

## **Chapter 6 – COMMUNICATION**

by

**Sharon L. Riedel**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

Military forces are increasingly being required to operate in multinational environments. This may be in multinational teams, such as North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) teams, where soldiers from different nations work together for common goals, or in non-traditional missions such as peacekeeping and disaster relief, where soldiers work closely with local populations.

In these situations, people from different cultures are put into close contact. Such relationships can be problematic when the potential for miscommunication is considered. Having been socialized in different cultures, participants in multinational teams bring to interactions diverse ways of communicating and understanding communication. Different cultures have different values, communication styles, norms, and behaviors, all of which can lead to problems in communication.

Communication is critical in any team setting but particularly within multinational military teams. The research on multinational teams (MNTs) indicates that communication is one of the most pressing difficulties affecting team efficiency and effectiveness. A study by Riedel and Karrasch (2002) found that soldiers in multinational collaborative teams in a NATO operation rated communication as the number one challenge to teamwork in their teams.

Some argue that culturally diverse groups present more opportunities for problems than culturally homogeneous groups, including lower levels of trust (Adler, 1997; Triandis, 2000) and miscommunications (Li, 1999). Overall, while cultural diversity has the potential to produce better performance (Nemeth, 1986), it also increases the complexity of interactions and potential communication problems. However, since the use of multinational teams and group interactions is increasing and likely to continue to be the mode of operation in the future, it is important to understand how and why miscommunications arise and ways that they can be avoided.

This chapter focuses on communication in groups engaged in multinational military operations. One important subset of these groups is the multinational team. A team can be defined as “a set of two or more people who interact, interdependently and adaptively toward a common and valued goal or mission, who have been assigned specific roles or functions to perform, and who have a limited life span of membership” (Salas, Dickinson, Converse, & Tannenbaum, 1992, p. 4). This definition emphasizes that the team members are interdependent and that they are working toward a common goal. This means that communication and coordination to keep teams on track is very important. Communication is at the heart of what teams do. If communication breaks down, then team functioning is weakened. It is important then, for teams in multinational military operations that have the potential for communication problems, to be alert to and deal with those communication problems.

This chapter will discuss how cultural differences affect communication in multinational military operations; describe different cultural dimensions and how differences along these dimensions can affect communication in multinational military operations; and discuss the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that facilitate intercultural communication in those environments. While there is not a great deal of research specific to multinational military operations, academic research is clearly relevant and the focus in the paper will be on the academic literature. This chapter will not deal with technology and communication (see Masakowski, Chapter 7), but with the impact of culture on communication.

## 6.2 COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS OF CULTURALLY DIVERSE GROUPS

Potentially, cultural diversity in multinational groups can be a strength. Research suggests that multinational teams can have big advantages over more homogeneous teams. Team diversity can improve creativity and decision making by bringing together different perspectives, world views, and experiences. Culturally diverse teams can be more innovative because multiple points of view can be brought to a problem. A diverse group is thus more likely to come up with different solutions to a problem (Nemeth, 1986). In addition, cognitive complexity is associated with second-language acquisition and may improve problem-solving abilities of group members who speak more than one language (Earley & Gibson, 2002).

However, Miller, Fields, Kumar, and Ortiz (2000) maintain that while teams made up of members from different cultures can be significantly superior to homogeneous teams, they can also experience more difficulties if the cultural differences are ignored. Indeed, communication problems due to cultural factors can be a major barrier to group performance and effectiveness. This section discusses communication problems in culturally diverse groups and the operational difficulties that these communication problems can produce.

### 6.2.1 Lack of Language Fluency

One might argue that miscommunications in multinational settings arise because of lack of fluency in the language that is being used. While researchers agree that fluency in the language does not ensure accuracy in intercultural communication (Gass & Varonis, 1991; Hammerly, 1991; Scollon & Scollon, 1995), part of the problem of communication is simply a lack of knowledge of the language and common idioms of the language used by the group.

Riedel and Karrasch (2002), studying communication in the NATO Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR), found that even speech mechanics can make communication difficult for non-native speakers (i.e., speakers with English, the specified NATO language, as their second language). Speaking too fast or too softly, and using acronyms, slang, dialects, and even humor can make the communication even harder for non-native speakers to understand. Some SFOR native speakers (i.e., those with English as their first language) said that they had difficulty understanding other native speakers. Speaking in an English or American regional accent can make communication difficult. For instance, some soldiers from the United States (US) said that they could not understand soldiers from the United Kingdom (UK) and would go to the Canadians for a translation. One SFOR non-native speaker said that even at his Newcomers' Orientation, the presenter had an American southern accent and he was able to understand only half of what she was saying, even though he was fluent in English.

Li (1999) found that speakers in intercultural situations communicated significantly less information than speakers in intracultural situations, even when language ability was controlled. Listeners in intercultural groups could retrieve only 50% of the information that was sent versus 75% in intracultural situations. This means that language ability alone does not ensure intercultural communication. This finding has implications for intercultural communication training: language training per se is not enough. Participants in intercultural groups need to be aware that even if they are fluent in the language being spoken, miscommunications are highly likely. To communicate successfully, one needs to understand not only the language but cultural differences in communication.

### 6.2.2 Information Sharing

Cherrie (1997), looking at multinational military operations during a mine strike recovery, concluded that multinational operations take more time. Information exchange in culturally heterogeneous teams is slower due to language barriers and the effort that it takes for the calibration of meaning. Differences in language, tactics, techniques, and procedures and doctrine cause the pace to be much slower than usual.

Because multinational commanders must issue orders in a tactful and diplomatic manner, the orders process in multinational operations often is more collegial and less structured than, for example, the more direct US process.

A problem that plagues MNTs is the inability or unwillingness of team members to share mission-related information with team members of other cultures. If information does not get shared, the quality of team mental models degrades and performance suffers. Jackson, May, and Whitney (1995) found that cultural heterogeneity lowers information exchange among coworkers. Because team communication is likely to be limited to topics commonly known to team members as opposed to important information held by only one team member (Strasser & Titus, 1985), cultural heterogeneity effects become important in information sharing. MNTs will talk less frequently and when they do talk it is likely to be about a topic with which other team members are familiar.

### **6.2.3 Stress and Increased Cognitive Effort**

Having to communicate in another language creates problems at a very elementary level. For example, members of a NATO coalition force reported that having to speak and think in another language for long periods of time is a source of cumulative stress (Riedel & Karrasch, 2002). One non-native speaker reported that when he is thinking, listening, and speaking in a second language, it takes a tremendous amount of focus and concentration, and that he tires faster because of it. Another said that understanding the language uses 50% of his thinking capacity, leaving only half of his brainpower left to do his tasks. This means that it takes more cognitive effort to do the same task using another language than one's own language. If this is a long-term assignment with the requirement to continually work and think in a second language, stress builds up. Not understanding or being able to speak English fluently requires exhaustive cognitive effort on the part of non-native speakers, and much patience and a willingness to understand and be understood is required on the part of native speakers.

### **6.2.4 Perception of Ability**

Riedel and Karrasch (2002) report that the non-native speakers who participated in the study often felt that they were being unfairly judged about their abilities based on their language fluency. That is, because they may not understand a conversation immediately, they felt that native speakers would judge them as not knowledgeable or intelligent. Because they did not want to be judged incompetent, non-native speakers sometimes hesitated to ask questions or to say that they did not understand.

### **6.2.5 Being By-Passed for Assignments**

Non-native speakers of a language may initially misunderstand directions and perform a task incorrectly or not in accordance with the intent of the assignment (Riedel & Karrasch, 2002). Their superiors, rather than taking the time to re-explain the directions, may give the task to someone else or just do it themselves. Similarly, when time is short, superiors may give the task to native speakers rather than risk a misunderstanding. Some thought that the practice of giving tasks to native speakers (i.e., speakers whose first language is English), simply because it was easier, hurt the team spirit of MNTs. If non-native speakers did not understand the first time, often the task was just given to a native speaker, who could understand.

### **6.2.6 Adjustment Time**

NATO SFOR multinational team members felt that SFOR teams need time before they can start to process the language and customs quickly and efficiently (Riedel & Karrasch, 2002). For instance, colloquialisms, the use of humor in meetings, the norms for morning greetings (salute, shake hands every morning, or nod your head on the way to your office), addressing of rank, and some body language differs across cultures

and requires adjustment. Other examples of customs that required adaptation included whether to bring coffee for yourself to a meeting or to take a coffee break with others after the meeting, hour-long coffee breaks in the morning and afternoon, a slower pace of work, dinner at 8pm, and the approach to alcohol consumption.

These differences can set a tone for teamwork and distract team members from the work at hand. However, members of the SFOR indicated that once you learn about these cultural differences they do not present a problem. However, the amount of time spent in the SFOR assignment varied with NATO nations, with some officers spending as little as 3 months at SFOR. They would barely adjust to the cultural differences before they would have to leave. This suggests that deliberate up-front training on cultural differences could make the adjustment faster. However, as more and more soldiers gain experience in multinational teams, this problem may become less important.

This section gave selected examples of the problems that are created by communication difficulties in multinational groups. The next section will discuss further how cultural diversity can cause communication problems.

## **6.3 HOW CULTURAL DIVERSITY CAN CAUSE MISCOMMUNICATION**

### **6.3.1 The Cultural Lens Model**

There is little empirical research investigating factors that contribute to communication in multicultural teams. However, understanding the differences in world views between cultures is essential to good communication. Klein and Steele-Johnson (2002) have proposed a cultural lens model which can be used as a way of conceptualizing communication problems in terms of how the communication is framed. The cultural lens model offers a theoretical explanation for why cultural differences could create communication problems, besides the obvious reason of not understanding the language. In general, our experiences in our families and our environment shape how we see the world. According to the cultural lens model, these experiences provide a perspective or cultural lens through which we see others. This lens shapes how people think, the beliefs and values that they hold, and the way that they see themselves and their relation to others with whom they interact. The cultural lens shapes a person's emotional reactions, ideas of how the world works and should work, and relationships with other people. People from the same national culture tend to see the world in similar ways. They share a cultural lens shaped by common experiences. People from similar cultures see the world in similar ways, and thus interpret events and make decisions similarly. They share a "lens" for making sense out of the world. This lens contains the common values, beliefs, and reasoning styles of their culture. The idea of a cultural lens is important because it provides a perspective by which we understand other people's words, gestures, intentions, and in general what we think they are communicating.

According to Klein and Steele-Johnson (2002), the cultural lens can be thought of as consisting of a number of cultural dimensions through which our experiences are filtered and interpreted. If we could adopt the cultural lens of the other person, that is, see his or her words, actions, and context through the cultural lens of his or her culture, then we would have a better chance of understanding what it is he or she is communicating. The next section discusses cultural dimensions and how they affect communication.

## **6.4 CULTURAL DIMENSIONS AND HOW THEY AFFECT COMMUNICATION**

There are a number of major cultural dimensions that can be used to explain differences in communication across cultures. Differences in these cultural dimensions can make cross-cultural communication difficult and challenging for teams operating in a culturally heterogeneous environment. The dimensions exist at

both the cultural level and the individual level. For example, one’s culture could be characterized as emphasizing one’s responsibility to society, but individual people in that society could have an orientation that emphasizes their responsibility to themselves. However, people within a culture tend to adopt the attitudes, customs, and beliefs characteristic of their culture.

Salas, Burke, Wilson-Donnelly, and Fowlkes (2004) identified 45 cultural dimensions that have appeared in the literature. The most widely accepted of these dimensions were proposed by Hofstede (1980, 2001), based on data from 100,000 mostly male employees of IBM. Table 6.1 presents five of the Hofstede dimensions and selected others identified by Salas et al. (2004). A large study by House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, and Gupta (2004) identified similar dimensions.

**Table 6.1: Cultural Dimensions (abstracted from Salas et al., 2004)**

Cultural Dimension	Definition
Individualism-Collectivism (Hofstede, 1980)	Individualism is “A loosely knit social framework in which people are supposed to take care of themselves and of their immediate families only” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45). It is the pursuit of self-interests as opposed to group interest. The dimension is similar to Triandis’s (1989, 2000) instrumental-expressive dimension, which describes whether getting the job done (instrumental) or relationships (expressive) are considered more important in the culture. Collectivist cultures have a tight social framework “in which people distinguish between in-groups and out-groups. They expect their in-group to look out after them, and in exchange they feel they owe absolute loyalty to the in-group” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45).
Power Distance (Hofstede, 1980)	“The extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45). High power distance cultures accept this and social exchanges are based on this fact. Low power distance cultures do not see a strict hierarchy among social exchanges.
Uncertainty Avoidance (Hofstede, 1980)	“Extent to which a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and tries to avoid these situations by providing greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviors, and believing in absolute truths and the attainment of expertise” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45).
Masculinity-Femininity (Achievement-Relationship) (Hofstede, 1980)	“The extent to which the dominant values of society are ‘masculine’ – that is, assertiveness, the acquisition of money and things versus caring for others, the quality of life, or people” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45).
Long-Short Term Orientation (Hofstede, 2001)	Long-term orientation refers to a culture with future-orientated values, especially perseverance and thrift, while short-term orientation refers to cultures that are driven by past and present-orientated values (e.g., respect for tradition), preservation of face and fulfilling social obligations (Hofstede, 2001, p. 359).
Past-Future Orientation (Hall & Hall, 1990)	Similar to long-short term orientation. Refers to the time frame that is emphasized.

Cultural Dimension	Definition
Monochronic-Polychronic (Hall & Hall, 1990)	In monochronic cultures, time is experienced and used in a linear way, segmented and compartmentalized. In polychronic cultures, time has an unlimited continuity; it unravels. People attend to many things happening at the same time. The focus is on the group, stretching forward and back.
High-Low Context (Hall & Hall, 1990)	In communication in high-context cultures, much of the information is implicitly implied and exact meaning is determined by context. Within low-context cultures communication is very direct and explicit.
Analytic/Holistic Reasoning (Choi & Nisbett, 2000)	The extent to which individuals reason holistically versus using rules, formal logic, and categories to understand behavior.

The identified cultural dimensions tend to cluster together, that is, they are not orthogonal. Certain positions on the dimensions tend to cluster together (Triandis, 2000). Triandis calls this “clustering cultural syndromes,” that is, a shared pattern of beliefs, attitudes, and norms organized around a theme. For example, the individualism-collectivism dimension overlaps with the achievement-relationship dimension in that collectivists tend to be relationship-oriented while individualists tend to be achievement or task-oriented (Levine & Norenzayan, 1999).

Triandis (2000) argues that these dimensions are important in communication because a culture’s position on the dimensions influences cues in the communication interaction to which the person pays attention. Members of different cultures pay more attention to different kinds of information when communicating. For example, a person from a high-context culture would pay more attention to body language and to the context of a message than a person from a low-context culture, who would focus on the explicit content of the message. Western cultures tend to pay more attention to the content of communications while Eastern collectivist cultures attend primarily to the context of communications (Triandis, 2000). The dimensions are presented in Table 6.1, together with how they influence communication.

**6.4.1 How Does the Power Distance Orientation Affect Communication?**

High power distance people tend to use formal, hierarchical communication. That is, they go through channels with suggestions and problems. Rank affects to whom they talk. Information may not be offered except in formal settings. Some high power distance people may be reluctant to go to the commander for additional guidance. Subordinates may fail to provide critical information to leaders, believing it is the leader’s responsibility to make decisions (Helmreich, 2000). Or they may fail to challenge a commander’s decision, even if it could result in catastrophic consequences. They prefer more traditional approaches to dealing with obstacles. Riedel and Karrasch (2002) report that one cause of communication problems cited by multinational team members was the reluctance to ask questions when they did not understand, because in their culture, it is rude to ask questions or because one simply does not question one’s supervisor.

Low power distance people tend to use informal, rather than formal, communication channels. They tend to be less traditional and seek more innovative answers to problems. They have a greater need for technology and independent thinking. They have different value orientations about the appropriateness or importance of status differences and social hierarchies than high power distance cultures. They are less traditional and more open to innovative answers to problems. They feel more comfortable challenging the decisions of the power holders. Low power distance cultures defend and assert their personal rights more than members of high power distance cultures.

Power distance influences who group members are most likely to talk with and question, and with whom they are most likely to make eye contact. Conyne, Wilson, Tang, and Shi (1999) found that Chinese group members (a high power distance culture) spoke directly to the group leader twice as frequently as to other members. They also found that group members from the US, a low power distance culture, spoke directly to the leader one third as frequently as they did other group members.

#### **6.4.2 How Does the Individualism-Collectivism Orientation Affect Communication?**

Gudykunst and Mody (2002) believe that individualism-collectivism is the most important dimension of cultural variability used to explain differences and similarities in communication across cultures. In individualistic cultures, individual goals take precedence over group goals; in collectivistic cultures, group goals take precedence over individual goals. Salas et al. (2004) report that individualists are more likely to give more weight to dispositional cues while collectivists are more likely to pay attention to situation and context cues in inferring why something happened. Individualistic cultures emphasize person-based information to interpret others' communications. Individualists tend to use low-context messages, which are direct, precise, and clear. Individualist countries include Canada, Australia, England, France, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, and the US, among others.

On the other hand, in collectivist cultures, group goals take precedence over individual goals, tending to be concerned with avoiding hurt feelings and not imposing on others. They emphasize harmony and cooperation within the in-group and will try to save face for the group and in-group members. They see direct requests as the least effective way to accomplish goals. Collectivist cultures tend to be group-oriented. They make a clear distinction between in- and out-groups. In multinational teams or groups, members who are judged as being very dissimilar may be judged as being in the out-group. This may result in less interaction and communication with the out-group members, less information sharing, less value placed on their contributions, and fewer assignments given to those perceived as out-group members (Salas et al., 2004). Collectivists focus on the goals of the group and the "we" identity is emphasized. They have few in-groups, value tradition and conformity, and have an interdependent identity. They tend to use high-context messages, which are indirect, ambiguous, implicit, and dependent on the context. Cultures high in collectivism include African, Arab, Asian, Latin, and Southern European cultures.

Collectivists tend to impose a large psychological distance between in-group and out-group members, and in-group members are expected to have unquestioning loyalty to their group. In conflict situations, members of collectivistic cultures are likely to use avoidance, intermediaries, or face-saving techniques. Leaders of collectivist cultures never reprimand a person in front of other group members. They are aware of the importance of the group and the importance of saving face. Collectivists prefer an indirect or implicit communication style (Gudykunst et al., 1996). Implicit language carefully imbues messages within a more positive tone to decrease the chances of unpleasant encounters, direct confrontations, and disagreements. Collectivists are not likely to ask questions. They follow the saying, "the nail that sticks up gets pounded."

Conyne et al. (1999) found that collectivist team members were less likely to have direct communications with the leader than with other team members, while the opposite was found for individualistic team members. They also found that collectivist team members were more hesitant to provide information, possibly due to a culture-related hesitancy to speak. When they did speak, it was for longer time periods than in the case of individualist team members, possibly to save face when a risk was taken to speak. That is, by speaking longer they were able to better justify their speaking out. For example, Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, and Indonesians make frequent use of ambiguous words such as maybe, perhaps, and somewhat to avoid confrontation. Members of these cultures tend to avoid negative responses while communicating with their team in order to preserve the sense of harmony within the group. In collectivist cultures it is vital that one establishes a cordial interpersonal relationship and maintain it over time. For example, in African, Middle Eastern, Chinese, and Japanese cultures, sociability is extended to

business hours, schedules are looser, and the first encounter is slated for getting acquainted (Conyne et al., 1999).

People in individualistic cultures do not perceive a large psychological distance between in-group and out-group members. They value self-expression, see speaking out as a means of resolving problems, and are likely to use confrontational strategies when dealing with interpersonal problems. For example, North Americans and Germans prefer directness while Japanese prefer indirectness. Individualistic cultures are concerned with clarity in conversation and use direct requests as the best way to accomplish goals. They focus the communication on the task rather than on maintaining relationships. Individualists prefer a direct or explicit communication style, where language communicates exactly what is meant in a direct manner, even if the message is negative or somewhat harsh. Individualistic group members may inadvertently offend other members because they did not take time to learn about cultural differences or because they were so focused on their tasks that they neglected social amenities.

Collectivists are more attuned to social relationships in communication than on the task, and individualists may feel that collectivists spend too much time on relationship building and not enough on the task. The individualist is more likely to give more weight to dispositional cues, while collectivists are more likely to pay attention to situation and context cues in inferring causality.

In teams, a natural and profitable strategy is to monitor each other's performance and offer feedback if needed. However, members of collectivist cultures may have a difficult time offering feedback, and even help, to fellow team members. Collectivists may feel that those they critique will lose face and thus hesitate to offer feedback, or they may hesitate to give feedback because of the conflict that the feedback may create. Collectivists also tend to be more favorable in their evaluations of their in-group members (Gomez, Kirkman, & Shapiro, 2000).

One communication dynamic related to the individualism-collectivism dimension is face saving. Novinger says that saving face is "the value or standing a person has in the eyes of others... It relates to pride or self respect" (2001, p. 81). Face includes status, power, courtesy, insider and outsider relations, and respect. In many cultures, maintaining face is of great importance. Collectivist cultures use more other-oriented face saving strategies and other-oriented face approval enhancement strategies than individualistic cultures, which use more self-oriented face saving strategies. In Asian cultures, preservation of the self and the reputation of the family are important (Leong, Wagner, & Kim, 1995). This leads to avoidance of interpersonal risk and avoidance of direct types of communications, such as challenges, confrontations, interruptions, and direct questions. In the US, people are less concerned with saving face and more apt to challenge the speaker. In individualism, saving face has to do with preserving one's own image with others. For collectivists, considerations about face are with respect to one's own group rather than one's self. Direct confrontation with others may reflect poorly on one's own group or disturb the overall community harmony; thus one may prefer to avoid criticism of others. Emphasizing self-face leads to using dominating/competing conflict styles and substantive conflict resolution modes. Emphasizing other-face leads to using avoiding/obligating conflict styles. When there is conflict, a third party who intervenes between the people involved in the conflict preserves face since no direct confrontation takes place and the relationship is maintained. Thus, collectivists use relational process-oriented conflict strategies more than individualists.

### **6.4.3 How Does the Uncertainty Avoidance Orientation Affect Communication?**

Uncertainty avoidance represents the extent to which "a society feels threatened by uncertain and ambiguous situations and tries to avoid these situations by providing greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, not tolerating deviant ideas and behaviors, and believing in absolute truths and the attainment of expertise" (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45). Low uncertainty avoidance cultures can accept dissent and conflict and see these as natural and useful. Norms and rules are not as clear cut and rigid as in high

uncertainty cultures. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures tend to be able to adapt to change and cope with uncertainty. They are willing to change and take risks. Conflict and dissent are seen as natural and beneficial. Low uncertainty avoidance cultures are characterized by low stress, acceptance of dissent, high level of risk-taking, and few rituals. Cultures high on uncertainty avoidance include Japan, Mexico, Greece, Chile, Belgium, Argentina, and Egypt. Cultures low on uncertainty avoidance include Canada, the UK, Denmark, India, France, Hong Kong, Sweden, and the US.

In high uncertainty avoidance cultures, situations that deviate from the plan may be unnoticed or not communicated because these events are threatening to individuals who have high uncertainty avoidance (Ilgen, LePine, & Hollenbeck, 1997). Uncertainty avoidance may have the effect of limiting the recognition of cues that may call for the team to adapt.

If leaders are too high on uncertainty avoidance, task procedures may become so detailed and structured that team members' ability to think creatively about a task is stifled. These leaders may excessively control a situation, limiting dialogue and the development of a shared situational awareness. If team members are high on uncertainty avoidance, they may ask for so much guidance and information that they no longer provide unique contributions to the task. In other words, the leader might as well have done it him or herself. If leaders are low on uncertainty avoidance, they may appear to be "shooting from the hip" or may not cover sufficient details in an operation. They may not give the team members enough information for them to do their jobs.

Rifkind and Harper (1993) found that in high uncertainty avoidance cultures, clear instruction, specialized careers, and cooperation among employees tended to be preferred. One would expect that cultures with high uncertainty avoidance would tend to ignore information that did not conform to what they already believed.

#### **6.4.4 How Does Achievement-Relationship Affect Communication?**

This dimension refers to the extent to which cultures prefer achievement and assertiveness as opposed to nurturance and social support. Japan, Italy, Mexico, the UK, Germany, and the US tend to believe in achievement as a basis of performance, whereas Sweden and Portugal tend to be relationship countries.

If leaders or team members are high on achievement and low on relationship, then they will miss the richness of information sharing provided by the diverse team, because they will tend to encourage people to focus on the task at hand, rather than take time to think of different ways of solving the problem. Members may tend to work in their national chain or with selected team members who can accomplish the tasks, thus missing the richness of the diverse team setting and resulting in streamlined, but content-poor information.

If team members are high on relationship, then they may spend too much time off-task and either not produce a product on time or produce a product that is incomplete. If a leader is high on relationship, he or she will likely have a high level of interaction with team members, which will positively influence team members' confidence, efficacy, and performance. With regard to communication, the team members high on relationship may interact more with other members, generating more information and better coordination.

If leaders are high on achievement and low on relationship, then they may disregard some team members' contributions if they do not obviously contribute to the task at hand, ignoring that their contributions may indirectly contribute to the task or may be relevant to team functions in general. Information and opportunities for shared situational awareness are lost. If leaders or team members are high on achievement but low on relationship, then they may be moving from task to task, without developing a team culture or team situational awareness.

If leaders or team members are low on relationship, then they may inadvertently offend another team member because they did not take the time to learn cultural nuances important to that person. This will inhibit information sharing and coordination.

#### **6.4.5 How Does the High-Low Context Orientation Affect Communication?**

Hall and Hall (1990) described the cultural dimension of high-low context. In high-context cultures, speakers tend to use a more indirect communication style, while in low-context cultures, speakers tend to use a more direct communication style. This dimension overlaps with individualism-collectivism, with high-context and low-context communication styles being the predominant forms of communication in individualistic and collectivistic cultures, respectively (Gudykunst & Ting-Tooney, 1988). US, German, Swedish, European American, and UK are low-context cultures. Buddhist, Hindu, Japanese, African-American, Mexican, and Latino are high-context cultures.

In low-context cultures reactions are frequently very explicit and readily observable. In high-context cultures, information about procedures is more likely to be communicated through non-verbal cues, and with less reliance on explicit verbal communication (Rifkind & Harper, 1993; Triandis, 2000). In low-context cultures, communication is more explicitly verbal and direct – the non-verbal context of the message has less value. This dimension speaks directly to the communication style norms across cultures and represents a particular challenge for multicultural environments. More is taken for granted and assumed to be shared in high-context cultures. Messages do not need to be explicitly and verbally transmitted. Reactions are likely to be reserved, as unconstrained reactions could threaten face or social esteem.

High-context cultures rely heavily on a non-verbal code system. People from low-context cultures would tend to seek information that emphasized personal or individual aspects rather than social or group aspects. In low-context cultures, messages are explicit and dependent on verbal codes (Ting-Tooney, 1988).

#### **6.4.6 How Does the Masculine–Feminine Orientation Affect Communication?**

In masculine cultures there are differentiated gender roles, and power, assertiveness, and performance are valued. Masculine-oriented countries include Arab cultures, Austria, Germany, Italy Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Switzerland, and Venezuela. In feminine cultures, there are overlapping gender roles, and quality of life, service, and nurturance are valued. Countries with a feminine orientation include Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.

This dimension has major implications for military multinational teams because of the different roles of women in cultures differing on this dimension. For example, one female Major from a feminine culture reported that in her multinational team, her authority was repeatedly challenged by subordinates from masculine cultures. If she issued an order, team members looked to her male peer for confirmation. If she gave information, it was ignored until a male peer repeated it. In general, she felt powerless and unable to communicate effectively in the team even though she had a relatively high rank and experienced acceptance of her authority in her own country's military community (Riedel & Karrasch, 2002).

#### **6.4.7 How Does the Polychronic vs. Monochronic Orientation Affect Communication?**

The monochronic or Western concept of time sees time as a straight line. An individualist way of life fits easily into the monochronic culture. Time is logical, sequential, and present- and future- focused. Efficiency is important. Time is money. In contrast, Eastern cultures tend to be polychronic. Here time unravels and the universe is continuous. People may attend to many things at once. There is a certain timeless quality to time; it is too vast for the human mind to comprehend. Eastern countries tend to be polychronic. Time is alive with fate and destiny. Time is a circle, an unravelling ball of thread, a spiral.

Members of American culture, for example, tend to regard time as a valuable, tangible commodity that is to be consumed to a greater or lesser degree. Americans tend to be very time-driven. A polychronic time system means that several things are being done at the same time. For Spanish and many South American cultures, relationships are more important than schedules. Deadlines are unmet when friends or family require attention. They often schedule multiple appointments at the same time. Whether they are members of polychronic or monochronic cultures, people tend to see their own time system as superior.

Monochronic cultures tend to organize their thoughts and communications linearly, that is: fact, fact, generalization, conclusion. In polychronic cultures, the line of thought is associative, going around and around the point so that the listener understands the point almost intuitively, finally zeroing in on the conclusion. Group members from a monochronic culture may find the circular and intuitive way of reasoning and communicating of polychronic group members difficult to understand and work within.

#### **6.4.8 How Does the Past-Future Time Orientation Affect Communication?**

This dimension overlaps somewhat with the monochronic-polychronic dimension. Monochronic cultures tend to be present- and future-oriented and short-term focused. Polychronic cultures are past- and long-term oriented. Past-oriented cultures regard past experiences as most important. The emphasis here is on tradition and wisdom passed down. These cultures show deference and respect for elders who represent links to the past. British, Chinese, and native American cultures show past orientation. Tradition is very important.

Present-oriented cultures regard current experiences as the most important. They emphasize spontaneity and experiencing each moment as fully as possible. They participate in events because of the immediate pleasure of the activity and believe in unseen and unknown outside forces like fate or luck. They might be seen by past- and future-oriented cultures as self-centered, hedonistic, and inefficient.

Future-oriented cultures believe that the future is the most important. Current activities are appreciated for their future benefits. Planning ahead and having a schedule to know what they will be doing in the future is important. Other cultures find this future orientation and the need to schedule and plan ahead very unreasonable and hard to deal with. Members of Northern European and American cultures are future-oriented, believing that their fate is in their own hands, and that they can control the consequences of their actions. Past- and present-oriented cultures see future-oriented cultures as slaves to efficiency. These orientations can cause miscommunication because future-oriented cultures see schedules as firm and important.

If a future-oriented team member says that a task is scheduled to be completed by 5 pm, this member's assumption is that everyone understands that the task must be completed by 5 pm. Present-oriented members, however, may understand this to mean that the task is to be completed by 5 pm if it gets done.

#### **6.4.9 How Does the Analytic vs. Holistic Reasoning Orientation Affect Communication?**

The last dimension to be discussed here concerns cultural differences in holistic versus analytical reasoning (Ji, Penne, & Nisbett, 2000). Holistic reasoning represents the tendency to perceive ideas and objects as part of a larger context, whereas analytical reasoning focuses on specific objects and minimizes the larger context. These different perspectives lead to differences in how the causes of actions and events are attributed. Holistic reasoning may lead to more external or situational attributions, while analytical reasoning may produce more attributions to the person or actor of an event. These culturally based reasoning differences influence how events in the larger environment tend to be attributed to either situational (external) causes or to personal (internal) causes. Individuals in a multicultural group may make different interpretations of the same event, depending on their cultural orientation (Choi & Nisbett, 2000; Ji et al., 2000). People from holistic cultures may attribute the same behavior to different causes and give different meanings to the same behavior, complicating their communications.

#### **6.4.10 Other Dynamics in Multicultural Miscommunications: False Consensus**

A psychological phenomenon that contributes to miscommunication is the “false consensus” effect (Mullen et al., 1985). This phenomenon holds that if we agree with a particular position, then we believe that most other people also agree with it. If we disagree with a position, then we believe that most people also disagree with it. That is, we believe that people are more or less like ourselves. This means that when we come into contact with other cultures, we are often unaware of miscommunications because we think that others are more or less like we are and think the way we do (Triandis, 2000). This is supported by the findings of Riedel and Karrasch (2002). In focus groups with multinational MNTs, focus groups with only US soldiers did not see communication as a problem, while groups consisting of speakers with English as their second language (i.e., non-native speakers) saw communication as a major problem. Because US officers did not have problems communicating in MNTs, they tended to think that the non-native speaking team members also had little trouble communicating.

### **6.5 NON-VERBAL INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

A topic that cuts across the above cultural dimensions is the use of non-verbal communication. Studies on the facial expression of emotion have demonstrated that facial expressions of basic emotions, such as anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness, and surprise, can be accurately recognized across cultural groups. This suggests that emotion is a universal language (Ekman, 1972, 1982; Ekman, Soresen, & Friesen, 1969; Izard, 1971). Despite this universal expression of emotion, a study by Halberstadt (1985) found that specific appearances of facial expression may differ among cultures. A study by Marsh, Elfenbein, and Ambady (2003) also found evidence for subtle differences in the facial expression of emotions between cultures, such that the facial expressions in people of one’s own culture tend to be easier to read.

However, many other forms of non-verbal communication can be interpreted only within the framework of the culture in which they occur. That is, cultures vary in specific repertoires of behaviors. Use of movement, body positions, postures, vocal intonations, gestures, touch, time, and spatial requirements all vary across cultures. These will be discussed next.

Cultures vary a great deal in non-verbal communications and there is a great deal of room for error in these interpretations. The importance of non-verbal communication in the interpretation of messages also varies with culture. Low-context cultures like the US tend to assign less importance to non-verbal communication than to the literal meaning of the words. In high-context cultures like Japan, understanding of the non-verbal communications is more important to understanding the meaning of the communication than it is in Western cultures.

People from collectivist cultures tend to pay more attention to the context of communications than people from individualist cultures do, paying more attention to gestures, eye contact, level of voice, touching, distance between the bodies, and so on. Further complicating the situation, non-verbal communication also varies by gender and social status within a culture (Tannen, 1994).

All cultures have display rules that govern when and under what conditions various non-verbal expressions are required, preferred, permitted, or prohibited, such as how far apart to stand while talking, who to touch and where, speed and timing of movements and gestures, when to look directly at others in a conversation, when to look away, whether loud talking and expansive gestures or quietness and controlled movements should be used, when to smile and when to frown, and overall pacing of communication. Display rules vary greatly across cultures. Approachability (smiling, laughing, appropriate conversational distance) is important for Latinos when working with other Latinos and socializing with people from other cultures. European Americans tend to display these behaviors only when socializing with other European Americans. When showing grief, Southern Mediterranean countries tend to exaggerate their displays. In European American cultures, people try to remain calm. British cultures may understate their displays. Japanese may hide their sorrow or cover it with smiling.

Non-verbal communication is also important in regulating the flow of conversations. Non-verbal behaviors that help to synchronize the back and forth nature of conversations are called regulators. They are culture-specific and include behaviors such as eye contact, posture, movement, and vocalizations.

As discussed above, the expression of many emotions are constant across cultures. However, cultural differences may occur with regard to which emotion it is acceptable to display. For example, in the US it may be more socially acceptable for a woman to express fear but not anger, but it is just the opposite for a man. In Japan it is unacceptable to show anger or sadness (Novinger, 2001) and those emotions may be masked by an expression of happiness. Thus, when talking about the death of a relative, a Japanese smile may seem inappropriate to a Westerner.

### **6.5.1 Eye Contact and Duration of Verbalizations**

High-context cultures are concerned with meanings conveyed by the eyes. Asians consider extended eye contact rude and prefer brief eye contact. Anglo-Americans, on the other hand, admire a steady gaze and consider it important to maintain eye contact. For them, if someone will not make eye contact, it is a clue that something is wrong. European Americans look into the eyes of the other people when they are the listeners, but US Blacks look away, which European Americans could regard as a sign of indifference. This looking into the eyes by the European Americans could be regarded as invasive or confrontational by US Blacks.

Conyne, Wilson, Tang, and Shi (1999) found that US group members tend to look at fellow group members as they speak. Head nods and eye gaze indicate involvement with the task and eye gaze is associated with dominance. For Asian groups, on the other hand, the speaker tends to look at the leader or his or her notes, but rarely looks at other group members.

Conyne et al. (1999) found that in Asian groups, interactions involved fewer speech occurrences but longer duration of verbalizations than in US groups. They explained this finding by proposing that a cultural hesitancy to speak may yield fewer inputs, but when the risk is taken, the speaker may talk longer to protect against any loss of face. In the US, high verbal participation in groups is associated with dominance and high status. In comparison, Asian group members are relatively quieter. The Asian culture also emphasizes verbal non-assertiveness, reluctance of emotional expression, and avoidance of self-disclosure, all of which may be misinterpreted as lower status of or non-involvement by high-context group members.

### **6.5.2 Personal Space**

The amount of personal space that a person feels comfortable with when conversing varies depending on the culture. Members of Hispanic, Latin American, and Italian cultures tend to stand close to others while talking, while Anglo-Americans might feel that their personal space has been violated by someone standing that close. In general, people from cold climates use large physical distances when they communicate whereas those from warm climates prefer close distances.

Different cultures have different ideas about the appropriate amount of space between conversationalists. Americans and Canadians prefer large amounts of space. Europeans tend to stand more closely to one another when talking. North Americans may see the European desire for such nearness as pushy, while the Europeans may see the North American preference for more physical distance as cold.

### **6.5.3 Touch**

Meanings of touch include affect, playfulness, control, ritual purposes, and task-related purposes. Members of Middle Eastern, Latin American, and Southern European cultures touch more than others. This may be regarded as aggressive, overly familiar, or pushy by Northern Europeans. The latter tend not

to touch others and may be perceived as cold or aloof by members of Southern European cultures. Cultures also differ in where people can be touched. In Japan there are deeply held feelings against the touch of a stranger. For Muslims, one cannot touch a person of the opposite sex. But it is acceptable for men to hold hands. However, for Europeans and Americans, it is acceptable to touch the opposite sex, but not acceptable for men to touch each other.

#### **6.5.4 Other Non-Verbal Communication Cues**

Voice includes pitch, tone, and loudness. Latinos speak more loudly and more frequently than Americans. A Saudi Arabian's sentences may be perceived as showing apathy or lack of interest. Americans' voices may be interpreted by Saudis' as calm and pleasant. A firm statement by an American may seem doubtful to a Saudi Arabian. Other non-verbal codes include dress, body ornaments, and the need for privacy. The latter is expressed by closed doors in the US and sound-proof doors in Germany, while Japan has paper thin walls.

Rules that govern most non-verbal communication are both culture-specific and outside of conscious awareness. People use these non-verbal behaviors to make judgments of people's feelings and attractiveness. For example, Americans highly value positive non-verbal displays and regard someone who smiles as more intelligent than someone who does not, while Japanese do not equate expressiveness with intelligence.

In general, non-verbal communication becomes more important in cross-cultural communication than in homogeneous communication. In the former there is a greater chance of the verbal message being misunderstood or unclear. When this happens, people look to non-verbal clues for clarification.

### **6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION IN MULTINATIONAL GROUPS**

Communication competence in multinational settings involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures. These can be influenced by training, education, experience, and guided practice (Wiseman, 2001). In addition, many communication difficulties in multinational settings can be eased by building up and using social capital (Riedel & Karrasch, 2002).

#### **6.6.1 Knowledge**

Included here is the knowledge necessary to interact appropriately and effectively, and the attitudes and abilities to facilitate the acquisition of this knowledge. What is needed is knowledge of other cultures, the host language, communication rules, and rules for specific contexts. Without knowledge, people will make misattributions, choose incorrect communication strategies, violate rules of etiquette, and cause loss of trust. Without knowledge they may not be able to correctly determine the reasons for the communication errors that they make. They also need feedback from others, and flexibility to learn from the feedback and change their behavior. Acquiring this knowledge involves attitudes and abilities such as open-mindedness, non-judgmentalness, and problem-solving ability.

#### **6.6.2 Motivation**

Communication competence involves the motivation to understand and be understood. Factors such as anxiety can influence the decision to communicate with someone. If multinational team members feel that they will not be understood, then this can influence whether they will even try to communicate. Or, if the effort to communicate outweighs the potential benefits, then team members may just give up the effort. With the motivation to communicate, team members will also be more open to feedback about whether

they are understanding and being understood. Motivation can create positive attitudes toward other cultures, empathy, and social relaxation, all of which will aid communication.

### **6.6.3 Skills and Attitudes**

These include being mindful of what you are doing and saying as well as your effect on others, appropriate self-disclosure, being flexible in your behavior, being able to manage the social interaction, maintaining your own cultural identity, the appropriate display of respect, finding ways to reduce uncertainty about others' communications, the ability to establish interpersonal relationships, expressing yourself clearly, and being able to "save face" for the other person.

Communicating across cultures involves a certain cognitive flexibility that enables the person to see the situation and communication that he or she is transmitting and receiving from different cultural perspectives. It involves paying attention to how others are perceiving you and then making adjustments to make the communication successful. This involves knowledge, that is, understanding cultural differences. If one is going to take another's cultural perspective then one must know what that perspective is.

Communicating across cultures also involves a behavioral flexibility to construct a message in the other person's frame of reference or to react within the cultural framework of the other person. It also involves meta-cognitive skills in the ability to see one's own behavior and communications in terms of the other's culture (i.e., the ability to observe one's own words and behavior from the viewpoint of another culture).

A key element in improving communication in multinational military teams is the team leader. Riedel and Karrasch (2002) report that multinational NATO team members participating in focus groups felt that the team leader has the critical role in managing the communication problem because the leader models how miscommunications should be identified and handled, and how feedback is given when miscommunications occur. The leader sets the tone of patience and respect for non-native speakers. The focus group participants agreed that patience and tolerance are the keys to any communication problem in multinational teams.

### **6.6.4 Social Capital**

Putnam (2000, p. 19) defines social capital as "connections among individuals – social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." Communication interactions among members of intercultural groups can be eased with the use of social capital, where social capital is the good will that has been built up between the group members. If multinational group members expect that the other group members will behave with respect and consideration toward them, then they will be inclined to interpret a cultural faux pas as unintended and the result of not knowing cultural differences in acceptable behavior. For example, a Canadian lecturer at an SFOR training session (Riedel & Karrasch, 2002) reported that he inadvertently used gestures that were offensive to his Saudi Arabian training audience. However, instead of being offended, the Saudi audience laughed and pointed out his mistake. Believing that he would not deliberately offend them, the Saudi audience assumed that his offensive gestures were unintended. In the end, use of social capital may be one of the most effective means of creating the motivation to communicate with group members of other cultures and easing communication difficulties.

## **6.7 CONCLUSION**

Communication is at the heart of multinational operations, yet soldiers from different countries may bring diverse styles of communication and understanding communications to their interactions, which can lead to problems in multinational military operations. In addition to misunderstandings, other communication problems can include an inability or unwillingness to share information, the stress and increased cognitive

effort of communicating in a second language, degraded perception of one's ability based on language fluency, and being overlooked for assignments due to lack of language fluency.

Cultural dimensions (e.g., Hofstede, 2001) can provide a useful framework for identifying, understanding, and dealing with cultural differences in communication. Other chapters in this report (e.g., Chapter 4) discussed how differences on cultural dimensions impact teamwork and performance. All of the dimensions also have implications for how people communicate and understand communications. For example, a soldier high on the cultural dimension of context would tend to use an indirect style of communication with much of his communication coming from the context and common assumptions. Another soldier low on the context dimension, and tending to use direct, explicit communications, may miss much of the contextual information because she is not looking for it. Knowing that the first soldier comes from a high-context culture would tell the second soldier to look for contextual information. Training on these cultural dimensions would give soldiers a framework for better understanding themselves, their multinational partners, and for avoiding and dealing with miscommunications.

Because the multinational component of military operations is only likely to increase, training in multicultural communication should be part of standard military training programs. Communication competence in multinational settings involves the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively with members of other cultures. These can be developed using a wide variety of techniques, including training, education, experience, and role models. Possible training approaches include pre-deployment training and resources available during deployment for specific information. Joint or multinational training would help develop skills in working with those of other cultures. But specific courses in multicultural awareness are not enough. Cultural issues should be integrated into all military training courses starting at the most basic levels. Consideration of cultural differences needs to be a part of how all military personnel think and operate.

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