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**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE  
WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF MULTINATIONAL  
PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS**

**PHD ABSTRACT**

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## **PHD ABSTRACT**

# **INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF MULTINATIONAL PEACE SUPPORT OPERATIONS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Military missions have grown in complexity in recent years to involve a mix of peace building tasks (e.g. peace-keeping or nation building) and war-fighting responsibilities (e.g. peace enforcement or combating insurgency). This complexity requires soldiers at all levels to integrate tactical proficiency with leveraging of non-military advantages, including the building of trust and alliances with local groups and individuals. Winning “hearts and minds” and developing collaborative relationships with each other can be essential for the advancement of peace and stability as well as for the collection of information, or to align local support necessary to succeed in both war-fighting and low intensity operations.

Over the years, the world has undergone a transformation process in which it has become a particular omnibus form of culturally diverse societies. Whether it is based on race, ethnicity, age gender, religion, physical abilities, sexual orientation or socio-economic status, you are more likely than ever to find yourself in a culturally diverse organisational setting. With this diversity comes the potential for great benefits as well as potential problems. Many of these problems consist of difficulties in the form of communicating, problem solving and resolving conflicts within diverse groups where people have significantly different values, beliefs, perspective, work styles and communication styles. In order to overcome these potential problems and to draw upon the possible benefits, each of us must enhance our ability to understand cultural differences, and to effectively communicate and resolve conflicts with those who are different from ourselves. With so many diverse cultures and enormous amount of study required to become expert on any given one, how do we narrow the field to find the right focus for generating skills in soldiers?

The growing interest in establishing and maintaining cooperative relationships with local civilians has focused primarily on the need to enhance soldiers’ cultural awareness, including basic knowledge of cultural history (e.g. ethnic diversity), manners and traditions (e.g. social structure, role of religion and religious leaders), style of communication (e.g. how to avoid offensive body language and gestures), and basic language skills. In fact, engagement with local populaces has become so crucial that mission success is often significantly affected by soldiers’ ability to interact with local individuals and communities. Working with diverse cultures in their home element is more a matter of finesse, diplomacy, and communication than the direct application of coercive power. Cultural literacy is about understanding one’s individual cultural patterns and knowing one’s own cultural norms. We all have an internal list of those we still don’t understand, let alone appreciate.

## **AIMS OF THESIS**

I am not the first, nor do I expect to be the last, to observe the need for increasing the quantity and quality of cultural knowledge and communication competence in the profession of arms and its integration to specific military systems. In the current security environment, understanding foreign cultures and societies has become a national priority. Cultural understanding is necessary to work successfully with allies.

Working with coalition partners and projecting influence worldwide, the Armed Forces will continue to be sent to the far corners of the earth to perform wide-ranging missions such as stability operations, nation building, peace-keeping duties, and humanitarian assistance. These types of operations all require competencies far beyond traditional war-fighting skills. All leaders in the military, whether at the tactical, operational, or strategic level, need training, education, and new skill sets as they function as “warrior diplomats”.

This thesis defines a way military leaders can prepare for and conduct military operations through the lens of cultural awareness. It provides a method for helping military commanders, staffs, and trainers engage successfully in any type of operation. Initially, this research was undertaken to support military training conducted at the National Training Centre. In its final form, however, this paper will serve to inform additional studies as well as projects, conferences, and training conducted by the Ministry of Defence. This study will be of interest to Armed Forces and personnel planning for or conducting operations in multinational settings. It can also be of interest to personnel that need to assess the intentions, motivations, and decision-making styles of persons from other cultures.

This thesis tries to expose how a lack of cultural knowledge has hindered the military and diplomatic efforts, then identify gaps in the current Army structure in providing cultural knowledge, and next offers pedagogical tools and methods to provide our soldiers with the value of cultural knowledge as well as intercultural communicative competence in military operations. The paper will conclude with recommendations to develop and employ a more culturally adept force.

## **OBJECTIVES**

My musings in this paper should not be mistaken for definitive answers, but rather an attempt to identify the major realms of inquiry, pose some preliminary questions, and provide some admittedly superficial initial responses from interdisciplinary perspectives. Clearly, a great deal more research and conceptualising must occur, and several areas stand out as requiring particular attention. From most abstract to most concrete, these are:

- How do different academic disciplines understand culture and multiculturalism, and which aspects may be of relevance to the military operationally and institutionally?
- How effective communication and cultural challenges are responded? How have other militaries and professions not examined in this paper addressed similar challenges?
- How should this professional development framework be expanded and employed to guide the development of individual members’ competency?
- How should this effort be assessed to ensure it is achieving the desired goals (and that these are in fact the most appropriate objectives)?
- How should cultural effectiveness be conceived, developed, and evaluated?
- How can military organisations promote and sustain cultural and communication awareness in case of foreign missions?

These are large and complicated questions; nevertheless, I hope my researches– tentative though they may be – promote greater awareness, discussion, and action that will ultimately lead to more militaries achieving broad-based competency.

## STRUCTURE OF THESIS

In **Chapter 1** I introduce the nature of culture and its particular features based on professional studies. In order to perfect the abilities and skills of intercultural communication, it is required to have an understanding of basic notions and their effects on us while working with challenges and competencies of cross-cultural communication. We all have biases, even prejudices, toward specific groups. We need to try thinking about their hopes and fears in relating to people of a group different from their own. Fears usually include being judged, miscommunication, and patronising or hurting others unintentionally; hopes are usually the possibility of dialogue, learning something new, developing friendships, and understanding different points of view. At any moment that we are dealing with people different from ourselves, the likelihood is that they carry a similar list of hopes and fears in their back pocket.

We all communicate with others all the time – in our homes, in our workplaces, in the groups we belong to, and in any community. No matter how well we think we understand each other, communication is hard. “Culture” is often at the root of communication challenges. Our culture influences how we approach problems, and how we participate in groups and in communities. When we participate in groups we are often surprised at how differently people approach their work together.

**Chapter 2** discussed a model that can be used to help the military “operationalise” cultural awareness and intelligence in ways that are relevant to both combat and post-conflict support operations. The key features of the model are:

- Cultural influences: Major social or institutional factors, such as heritage, religion, traditions, and language that bind people together.
- Cultural variations: Styles of behaviour values and ways of thinking that are common to a culture.
- Cultural manifestations: The concrete displays of a culture’s thought and behaviour, whether through its members’ view of authority, communication style, willingness to compromise, embracing of risk, culture –shock, etc.

Current operations in missions involving counterinsurgency, peace-keeping, stability and support missions and nation building have increased interest in cross-cultural communication skills as well as cultural awareness as a central competency of the military forces in due course of foreign missions. I developed a questionnaire that can serve as a conceptual framework that can guide the design of training programmes for officers preparing to deploy abroad. I introduced the empirical results of the above mentioned research in **Chapter 3**.

### Procedure:

In depth interviews were conducted with 43 officers and NCO-s who had returned recently from deployments. The interview protocol included a script of 35 questions presented to participants addressing:

1. any language and cultural differences experienced,
2. their level of trust in their work and colleagues,
3. the degree of openness and information exchange experienced
4. the type of communication techniques employed.

Interviews were examined for common content, themes, and issues.

## Findings:

Key challenges reported by officers included:

- ethical dilemmas
- the development of work arrangements in the face of conflicting cultural values and norms
- cooperating in the face of threat and determining the appropriate use of skills and methods
- emotional self-regulation
- adaptive response to a range of communication challenges.

## Utilization and Dissemination of Findings:

This research summarises officer strategies and groups those perceptions into a conceptual framework. This research can be used to guide communication skills and cultural awareness instruction for pre-deployment training.

As described in chapter 2, the full benefit of the cultural awareness model can be realised only if cultural awareness is integrated into military training and doctrine. Topics and tasks provided in the appendix serve as a basis of the methods, techniques and recommendations made in **Chapter 4** regarding this integration. The cultural awareness program specified in this chapter can apply across cultures and regions worldwide. The development and maintenance of cultural competencies is a continuous process, and military leaders need to always be looking ahead and looking to understand multiple cultures at one time.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. My thesis undertook a critical approach to the theoretical background of multiculturalism as a consequence of which inter- and cross-cultural communication challenges are arisen. I explored the common link in between the altered concepts and descriptions of multiculturalism with interdisciplinary methods in order to support my hypothesis of facing the growing importance of intercultural challenges not only in the civilian sphere but also in the fields of military, especially in multinational missions.

2. Recent operations have highlighted the change in the contemporary operating environment. Not only must doctrine and structure transform, but training and utilization must also transform in order to procedure officers with skill in the required competencies. An understanding of language and culture is just as important as understanding the enemy order of battle. This issue cannot be addressed on a superficial level. Officers must have a depth of knowledge that will provide the basis for predictive analysis. Foreign language proficiency, cultural awareness and regional expertise will provide that depth. Communication proficiency and cultural understanding are and will remain critical skills for military personnel in current and future operations. Present shortages of those skills must be addressed in an aggressive manner. Although there is no easy solution, a long-term strategy that provides military personnel in foreign missions with the appropriate communicative and cultural skills is needed to remain relevant in a global world.

3. There is a growing awareness in the military leadership of the need to include cultural awareness as part of military operations. Cultural awareness can reduce battlefield friction and the fog of war, and improve the ability of leaders and soldiers to accomplish the mission by providing insight into the intent of actors and groups in the battle-space. Finally, cultural awareness reduces cultural friction and can help our country rapport and prevent misunderstandings that detract from mission accomplishment.

Do we expect other cultures to adopt our customs or are we willing to adopt theirs? This might translate to how foreign relations are to be conducted. Do we compromise or force other people to deal only on our terms? Effective communication with people of different cultures is especially challenging. Cultures provide people with ways of thinking – ways of seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world. Thus the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures, even when they talk the “same” language. If the people involved are not aware of the potential for such problems, they are even more likely to fall victim to them, although it takes more than awareness to overcome these problems and communicate effectively across cultures.



Dates	From August 1987 to September 1995
Occupation or position held	Assistant (part-time occupation)
Main activities and responsibilities	Translating official documents, interpreting at business meetings
Name and address of employer	Heves County Chamber of Commerce and Industry Eger, Hungary

## EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Dates	From September 2005 -
Title of qualification awarded	PhD course programme in Military Sciences
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Thesis: "Intercultural Communication Competence Within the Framework of Multinational Peace Support Operations"
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University, Budapest, Hungary
Dates	2001 - 2004
Title of qualification awarded	Graduate in Faculty of Arts, Degree of English Language and Literature
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	-British and American Culture, History and Literature -Teaching Methodology
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	University of Pécs, Pécs, Hungary
Dates	2000, 2003
Title of qualification awarded	Diploma of Advanced Language Proficiency Skills
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	American Culture, Literature, Military Studies
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Defense Language Institute, Lackland Airforce Base, San Antonio, Texas, USA
Dates	1997 - 2000
Title of qualification awarded	Alternative Medical Practitioner
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Therapist
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	MANTRA Alternative College of Natural Sciences, Budapest, Hungary
Dates	1988 - 1990
Title of qualification awarded	Assistant Manager
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	Management



Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Open Business School, Budapest, Hungary
Dates	1984 - 1988
Title of qualification awarded	Degree in Teaching English and Russian as Foreign Languages
Principal subjects/occupational skills covered	TEFL, TRFL
Name and type of organisation providing education and training	Eszterházy Károly Teachers' Training College, Eger, Hungary

## PUBLICATIONS

### **Articles in English published in vetted magazines:**

„Managing cross-cultural communication challenges. Toward a more perfect union in an age of diversity”

AARMS            Volume 4    Issue 2, 2005   pp. 215-223

„The importance of cultural education in military”

AARMS            Volume 5    Issue 2, 2006   pp. 467-475

„Military, civilians and their cultural values gap”

AARMS            Volume 5    Issue 2, 2006   pp. 491-498

„Tactics for removing cultural barriers. A practical approach to effective communication”

AARMS    Volume 7    Issue 3, 2008   pp. 425-433

„A Theoretical approach to Intercultural Communication”

AARMS    Volume 7    Issue 3, 2008   pp. 435-443

### **Articles in Hungarian published in vetted magazines :**

„Motiváció mint faktor az idegen nyelv elsajátításának hatékonyabbá tételében”

Kard és Toll      2005/1      138.o

„Egyén és csoport, az egyének közötti kölcsönhatás, az interakció”

Kard és Toll      2005/2      63.o

„A többnemezetiségű kultúrák együttműködéséből fakadó kihívások jelenségei és konfliktusai kezelésének módjai”

Hadtudomány    2007/3

„Psyops – Lélektani Hadműveletek”

Kard és Toll    2007

### **Articles and lectures in English at international conferences and published in those conference publications:**

„Perceptions and Challenges of Intercultural Communication Competence in Culturally Diverse Military Missions”

International Conference on Linguistic and Intercultural Education, Conference Book, CLIE-2008

### **Articles and lectures in Hungarian at Hungarian conferences and published in Hungarian publications:**

„A közösségekben való együttműködés interkulturális kihívásai és kommunikációs kompetenciájának koordinálása”

Nyelv, Szaknyelv Katonai Szaknyelv (A szaknyelvi konferencia anyaga) 2008

„A közösségekben való együttműködés interkulturális kihívásai és kommunikációs kompetenciájának koordinálása”

Nyelv, Szaknyelv Katonai Szaknyelv (A szaknyelvi konferencia anyaga) 2008