



CULTURE TIPS

EDITION NO. 21

Understanding the importance of cultural differences at the individual engagement level of operations.

Understanding of cultural differences enables Soldiers to adjust their behavior and plans to operate more effectively. Cultural differences arise from the legacy of our common experience as a people that are reinforced by norms (taking similar others as references). On the other hand, similarities across cultures arise from having similar biological cognitive processes, emotions, and needs; and through the process of globalization that drives interaction of cultures, resulting in greater similarity.

In general, we share more with those from other cultures than we differ. By some estimates, most cultures differ by only 10 to 20 percent. We tend to notice most what is different and over-estimate these differences. Because culture is shared, violation of even a few cultural programs impacts the population dynamics – where small differences have large impacts at the group level.

At the individual level for operating, culture has less of an impact. Because cultures are mostly similar, individual differences usually are greater than group differences. However, it is still critical to know about cultural differences. Without knowing about the other culture, we are unaware of different cultural programs that an individual may operate by.

Even if the individual does not fully share in his/her culture programs, they will return to and operate within a population that does. This impacts their decisions and actions. Our personality and maturity are more critical for effectively operating with foreign populations. However, effectiveness can be enhanced by understanding the other culture. As an Army, our common capacity to operate effectively is increased by greater cultural understanding.

It is also important to keep in mind that national cultures are sometimes weak and have relatively few shared programs. What we think of as sub-cultures—ethnic groups, tribes, or community—often are more important. Pre-deployment training can only provide a brief and idealized picture of a national culture that may have little correspondence to your particular AO. It is up to you to recognize cultural differences in your AO.

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