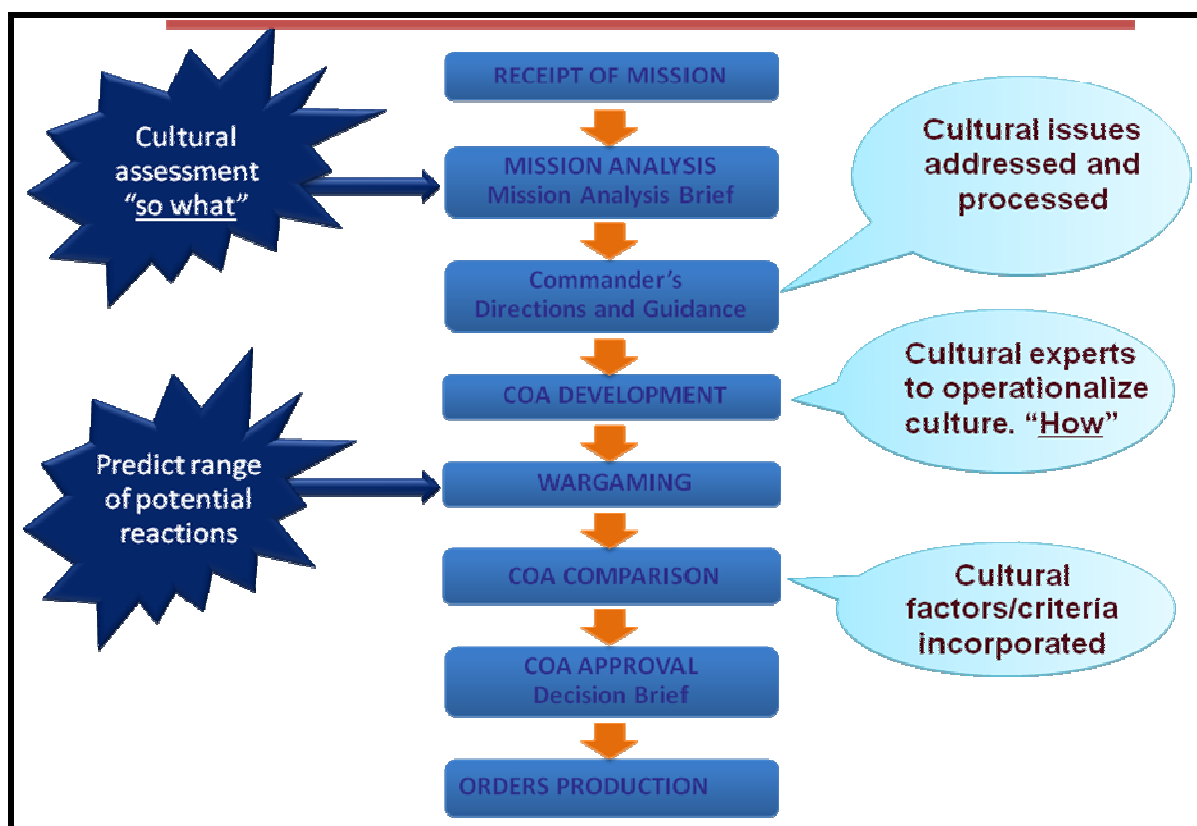
A new comprehensive planning system that takes fully into account concepts such as “full spectrum operations”, “comprehensive approach”, “kinetic vs. non-kinetic actions” has not yet been born. So, in the short term, the general approach proposed here is that, rather than having new planning elements introduced, the traditional planning elements may, in most of the cases, still be used. They will need an eventual adjustment to be used in a manner which involves developing and applying socio-cultural concepts (e.g. traditional analysis like “time-space-force” best suited for “force-on-force” combat may need to evolve to a more inclusive and nuanced “time-space-forces-population/other actors” pattern).

Also, the traditional definitions of planning elements are still considered fundamentally valid although their specific formulation may have to be refined in each particular planning case “through the lens of cultural awareness”. In any case, it has to be acknowledged that cultural factors are vital when dealing with some of the already existing planning elements (e.g. such as the “critical capabilities”, “critical requirements” and “critical vulnerabilities” of each centre of gravity —CoG—).

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For our purpose of integrating culture into planning, in a very simplified way, the planning process may be assimilated to a solving problem method through the following construct:

- Stage 1. Mission & Situation Analysis: defining and framing the problem and studying the context.
- Stage 2. Development of the Courses of Action (COAs): development of different solutions based on the previous analysis.
- Stage 3. Commander’s decision: the best solution is chosen.

**Stage 1. Mission & Situation Analysis**

Everything will be much easier if the acknowledgement of the need to use culture is already present in the Higher Commander’s Guidance. Socio-cultural issues should be present in the Mission & Situation Analysis right from the beginning so as to influence, as appropriate, the whole planning process from its first significant product, the Commander’s Planning Guidance, which sums up all the efforts made during this stage.

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Traditionally, the main factors described as METT-T (Mission, Enemy, Terrain and Weather, Troops and Support Available, and Time available) have been recently transformed into METT-TC adding Civil Considerations. However, it is important, rather than just introducing “culture” as a discrete “variable” or “factor”, to understand thoroughly the way in which it affects all the rest of the main factors.

In this first stage, the Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB), or the Intelligence Preparation of the Operational Environment (IPOE) should bring to bear all the cultural considerations relevant for planning purposes. Using cultural analysis templates, databases and other specific analysis tools, gaps may be identified in order to be filled through Priority Intelligence Requirements (PIR).

Besides our own forces and allies, all the different relevant actors should be identified and analyzed: irregular threats, neutral actors/“by-standers” (e.g. local population), non-compliant actors, international organizations, NGOs, etc.

Knowing the involvement, relationships, beliefs, motives, perceptions, interests, objectives and desired outcomes, resources and relative strengths and weaknesses of every relevant actor is crucial to understanding the operational environment.

Each branch/cell will have to draw its cultural-related conclusions in its own realm to further analyze the consequence of that finding for the development of the course of action. It is the time to get the “so what” applied to its own domain (e.g. the identification of the real leader in a community can play a key role for CIMIC when it comes to get across master messages).

Actors must not be studied in isolation. All their internal and external (even beyond our own Area of Responsibility —AOR—) relationships should be thoroughly addressed. The most relevant aspects for planning are the identification of the relationships between the different actors, the cultural ties, alliances and divisions between our opponents and the population that can be properly exploited, as well as the popular perceptions about the intervention force.

In addition to applying culture to study the enemy properly, as well as the local population, it is worthwhile acknowledging that culture should also be applied for understanding better the circumstances of our own forces and local allies. In the “initial assessment of capabilities” there should exist a proper consideration of the specific context of each of the coalition national contingents (including the expressed national caveats), as well as the host nation allied forces.

The final result of integrating cultural expertise in this initial stage should allow a proper understanding of the operational environment that includes cultural matters as appropriate by the Commander and the HQ staff. All critical cultural data should be identified and, if possible, known (or requested through PIR,s) in this initial stage, before the Commander’s Planning Guidance (CPG), which will drive the planning in the following stages, is issued.

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It is important to note that, at this stage, the CPG provides a shared situational understanding to the Commander and all the planners. Later, when the CPG evolves into the Commander's Intent, it also provides a shared situational understanding to subordinate HQ/Units that receive the order or plan, which allows them to make their own planning bearing in mind how the Superior Commander understands the operational environment and the mission to be accomplished.

Stage 2. Development of different Courses of Action (COA)

At this stage the staff develops different COAs (different solutions) that should be consistent with the CPG and based on the previous analysis. At the end of the stage the different COAs will be presented by the staff to the Commander for him/her to choose one of them, which will be the best to accomplish the mission and reach the end state.

While the Commander and most of the staff (Operations supported by other branches) are trying to identify different possibilities about what is to be done and how, our own Courses of Action (own COAs), the Intelligence community would try to follow the same process as for the different actors. Traditionally, they focus on the adversary, developing the so-called “Opposing Forces Course of Action” (OPFOR COAs)/ “Red COAs”. Ideally, it could be useful to develop not just our own “Blue” COAs (us & allies) and “OPFOR/Red” COAs, but to go beyond that and develop COAs for other actors. Even though this may prove difficult, complex and time consuming, at least the effects and probable reactions of the main actors (and the population as a whole) to our own “Blue” COAs (us & allies) and “OPFOR/Red” COAs should be thoroughly considered. It is generally acknowledged that irregular warfare is “population-centric”, where most (if not all) of the activities are planned considering mainly its impact on the local population. Thus, someone in the HQ should be studying the eventual response from neutral actors to our own and the enemy's actions alike in order to properly develop our own and the enemy's COAs.

During this stage, taking into account the estimated OPFOR/Red COAs and the estimated responses of the critical neutral actors, our own COAs are developed in a dynamic iterative process following the directions provided by the CPG and in accordance with the Mission Statement. In the development of our own COAs, cultural considerations may shape the balance of fires, influence activities and manoeuvre as well as introduce or modify specific activities.

COAs development (as well as the detail of the operational design) should take into consideration all the culture-related information that has been analysed in the previous stage. Most probably, not a single “planning element” can be properly defined without relating it to culture. The importance of cultural experts, SMEs, shows to be crucial in this phase since the incorporation of culture will mean to be

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able to devise and craft ways to develop the COAs and fulfill the mission by having considered the socio-cultural factors in the process, i.e. operationalization of the “so what” into the development of the COAs.

During the planning process, relevant and proper assessment tools should be identified to monitor and measure the progress of the campaign, the so called “Measures of Effectiveness” (MOE) and “Measures of Performance” (MOP). Again, culture is critical in selecting such indexes of success.

Also, particular operational activities like Information Operations (INFOOPS), Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC), the Commander’s engagement with key local leaders (Key Leader Engagement (KLE), a critical activity when facing irregular threats) and even Targeting may be heavily dependent on cultural considerations.

Furthermore, cross cultural awareness is also needed in order to integrate, coordinate and synchronize our own military actions with other by friendly actors, like the host nation security forces, or some international organizations, within the context of the wider international/ interagency intervention.

Also, when developing the troops to task analysis, national sensitivities should have been clearly identified and addressed appropriately through the involvement of the National Contingent Commander in planning, as appropriate.

Although we have referred mainly to the traditional planning, in an Effects Based Approach to Operations (EBAO) framework for planning, cross cultural awareness is even more evident and explicit when as it comes to determining effects to be produced on the different actors and identifying the actions needed to produce the desired effects.

During the “wargaming” and “comparison” of the different COAs cultural considerations are central in assessing each COA. Consequently, the presence of cultural SMEs becomes pinnacle. It cannot be stressed enough that the current operational environment makes it imperative to go beyond the dialectic challenge of our own COAs vs. OPFOR/Red COAs as it is done in traditional “wargaming”. No realistic and meaningful assessment of the effectiveness of our own COAs can be made without considering properly the actions and reactions of other relevant actors and, in particular, those of the local population.

Stage 3. Commander’s decision

Finally, the Commander must choose the best solution from the different ones presented by the staff. At this point, the Commander should ensure that, amongst other things, the options (COAs) have considered and addressed appropriately the cultural facts and the human granularity identified in previous stages. Later, the Commander’s decision will be further developed into a Concept of Operations

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(CONOPS), Plan or Operation Order (OPORD), and the planning process may be considered to be complete.

As we have seen, the local culture should be present all along the planning process as it decisively adds realism and effectiveness to planning. Not giving proper consideration to culture in planning may produce the most serious consequences, as it is unanimously testified by operational Commanders and staff personnel with experience in Iraq and Afghanistan.

c. Recommendations on how to integrate Cross cultural awareness into planning

9. “Culture” as a planning factor should be integrated systematically in the applicable doctrine, as well as in all general planning procedures and in the Standard Operating procedures (SOPs) of the different HQs.
1. Cultural considerations should be included routinely in HQ training and planning exercises.
2. Cultural considerations should be included in the HQ planning documents (SOPs, templates, checklists) in a systematic manner.
3. Cultural considerations should be assessed and cultural analysis should be taken into account in a systematic manner by all planners and every planning area (not just by a specific “cultural area” or by cultural SMEs, augmentees to the staff) at all times during planning.
4. Specific cultural experts/enablers (if they are available) and other sources of cultural expertise should be identified and involved routinely in planning from the beginning.
5. All relevant actors (not only allies and opposing forces) in the operational area should be properly identified and analyzed during planning.
6. The perceptions and attitudes about the force of all actors should be considered during the planning process.
7. Cultural considerations should be taken into account when defining the different particular planning elements (e.g. the Center/s of Gravity) of the operation.
8. The Commander’s Planning Guidance (and in particular the Commander’s Intent) and the Commander’s Critical Information Requirements (CCIR) should include and/or reflect relevant cultural considerations identified (as appropriate).
9. Cultural considerations should be assessed all along during the whole planning process: when doing the Mission/Situation Analysis; while

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developing/assessing the COA; during the COA viability test (suitability, feasibility, acceptability, exclusivity and completeness); when defining the appropriate Criteria for Success (CfS), Measures of Effectiveness (MoE) and Measures of Performance (MoP) to monitor the campaign progress, etc.; and when offering advice to the Commander on which COA to choose to be further developed as CONOPS/plan/order.

d. Developing cultural expertise in the staff

Commanders and staff should promote that the staff achieve a collective capability of “cultural understanding” or “cultural competence” with the concurrence of cultural SMEs. In order to achieve this end, both internal and external sources of cultural expertise have to be considered.

Most activities in a staff are “command driven” and culture is no exception to this. A culturally sensitive Commander means a great step forward for integrating CCA into planning. That is why great care should be devoted to the education and training on cultural matters for leaders at all levels

Also, many times the most important source of cultural expertise in a HQ is that of its members, achieved through their individual education and training, coupled with their operational and planning expertise. In the staff there are particular specialists or branches that presumably may be (or should be) more sensitive to culture as they may be more affected by cultural matters. For example, INTEL, Civil Affairs, CIMIC, INFOOPS carry out activities such as Psychological Operations (PSYOPS), Key Leader Engagement (KLE), Liaison officers (LNO), Public Information (PI) or Public Affairs (PA), whose aim is vastly the population and hence are closely linked to or dependent onto cultural factors. All of them contribute to the staff by achieving a “cultural understanding” or “cultural competence”.

With an appropriate approach (and some degree of caution) Liaison Officers (LNO,s) from the host nation, as well as civilian contractors (e.g. interpreters) may also contribute to the collective cultural knowledge of the staff when there is no other external resource available.

Besides, there are additional sources of cultural expertise for the staff found in external non-organic Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in the form of HQ augmentees, as it is the case of the Political Advisor (POLAD).

Also, if lucky, the staff may receive specific cultural SMEs. The actual format of the cultural SME,s support may vary widely as explained in chapter 2, being them a team (like the US Army Human Terrain Teams (HTT), mainly for Brigade HQs or a single person (like the US Marines Foreign Area Officer —FAO—, also called Cultural Advisor —CULAD—); military (like the US Marines CULAD), civilian or a blend of both (US Army HTTs); a whole system supporting several levels of HQs (like the US Army Human Terrain System —HTS— that encompasses HTTs at

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several levels) or just an augmentee to a particular HQ, with or without a cultural support reach-back capability. The models are evolving and they must be adjusted to the national needs, level of ambition and resources available as they are a long term effort since cultural SMEs cannot be created overnight.

However, even if those cultural SMEs are available, Commanders and staffs must acknowledge how crucial is having an optimal interface between those cultural SME,s and the rest of the staff. Again, that depends on the previous education and training of both sides: the members of the staff, to be able to focus their cultural SME, ask the right questions and be open to their advice; and the cultural SME, to discern what elements of culture may be operationally relevant and to understand the context and procedures of the HQ he/she is supporting. In general, the cultural SME should not be considered an “outsider” to the HQ and should be involved in the planning process from the early stages.

A further important Commander’s responsibility is that of creating the right tone for developing a collective cultural expertise in the HQ.

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“I asked my Brigade Commanders what was the number one thing they would have liked to have had more of, and they all said cultural knowledge.”

*LTG Peter Chiarelli,
former Commanding General,
Multi-National Corps-Iraq*

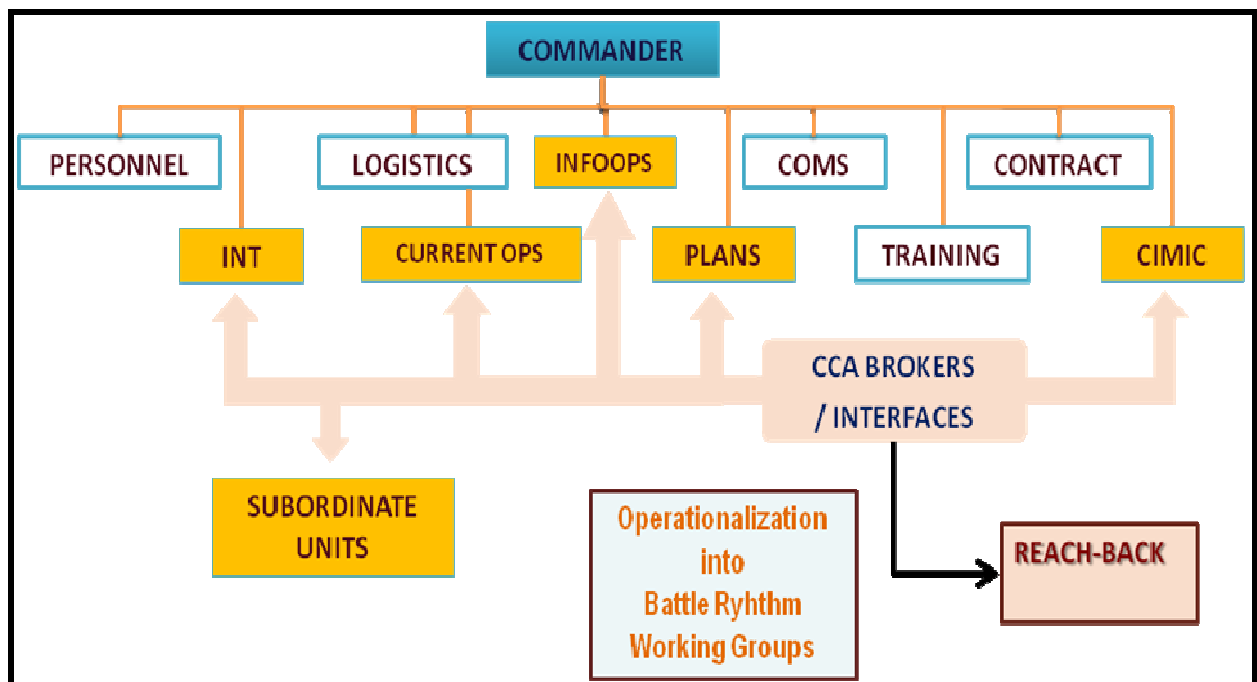
4. BEST PRACTICES IN INTEGRATING CROSS CULTURAL AWARENESS INTO THE CONDUCT OF OPERATIONS

Once the plans have been elaborated and issued (OPLAN, OPORD) while having considered and incorporated the local culture as a key driving element in that crafting (see previous chapter), the subordinate units will have to implement those orders along the chain of command all the way down to the lowest tactical unit. Now is the time for the plan execution or the conduct of operations, which is the stage when the day-to-day decisions are made and synchronization of all activities is required. In this phase, the importance of integrating the culture will also remain as paramount to make successful cultural-oriented decisions. To do so, the socio-cultural information and process human domain data is to be fully integrated throughout the Battle Rhythm across the Staff.

In this chapter we will analyze the best practices as to the structure for the cultural SME to be positioned within the staff, as well as his way of acting, tasks and responsibilities, in the HQ to make the most of his expertise in the operationalization of the cultural inputs across the different decision-making working groups, boards and forums.

a. Integration of cultural issues into the battle rhythm of the Staff

One of the first questions to sort out is the location of the new element —cultural SME— into the structure. Regardless of the composition of that cell, either one individual as a single cultural adviser or a team composed of various members, its position in the PE/CE might greatly determine his further contribution across the different boards and working groups. In this sense it is advisable to place that element embedded into the staff as another member, but not as personal or special staff of the commander. Thus, his tasks and relation with the rest of staff cells and branches are to be addressed in the SOPs and TTPs of the staff so that he/she can actively participate across the various working groups in the battle rhythm, in order to instill the cultural expertise into those forums. The cultural SME is to be the actual catalyst that can channel the cultural information into decisions that will be further reflected in the working and operational documents produced.

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By doing so, it will be ensured that the cultural expert will be readily available to the staff members through the different working groups set up in the internal SOPs. The key point on this regard is to get the cultural matters involved and engaged across the staff

b. Working Groups and Meetings

The cultural SME/enabler, either as unique adviser on cultural issues in the Staff or as representative of a team embedded in the HQ, will keep presence in all meetings, working groups and boards where cultural influence is appropriate and required. These groups include representatives from within or outside the Staff in order to make decisions or regulate the specific action, process or function. In those meetings the exchange and share of information is vital to synchronize activities or conduct operations on the short, mid and long term.

The number of subjects and working groups depends on the situation and echelon. In all those working groups the cultural inputs are to be present, integrated and processed to effectively consider the culture in the recommendations or decisions made. In this sense, for instance, the targeting working group that brings together members across all the staff branches/cells require the presence of the cultural expert to properly elaborate the list of targets to engage whether of the actions are kinetic or not.

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Although the number and composition of the working groups will vary according to the level (strategic to tactical) addressed, the most usual ones where the cultural expertise is required are the following:

- Intelligence
- Planning (short-mid-long term)
- Operations synchronization (current operations cell)
- Targeting
- INFOOPS
- Force Protection
- Civil-military operations (G-9)
- Information management
- Assessment Board.

Sometimes, due to the lack of a proper operationalization of the cultural aspects into the military operations, it could be deemed indispensable to stand up a specific working group or Board to deal conveniently with the cultural issues across the staff. In such a case, the composition, frequency and aim of the meetings will be also set out in the related SOPs.

c. Cultural-related Board

In the event that the existing working groups and boards are not enough to properly take into consideration the local culture and operationalize the human environment, a dedicated cultural-related Board should be set up so as to consider the cultural issues in the correct dimensions and scope. That circumstance is more likely to happen at the tactical level than in the operational or strategic ones due to the fact that the higher the military level, the easier for the cultural expertise is to be operationalized. At the operational level there is a great number of functional working groups in the Battle Rhythm available for the cultural SMEs to keep presence and advise so as to incorporate their expertise in such forums. However, it is also true that the higher the level, the more numerous presence of cultural SMEs is required to keep presence across all boards and forums in the battle rhythm.

Those boards can constitute a powerful tool to engage and catalyze the culture across the Staff. It can also serve as a filter or catalyst to solve the problem posed by information overload and the lack of info sharing. In spite of above mentioned, if the cultural SME is able and proactive to freely move and interact with the staff at the tactical level, this kind of interaction can enable cultural integration more than any cultural-related board or working group. With this kind of engagement the staff might take more and more ownership of the socio-cultural knowledge, therefore benefiting the incorporation of culture in the daily conduct of operations.

MNE-6, OBJ 4.3 “CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS”**d. Other considerations for the work of the cultural SMEs within the Staff**

Operationalizing culture does not imply changing drastically the way of doing business. There is no need to change the current processes, but to reconsider that there are some new inputs to incorporate and integrate into the decision making process. At the same time, the Cultural expertise provided is to be tailored and balanced at the proper level. There is no “one-shop solution”. Even though some cultural experts could fit in a military level or specific geographical area, they cannot be extrapolated to other similar scenarios.

The incorporation of culture into the military planning and conduct of operations implies personal proactive attitudes of the personnel involved regardless of their knowledge or expertise on the local culture. Just acquiring knowledge without changing attitudes will not help at all.

In this regard, special emphasis must be put mainly on leaders and decision-makers as the military planning processes are rather personal-driven processes, requiring personal proactive attitude for its incorporation. Even though this fact might be compensated through education and training, notwithstanding commander’s role has no parallel.

In addition the commander sets the tone for culture or to operationalize culture. He must be thoroughly prepared to effectively organize the staff for its utilization, using socio-cultural information in his decision-making processes and promote cultural awareness/competence. Therefore, he should also make use of his cultural enablers and encourage the utilization of these capabilities and capacities resulting in a more culturally aware staff able to integrate culture across the Lines of Operations (LOO).

Additionally, the emergence of a new functional area in the Staff might trigger some overlapping areas to de-conflict with other branches such as CIMIC or INTEL with regards to the roles and responsibilities to be assigned. The border line is very thin and the tasks and areas to work should be clearly delimited. It is required then to deconflict and delimit the role and responsibilities of the cultural SME and CIMIC through establishing proper Standard Operational Procedures (SOP).

The cultural SME should be fully acquainted with the scenario/operational environment and the military context. Introducing exclusively a civilian as cultural SME, someone who has not an in-depth knowledge of the military culture, would probably be counter-productive. The cultural SME is adequate to help the staff and the commander to absorb and understand relevant information and to prioritize what they need to know. Anthropology is by no means, and should not be perceived to be, a silver bullet in terms of the training or education required by cultural SMEs. It provides one of many perspectives, including psychology, politics, history, archaeology, which contribute to a comprehensive understanding of regional dynamics. However, in situations where individuals with a dual capability in military and region specific cultural expertise are not available, the use of an expert in planning processes educated in cultural general concepts, deployable to any theatre

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is worthwhile. Thus, the requirement for a cultural SME with a comprehensive understanding of military tactics, techniques and procedures outweighs that for region specific expertise.

Despite the fact that some cultural elements/SMEs of the staff can bear a vast socio-cultural knowledge of the specific region where the operation is conducted, no matter if this SME figure is constituted by one person or is composed of a team, it is always required a sort of reach-back that can provide those answers and detailed expertise not available in theatre.

With regards to the co-existence of the cultural SME and the actors' analysis Team (AAT), both elements are not comparable in the tasks performed and support to the Staff but both can be considered as complementary figures. In addition, AAT could be useful on conflicts among the members of coalition (organizational culture) and on conflictive cultural factors at the Strategic or Operational level.

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“You can't help if you're an American, but you should always remember that very few of our people are capable of genuinely positive feelings towards you. You must assume that you are not wholly liked or trusted, and do not be deceived by the Asian smile.”

Vietnamese instructor

5. EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education and training in cultural aspects is a pre-requisite to enable a cultural understanding and cultural awareness although they are not enough to develop adequately the cultural competence capability, since the experience acquired over time is also paramount. Therefore, cultural understanding and awareness are necessary but insufficient components upon which to build the broad cultural capability needed by general-purpose forces to meet current and future challenges. Acquiring cultural competence is more extensive than gaining cultural awareness or understanding.

Cultural competence can only be instilled in a military practitioner following educational instruction of some depth using a carefully structured curriculum aimed at fostering a general knowledge of how operational culture is applied during operational planning and decision-making processes. The level of education needs to be considerable to gain the required higher levels of expertise, although as above mentioned time and experience are pre-requisites.

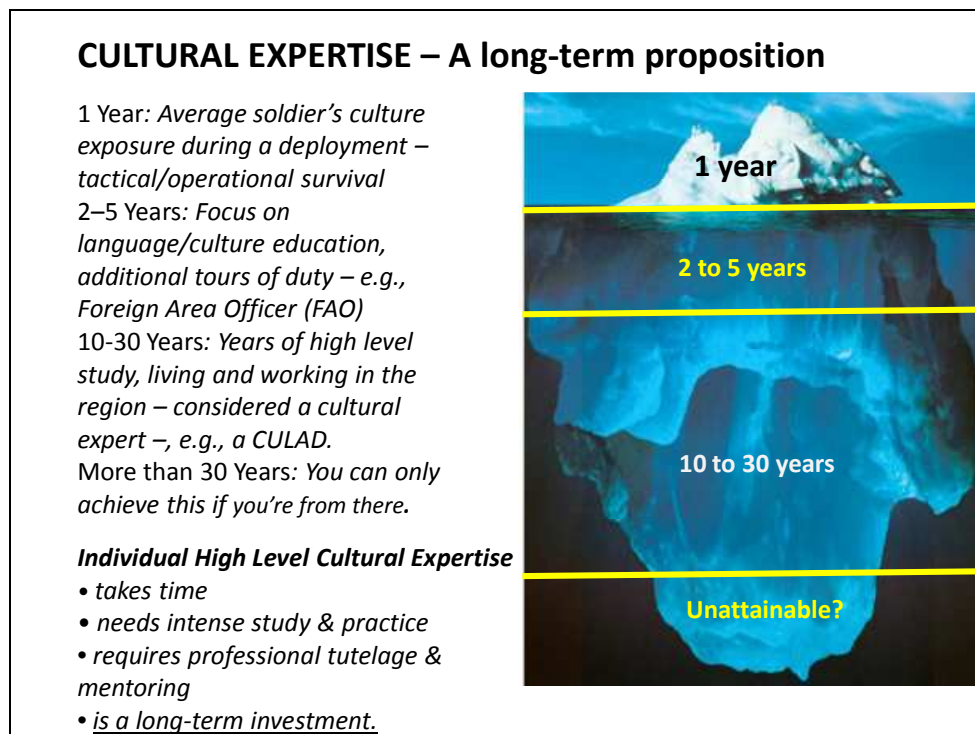


Figure 3

MNE-6, OBJ 4.3 “CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS”

Education on CCA is to be considered in a bottom-up approach, as a type of a long-career process from the most basic military education and training courses. It is to impregnate all the curricula and syllabi. Curricula may need to be designed for several levels of expertise. Therefore, it may begin with an “initial education” when joining the military and then continue with an “advanced education” tailored to the career profiles, including, as appropriate, the development of specific cultural SMEs.

- As shown above (See Figure 1), cultural expertise is a long-term investment. There are several useful levels of knowledge that may be required basing on the military function or operational level required.
- A true area cultural expert, such as a cultural SME, may require many years of both general and specific area language, cultural education and experience. This is because his purpose is to assist commanders and staffs to reach levels of awareness and competence they could not reach on their own. This is the cultural competence.
- Other key people such as Commanders, planners, specialists in certain areas (INTEL, CIMIC, INFOOPS, Public Affairs, etc.) should have a deeper level of knowledge to understand how culture applies to his military specialty and to understand how to synthesize that information with other LOOs. It can be considered as cultural understanding.
- The rest of individuals/practitioners should receive a proper cultural awareness training in the specific operational environment (or specific region/area). The aim will be to teach the basics on the human fabric of the Area of Operations for them to be able to assimilate socio-cultural information from any theater and, in particular, from the one to be deployed.

As for the **Training**, the cultural understanding and awareness should be included in the general collective training of Units/HQs and routinely practiced in exercises as appropriate. It should not be considered specifically in a kind of single cultural training event, but be embedded in the periodical individual and collective training programs. Besides, some pre-deployment courses should be designed to acquire cultural awareness specific for an operation. The courses ought to be tailored to the scenario and the role to accomplish (commanders, staff officers, troops). That training can focus and deconflict the cultural SME roles and responsibilities as well as the mission to accomplish.

Finally, it is also advisable to train the commander and staff on some reframing and self-awareness techniques. These techniques are aimed at facilitating a more flexible mindset within the whole staff, which would in turn make better use of the Cultural SME. It would help understand others' mindset and anticipate reactions when planning and executing operations.

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“Transformation has been interpreted as exclusively technological, but against an enemy who fights unconventionally...it is more important to understand motivation, intent, method, and culture than to have a few more meters of precision, knots of speed, or bits of bandwidth.”

*Major General Robert H. Scales Jr.,
U.S. Army, October 2004*

6. CONCLUSIONS

To hold cultural competence is to be definitively considered as a Force multiplier in the sense of a capability that, when added to and employed by a combat force, significantly increases the combat power of that force and consequently enhances the probability of successful mission accomplishment.

In counter-insurgency operations, cultural competence is a critical combat capability because it generates a permissive operating environment and helps enable access to cultural centers of gravity, situational awareness, cultural pressure points, and interaction with the population. A military plan will not work if the population and their needs are not understood from a culture-centric vantage point. It is to be pondered not as an end in itself, but considered in an utilitarian way, making the knowledge of culture operationally relevant

Linking with concepts like the “comprehensive or whole of government approach”, cultural awareness (CA) but above all, cultural competence is required when dealing not just with local population and the adversaries but also with other non-military partners (international organizations, governmental and non-governmental organizations, etc.) including the host nation agencies and forces. In that sense CA is also critical for success, when it comes to partners, allies and peers in the working shoulder to shoulder in the same coalition as they will have organizational cultures that can differ from ours.

The systemic understanding of the cultural environment is paramount to incorporate the specific factors into the planning and conduct of operations. Culture is to be analyzed and incorporated in the different elements and features in which it can be dissected. In addition, the responsibility of considering culture in operations affects the chain of command vertically, that is to say, in a top-down approach, from the commander to the private deployed on the ground.

However, the way how the knowledge of local culture applies to everybody in military operations varies even though a certain degree of cultural sensitivity should be achieved at every level. The culture needed at each level to enable and support operations may differ widely in each case. Every individual and Unit/HQ should be able to identify what is operationally relevant to accomplish its mission. In this sense, cultural knowledge, though badly needed, is not enough; cultural information should be “operationalized” and made “actionable” in order to be really useful.

As for an optimal performance of the cultural SME within the Staff, it may be achieved if that element/team is not only a type of Commander’s personal adviser, but routinely engaged and engaged across the staff during the planning and

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execution of the operations as appropriate. To that end, during the planning, the cultural SME should be involved from the beginning and throughout the execution should be represented in all the appropriate working groups and boards organized set out in the battle rhythm of the Staff.

Therefore, socio-cultural information must be integrated throughout military planning processes, from problem framing to the issuing of orders, not as an add-on once a Course of Action (COA) has been developed.

Education and Training must prevent militaries from forgetting culture as a driving factor for operations. Accordingly, cultural education it should be developed as a career long requirement, from an “initial education” when joining the military, then continue with an “advanced education” tailored to the career profiles, including, as appropriate, the development of specific “cultural SMEs. Nevertheless the expertise of one individual should not be viewed as an alternative to institutional learning of key concepts.