Relating Cross-Cultural Competence to Language Proficiency and Regional Expertise

DoD Symposium
The Role of Cross-Cultural Competence in Organizational and Mission Success
30 June 2009

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The Cultural Capability Triad

Three components combine to provide cultural capability:

- Regional/culture-specific knowledge and language provide depth for specific cultures.
- Cross-cultural competence is culture-general: i.e., provides the foundation and breadth to quickly learn about and adapt to any culture.

Different roles and functions require these components in differing degrees.
A General Framework for Cross-Cultural Competence

**Antecedent Variables**
- Traits
- Experiences
  - Personal Professional
- Self and Identity

**Cross-Cultural Competence**
- Knowledge
- Affect and Motivation
- Skills

**Language Proficiency**

**Regional/Culture-Specific Knowledge**

**Organizational Outcomes**
- Job Performance
- Personal Adjustment
- Interpersonal relationships

**Individual Outcomes**
- Mission Success
- Retention

**PME, Training, and Self-Development**

**Situational and Organizational Context**
Cross-Cultural Competence and Intercultural Outcomes

The goal is to make military personnel more effective.

- Research has shown culture-general characteristics contribute more to effective outcomes than do culture-specific variables.
- Attitudes and skills are particularly important.
  - Non-ethnocentrism
  - Openness
  - Flexibility
  - Interpersonal skills
- Though distinctly culture-general, these characteristics have complementary relationships with culture-specific capabilities.
  - Interdependence in development
  - Interdependence in application
Conceptualizing Cross-Cultural Competence

A set of characteristics that enables learning about and adapting to unfamiliar cultures, even when in-depth knowledge of the specific culture or region is lacking (Abbe et al., 2007)

- Multi-dimensional
- Develops over time

Skills
- Flexibility
- Interpersonal Skills
- Self-Regulation

Knowledge
- Cognitive Complexity
- Schema
- Cultural Self-Awareness

Affect
- Empathy
- Openness
- Attitudes and Initiative
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Developing culture-specific capabilities depends on culture-general attitudes. Affect serves as a gateway for cultural and foreign language learning.

Openness, curiosity, non-ethnocentrism, willingness to engage, willingness to learn
Affect and motivation are not static. Development can be influenced through experiential learning.
Knowledge and Cognition

Cultural understanding can be enhanced by developing both culture-specific and culture-general knowledge.

← Experiences that are culture-specific and concrete can be used to generate general knowledge.

→ General frameworks guide learning about unfamiliar cultures.
SOF Soldiers reported using general cultural knowledge and interpersonal skills to navigate unfamiliar communities and learn the local culture.
Learning and using culture-specific capabilities depends on cultural flexibility – adapting in response to situational cues.

Knowing multiple cultures or languages also contributes to flexibility – expands one’s behavioral repertoire.
Adaptability depends on the ability and willingness to switch cultural lenses, but also requires knowing which lenses apply.
Levels of Cross-Cultural Competence

As with other domains of expertise, levels of intercultural development can be identified.

These levels are related to, but distinguishable from, language proficiency and regional knowledge. Different capabilities develop at different rates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Cross-Cultural Competence</th>
<th>Be (Attitudes/Affect)</th>
<th>Know (Knowledge/Cognition)</th>
<th>Do (Behavior/Skills)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Novice</td>
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## Levels of Cross-Cultural Competence

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<tr>
<td>1 Novice</td>
<td>Little interest in other cultures, ethnocentric attitudes</td>
<td>Sparse schema; holds stereotypes; generally unaware of own cultural lenses</td>
<td>Basic communication skills; can apply skills under low stress, low cultural distance</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Tactician</td>
<td>Willing to engage when relevant to mission; non-ethnocentric; unstable efficacy beliefs</td>
<td>Cultural awareness; basic understanding of cultural difference</td>
<td>Regulates own reactions; able to communicate and exert interpersonal influence</td>
</tr>
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<td>3 Operator</td>
<td>Willing to engage; receptive to cultural learning; intercultural efficacy appropriate to skill level</td>
<td>Culturally self-aware; rich cultural schema; can identify cultural impact in specific situations</td>
<td>Switches cultural lenses with effort; extensive repertoire of behaviors and influence tactics</td>
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<td>4 Generalist</td>
<td>Open to cultural learning; engages in empathy when appropriate; high intercultural efficacy</td>
<td>Complex schema; readily updates with new knowledge; generalizes from culture-specific experiences</td>
<td>Switches cultural lenses and behaviors without conscious effort; able to anticipate behavior, lead across cultures</td>
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Developing Cultural Capability

The specific mix of capabilities will depend on the mission, job function, and/or role.