A Multidimensional Approach to Studying Cultural Differences & Coping Strategies in a Multinational Coalition Environment

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Background

• Major military deployments involve collaboration between multinational teams
• Joint operations face operationally & environmentally complex & dynamic scenarios

**Effective & efficient communication is the key to success**

IRAQ 1991 – Op Granby (UK)/ Desert Storm (US)
AFGANISTAN 2002 – Herrick (UK)/ Op Enduring Freedom (US)
IRAQ 2003 – Felic (UK)/ Op Iraqi Freedom (US)

• **Diverse backgrounds** of multinational teams have presented serious challenges in coalition communication
Cross-cultural communication challenges

“England & America are two countries separated by a common language”

George Bernard Shaw

- Crossing Communication Barriers
- Establishing Common Ground
- Understanding Communication Preferences & Language use

Need to achieve common understanding sufficient to work together effectively
Fundamental Aspects of Cross-cultural Coalition Communication

• Cultural Traits
  – Conventions, customs, norms, preferences

• Cognitive & Mental Models
  – World views, assumptions

• Patterns of Language Use
  – Primary mode for communication
  – Use, interpretation, e.g.
    • Passing information
    • Receiving feedback
    • Reinforcing ideas
Studying Levels of Culture

CULTURE is acquired in the process of being trained, working & living in the same community.

CULTURE becomes thoroughly integrated into one’s outlook & behaviour.

Three levels of underlying culture:

(i) each Nation's culture
(ii) Military or Organisational culture
(iii) Professional or Expert culture
Integrated Systematic Approach

**MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH**
for
identifying sources of miscommunication & possible coping strategies
in US-UK military collaborations

**DATA COLLECTION**

- Questionnaires
- Recording of data from an exercise or a simulation: i.e., direct observation, text, audio, video
- Interviews

Including context information:
e.g. role of speaker, nationality of speaker, time of utterance,
mode of utterance (e.g., email, radio)
addressee (e.g., broadcast)

**THEORETICAL APPROACHES & PATHS**
toward
understanding of Coalition Communications

- Social Sensemaking: establishing common ground
- Individual Strategies: creating & using cultural filters
- Pragmatics of Language Use: uncovering linguistic differences

**RESULTANT PRINCIPLES**
for effective Coalition Communications will inform

**DESIGN of PROCEDURES**

**COMMUNICATION SOFTWARE TOOLS**

**TRAINING PROGRAMS**

**Validation**
Studying Cultural Sensemaking

- During Multinational Collaboration
  - Need to study how people’s behaviour & use of language differs from others, less successful actors

- How people decipher meaning
  - Uncover tacit knowledge
  - Create common ground
  - What sensemaking strategies do they use?

Are these just talented individuals? OR
Are these strategies can be identified, learned & taught?
Sensemaking Conceptual Model

From CCRP Sensemaking Symposium 2001
D K Leedom

Differ from culture to culture
Understanding Individual Strategies

• Using a Cue-Recall Debrief method to understand how individuals overcoming cultural communication barriers

• Conceptualizing cultural filter
  – References
    • ie Frames of Reference
    • Mind References
  – Individual Coping Strategies
    • May not be culturally dependent
**Pragmatics** is a study of:
- how language is used -> interpretation of the intended meanings
- what effect context has on the interpretation of linguistic expressions

**Context** ->
- temporal & spatial parameters of the communication event
- beliefs + intentions of the participants
- the knowledge including the presuppositions
Computational Pragmatics Approach

• Patterns of language use
  – Contributions to miscommunications & recoveries

• Cultural differences vs. Language use
  – Culture-based linguistic variations
  – Appropriate interpretation
Multidimensional Approach

Disadvantages
Data collection is time-consuming, requires military personell, non- & experienced from UK & US

Advantages
Culture needs & can be studied in context
– Capture of subtle verbal & non-verbal cues that can not be catptures post the event as easily
– Surface linguistic features & intent can be studied in detail in a number of ways, ie tied into:
  - Social Strategies
  - Cognitive Thought Patterns
  - Interpretation of commander’s intent in the context of military operations by several cultures
Conclusions

• Approach allows an insight into different levels of communication:
  – Group level cultural sensemaking
  – Individual level communication strategies
  – Linguistic level pragmatics

• Effect Proposed approach can
  – Help identify & measure communication challenges
  – Raise awareness & proficiencies
  – Facilitate multinational coalition work
Potential Outcomes

Proposed Multidimensional Approach

• Help identify & measure communication challenges
• Raise awareness & proficiencies

• Facilitate multinational coalition:
  – Reduce miscommunication
  – Allow to raise tempo of operations
  – Highlight potential instances of miscommunication, which can be addressed before further problems arise
The reason the Army, Navy, Air Force, & Marines squabble among themselves is that they don't speak the same language. For example, take a simple phrase like, "Secure the building."

- The Army will put guards around the place
- The Navy will turn out the lights & lock the doors
- The Air Force will take out a 5-year lease with an option to buy
- The Marines will kill everybody inside & make it a command post.

From: http://www.swapmeetdave.com/Humor/MilJoke.htm

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