

“ENGAGE”: EQUIPPING AIRMEN AS GLOBAL AMBASSADORS

Felisa M. Dyrud
University of Arizona
felisa.dyrud@gmail.com

The reality of a modern-day expeditionary military force with goals of establishing security and enabling nation-building in some of the most volatile areas of the world means that effective cross-cultural partnership has never been so crucial. Air Force and Department of Defense leadership at the highest levels has long acknowledged the importance of developing cross-cultural competence in its members, and current efforts by the Air Force Culture and Language Center established in 2006 are moving rapidly closer to that goal, developing distributed learning systems and incorporating cross-cultural training into every level of professional military education. With the high rate of deployment, however, the challenge to ensure that each member is adequately and specifically prepared prior to deployment is monumental. In one approach to meet this challenge, the author and associates have developed ENGAGE, a grassroots experiment in cross-cultural pre-deployment training, featuring an interactive model which invites attendees to participate in their own learning through dialogue, active illustrations, and actual cultural practices which amount to more of an immersion experience than a briefing. As each participant is engaged, stereotypes begin to break down, and a mentality of respectful, discerning, and creative approaches to cross-cultural interaction develops.

Caveat: The ideas and views presented in this paper are those of the author, and are not the official views of the Air Force, the Air Force Culture and Language Center, or any other military organization.

INTRODUCTION

They call what we do *servicing* in the military. Indeed there are many opportunities to serve, discover humility, and place the life of another before one's own. This paper involves a less-understood dimension of this service: the opportunity to serve not only our own nation, but also the nations of the world with whom we interact daily, perhaps outside a base in partner countries like Japan or Germany, in a joint exercise with Chile, or on the streets of Kabul. Many servicemen and women find themselves unprepared for the complex realms of inter-cultural communication and negotiation. Alongside other

current initiatives in Air Force education and training, the ENGAGE¹ (not an acronym) workshop model seeks to develop airmen as ambassadors-in-uniform, equipping them to be cross-culturally competent in a variety of circumstances and environments.

Effective cross-cultural relationships are strategically critical; they enable success in the current operational environment of unconventional struggles, multicultural partnerships, and military operations other than war (MOOTW). It is clear that the military engagements of the twenty-first century will not be won with military might alone; a crucial element will be the creativity and flexibility to relate to and work effectively with other cultures. As military leaders returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have reflected, “wars are won as much by creating alliances, leveraging non military advantages, reading intentions, building trust, converting opinions and managing perceptions, all tasks that demand an exceptional ability to understand people, their culture and their motivation” (Scales, 2004).

The Air Force and the other Armed Forces of the United States desperately need their members, of all ranks, to be cross-culturally competent, a skill set and mentality not taught to the vast majority of airmen at combat skills training. While this necessity has been recognized at the highest levels of military and Air Force leadership, implementing an effective system for the kinds and levels of training needed will take time and creativity. Toward this end, a small team of innovators has developed a grassroots experiment in cross-cultural training, both in the realm of general cross-cultural competence and more “culture-specific” training, especially focused on pre-deployment preparation.

The approach I discuss here, the ENGAGE workshop—is meant to complement, not criticize or minimize the many other methods and types of cross-cultural training currently being pursued by the Air Force. It is an experiment in dynamic, experiential training, in which trainees are actively involved in the development of an understanding of their own culture in relation to others, as well as the attitudes and approaches that will prepare them to ENGAGE effectively with people of other cultures. In its current form, it is organized and run by a volunteer facilitation team made up of military members who are in turn able to deepen their commitment to and understanding of cross-cultural issues.

This paper first addresses some foundational questions about the applicability of cross-cultural skills to military missions, the perspectives and policies of the Department of Defense and the Air Force on the need for cross-culturally competent members, and Air

¹ To avoid any confusion, it should be noted that the workshop’s name was recently changed from its original name, “Culture-Clash?”

Force-specific progress in developing said competence. Without a doubt, the *ENGAGE* workshop model may be pertinent and usable in a variety of settings, but it is the military context which lends urgency to its development and implementation. The next section delves into the workshop vision, model, sample outlines and activities, and feedback received from workshop participants. The final section describes the vision for future implementation and multiplication of the model, as well as areas for development and research.

THE NEED FOR CROSS-CULTURAL COMPETENCE (3C) IN THE MILITARY

Many have written about it, but some who are considering the question for the first time might question whether this whole idea of “engaging” cross-culturally is or should be applicable to military professionals at all. After all, does not the entire mission of the Department of State involve diplomacy and the building of cross-cultural relationships?

In past ages of conventional operations against conventional forces, “cultural intelligence” was relevant in a more limited way: knowing the culture of one’s enemy was still important—how he would react to certain strategies, how he would treat prisoners of war, and so on. However, it is safe to argue that in the 21st century, the need for a military that can see beyond the traditional kinds and ways of warfare is monumental. The multidimensionality of current engagements and the diverse array both of allies and adversaries in modern conflicts dictates that today’s soldier or airman² cannot be content to learn the traditional tools of the military trade, since the effective use of force is now only one part of the military’s role.

Recently, for example, in response to the disastrous earthquake in Haiti (January 12th, 2009) which killed hundreds of thousands, the military was uniquely equipped to respond rapidly and efficiently to ease suffering and expedite the flow of relief supplies. Within seventy two hours of the quake, the Air Force received permission from Haitian authorities to take control of the air traffic into Port au Prince—at first the sole way of getting supplies into the area due to destroyed ports and blocked roads. With that expertise, an airfield normally accustomed to receiving twenty or thirty flights a day was organized to receive up to one hundred and fifty daily flights at the height of the relief effort. Many other military capacities were also utilized to provide medical relief, logistical support, aid distribution, and other capabilities.³ This humanitarian role may be outside the scope of traditional military operations, but is well within the realm of

² The term “airman” is used as a generic designation for U.S. Air Force members, much as “soldier” is used as a generic term for Army members.

³ The information in this paragraph is drawn from the author’s personal involvement in the relief effort described, known as OPERATION UNIFIED RESPONSE.

what the military is being called upon to do in this age. Not only is there a moral imperative to do whatever possible to help a neighbor in such a situation, but would it not also be hypocritical to say that a principal goal of military operations in the Western hemisphere is about building partnerships and then do nothing to help when a partner nation finds itself in the grips of a terrible tragedy? In situations such as this one, where close contact with a local population is inevitable, general skills in cross-cultural communication and negotiation, as well as specific language and regional expertise, become invaluable.

It is not only in military operations other than war (MOOTW) that the cross-cultural dimension comes into play. In an environment like Afghanistan, where the enemy is not the Afghan people but rather a group or groups who have terrorized their own citizenry and that of other countries, engagement and partnership with the Afghan security and police forces, government, and citizens themselves is critical. In order to be successful at the mission of stabilizing Afghanistan and its government to be able to protect its citizens and contain extreme groups such as the Taliban and al-Qa'ida, international forces must be able to communicate and collaborate with the Afghans themselves, understanding their culture and perspectives. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and NATO forces, including the U.S. military component, must also be able to communicate and collaborate with each other. In this context, it would be difficult to say that cross-cultural competence is not relevant; surely it is not only relevant, but indispensable.

On a basic, tactical level, many leaders as well as soldiers and airmen have returned from deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan saying that the one area in which they wish they had been more prepared was the ability to deal with the cross-cultural environment. This is revealed in numerous personal conversations as well as articles and reports. Brig. Gen. Michael Jones, of the 1st Cavalry Division in Iraq, observed that "How the population feels is fundamental to the success of our mission and a lot of how they feel depends on our behavior" (German, 2004). Unfortunately, sometimes this revelation has had to come through painful faux pas. A guest speaker at one of our workshops on Iraq who had worked as an Iraqi Police captain told of how a couple of young, well-intentioned American soldiers, inflexible in their cultural views, managed to offend President Masoud Barzani of Kurdistan. Mr. Barzani was visiting Baghdad and attempting to enter the Green Zone, where he owned a home. A well-known figurehead of the Kurdish people, he was in the capital for some "important meetings" and certainly had a legitimate need to maintain his personal security. The soldiers not only insisted on having the President's car inspected by military dogs, a process seen as degrading, but also attempted to confiscate his party's weapons, an action which to President Barzani was equivalent with trying to kill him. After this treatment, although an envoy

came several times to entreat him to return for the planned meetings, he refused. As it turned out, it was President Bush's first visit to Baghdad, and he had been hoping to meet the Kurdish president. While later meetings between the two leaders showed the gaffe not to have been fatal for the relationship, it demonstrates the potentially large-scale consequences of one or two individual military members' actions.

There are multifarious accounts, as well, in which Americans, in an attempt to "get down to business" with local Afghan leaders or those of other hospitality-oriented cultures neglected or refuse to partake in the requisite amount of tea-drinking (read "relationship-building") and thus frustrated their entire mission. They were incapable of discerning the basic trust-building processes of the host culture, reverting to their time-oriented efficiency mindset.

Beyond the above anecdotes, a glimpse at several key speeches, doctrine, and policy memoranda of high-ranking military leaders gives a clear sense of the urgency with which developing cross-cultural competence in military members is now viewed at the highest levels. The 2008 National Defense Strategy (NDS) articulates the importance of partner nations in solving global problems, recognizing that partners "often possess capabilities, skills, and knowledge we cannot duplicate. We should not limit ourselves to the relationships of the past. We must broaden our partnerships for new situations or circumstances, calling on moderate voices in troubled regions and unexpected partners" (Department of Defense, 2008, p. 15).

In the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), a key issue identified is that of developing linguistic and cultural skills to a substantially greater level:

Developing broader linguistic capability and cultural understanding is also critical to prevail in the long war and to meet 21st century challenges. . . . The Department must foster a level of understanding and cultural intelligence about the Middle East and Asia comparable to that developed about the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Current and emerging challenges highlight the increasing importance of Foreign Area Officers, who provide Combatant Commanders with political-military analysis, critical language skills and cultural adeptness. (Department of Defense, 2006, pp. 78)

The QDR then outlines specific actions planned to further the Department of Defense's language and culture goals, including plans to increase funding for linguist programs to recruit and train native and heritage speakers to serve as translators; require language training for officer candidates; and expand immersion programs, semester abroad study

opportunities, and inter-academy foreign exchanges. It also urged improving language and regional training prior to deployments and developing country and language familiarization packages as well as operationally-focused language instruction modules for deploying forces.

The U.S. Institute of Peace’s “Iraq Study Group Report” of 2006 noted that

All of our efforts in Iraq, military and civilian, are handicapped by Americans’ lack of language and cultural understanding. Our embassy of 1,000 has 33 Arabic speakers, just six of whom are at the level of fluency. In a conflict that demands effective and efficient communication with Iraqis, we are often at a disadvantage. There are still far too few Arab language–proficient military and civilian officers in Iraq, to the detriment of the U.S. mission...The Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and the Director of National Intelligence *should accord the highest possible priority to professional language proficiency and cultural training* [italics added], in general and specifically for U.S. officers and personnel about to be assigned to Iraq. (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2006, p. 92)

From these and many other articles, speeches, policies, and experiential anecdotes, the mandate is clear: the military needs cross-culturally adept members more than ever, and more focus must be given to the training that will produce them.

Overview of Air Force Efforts

This broad discussion of the need for cross-cultural competence in Department of Defense policy provides the context and direction for Air Force policies and progress in the same arena, which is the primary concern of this project and paper. Air Force-specific guidance and programs, in turn, provide the backdrop for the ENGAGE experiment and ultimately may supply the structure for its broader implementation, whether on a continued “volunteer” and locally-oriented basis or in a more centralized way.

The United States Air Force has a responsibility to ensure that airmen are prepared to deploy beyond the acquisition of the proper uniforms, weapons qualification, and tactical skills. They must be engaged, perhaps first at a very basic level, with the concept of culture. Each must understand her own worldview, how it may differ from the perspectives of others, and the importance of these ideas in today’s operational environment. He should be given tools and resources to take personal initiative in becoming more competent and assured that he, as an individual airman, has the ability

and may have very concrete opportunities to make a difference, as he communicates effectively in a cross-cultural environment.

This paper does not attempt to trace the history of cross-cultural competence and training in the Air Force over its history nor the important role that the cross-cultural dimension has played in the conflicts of the last half-century. Many other articles and books have explored these issues. (A worthy bibliography to develop in the future would chronicle such resources.) Instead, my object is to give a brief snapshot of the status of recent and current Air Force efforts in the process of developing a more cross-culturally competent Force.

In September 2006, General T. Michael Moseley, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, spoke to the attendees at an Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition, saying,

You know the need for increased technical, cross-cultural, and regional skills throughout the Air Force...Our PME (Professional Military Education) courses now incorporate more regional studies. Students are beginning to explore these new language courses, again focusing on this *strategic stronghold business of awareness about the world* [italics added] that we live in and the uncertain future. We're also growing a new band of international affairs specialists; we envision filling key international positions for our combatant commands, DOD agencies, and U.S. embassies around the world. (Moseley, 2006)

The highest-ranking Air Force member could have spoken about many kinds of advances in technology and other issues of interest to this particular audience, but the advancement of intercultural skills was of critical importance to him and, as revealed by the following comments, to various top leaders of the Air Force.

In 2007, the Secretary of the Air Force, the Honorable Michael W. Wynne, released a letter to airmen that coined the term “every airman an ambassador.” While some may have political or technical objections to the term, his point was clear: airmen and, by extension, military members are often the first (and certainly potent) points of contact between U.S. citizens and the citizens of other cultures. They simultaneously represent the United States and the United States military, and their behavior is sure to shape the perceptions of those with whom they interact on the most tactical level. At a 2007 Pentagon town hall meeting on the topic, Mr. Wynne elaborated, “As your Secretary, I am committed to boosting your regional, cultural and language skills to make you a more capable Ambassador so that you can help build lasting long-term relationships with our allies and coalition partners” (Wynne, 2007).

More recently, in a speech at the Defense Language Institute in October, 2009, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Michael Donley affirmed that

A well-rounded understanding of the world and the diversity of its people and cultures which you promote here will make our country and our military a more effective leader and coalition partner in global affairs ... This increasing need to work with many different peoples and form close partnerships underscores the need to communicate with them, to understand their culture, and ultimately, their world view. (Donley, 2009).

The Air Force Culture, Region & Language Flight Plan (2009, May) discusses this “strategic imperative” to develop training in cross-cultural competence, noting that the “expanding and dynamic operational environment requires the Air Force to operate in and across the gamut of cultural, regional, and linguistic contexts. Most airmen have limited exposure with many of these cultures, regions, and languages, and therefore, will require targeted development of increased cross-cultural competence to appropriately, effectively and decisively achieve desired effect[s]” (p. 5).

One of the most significant recent steps in improving cross-cultural competence for the Air Force was the establishment of the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) in 2006. The Center is strategically co-located at Maxwell Air Force Base with Air University (AU), which provides the bulk of Professional Military Education courses for both enlisted and officers, servicing about 30,000 students per year. The Center is charged with designing and implementing culture, region, and language training to reach the entire Air Force population (AFCLC, 2007).⁴

Over the past years, the center has grown their staff, engaged in research and program development, and begun to implement various aspects of their program. Their vision involves incorporating cultural, language, and regional training into every level of professional military **education**, on the one hand, and launching “just-in-time” pre-deployment **training** on the other. Measures are currently also being implemented toward the expansion of language training for Air Force members, which, though relevant, will not be discussed in depth here.

It should be noted that Air Force members may often have access to culture and language training provided by the Army or other services, especially for joint

⁴ A plentiful amount of information about the AFCLC is available at their website, <http://www.culture.af.edu>.

assignments. Mobile Training Teams (MTTs) from the Defense Language Institute (DLI) or other locations may be able to respond to specific requests from units for culture- or language-specific training. Special Operations troops often have access to specialized regional and intercultural communication courses such as those offered at the Joint Special Operations University (JSOU) located at Hurlburt Field, FL. However, none of these resources are adequate or have the capacity to reach all Air Force members, and their use is sporadic and limited.

As alluded to in the AFCRL Flight Plan (above), considering the multitude of backgrounds of Air Force members, many of them coming directly from towns, cities, high schools, and colleges where they may or may not have been exposed (or compelled to engage with) people very different from themselves, the challenges in producing programs which will bring all to some kind of interculturally competent level are understandably rigorous. Without a doubt, there is a substantial number of culturally attuned, globally-minded, and language-savvy people in the military and AF. However, often these assets are not identified or strategically utilized, especially when they are lower in rank. Secondary career fields such as the “International Affairs Specialist” and “Regional Affairs Specialist” programs are not usually available to officers until they have served perhaps 7-9 years in their primary career field. Meanwhile, their language skills dwindle away and their sights may wander to other organizations where their unique aptitudes will be employed, appreciated, and developed. This is clearly a retention issue, an area which deserves (and has received some) attention. The ENGAGE model may offer a partial solution by providing an outlet at the base level to utilize and recognize these “globally-minded” personnel early on, equipping them to facilitate workshops which train others and simultaneously expand their own cross-cultural competence and experience.

The “ENGAGE” Model

The ENGAGE project is a grassroots effort to enhance cross-cultural competence (3C) in Air Force members, especially in the critical season leading up to deployment. The inherent flexibility and creativity of the experiment makes it applicable to a variety of audiences, which to this point has included individual units, spouses and families of deployed members, and groups of children. Its primary focus, however, is pre-deployment training. This paper gives an overview of the vision and mission, format, and facilitation methods, followed by outline-based descriptions of two kinds of sample workshops.

The vision of ENGAGE is to be an experience (not a briefing) that launches participants into deeper understanding of the critical and strategic nature of effective cross-cultural

interaction, equipping them with perspectives and tools for cross-cultural engagement. The **mission** of the project is to create a model for locally based cross-cultural training that can be broadly incorporated into the Air Force’s developing efforts toward instilling global awareness in the Force.

One of the driving ideas behind this workshop’s creation is that computer-based trainings and PowerPoint briefings are not enough to make the necessary impression toward mind-opening and attitude-modification. Due to over-saturation with this kind of rote training, most airmen are not likely to be fully engaged when clicking through screens, no matter how substantial or useful the material. There is simply no replacement for face-to-face, interactive, experiential training. Vella (2000) puts it well in her discussion of learning tasks and the assumptions that enable teachers or facilitators to move toward a more learner-centric approach:

Learners learn when they are actively engaged... engagement can be cognitive, affective, or kinesthetic, depending on the content. It can be deeply reflective or fiercely argumentative. Engagement can begin with the lives and experience of the learners, or with the research-based new content. Although it can take on as many shapes as there are learners, it must be intentional and designed. (pp. 3-4)

Workshop developers and facilitators should always be seeking new ways to engage the learners in any and every way possible, and this in itself is a stimulating and exciting process of discovery.

The workshop aligns with the Air Force Culture and Language Center’s vision by offering workshops of two types: culture-general and culture-specific. It has focused thus far (since the experiment’s launch in 2007) on the pre-deployment **training** side, as opposed to the long-term incorporation of culture and language training into PME, which the Center is particularly well-placed to implement. The workshop has simply been one way to bridge the gap from the vision of extending pre-deployment cross-cultural training to the entire Air Force, to reaching the individual airman in a personal, timely way on the local level.

Format and set-up. The workshop model engages the whole person to prepare for cross-cultural challenges in an energizing, dynamic environment. It relies on a certain level of hospitality, and it is helpful for the facilitator or facilitation team to think of themselves as hosts. Budget permitting, some kind of food and/or drink adds interest and puts participants at ease. If available, music from the target culture enhances the environment as people are gathering. Lower/warm lighting is ideal, though there should

be enough light to easily read and write. Greeting and giving basic instructions in another language, while gesturing (“Welcome! Come on in, please take off your shoes”) sets the mood and takes participants/guests immediately into a different place: one of some uncertainty and hopefully curiosity. When the facilitator does not have direct experience with the focus culture, some of these actions may feel or seem contrived. The guest expert, as part of the lead-team, may also be able to participate in the greeting/welcoming process (this should be discussed ahead of time, as noted below in the facilitation section).

The set-up of the room is also important; aim for an interactive arrangement such as a circle of chairs or cushions on the floor around a tablecloth (where the food is!). Accordingly, the ideal size for a workshop is fifteen to eighteen people, and with more than twenty-five the format may need to change somewhat to accommodate the active learning. For larger groups, tables of four or five people can also work well. Going “all out” each time may be too high maintenance for an all-volunteer team, but it can also be fun and relaxing. Ideally, the primary facilitator should focus on receiving the guest expert and making sure the content is ready, while one or two others should prepare the room. The hosting team will want to be focused on and attentive to their guests, both maximizing the learners’ experience and likely learning something from them also.

Despite the initial uncertainty created by such an approach, participants have indicated in their feedback that they found it effective and memorable to be shaken free of their comfort zone and invited into “another world” for a little while. Most find it refreshing not to find another PowerPoint briefing but to be engaged with pictures, maps, objects, and the other people in the group: the participants, facilitator, and the guest expert. While attempts at reproducing given cultural environments will necessarily be only glimpses or “tastes” and could arguably even reinforce certain stereotypes, the visual, auditory, and sensory engagement at the very least provides an excellent place to begin the conversation. It sets the scene.

Facilitation. Workshop creation and preparation itself takes partnership and cross-cultural communication. Most sessions involve finding and coordinating with a “guest expert:” someone from the focus culture who can articulate key insights on the challenges and joys of interaction between his/her original culture and mainstream American culture. In the current context of ENGAGE, direct prior experience with the American military is particularly valuable.

Good facilitator candidates are those with quality communication skills and a passion for enabling cross-cultural engagement for the Air Force. It helps to have lived through some formative cross-cultural contexts and relationships from which to draw insight.

Many more of these can also be procured along the way! It helps to also have a knack for hospitality and plenty of stamina. The facilitator’s energy and passion (or lack thereof) will transfer to the participants. The facilitator’s job is not to be the expert.

In contrast to facilitators, “guest experts” should be deeply versed in the focus culture or topic and comfortable speaking to groups. If they have observed (or been involved in) contact between the U.S. military and local people of the country in question it gives them a particularly relevant and useful perspective. Even if they have not, they should be able to express answers to questions like, "What do Americans sometimes do that is offensive in your culture? What are some of the top phrases and gestures that communicate respect or disrespect? What kind of ideas do people of your country have about Americans? What do you think Americans typically least understand about your culture?"

In terms of finding a guest expert, Universities and Cultural Centers are always good places to start. Many local resources like this can naturally be found by searching the internet. One can also look for organizations that process political refugees; many of them are highly educated and willing to share their knowledge and experience.

The facilitator should build the workshop, working closely with the guest expert to include key topics. While some sample formats and content are included here, each workshop will be unique, and the possibilities for cross-cultural exercises and experiments are endless. In working with the guest expert, the facilitator should share the basic concept of ENGAGE over e-mail or phone and meet with him or her at least once in person before the workshop to go over the format for the workshop and get a sense of working together. The expert is often willing to share ideas about how to make the workshop as authentic as possible. For instance, how should people be greeted (will the guest expert be involved with this)? Should participants take their shoes off? What kind of finger food would work well?

Other details are always important, such as having a plan for who will meet the guest expert on the day of the workshop, as well as when and where, since usually he or she will need to be escorted onto the base. As the facilitators develop the workshops following these basic principles, they have the freedom to use tools, ideas, and checklists which work well for them, or to develop new ones. Having toured the basic format and process of the workshops, especially in terms of preparation, we now turn to deeper descriptions of the two types of workshops, including some sample content.

Culture-General Workshop (Basic level)

Time: 1.5 to 2 hours

This type of ENGAGE workshop takes a “culture-general” approach to learning. The goal of the workshop is to communicate these somewhat abstract ideas in a lively, memorable, and personal way. The participants are given a certain amount of material on cross-cultural concepts, some of which many of them will grasp intuitively. The bulk of the workshop, however, consists of working with and processing this material in a variety of ways, including discussion, reflection, exercises, dialogues, role-plays, story-telling, and so forth.

For pre-deployment training, a culture-specific workshop may be the more relevant choice, but culture-general material is foundational for all cross-cultural interaction and learning. A typical introductory culture-general workshop might be set up in a distinctive cultural way (such as a Central Asian-style floor-setting), just to set the atmosphere. However, facilitators should clarify that the workshop itself introduces general topics in cross-cultural competence, rather than delving into a specific culture. If facilitators have deeper knowledge of a specific culture, examples or artifacts from that culture may be useful to provide a discussion of comparison and contrast with a typical American mindset and culture.

Following the introduction, the facilitator brings the participants’ attention to a *Far Side* cartoon which shows an alien ship arriving with creatures whose heads look very much like human hands. The caption of the cartoon reads: “Inadvertently, Ray dooms the entire earth to annihilation when, in an attempt to be friendly, he seizes their leader by the head and shakes vigorously.” This is a classic, simple, cross-cultural misunderstanding with more drastic repercussions than anyone expected.

A good way to have participants introduce themselves is to give their names and tell (in 30 seconds or less) about a time they had a cross-cultural moment or felt out of place. This immediately gets participants involved, sharing a piece of their context, and building an argument for the universality of cross-cultural confrontations or contacts.

The workshop’s major themes are:

1. Cultural Self-Identity—importance of gaining understanding one’s own culture/worldview and its major areas of difference with others

Illustration: different people “see” the world different ways. Have one person wearing prescription glasses remove them and trade them with someone else wearing glasses... how does the world look? Have a discussion about the ease or difficulty with which we are able to assume and adjust to another person’s glasses. You may be convinced your prescribed pair of glasses may be the “best” and most comfortable (especially for you), but what if each pair of glasses that we learned how to

wear showed us new things in our world which had previously been invisible to us—new colors, new landscapes, new ideas?

2. Concepts and levels of culture (iceberg model)—how observable behaviors or objects are connected to deeper attitudes, beliefs, and values (specific examples)

Illustration: pass out an iceberg image to each participant. Have them write one observable behavior or object from their own culture, and underneath it the values or beliefs that it stems from. Give examples, such as the disposable coffee cup: an object which exists because of a culture which values high productivity. (Have these objects with you.) Hear several examples of the objects or behaviors people drew or wrote and what they described as the underlying values and beliefs.

3. Cross-cultural competence in the military: what is it, why is it important, and what does it entail to acquire it?

The aforementioned Flight Plan of May 2009 defines cross-cultural competence (3C) as “The ability to quickly and accurately comprehend, then appropriately and effectively engage individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds to achieve the desired effect.” Selmeski (2007) elaborates with two further conditions: (1) despite not having an in-depth knowledge of the other culture, and (2) even though fundamental aspects of the other culture may contradict one’s one taken-for-granted assumptions/deeply-held beliefs” (Selmeski, 2007, p. 12)

This section is rife with possibilities for interactive learning. Some ideas follow.

a. Break the participants into groups of four or five, giving each a summary or portion of an article on either a blunder or a success (“blunder” articles are likely to be more readily available, since successes generally cause little drama) in military cross-cultural relations. Group members discuss a set of questions like: what was at the core of this blunder or miscommunication? Was it ignorance? Carelessness (or a favorite military term, lack of situational awareness)? Was it avoidable? What kind of training or insight could possibly have prevented the mishap?

b. Include a section on the joys, challenges, and importance of language-learning. Even a few appropriate phrases and gestures could make a world of difference in the way one’s approach and presence, especially as a military member, is perceived. A role-play in pairs may be appropriate here, where the individuals are assigned different languages (one of them would be English. Each has an objective and brief instructions on how to react if certain things are said or done. This can be done with real or imaginary cultures, and it can also be done en masse by dividing the group into 2 “cultures” which come into contact with each other and find aspects of each other’s

behavior to be puzzling or offensive. See examples of individual and en masse role plays in Appendix I.

c. Although the workshop tends to thrive on minimal “screen” focus, videos or movie clips can be quite effective at sparking interest and discussion. One is the scene in *The Last Samurai* where the captured American soldier is totally at odds with his surroundings in the Samurai village. Two separate clips could be shown, on either side of a discussion about “what it takes” to adapt, the second clip showing that he has come to respect and understand his earlier-despised hosts, even to the point of going to battle on their side.

Each workshop finishes with very short, clear feedback forms and a thank you to any guest experts, the hosting/facilitation team, and the guests themselves for coming. The role of a guest expert in the culture-general workshop is optional. We have had great success with a contact who is an Egyptian anthropologist. He offers both a scholarly perspective on culture and a background that enables him to see Americans, though he is now an American citizen himself, from a unique angle. However, the workshop can be done well without a guest expert and may incorporate material presented in the Air Force’s computer-based training on “culture-general” topics. The key to successful facilitation of this workshop is preparation and creativity; these ideas are only a beginning.

Culture-Specific Workshop: Afghanistan

Time: 1.5 to 2 hours

The workshop might begin by greeting the guests, preferably in Dari or Pashto (with the help of the guest expert, if he/she is willing), inviting them to come in, take off their boots, and sit down on the floor around a tablecloth set with dried fruit, cookies, and, if available, Afghan snacks such as *noqol*. Where appropriate, hosts may want to greet their guests in a traditional way, such as with three kisses on alternating cheeks—a traditional way of greeting people of the same gender in Afghanistan, especially women. This is a little riskier, since not everyone will be prepared. Facilitators should gauge where their guests are, and perhaps choose one or two people to greet in this way, later discussing how it made them feel or react. Maps, books, or other cultural items can also be displayed in the middle of the tablecloth (with the food around the edges closer to the guests). Thick blankets and long pillows work well for sitting. One team member serves tea while the primary facilitator introduces him/herself and the workshop. If available, Persian-style music can be played while the guests are arriving.

The participants first learn a basic greeting and how to introduce themselves in Dari or

Pashto, repeating after the guest expert something like “Salaam, nameh man...” and their name. If there are more than twenty participants, the more efficient way would be to teach the greeting to all and then have introductions in pairs, encouraging them to practice it several times.

It is helpful to organize the workshop into several topics of interest, or key cultural themes. One outline we have used is the “Five H’s:” HOSPITALITY, HONOR, HISTORY, HURT, and HOPE. The first two give a sense of some of the key values of the culture, as well as some of their practical implications. Here the facilitator might read a proverb or fable about hospitality, and then ask participants to discuss it in light of what they know or have heard about Afghan culture. Have they been surprised by a similarly hospitable culture in the past? What were some of those experiences? What is different about the way we treat guests and act as hosts in the United States, for instance, versus in Afghanistan?

In the section on honor, a powerful illustration is to bring out a burqa and ask for a volunteer to put it on for a few minutes. Meanwhile, the facilitator might pass around pictures that incite discussion about styles of dress, modesty, and gender roles in Afghan culture. Participants are then invited to share their impressions of these pictures, trying not to pass judgment but to understand how things work in the culture represented. Good questions to ask the participants might be: Why do you think they wear these types of coverings? How is modesty related to honor? What is the conception of honor in your society and how is it different? This would lead into a time of hearing from the guest speaker on issues like the dress code, the variety of ethnic groups in Afghanistan, “Pushtunwali” (the code of honor for Pashtuns, who dominate Southern Afghanistan into Pakistan), the Afghan and how their culture and language may differ from that of the Tajiks, Hazaras, or Uzbeks.

The history section gives a glimpse into some of the influences on the highly diverse, competitive, and resilient mix of cultures that co-exist in Afghanistan. Here a role play is particularly effective in illustrating the complexity of a place which has undergone decades, if not centuries, of conflict and shifting tribal loyalties depending on the worst enemy at the time. The historical role-play scans the last 30 years or so primarily around the character of a Pashtun leader (i.e. warlord), Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Other participants are assigned the roles of Ahmed Shah Mahsood (a Tajik leader), Pakistan, the Taliban, the C.I.A., Iran, and Saudi Arabia. As the narrator (either the facilitator or a co-facilitator who has practiced saying the names) relates a basic sequence of events, monopoly money and “drugs” (represented by pouches or simply a card that says “drugs”) trade hands, “grenades” (crumpled up pieces of newspaper) are launched back and forth between various groups, and powers rise and fall in 20 minutes of controlled chaos. By the end, it is clear why “winning” in Afghanistan will never be easy, and why

understanding a little about the ethnicities, politics, and cultures of the people could be not only “nice to know” but absolutely vital.

We do the sections on *hurt* and *hope* (usually intertwined) simply because the suffering undergone by a large majority of Afghan people living in Afghanistan during the last decades has a major impact on their lives and outlooks . . .yet their resilience is a significant and noticeable feature. A way to give a sense of the everyday hardships experienced by many Afghans is to show or pass around a series of pictures of everyday life (children hauling water, a man carrying his wares on a bicycle, a child with no legs begging, women waiting outside a hospital, etc.) or to have participants read mini-vignettes heard on the street. A sense of the hope that exists can be grasped in a similar way, with pictures of Afghans rebuilding their homes, spending time with their families, running and attending schools and aid organizations, training at the Police Academy, and so forth. This section can be very much tailored to the experience of the guest expert or changed into something else he or she is eager to speak about. If the guest’s family had to leave Afghanistan, for instance (as millions did), they are part of a mass emigration which has had a significant impact on the culture.

At the end of the workshop, participants fill out brief feedback forms and browse resource tables, including country handbooks, phrase books, “smart cards,” and a list of helpful websites, which are available for them to take. The facilitator should emphasize that these tools are only a beginning, not the end “solution” to your cultural needs. Culture is deep, complex, and endless. These tools should spark questions and curiosity and ideally launch a willing learner into his/her own exploration of a culture that will revolve around relationships with real people and may even continue into the future beyond the deployment.

Future Development and Research

Currently the ENGAGE experiment remains at the grassroots level, is run by volunteers, and has an extremely limited funding stream which stems from the good faith and support of a base agency, the “Airmen and Family Readiness Center” (A&FRC). There are several ways the workshop could develop to become more widespread. This section outlines two possible courses of action for future development. The major questions which identify the variables necessary for the workshop to continue to exist and evolve are: Who will fund it? Who will facilitate it, and how will these facilitators be equipped and trained? What organization will oversee the program to ensure quality and assess effectiveness?

1. Remain at the base level, run by qualified volunteers in an experimental, decentralized format, but loosely overseen by the Air Force Culture and Language Center.

Facilitators could potentially be trained at a brief “add-on” workshop in conjunction with one of their Professional Military Education courses at Air University, such as Air and Space Basic Course (ASBC) for new officers or Squadron Officer School (SOS). They would likely continue to rely on the support of the local A&FRCs for facilities and possibly financial support, and thus they may require the higher-level approval of this organization. Overall financial support for the program might also be attained through the AFCLC. This course of action has risks in terms of continuity, since it would still be sustained by volunteers. It would require additional staffing at the Air Force Culture and Language Center to design and conduct the “train-the-trainer” workshops and would still face challenges of reaching target audiences in a consistent way.

2. Incorporate the workshop into another pre-deployment training venue, like Combat Airman Skills Training (CAST), conducted at three locations and intended to eventually reach all Air Force members before they deploy. This may be complicated in terms of training facilitators and having them stationed at the training locations, but has great potential in terms of reaching the target audience at a critically relevant time, often literally on their way to the deployment location. Much remains to be explored in terms of the realistic potential of this option.

CONCLUSION

The United States is a leader in the world. It has powerful weapons of warfare at its disposal. But what may win the conflicts of today is humility, the willingness and ability to see the world from the eyes of another and to change one’s tactics accordingly. It is this critical cross-cultural competence that the ENGAGE workshop seeks to develop in Air Force members, despite the many challenges and seeming paradoxes encountered by the military peace-maker.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A special thank you to Magdy Behman and Hamdy Singary for their insights into this workshop, to ENGAGE team volunteers at Hanscom AFB and Davis-Monthan AFB, to the Air Force Culture and Language Center for their support and input, and to my husband Peter Dyrud for his unending love and editing prowess.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Felisa Dyrud grew up a "third culture kid" in Chile, Kazakhstan, and California. With a B.S. in Humanities (Air Force Academy), an M.A. in English (University of Massachusetts), she is currently a PhD student in Near Eastern Studies, University of Arizona. She is married to Peter Dyrud, also an AF officer.

REFERENCES

Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC). (2007, December). AFCLC Charter. Retrieved from <http://www.culture.af.edu/PDF/AFCLCcharter.pdf>

Air Force Culture & Language Center (AFCLC), Air Force Culture, Region & Language Program. (2009, May). *Air Force culture, region, and language flight plan*. Retrieved from <http://www.culture.af.edu/PDF/flightplan.pdf>

Donley, M., (2009, October). *Air Force committed to increased language training*. Keynote address to the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center's 68th Anniversary Dinner, Presidio of Monterey, CA. Retrieved from <http://www.af.mil/information/speeches/speech.asp?id=513>

Efforts to improve the Department of Defense's language and cultural awareness: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities of the Committee on Armed Services (S. hrg. 110-201), U.S. Senate, 110th Cong. (2007) (testimony of Major General (ret.) Robert H. Scales) . Retrieved from <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-110shrg201-pt5/html/CHRG-110shrg201-pt5.htm>

German, S., (2004, October 19). Cultural sensitivity makes a difference. *Defend America* (U.S. Department of Defense News about the War on Terrorism). Retrieved from <http://www.defendamerica.mil/articles/oct2004/a101804h.html>

Jumper, J. P. (2004, June). *Cultural awareness for an expeditionary military*. Remarks to the National Language Conference, Adelphi, MD. Retrieved from http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/af/ca_for_exp_af.htm

Moseley, T. M. (2006, September). *The future of air and space power*. Address to Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+future+of+air+and+space+power-a0152936436>

Department of Defense. (2008). *National Defense Strategy* (NDS). Retrieved from <http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2008NationalDefenseStrategy.pdf>

Department of Defense. (2006, February). Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report. Retrieved from <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/dod/qdr-2006-report.pdf>

Selmeski, B. R., (2007, May). *Military cross-cultural competence: Core concepts and individual development* (Rev. ed.). Air Force Culture and Language Center Contract Report 2007-01. Royal Military College of Canada: Centre for Security, Armed Forces & Society.

Selmeski, B., (2008, November). *Anthropology for the masses: A moral-practical argument for educational engagement*. Paper presented at the 107th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, San Francisco, CA.

U.S. Institute of Peace. (2006). *Iraq Study Group Report: The way forward – a new approach*. (J. A. Baker, III & L. H. Hamilton, co-chairs). Retrieved from <http://www.usip.org/isg/index.html>

Vella, J. (2000). *Taking learning to task: Creative strategies for teaching adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Wynne, M. W. (2007, February 7). Every airman an ambassador. In *Letter to Airmen* (from Secretary of the Air Force, the Honorable Michael W. Wynne) . <http://www.931arg.afrc.af.mil/shared/media/document/AFD-070226-025.pdf>

APPENDIX A: Historical Role-Play**Following One Warlord’s Path in Recent Afghan History**

Purpose: Participants gain a vivid sense of the complexity and adversity of recent Afghan history. They learn about the role of the U.S. and other nations, the dizzying changes of sides and roles, and some major players and ethnic groups. This role-play will not usually go very neatly; this is inherent, expected, and part of the experience.

Time: About 25 minutes. Can easily take more not closely controlled or more discussion is sparked.

Step 1: Preparation

- Print role cards with the following names or groups on them, big enough to read:

Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (Pashtun)	Pres. Najibullah (86-92)
Ahmad Shah Masoud (Tajik)	Soviets (+Afgh communists)
Mullah Omar (Pashtun) / Taliban	Osama Bin Laden / Al Qaeda
General Rashid Dostum (Uzbek)	CIA
Ismail Khan (Herati)	ISI (Pakistan’s CIA)
Karim Khalili (Hazara)	Saudi Arabia
Mujaheddin	Iran
Pres. Rabbani	

-A sign or card can be made for the Northern (anti-Taliban) alliance, not specifically assigned; will be shared by several groups.

- Gather other materials needed:
 - Something to symbolize drugs (suspicious looking bags or even a paper reading “DRUGS”)
 - Monopoly money
 - Weapons such as toy water guns
 - Newspaper to be crumpled up and launched as rockets/grenades between the groups
 - Props such as a Afghan scarves or hats for the warlords (cowboy hats work too), sunglasses for the CIA and ISI, Iranian or Saudi flags
- Ensure room set-up facilitates role-play:
 - Plenty of space to move around
 - Designate one area (such as a pillow or chair) for “Kabul,” representing the seat of government. Various groups will stand there and then be deposed. Other areas can

be designated for Pakistan, Iran, the US, and Saudi Arabia. The role-players for those countries will stand in the designated areas; others may move back and forth.

Step 2: Implementation

1. Assign roles to workshop participants. Depending on number of participants, may have to exclude some of the less essential ones or group people together with warlords or countries.
2. Distribute \$\$ to CIA, Pakistan (ISI), Saudi Arabia, and Iran. CIA also receives weapons.
3. A narrator (facilitator or another member of facilitator team) will read the following historical narration, directing role-players to respond with relevant actions. It is best if this is done by someone who has practiced pronouncing the names and is familiar with the history to clarify or elaborate wherever needed. Narration consists of the main dated lines and sub-bullets clarify what is to be done by the role-players.

Historical Narration:

1973-79: US and Pakistan start providing support to Islamists opposing Soviets in Afghanistan

- CIA, ISI, & Iran give \$\$ and support to Afghan Islamists (Mujaheddin)

1978: Pro-Soviet Coup. Islamic militants carry out campaign of terror, assassinating teachers and civil servants. Soviets + Afgh Communists rise to seat of power in Kabul

- Mujaheddin and GH and cronies begin lobbing newspaper artillery at Soviets and innocents in Kabul

1979: CIA & ISI start funneling money to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar (GH), already known to be a ruthless, corrupt drug dealer

1980: Bin Laden is go-between for Saudi and Afghan Warlords. Close to Hekmatyar. Good friends with ISI.

- Bin Laden walks back and forth between the groups, delivering some \$\$ from Saudi to GH. They shake hands.

1982-91: Afghan opium production sky-rockets. A major heroin trafficker is GH, who is receiving about ½ of CIA's covert weapons

- Drugs & weapons pile up at the feet of GH

1983-84: GH receives hundreds of millions of dollars of supplies from ISI warehouses. Still among the most cruel & extreme of Afghanistan's warlords. Bin Laden, operating out of Pakistan, also strengthens Hekmatyar's opium smuggling operations.

- ISI gives \$\$ to GH, Bin Laden adds to the drug pile

1985-87: US-backed guerrilla attacks launched against soviet targets in Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, & Tajikistan. Primary leadership given to Hekmatyar.

- President Najibullah is in power in Kabul
- Mujaheddin and GH lob some more newspaper rockets at Soviets

1985: Pentagon/CIA reviewing Arab participation in the fighting, decide they want more. Sponsor Osama bin Laden & his group, who set up camp in Afgh-n (but separate from the other warlords).

- CIA gives money to Bin Laden, who moves from Pakistan to Afghanistan

1991: Osama Bin Laden begins laundering money from the drug trade, cooperating with GH

1992: Soviet puppet Pres. M. Najibullah ousted by Ahmed Shah Massoud.

Disagreements about warlords; (CIA thinks of funding GH, state dept. favors Massoud.)

1994: CIA claims partial responsibility for car bombing of WTC, because it helped train & support several of the bombers. More than half belonged to GH's faction, which had received around \$1B. Al-Kifah Center in NY was used as a recruiting & training center to support the Afghan rebels during Soviet occupation, later became Al-Qaeda base.

1994: After the end of the Soviet-Afghan war, an endless civil war and power-struggle continue in Afghanistan. Training camps have sprung up all over the country and Islamists from other countries are coming to train. 20 camps belong to GH. Although he had served as prime minister, Hekmatyar and his militia (Hizb-i-Islami) spend their time shelling Kabul and kill as many as 25,000 civilians.

- Taliban, Mujaheddin, Northern Alliance all throw newspaper rockets at each other over Kabul.

1996: Osama Bin Laden allies with al-Qaeda and becomes their guest. They join with GH in calling for jihad against Ahmed Shah Massoud and their fellow Muslims (for not having a strict enough interpretation of Islamic law and lifestyle). Also openly targeting U.S./Western targets in Arabian peninsula.

1996: Taliban conquers Kabul. They close training camps of other warlords (incl. GH) but keep open those of Bin Laden. Hekmatyar flees to Iran due to political differences. The Taliban wreak havoc on human rights and crush the population with extreme Sharia government. Girls schools close, little medical are available for women, countless books, museums, and historical artifacts destroyed. Few in authority are educated except in a religious madrassa.

- The Northern Alliance forms, mostly made up of non-Pashtuns who realize that the Taliban is a danger to all of them and to the livelihood of Afghanistan. (Dostum, Massoud, & other warlords join forces)

2001: After years of brutal oppression, the US steps in after the struggle arrives on its doorstep in the attacks of 9/11. Together with the Northern Alliance, they wrest the Taliban from power in Kabul, but strongholds remain in the south and in Pakistan.

2001: Although Hikmatyar had been opposed to the Taliban he supported Bin Laden. When the U.S. attacks the Taliban, GH returns to Afghanistan and sides with them, actually hoping to create a united front against the "worse" enemy of the foreign invaders, out of the Taliban AND the Northern Alliance.

More recently Gulbuddin Hekmatyar has become somewhat of a “magnet of the disaffection among Pashtuns” (CACI) and should continue to be watched closely, since as his shifting loyalties suggest, he seems to be ultimately about power and position.