

Enabling Cultural Adaptability

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ABSTRACT

Military staff performing command and control functions require a unique set of skills when working in a multinational environment that are not typically taught in national or NATO training venues. It is vital to be able to navigate the challenges of culture during information exchange regarding team tasks, goals and mission, response sequencing, time and position coordination, load balancing, matching resources to task requirements, adjusting activities in response to errors and omissions, and general activity monitoring. Lack of skill in multicultural teamwork has been found to be an unnecessary weakness in military staffs, specifically at the Joint Task Force level. This paper presents a technology solution: a web-based tool named "GLOBESMART® COMMANDER" currently under development by the U.S. Army Research Laboratory Human Research and Engineering Directorate and MeridianEaton Global, an international consulting company.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Multinational alliances in war or peace are the way of the future. For example, alliances Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq are representative of this transformation. No where is the cultural diversity inherent in multinational teams more prevalent than at the operations level. Task forces executing Commander's intent in the performance of critical command and control functions in a multinational environment often have the capacity for more creative approaches to problem solving, but they can also experience difficulties in coordination, aligning team members to complete tasks, and error-checking. In these culturally diverse groups, failure to understand the impact of culture on thoughts and behaviour often results

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in distrust, confused priorities, frustration, misunderstanding, even conflicting goals. Extended deployments may magnify problems rooted in culture, resulting in increased experienced stress by individuals on those deployments.

2.0 IMPACT OF CULTURE ON TEAMWORK

Culture is the totality of socially transmitted behaviour patterns, arts, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought typical of a population or community at any given time [1]. It is the acquired knowledge used to interpret experience, form values, create attitudes and influence behaviour. Values are basic convictions that people have regarding what is right and wrong, good and bad, important and unimportant. Values are relatively stable, not subject to sudden shifts or impulses of the moment, and serve as a standard for judging the behaviour of others. The ability to adapt, as necessary, to differences in cultural influences on behaviour is a key success factor for effective multinational team.

Culture impacts teamwork in various ways. Members of the military in any NATO country belong to organizations with related command structures and share some experiences in common. However, they also tend to behave in ways that are consistent with cultural norms for their own country. Several decades of research have led to the identification of dimensions of culture that shape individual behaviours; these behaviours affect team performance in both civilian and military settings. Table 1 presents six of the most commonly referenced cultural dimensions along with brief references to their practical implications.

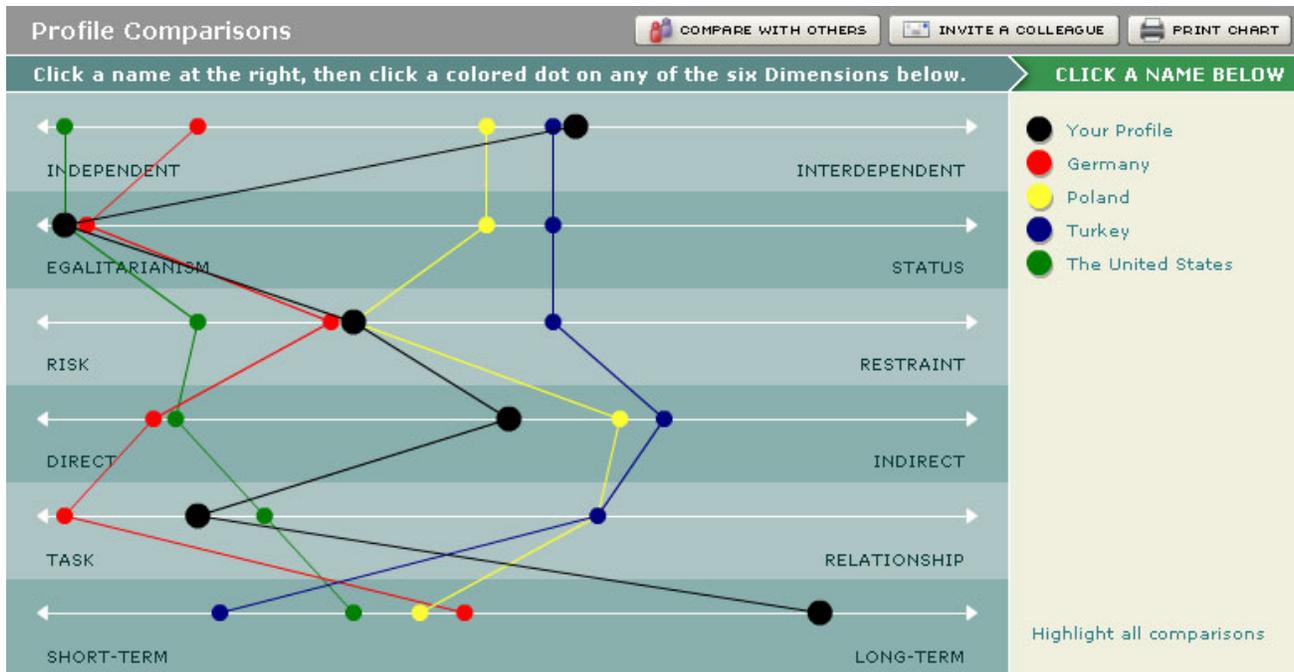
<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Practical Implications</u>
1. Independence/Interdependence:	Shapes a preference for individual initiative and action, or for a more group-oriented approach emphasizes the interests of the team as a whole
2. Egalitarianism/Status:	Shapes a preference for mutual consultation in decision-making, or for greater deference to rank and hierarchy
3. Risk/Restraint:	Shapes a preference for rapid action and risk-taking, or for more cautious and calculated actions based on ample information
4. Direct/Indirect:	Shapes a preference for open and explicit communication, or for careful attention paid to context or to implicit meanings in a given message
5. Task/Relationship:	Shapes a preference for immediate attention to getting the job done, or for establishing strong and trusting personal relationships first
6. Short-term/Long-term:	Shapes a preference for making choices based upon a narrow time horizon, or for considering the impact that choices will have over a longer span of time

Table 1. Six Key Dimensions of National Culture

It is important to stress that there are positive and negative aspects of both ends of the spectrum for each cultural dimension, and there is not a judgment attached to either extreme. Depending upon the situation that a team encounters, any of these cultural perspectives could be useful. The challenge for multicultural teams is to

fully leverage the diverse perspectives of their members while also being able to reach closure and move to action when this is required. Recent data on multicultural teams confirm that such teams experience particular difficulty with areas such as establishing an effective decision-making process, giving and receiving critical feedback in a constructive manner, and creating procedures for resolving problems among team members [2].

Using several NATO countries as examples, national norms for the same six cultural dimensions are contrasted in Figure 1. The black circles represent points on the six continuums where an individual's culturally based behaviour may fall.



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Figure 1. Profiles for a sample of NATO countries

Members of operational level multicultural teams that include this kind of wide range of perspectives can benefit from assistance in understanding the cultural norms of other members on the team. They can also benefit from recommendations for how to adapt their own personal styles to work most effectively with other team members.

3.0 GLOBESMART® COMMANDER

The concept for creating a tool that went beyond just raising cultural awareness was validated with a multinational pool of officers conducting peacekeeping at Stabilization Force headquarters (HQ SFOR), Camp Butmir, Bosnia-Herzegovina [3] [4]. There, research conducted by the U.S. Army Research Laboratory (ARL) Human Research and Engineering Directorate (HRED) found the inability to adapt to cultural differences among headquarters staff to be a critical barrier to effective teamwork [5]. As a result, ARL HRED partnered with MeridianEaton Global, in conjunction with Dr. David Matsumoto at San Francisco State University, CA, USA, to develop a tool, GLOBESMART® COMMANDER (*GS Commander*), designed to provide military staff performing command and control functions the necessary skills to adapt, as needed, to cultural influences on teamwork at the operations level. The utility of *GS Commander* for a multinational headquarters staff was validated with the Allied Warrior 2004 (AW04) Deployable Joint Task Force (DJTF) staff [6].

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The *GS Commander* program includes ten learning modules. These modules introduce the topic of cultural differences, provide an orientation to each of the six dimensions of culture, and also cover several aspects of multicultural teamwork that correspond with the “Forming,” “Storming,” and “Norming” phases of team activity identified by Bruce Tuckman [7]. The standard outline for all of the modules incorporates the following five steps:

- Step 1 contains a brief survey and personal profile. Users respond to a short set of survey questions that result in the display of their personal profile for a particular cultural dimension, helping them to become more aware of their own preferred styles.
- Step 2 is a scenario that illustrates an unproductive interaction based on cultural differences. This segment includes a narrative that provides a fuller description of the cultural dimension under discussion in a particular module and contrasting behaviours that could result from an orientation towards one end of the cultural spectrum or the other. The narrative allows users to listen to perspectives from the characters in the video scene just presented that represent each side of a given dimension. Checkbox exercises are included for users to confirm their understanding of the lesson.
- Step 3 shows an animated display of country profiles. This segment helps users to seek out the country profiles for NATO allies they may be working with, and begin to consider contrasts between their personal styles and the norms for these other countries.
- Step 4 provides recommendations for working with different behavioural styles. Follow-on exercises offer opportunities for practice in recognizing other styles and suggestions for how to integrate them into a productive team effort through mutual style-switching and adaptation.
- Step 5 offers an opportunity for *GS Commander* users who are already in contact with members of other national groups to develop an action plan. This feature makes it possible to take key lessons from the program and apply them directly to upcoming tasks or activities.

Shown below in Figure 2 is a screen shot that illustrates some of the information provided to a *GS Commander* user in Step 2, described above. Information on this page is found in the Communication Styles module. The continuum of behavior associated with Direct and Indirect communication styles appears as a double-pointed arrow. The two dots appearing on the bar reflect a point on a theoretical behavioural continuum where individuals with a strong Direct or Indirect style, respectively, would be placed.

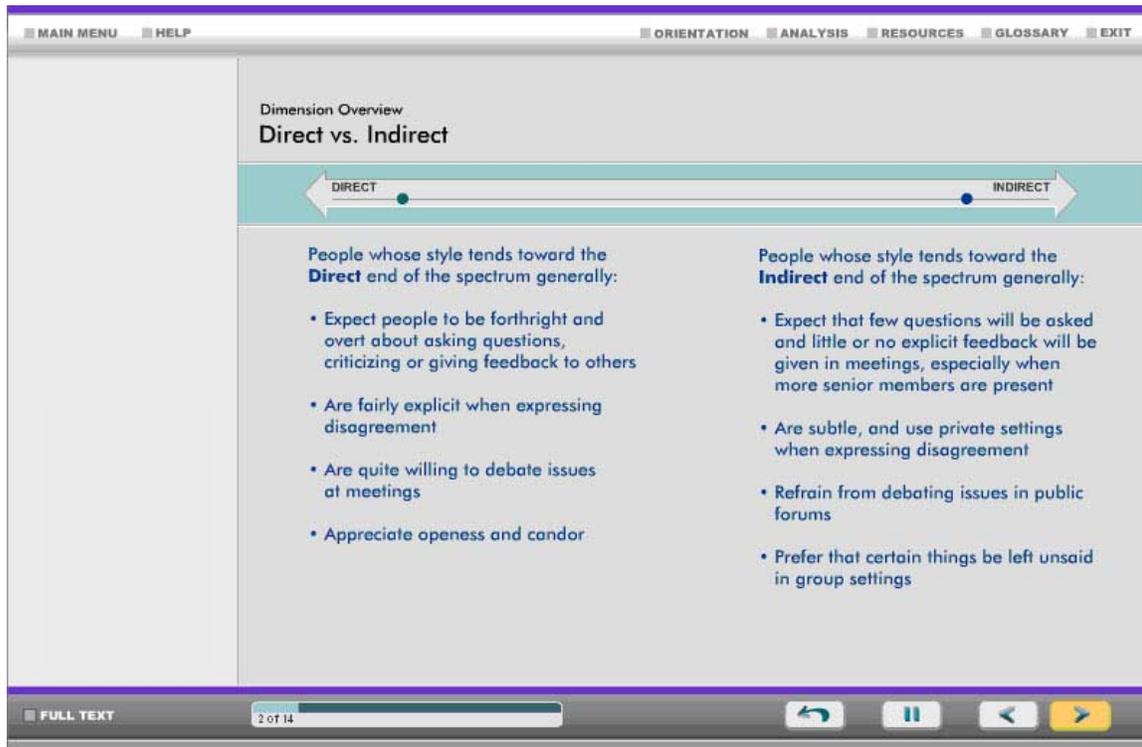


Figure 2. Direct and Indirect communication styles

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A drag-and-drop exercise on how best to obtain information from individuals with different communication styles than the user is shown in Figure 3. Again, the double-pointed arrow shows the continuum of behavior associated with Direct and Indirect styles. This time, however, the one dot appearing on that continuum shows the user's own communication style based on the personal profile created in Step 1. Users are presented with four possible ways to adapt their style to that of others. One at a time, they can drag a suggested style-change to the appropriate column. Feedback is provided both when user placements are correct or incorrect.

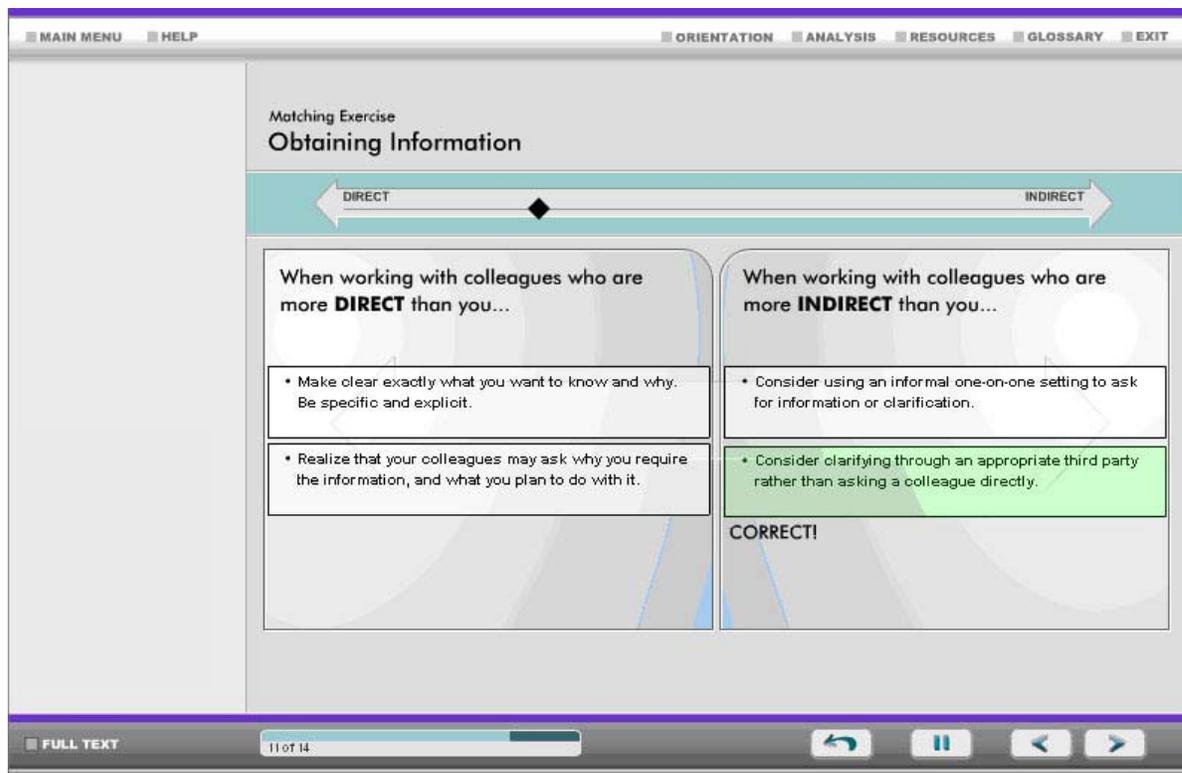


Figure 3. Working with different communications styles

4.0 BENEFITS

4.1 Technology Solution

Whether implemented as an intranet (internal to military firewalls) or as an internet tool (accessible on the worldwide web), a web-based tool offers many advantages: for example, ease of administration and data capture, and the ability to reach a larger training audience than would be available through the traditional classroom venue. The embedded self-assessment profile is unique in its ability to provide immediate feedback to users as well as its ability to access a data base of country profiles for comparison purposes.

Further, a web-based solution means that the user data can be collected and analyzed quickly, knowledge gaps across branches of service, rank, gender, and other demographics can be easily identified, and supplemental targeted information can be accessed to address those gaps. With the data capture feature of *GS Commander*, instructors, researchers, and leaders of multicultural staffs will be able to objectively assess the ability of

individuals and teams to culturally adapt. Finally, the tool includes a user-friendly backend administration system that allows ongoing maintenance, modifications, and development.

4.1.1 Military Payoff

Little is known about how to rapidly form and support multinational headquarters staff over extended deployment because research and development has primarily focused on fighting and winning wars. However, ARL HRED research at HQ SFOR and at HQ DJTF during AW04 provided a rich source of information on issues associated with the impact of cultural diversity on teamwork that had not been addressed in national or NATO training venues. In-depth interviews conducted by MeridianEaton Global with officers experienced in multinational staff assignments around the world have provided, and continue to provide, realistic, relevant content designed specifically for officers preparing for short-term or extended deployment in a multicultural environment. Thus, *GS Commander* can facilitate a shortened learning curve for working at the Joint Task Force level. Additionally, unique to *GS Commander* is its application for Commanders and principal staff to assess, and possibly predict, behavior of team members. When potential problems in team composition are identified through analysis of the individual and team profiles created by the embedded survey, steps can be taken to minimize, avoid, or address issues before they negatively impact the mission.

5.0 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

5.1 Science and Technology Gaps

We have identified three science and technology gaps associated with *GS Commander*:

- *GS Commander* can be leveraged to provide recommendations for system requirements that address unmet or, as yet, unidentified needs of multicultural teams at the Joint Task Force level,
- *GS Commander* functionality can be expanded to address threats to information sharing and decision making performance on interagency task forces, and
- *GS Commander* embedded survey tool can be used to identify cultural profiles for the purpose of populating cultural variables in a multitude of existing decision making models, where assigned weights are currently based on educated guess rather than real data from real people.

5.11 The GLOBESMART[®] SOLDIER

Experience with *GS Commander* can be leveraged to create a tool that bridges gaps in cultural differences between coalition forces and Iraqis that they encounter on a daily basis. MeridianEaton Global proposes a training/decision aid that will, upon implementation, immediately benefit troops in Iraq.

Pre-deployment training has generally been limited to raising cultural awareness about Iraqi customs, religion, and history and understanding the physicality of cultural differences (e.g., time, space, and gestures). What is lacking is a means to prepare (and to provide ongoing support for) leaders and Soldiers by helping them to understand culturally based cognitive biases that influence not only Iraqi behaviour, but their own behaviour as well (e.g., risk-taking, activity orientation, or perceptions of inter-relationship power). These biases, when not understood, can impede progress toward mission goals. Proposed is a 24/7 online reference tool, "GLOBESMART[®] SOLDIER (*GS Soldier*)," with information on critical topics identified by "boots-on-the-ground" Soldiers that would provide military personnel with quick and easy access to extensive knowledge on how to interact effectively with Iraqis. This tool could be developed and fielded within nine months with appropriate funding.

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GS Soldier design would contribute significantly to:

- Faster and more effective training of Iraqi military personnel,
- Avoidance of unnecessary misunderstandings with Iraqi counterparts in the government, clerical, or civilian areas, and
- More rapid transition to Iraqi autonomy and self-government.

A further advantage of this tool is that the groundwork would be laid so that *GS Soldier* could be rapidly scaleable to other countries. In the longer term, military personnel could also have access to a similar set of benefits for other strategic locations such as Afghanistan, Kuwait and Sudan (assuming access to appropriate information and interviewees).

6.0 RELEVANCE

The need exists to leverage what is known about culture, teams, training, and leadership in order to provide a model of coalition teamwork. First, the NATO Strategic Concept provides an integrated military structure necessary to sustain the NATO Alliance based on cooperation and coordination agreements, including collective force planning, common operational planning, and multinational formations [8] [9]. These agreements depend on the ability of leaders and teams to adapt to uncertain and complex conditions. Multinational staffs increase uncertainty and introduce complexity into performance of command and control functions. Second, the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) Concept was established for a multinational, multi-service deployable task force generated primarily for humanitarian relief and peacekeeping. The demands on leaders and teams within CJTF are recognized as considerable, resulting in a nucleus of core staffs established within the NATO military command structure. The CJTF Concept implies the existence of adaptable leaders and teams. Third, the Prague Summit Declaration [10] began the process of accession to join the Alliance, with Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia to begin accession talks. The introduction of new cultures and militaries to the NATO family requires leaders and teams to accommodate to the new entrants. Fourth, the NATO Response Force (NRF), consisting of a technologically advanced, flexible, deployable, interoperable and sustainable force, was created. This force will be a catalyst in improving the Alliance's peacekeeping capabilities, but again, will challenge leaders and teams to recognize the effect of cultural diversity on teamwork.

7.0 SUMMARY

Significant cultural differences have been found to interfere with mission success when cultural knowledge is lacking [11]. The inability to adapt, as necessary, to the influences of culture on thoughts and behaviour can result in imperfect situational awareness, which can lead to inaccurate situation assessment, and flawed or delayed decision making. We propose that cultural adaptability is critical to mission success in multicultural military environments, particularly at the operations level. Cultural adaptability includes the ability to recognize the influences of culture on teamwork, understand how best to act and react to those influences, and most importantly, take action by choosing to adapt. Mere exposure to other cultures over a long-duration deployment does not guarantee performance improvement.

The performance of multicultural teams on extended deployment can be enhanced through understanding common cultural differences between team members from different NATO countries and exposure to practical strategies for adapting to those differences. *GS Commander* will enable users to learn rapidly and immediately apply the knowledge acquired to their daily work.

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