

A Paradigm Shift in Cultural Training: Culture-General Characteristics of Culturally Competent Forces

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ABSTRACT

U.S. Armed Forces conduct operations in diverse international settings. These forces interact not only with the populations of the host country, but also with cooperating military from other national backgrounds. U.S. Forces are likely to operate in multiple different cultural settings over the course of their careers. Working with a respect of these cultures, as opposed to against them, or in ignorance of them, is conducive to mission success. Fortunately, there has been a recent increase in focus on cultural training within the military. Unfortunately, a majority of the existing training is culture-specific (i.e., focused on one country or region) and can only partially prepare individuals for numerous multicultural interactions. In fact, the specific knowledge learned about one culture can be rendered ineffective or even offensive when applied in another culture. Although culture-specific knowledge is conducive to mission success, effective performance across a variety of cultural settings also requires an emphasis on on-the-spot cultural learning and adaptation. Recent research suggests that cultural success is just as much about general adaptability within ambiguous, complex settings as it is about specific knowledge of a culture. This paper presents a framework distilled from the scientific literature that can be used to build training to develop the culture-general (i.e., not dependent on particular cultures or cultural dimensions) skills of our Armed Forces. The framework draws from the multidisciplinary cultural competence literature to suggest that individuals who possess a set of basic cognitive, behavioral, and motivational characteristics will demonstrate stronger on-the-spot cultural learning. This learning, in turn, will allow individuals to adapt to new cultural situations and make better use of their culture-specific knowledge. In sum, the presented framework suggests that training individuals' self-awareness, social awareness, flexibility, self-management, openness to experience, and multiculturalism will lead to more intercultural success, improving the chances for mission success.

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INTRODUCTION

Overseas military operations place U.S. Armed Forces personnel in extremely diverse international settings. These personnel often interact not only with the relevant populations of the host nation, but also with cooperating military forces from other national backgrounds. Take, for instance, the experience of U.S. Armed Forces in NATO transition teams. Not only are these individuals tasked with the mentoring and training of host national troops, but they are simultaneously working with partners from a variety of countries such as Germany, Australia, and Sweden, among others. Furthermore, many individuals are stationed in a variety of cultural settings over the course of their careers as they are deployed to different countries, further increasing the number of distinct intercultural encounters. It is critical that these personnel develop cultural competence, which can be defined as the ability to function and manage effectively in culturally diverse settings (Ang et al., 2007).

Fortunately, there has been a recent increase in focus on cultural training within the military in response to the ever increasing cultural nature of military work. The Army has developed and employed cultural training at all levels of Army military education (Geren & Casey, 2008), the Navy has increased the availability of language and culture training in order to improve security (Smith, 2008), the Air Force has a formal center for culture and language that develops training (<http://www.culture.af.mil>), and Marines are now required to complete region-based cultural training (Sanborn, 2010). With every branch of the U.S. military concerned about improving cultural effectiveness, now is a perfect time to debate the quality of the current training.

The majority of the training mentioned above is culture-specific (i.e., focused on one country or region). As we will discuss shortly, there are several shortcomings to culture-specific training that limits its effectiveness in preparing our Armed Forces to face the varied cultural

challenges they will encounter overseas. Although culture-specific knowledge may contribute to mission success, effective performance across a variety of cultural settings requires more; it also requires the ability for on-the-spot learning and adaptation. Recent research suggests that successful adjustment to novel cultural settings requires a combination of culture-specific knowledge and culture general skills and abilities (Thomas, 2006).

Towards this end, the purpose of this paper is to introduce a framework incorporating the culture-general competencies established by the scientific literature as critical elements of cross-culture competence training. The multidisciplinary cultural competence literature suggests that individuals who possess this set of basic cognitive, behavioral, and motivational skills will more rapidly adapt to novel cultural settings by more quickly picking up on culture-specific knowledge.

Before presenting the framework, a background regarding cultural training in general is necessary to set the stage. First, we provide a summary of the current training paradigm, culture-specific training, along with the strengths and weaknesses inherent to this approach. Second, we provide a summary of a competing approach to training, known as culture-general training, along with the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. Third, we present a theoretical framework outlining the most critical culture-general skills necessary for developing cultural competence. Within the framework description, we introduce a fictional Soldier named John to demonstrate the role played by each skill. It should be noted, however, that this framework is intended to inform cultural training for the U.S. Armed Forces in general, and not just the Army. Finally, we conclude the paper with a discussion regarding how to most effectively design training to develop these culture-general skills.

Current Training Paradigm: Culture-Specific

The cross-cultural success of deployed Armed Forces can be facilitated through acquiring the awareness of the norms and behaviors that are appropriate in the host country (Black et al., 1999). To that end, many governmental agencies such as the Defense Language Office under the Department of Defense have recognized the importance of utilizing cross-cultural training to prepare individuals for specific deployments. In other words, culture-specific training was advocated as a means to assist in the acquisition of knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes relevant to the specific culture in the area of operations.

Culture-specific training is a training approach which addresses trainees' achievement of competence in a particular target culture by focusing on providing information on the day-to-day interactions among individuals from that particular culture (Fowler & Mumford, 1995). Culture-specific training assists in the development of the practical knowledge and behavior necessary for effective interactions within some specific other culture.

For example, the Culture, Region, & Language Flight Plan- Tier 2B training program introduced by the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC; Gustafson, 2010) can be considered culture-specific. It is designed as training which covers mission-essential requisites for Airmen specifically to Iraq (Iraq-specific course) and Afghanistan (Afghanistan-specific course). Courses provide trainees with important background information about both countries including country overviews (e.g., geography, politics, history, and economic challenges), health and welfare issues, social issues, religion, and social etiquette.

In another example, The Virtual Culture Awareness Trainer (VCAT; <http://www.teamorlando.org/case-studies/vcat.shtml>) was introduced as a Joint Knowledge Online tool which provides a web-based gaming simulation using scenarios centered on operational mission sets specific to the various regions of deployment of the different military branches. Module one of the training focuses on countries within the Horn of Africa region and includes three mission types: Civil Affairs Operations, Security Operations, and Humanitarian Operations. The VCAT relies on "free-form" storylines allowing trainees to interact with a variety of host nationals and observe the outcomes of such interaction.

Although the use of such training courses has been effective in providing culture-specific skills necessary

for mission success (Littrell & Salas, 2005), they limit effective performance to specific cultural settings. Thus, we summarize some of the strengths and limitations that come with the use of culture-specific training in Table 1. In the following section, we describe culture-general training.

Table 1. Strengths and Limitations of Culture-Specific Training

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contains large amount of information about the specific culture • Provides culture-specific skills and competencies • Appears more face valid to trainees who will be deployed • May utilize more richly detailed scenarios and simulations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills learned for one culture can be ineffective or offensive in another • Acquiring culture-specific skills for more than one culture requires more memory capacity and training time • Culture-specific knowledge is often based on stereotypes, which may not always be accurate • Culture-specific norms are often subtle and difficult to recreate or simulate, reducing the effectiveness of culture-specific training

A Paradigm Shift: Culture-General Training

As an alternative to the existing focus on culture-specific training, we suggest a shift toward culture-general training which focuses on the acquisition of the broad skills necessary for effective performance across various cultural domains. This approach is based on research in cognitive psychology (Harrison, 1994) which recommends that culture-general knowledge precedes culture-specific knowledge.

Culture-general training is a training design which focuses on "universal categories" or general characteristics of cultures (Fowler & Mumford, 1995). Culture-general training aims at providing trainees with a cognitive framework through which they can understand their environment and engage in cross-cultural comparisons. In this manner, by introducing culture-general training, individuals may apply broadly-applicable general principles regardless of deployment locations (e.g., how culture works) which would serve as a basis for culture-specific learning (e.g., the understanding of a specific culture) and successful interactions with people from various cultures.

Referring back to the Culture, Region, & Language Flight Plan training, the AFCLC announced in 2010 the introduction of a culture-general Tier 2A expeditionary skills training (Gustafson, 2010). Because Airmen must be prepared to deploy to any country at any time, it was necessary for the AFCLC to develop training that would provide Airmen with the requisite tools to effectively and successfully function in a complex cultural environment without prior exposure to any specific culture, region, or language.

The AFCLC describes the culture-general training as providing an in-depth cultural framework based on twelve domains of culture. These domains represent categories that exist universally (e.g., religion, politics, social relations, economics, and sports) but are expressed or practiced differently according to cultural/societal norms. Through this training, Airmen acquire the basic knowledge and skills necessary to effectively interact with various international cultures. Like all training approaches, culture-general training has both advantages and disadvantages for imparting cultural skills to trainees. We summarize these strengths and limitations in Table 2.

Table 2. Strengths and Limitations of Culture-General Training

Strengths	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides the necessary tools to better navigate across a variety of culturally-diverse environments • Encourages more on-the-spot cultural learning and adaptation • Reduces reliance on stereotypes and the chances of offending others or engaging in incorrect behaviors • Improves cultural adjustment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be supplemented with at least some culture-specific information • May lack face validity for individuals about to be deployed • May be unnecessary for those who will only work within one other culture

The culture-general training described aims to provide trainees with a basic understanding of what culture is and how it varies across the globe. However, there is another way to approach culture-general training. Rather than simply providing information regarding the concept of culture and cultural variation, training can focus on developing the basic skills that are useful in situation characterized by diversity. Given the clearly ambiguous and complex nature of intercultural interactions, it can be suggested that any skill which

assists individuals to effectively perceive, interpret, and respond to ambiguous situations should help individuals to more effectively deal with cultural diversity. It is this premise that the following model of culture-general characteristics of culturally competent forces is based upon.

A MODEL OF THE CULTURE-GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CULTURALLY COMPETENT FORCES

In an attempt to move toward improved cultural-general training for the U.S. Armed Forces, we propose a theoretical framework of the most critical skills for cultural learning. The proposed framework is built around an influential theory of cultural intelligence (CQ) put forth by Earley and Ang (2003). This theory suggests a three-dimensional approach to successful interactions in culturally diverse settings, with (1) cognitive, (2) behavioral, and (3) motivational components of CQ all contributing to the ultimate intercultural success of individuals. The cognitive facet of CQ captures the mental processes used to acquire and interpret cultural information (Ang et al., 2007). Behavioral CQ refers to the display of different behaviors within specific cultural contexts. Finally, motivational CQ refers to an individual's intrinsic desire to engage with culturally dissimilar people as well as the confidence and stress management skills needed to adapt and socialize in other cultures (Earley & Ang, 2003). All of these facets contribute to an individual's ability to accurately perceive, interpret, react to, and learn from cultural encounters.

The CQ facets described above have been related to several positive intercultural outcomes in the context of civilian organizations. For example, cognitive CQ predicts superior cultural judgment, decision-making, and task performance (Ang et al., 2007). Motivational CQ predicts cross-cultural adjustment of expatriates (Templar, Tay, & Chandrasek, 2006) and psychological well-being (Ward, Wilson, & Fisher, 2011). Within culturally diverse collaborations, high overall CQ is related to perceived leader effectiveness and team performance (Groves & Feyerherm, 2011). Finally, in instances of intercultural negotiations, CQ predicts more cooperative motives and more profitable agreements between individuals (Imai & Gelfand, 2010). Thus, it is clear that the U.S. Armed Forces can benefit from training that develops cultural intelligence.

The proposed culture-general framework assumes that cultural success is just as highly dependent on one's basic adaptability within ambiguous, complex settings

as it is about specific knowledge of a culture. Accordingly, the dimensions of cultural intelligence, as defined by Ang and colleagues (2007), are conceptualized as culture-general antecedents to an “individual’s ability to deal effectively in situations characterize by cultural diversity” (p. 101). Essentially, they represent the cognitive, behavioral, and motivational characteristics held by individuals that improve the individual’s ability to learn about and adapt to culturally diverse situations (see Figure 1).

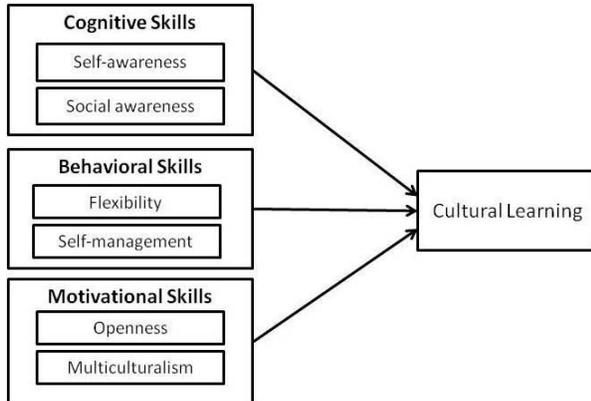


Figure 1. Summary of Theoretical Model

The ability to acquire and interpret cultural information (i.e., cognitive CQ) can be represented using two basic culture-general skills drawn from the emotional intelligence literature: (a) self-awareness and (b) social awareness. The capability to act in accordance with the behavioral norms of another culture (i.e., behavioral CQ) is essentially a combination of (a) flexibility and (b) self-management. Finally, the motivational aspects of CQ, or the desire and ability to engage with culturally dissimilar individuals, can be represented by two individual difference characteristics drawn from the social intelligence literature: (a) openness to experience and (b) multiculturalism.

Individuals who are trained in or possess the skills listed above will be more culturally successful as they will be, specifically, more adept at cultural learning. In other words, they will quickly pick up on new cultural knowledge when immersed in new environments and develop a richer understanding of the cultural norms. We suggest that it is this on-the-spot learning about the other culture which leads to the overall success of the intercultural interaction, especially when considering extremely diverse situations. Therefore, cultural learning is the primary outcome of interest in the presented theoretical model.

In the following sections, we summarize the scientific literature supporting the proposed culture-general

dimensions of cognitive, behavioral, and motivational CQ. As mentioned previously, to more clearly illustrate the utility of each skill for cultural learning, we use a fictional Soldier named John to describe how the skills would be used in the field. Our character John is stationed in Iraq fulfilling his first tour duty. As part of his duties he works closely with new members of the Iraqi police force.

Cognitive Skills

Information processing theory suggests that, in nearly all performance situations in which individuals must interact with systems (in this case, a culturally diverse system), humans must perceive information, transform that information into meaningful knowledge, and then take action based on that knowledge (Wickens & Carswell, 2006). In the context of overseas deployment and other multicultural situations, one of the primary forms of information that must be processed is information from within the socio-cultural environment. In other words, to succeed within that environment, an individual must be aware of cultural and social events occurring around them as well as their own role within that setting. Based on information processing theory, we assert that successful intercultural interactions will depend partly on an individual’s level of self-awareness and social awareness, regardless of the specific culture in which that individual is embedded.

Self-Awareness

“Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.” — C.G. Jung

Self-awareness refers to the understanding of one’s personally held skills, emotions, values, strengths, weaknesses, assumptions, and biases (Goleman, 1998). In general, self-awareness leads to greater confidence in one’s abilities and a higher propensity to adapt because one’s strengths and weaknesses are clearer to self-aware individuals (Jokinen, 2004). The first step towards effective cross-cultural learning is training individuals to recognize that they engage their everyday environment with a set of unconscious cultural assumptions (“rules of thumb”) that guide thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. These rules of thumb are based on predictable patterns people observe in the environment, which when commonly shared within a group, establish the unique cultural social norms. Before an individual can be aware of the cultural norms

of the people around them, they must be aware of their own cultural norms.

Self-awareness of one's own cultural norms is even more critical within the U.S. Armed Forces, as there are two very strong cultural norms at play. Not only will individuals act on the overall American norms with which they were raised, but Basic Training will also instill a set of military cultural norms that must be considered as well.

By relying on the unconscious assumptions provided by American and U.S. military cultures, individuals are able to reduce the amount of information they have to process during day-to-day interactions, so they can focus on other complex tasks. By becoming consciously aware of their own assumptions, individuals reduce the propensity to rely on the assumptions of their own culture and begin interpreting culturally novel situations from a less biased perspective. Moreover, self-awareness involves the recognition of emotional responses, which helps individuals avoid overreacting to novel or uncomfortable situations. As a result, self-awareness improves the ability to interpret environments clearly and learn from cultural experiences. Overtime, higher self-awareness will help individuals recognize their own thoughts and behaviors that encourage success in the environment.

To illustrate the skill of self-awareness, imagine this scenario involving John. John is required to collaborate with the Iraqi police to train their units and provide the necessary skills for dealing with any insurgencies. Within the first couple of days of the training, John notices a general feeling of uneasiness in the room; trainees avoid eye contact, don't participate much, and engage in side conversations. Wanting to understand the reason behind this behavior, John decides to talk to their supervisor Lt. Mohammed. The first question that Lt. Mohammed asks John is: "Have you done anything that might have upset them?" Not being aware of any particular incident, John describes briefly a typical training day to Lt. Mohammed who, to John's surprise, exclaims "You need to understand that norms and ways of communication in Iraq are different than those in the USA. You have to try to focus more on knowing your audience rather than just getting the job done." John takes the time to reflect on the information he just received and realizes that Lt. Mohammed is right; he has been showing up to the training each day and jumping right into the material as Americans like to get down to business right away. By making this realization and being more self-aware of his assumptions and actions, John is more likely to change his behaviors.

Social Awareness

Once individuals are more aware of their own strengths, weaknesses, assumptions, and biases, they are more prepared to monitor their social environment effectively (Goleman, 1998). Social awareness refers to the ability to recognize tacit social cues in order to understand the appropriate behaviors as well as the individual level and group level social dynamics of the environment. Individuals can be trained to improve social awareness and to pay more attention to their social environment and the various cues surrounding them. Culturally competent individuals quickly recognize social norms. They are also more adept at judging emotional responses of individuals from other cultures and responding appropriately and persuasively in order to build relationships. Furthermore, they are able to interpret social hierarchies and the networks of relationships (Moon, 2010). As a result, social awareness helps an individual understand both how to communicate and who to communicate with to achieve desired goals.

Going back to where we had left off our story, John, now more aware of his own cultural assumptions, wants to adjust his behavior to encourage the trainees to participate and feel more comfortable around him. However, John is still not sure how he should behave. In order to gain a better understanding of Arab cultural norms, John decides to spend some time observing the behavior of local Iraqis in business meetings. He notices that individuals start their meetings by asking about each other's health, family, interesting experiences, etc. He realizes that while Americans value their time and believe that the success of a business relationship is based on accomplishing tasks, Arab cultures value having informal interactions which build trust and ultimately facilitate better business collaborations. John is now more aware of social differences between American and Iraqi culture and begins each training session by spending some time engaging in informal conversations with the trainees. As a result, the trainees become more comfortable and participate more during training—moving John toward mission success.

Behavioral Skills

As information processing theory suggests, accurate perception and interpretation of the social environment is necessary, but not sufficient, for cultural success. Individuals must also have the ability to engage in the appropriate behavioral responses after recognizing and processing the information in the environment. Several constructs within the cultural intelligence literature reflect this ability to behaviorally adapt to new and novel cultures. We suggest that an individual's ability to

control their own behavior and appropriately adapt will essentially be a combination of their basic behavioral flexibility and self-management skills. Flexibility is necessary to be able to adopt behaviors that may fall outside one's repertoire, while self-management is necessary for individuals to be able to consciously control their behavioral responses to cultural situations. These behavioral antecedents to CQ are important because it is possible for individuals to understand the behavioral expectations within a culture via strong self- and social awareness without having the behavioral skills necessary to manage their impulses and perform new behaviors. Failure to do so may result in persistent miscommunication via inappropriate or unintentional non-verbal behavior—wrong messages conveyed through “normal” postures, gestures, or facial expressions—or in the transmission of incorrect impressions, perhaps of incompetency or malevolence.

Flexibility

Flexibility can be defined as the ability to adjust one's behaviors to the demands of new and unknown situations (Rose & Kumar, 2008). Previous research has linked flexibility to perceived intercultural success (Arthur & Bennett, 1995). Flexibility includes changing strategies when the current one appears to be inadequate. This behavioral skill also incorporates learning from mistakes and applying new behaviors to the situation when previous attempts failed. Moreover, it contains a slight attitudinal component, in that flexible individuals perceive the potential for new situations as a challenge or opportunity, rather than a threat. For military personnel, developing behavioral flexibility should aid in the accurate perception and interpretation of learning opportunities and the reduction of inaccurate emotional reactivity to the environment.

As an example, imagine our Soldier John decides to share the lessons he has learned thus far with his other friends on base. As they discuss the cultural differences he has experienced, some of John's friends recognize that it will be difficult for them to adapt and change their behaviors. A typical inflexible response he hears is “I'm only here for a couple more weeks; I don't see why I need to change how I've acted all along.” However, John sees the error in his friend's response. John doesn't necessarily want to let go of his “American way” of doing things, but in order to assure his success in his job, he knows that he needs to work within the new set of cultural rules he is learning. He decides to approach all situations as a learning experience and to adjust his behavior as much as he can.

Self-management

**“Mastering others is strength.
Mastering yourself is true
power.” – Lao Tzu**

Self-management involves control over one's own impulses and the conscious adaptation of responses to others (Moon, 2010). Self-management is a crucial skill in translating social and self-awareness into behaviors which facilitate cross-cultural success. Flexibility is needed to promote learning of new, culturally appropriate responses, while self-management is necessary to keep in check the ingrained behaviors specified by individuals' home cultures. An example of flexibility is learning to bow and present your business card face-up with the text turned towards the recipient whereas self-management captures the brief time before that behavior occurs, in which the individual refrained from the habit of casually flicking his card across the table. Self-management further includes the adjustment of behaviors based on the cues provided by others in the environment.

Now let's consider the role of self-management in our example with John. John shows up the next day to the training and walks in and starts setting up his slides. As he is ready to start his lecture for the day, he catches himself falling back into the same pattern of jumping right into business instead of starting the day with interpersonal interaction. Noticing that no one in the room is engaging with him or looking at him, John takes a deep breath, forces himself to break out from his script and asks everyone in the room about their morning. As we can see, it took John some effort and self-management to pull back from his comfortable way of doing things.

Motivational Skills

In order to be culturally successful, individuals not only need to have the cognitive and behavioral abilities necessary to adapt, but they also need to be internally motivated to adapt to the new culture. Culturally successful individuals possess two individual difference characteristics that make them intrinsically motivated to learn about and adjust to new cultures: openness to experience and multiculturalism.

Openness to Experience

The personality trait known as openness to experience refers to a person's receptivity to new ideas, approaches, and experiences (McCrae & Costa, 1990). Openness to experience is a personality variable that is

reflected in a desire for and enjoyment of new, novel experiences, and a general tendency to be imaginative, creative, and cultured (Ang et al., 2007).

Research on individual differences that relate to cultural intelligence suggests that openness to experience is a critical dimension of personality to consider. Individuals in cross-cultural contexts are required to adjust to new experiences and be open to alternative social norms in order to be successful. Individuals who are open to experience approach cross-cultural interactions with a genuine sense of interest and excitement for the new opportunity that it represents. Furthermore, individuals high in openness are more likely to question their own cultural assumptions and learn about the cultural differences of others (Ang et al., 2006).

Openness to experience has been related to higher cultural intelligence (Ang et al., 2006; Fischer, 2011). Furthermore, individuals that are high on openness to experience are more receptive to cultural training in general, making openness to experience useful both for directly improving cultural success and for improving the effectiveness of other training programs (Fischer, 2011). Since cultural experiences will be most effectively navigated by individuals who possess an intrinsic desire to experience new cultures and interact with culturally diverse others, we suggest that openness to experience will be an important predictor of intercultural success.

Thinking back to the interaction John had with his friends when he shared what he had learned about Iraqi culture, we can notice a difference between the two groups in their general openness to new information and ideas. Had John not been open-minded and accepting of others' views, traditions, and opinions, he wouldn't have wanted or even tried to learn the differences between American and Iraqi business culture or tried applying that knowledge the next day during his training. A lack of openness to experience may have led to a continuous cycle of uneasiness and lack of participation from his trainees, and inhibited overall mission success. In fact, it may have perpetuated stereotypes of Americans and made future missions more difficult for other U.S. Armed Forces personnel.

Multiculturalism

"Human diversity makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival." – René Dubos

Multiculturalism can essentially be seen as the absence of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism can be defined as the extent to which an individual is judgmental of other cultures and feels a sense of superiority about their own. Ethnocentric individuals are generally unwilling to acknowledge the validity of other cultural values, norms, and practices, let alone adapt to or engage in them when culturally necessary (Ascalon, Schleicher, & Born, 2008).

In order to be culturally successful, it is absolutely critical that individuals do not have an ethnocentric viewpoint. In fact, individuals performing in culturally diverse settings must be willing to negotiate the cultural landscape with others in order to be interpersonally successful. Individuals who subscribe to the value of multiculturalism do not feel their culture is superior to others, and therefore are willing to learn about and respect other's values, norms, and practices.

In order to better understand the importance of multiculturalism, let's consider again John's experiences in the previous examples. Comparing John to his friend who clearly expressed his unwillingness to adapt or engage differently with the Iraqi trainees and considered the "American way" as being superior, John was able to take on a more accepting view which did not pit the Iraqi culture against the American culture.

It should be noted here that multiculturalism does not mean that individuals should accept other's cultural practices without question, as there are ethical considerations to take into account. As an example, honor killings, in which families murder any individuals that bring shame upon their name, even if that means killing their own family members, exist in some cultures (Chesler, 2010). Multiculturalism would not suggest that individuals should accept this practice without question. Instead, individuals should be open to learning about and analyzing other cultural values and norms in terms of what it means for shaping the thoughts and actions of individuals they are engaging with, rather than immediately dismissing the practices as inferior and invalid.

Cultural Learning

As has been suggested throughout the previous discussion, individuals who possess the set of skills included in the framework will be more culturally successful specifically because they will be more likely to quickly pick up on new cultural knowledge when immersed in any cross-cultural situation. Being self-aware and socially aware will allow individuals to more accurately and efficiently pick up on the critical social

and cultural cues necessary to learn new values, behaviors, and norms. The ability to engage in flexible and controlled behavior will allow individuals to develop higher quality interpersonal relationships with others within the culturally diverse environment, leading to more opportunities for observing or learning culture. Finally, being open to experience and lacking ethnocentric views will result in individuals being more motivated to seek out information on new cultures and more comfortable with new experiences. Therefore, possessing the set of skills we have outlined would ensure that an individual can learn critical information in culturally unfamiliar situations, and rapidly adapt their behaviors, regardless of a particular culture, improving their effectiveness when engaging with members of that culture. We contend that it is this on-the-spot learning about the other culture which is the hallmark of culturally competent forces and that leads to the overall success of the intercultural interaction.

Given the ambiguous nature of intercultural interactions and the increasingly global nature of military work in which service members must engage with diverse populations with little notice, the ability to quickly learn about other cultures is critical to intercultural success. Culturally competent individuals will be better at building coalitions and ensuring mission success by increasing the willingness of people from other cultures to trust them. When individuals display effortful attempts to learn and understand other cultures, it invokes the perception of authenticity and respect for the host culture, which in turn improves relations, knowledge sharing, and collaboration. Within tightly-knit societies, instances of negative social interactions do not just affect the relationship with one civilian or collaborator, but will likely impact the perceptions of the whole community. Substantial violations can create hostile communities and severely limit the capabilities of all military personnel to work effectively with the native population. Thus, broadly ensuring the cultural learning competence of all individuals is critical to individual performance and well-being, as well as the overall impression communities and host nations have about U.S. Armed Forces.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TRAINING DEVELOPMENT

Now that we have fully described the set of skills most critical to cultural learning, we move onto a discussion of how to best train those skills within the U.S. Armed Forces. Several suggestions are made based on the science of training and the nature of the content being trained (Table 3). Specifically, we suggest that (a) all

cultural training should begin with a module on cultural self-awareness, (b) demonstration-based training and practice-based training are superior to knowledge-based training for imparting these particular culture-general skills, and (c) practice-based training programs should be developed with a careful focus on cognitive fidelity. Several examples of existing tools that could be used to develop practice-based training with high cognitive fidelity are provided.

Table 3. Training Development Suggestions

Suggestion	Tips for Implementation
1. Begin all cultural training with a module on self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use values, beliefs, and assumptions survey • Focus on both basic American and military cultural norms
2. Incorporate demonstration-based and practice-based training strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate examples of skills via videos or written vignettes • Use role-playing exercises or computer simulation to provide practice opportunities
3. Focus on cognitive, and not physical, fidelity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orient the training around the cognitive and behavioral requirements of the transfer task • Take advantage of existing tools even if they don't represent the particular transfer culture • Use a fictional country as the context of the training

According to the framework, all cultural training should begin with a module on cultural self-awareness. This module should use self-exploration and discovery exercises that help the trainees to externalize their own cultural beliefs, values, and assumptions about life. Furthermore, the trainees should be guided to consider how those beliefs, values, and assumptions shape the way they behave. This self-awareness should then be used to emphasize the fact that cultures differ in these beliefs, values, and assumptions, and one cannot assume that everyone thinks or perceives the same way (s)he does.

Our second recommendation is to use demonstration- and practice-based training approaches to truly develop cultural-general skills rather than just knowledge (Wildman, Xavier, Tindall, & Salas, 2010). As mentioned previously, a large portion of the existing cultural training focuses on providing a broad overview of the cultural information for a region, often through classroom presentations and reading materials. This

type of training is useful for imparting cultural knowledge, but it is not ideal for imparting the deep-level skills that are necessary for cultural learning. Cognitive and behavioral skills are more accurately trained using demonstration-based training in which trainees are shown the correct skills being practiced by others (Rosen, Salas, Pavlas, Jensen, Fu, & Lampton, 2010), and practice-based training in which trainees actually engage in the skills themselves in low-risk, learning-oriented environments. In fact, research has strongly supported the idea that “practice is a necessary condition for skill acquisition” (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, p. 480).

Our third recommendation applies to the design of practice-based training. When designing practice-based training, the focus should be on the cognitive fidelity of the training program and not the physical fidelity (Salas, Bowers, & Rhodenizer, 1998). Physical fidelity refers to how the physical features of the training system correspond to the physical features of the transfer situation. For example, cultural training with high physical fidelity would use extremely realistic videos with real actors to approximate cultural interactions. Cognitive fidelity refers to the extent to which the training situation approximates the cognitive demands of the transfer situation (Freda & Ozkaptan, 1980). In other words, cultural training does not necessarily need to look exactly like the cultural situation downrange, but it should create the same psychological conditions that would be experienced. Research has demonstrated that high physical detail does not lead to better performance, but rather that fidelity should be dictated by the cognitive and behavioral requirements of the task (Salas et al., 1998).

For example, the training does not necessarily need to be set in any real operational context, but instead could be designed around a fictional country such as in the BaFá BaFá cultural simulation (e.g., Shirts, 1995). In fact, by using a fictional country as the training context, all trainees will approach the situation with the same lack of understanding and therefore lack of biases or stereotypes. This approach also reinforces the idea that these skills will help trainees succeed no matter which culture is involved.

In a final example of a practice-based training approach with high cognitive fidelity, behavioral flexibility could be trained using a tool similar to the Test of Attentional Performance (Zimmerman & Fimm, 2002). This neuropsychological test requires the participant to shift between attending to letters and attending to numbers. The test takes no more than 3.5 minutes to complete and is commercially available. Although the task of shifting

attention between letters and numbers does not seem obviously relevant to the skill of behavioral flexibility in intercultural situations, it develops the brain’s ability to flexibly switch focus across cues which is very similar to the ability to flexibly perceive and engage in different behaviors. In other words, it represents the same cognitive demands as the transfer task. Of course, this particular approach would require empirical testing. In sum, cultural training programs do not need to place trainees in a costly face-valid cultural situation in order to improve the general abilities that will improve intercultural success.

CONCLUSION

The topic of cultural training has never been as prevalent in the U.S. Armed Forces as it is today. Every Service is concerned about improving the cultural awareness and cultural success of its members. This paper suggests that in order to truly achieve the goal of cultural success, cultural training needs to make a shift away from a model that focuses only on culture-specific training to one that includes a cultural-general training focus. We presented a framework distilled from the scientific literature that emphasized the importance of a set of cognitive, behavioral, and motivational cultural-general characteristics that are expected to improve cultural learning. We believe that this framework, and the accompanying recommendations for designing training, can be used to improve the state of cultural training in the U.S. Armed Forces.

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