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**THE INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
COMPETENCE:
AN ASSET FOR MULTINATIONAL OPERATIONS**

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Abstract:

The world is in constant change. Thus, adapting to the environment, has been, it is and must be not only a future quality but also a human capability. “Cancellation” of physical borders between nations by the appearance and operation of supranational organizations, like UE and NATO, creates advantages such as free movement of people and goods, but also agreements in the field of peacekeeping and defense policy in order to maintain their own independency. This course requires significant interaction between the states, reflected both in the concept of intercultural communication and communication as well, which become decisive factors in the process of cooperation, whether at the individual or society level, but and more importantly between armies.

Key words: culture, change, communication, skills, abilities

1. Introduction

The world is in constant change. Thus, adapting to the environment, has been, it is and must be not only a future quality but also a human capability. “Cancellation” of physical borders between nations by the appearance and operation of supranational organizations, like UE and NATO, creates advantages such as free movement of people and goods, but also agreements in the field of peacekeeping and defense policy in order to maintain their own independency. This course requires significant interaction between the states, reflected both in the concept of intercultural communication and communication as well, which become decisive factors in the process of cooperation, whether at the individual or society level, but and more importantly between armies.

2. Culture influence on communication

2.1. Intercultural & cross-culture communication

No matter where are you from or what is your skin colour, communication is important. Nelson Mandela once said: „*If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his hart.*” But when communicate across culture, that can be very tricky.

“Culture” is known worldwide as a phenomenon specific to a particular nation in which are integrated a number of distinctive features of that society such as gestures, rituals and customs, historical events, religious belief, etc.

Over time, people of the world were forced in some way or another to interact in some cases, so need for communication inevitable appears. Following numerous case studies on this issue, have revealed two important forms in which culture influences communication between nations:

- Intercultural communication
- Cross-culture communication

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Although the two forms may be regarded as synonymous there are differences of shape between them. Intercultural occur when two or more groups from different cultures meet and communicate with each other, while cross culture is offering comparison between two or more different cultures.

Intercultural communication is a term that show as how culture affects communication, and it referes to those communication issues or problems that might appear in one group or organization in wich people have different opinions regardind social, ethic and educational heritage.

In another train of thoughts, **cross cultural communication** it help us to understand not only the differences, but also the similarities between people of various culture. Analyzing and understanding these two criteria, help us rectify some biases among people and nations with different culture in order to create a feeling of trust and cooperation by means of language, gestures and body language.

All in all, intercultural communication is very important in nowadays, as it helps us to eliminate so-called cultural barriers between nations, through individual adaptation to the cultural environment of other nations, and also to develop communication skills in order to eliminate misunderstanding, confusion and embarrassment situations.

2.2. Forms of communication

Intercultural communication depends largely on how the message is sent. If the communication between people of the same culture is simple, when we are dealing with people from different cultures, the receiver can interpret the message in terms of its culture (values, beliefs, religion, language means, etc.), so it might be different from what the speaker intended.

There are many forms of communication, but the most important are:

A. Verbal communication

Verbal communication is used in everyday life, but also in relationships between people from different groups and organization, with different opinions and beliefs. The advantage of verbal communication is that to allow the speaker to see how the message was received and what changes are to be made depending on the receiver reactions. It also facilitates delicate communications and allows a wide range of possibilities to express the meaning of a message (dialog, exposure, report, lecture, etc.). In this sense we can see that verbal language is always connected with paraverbal language, or what people communicate by voice (volume, tone, rhythm, accent, pauses, etc.) and manifestations voice without verbal content (laughing, moaning, sighing, screaming, whistles, etc.)

Factors that affect verbal communication:

- Tone of voice
- Volume of voice
- Using descriptive words
- Emphasis on certain phrases

B. Nonverbal communication

This is done through non-verbal means, among them, the human body, the image or space. The information is encoded and transmitted by a variety of signs directly related to the position, movement, gestures, mimics, appearance, etc. Nonverbal communication is related to verbal one and it's easier to understand.

Factors that affect nonverbal communication:

- Facial expression and gestures
- Movement
- Eye contact
- Posture

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- Clothing

Regarding all this, in order to avoid misunderstanding, when you have to communicate with people from different cultures, it will be a great advantage to know in advance about their history as a nation, about their culture, habits and gesture. This can save us a lot from embarrassment moments and misunderstanding of the message that we want to be sent.

In conclusion, the main requirements for having an effective intercultural communication are:

- to have the capacity on understanding people's ways of thinking and their behaviours
- to have the capability to accept the existence of another opinion
- to be able to appreciate and respect different ways of thinking
- to be able to adapt and to be open-mind to different behaviours

3. Military culture & communication

3.1 Military culture

If we are to talk of military culture should keep in mind that the military is an organization. As a general definition, organization is an association of individuals, with common interests and concepts, united by specific regulation or statute, in order to develop an organized activity.

Unlike most organizations, military organization is specialized in use of threat and collective violence. Having this in consideration, we can say that the proper functioning of a military organization requires a high degree of coordination, based on a well structured leadership from top to bottom with a chain of command centralized and well defined, based on strict adherence to laws and regulations.

This reflects the concept of military culture, in which the individual is educated and trained in favor of the group, in order to achieve a common goal, for which he is willing to sacrifice not only his freedom but sometimes his life.

Sometimes this goal is not always accepted by the individual, but the way his human and professional life it develop by being educated in a high spirit of discipline and respect, might be the key to solving this social dilemmas (Olson, 1965).

Often soldier is forced to leave besides his own interests, in order to achieve the collective goal. Not a few times he has to accept the fact that he deals with extreme situations which are mandatory and must be accepted, but this shouldn't be a problem having in mind that his level of discipline is very high.

Nowadays, military culture has adapted to the needs of society and the current reality and has become:

- a culture which considers the military profession as a service to the country, in order to ensure the safety of the national and international community;
- a culture based on group cohesion and on professional code of ethics;
- a culture which consider that individual leadership is not only a responsibility, but also a duty;
- a culture that defines a group which is strongly motivated by its social duty as an activity of excellence;
- a culture that characterizes a group subjected to political leadership and characterized by strong loyalty to the country's fundamental laws;
- a culture that characterizes a set of group values: duty, honor, dedication, personal example, community character, hierarchy, discipline and control;
- the culture of a group that has gone through a careful selection and thorough professional education.

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As in any institution, the army is based on a hierarchical system. The ability of a soldier in becoming a leader is influenced by its military culture that helps to develop an entire system of skills and capabilities such as:

- a) Knowledge and skills: Leaders occupying a commanding post or another in which they have a direct influence must excel in their military specialty. On the other hand, the subordinates of a very competent leader are less at risk than those whose leader is of questionable competence;
- b) Cognitive ability: Solving problems intelligently was always a reliable indicator of a leader efficiency;
- c) Social skills: Doesn't matter the level of influence exerted by a military leader, but his interpersonal attitudes - empathy, kindness, capacity negotiation, persuasion and effective management conflicts – those who are essential in order to establish and maintaining good group relationships;
- d) Personality: Personal integrity is the most important virtue of a military and an essential quality of a leader;
- e) Adaptability: leader who possess this characteristic is able to face any changes, learn from its experiences and make changes when it is necessary;
- f) Motivation and values: leader's desire to use their influence for the common good and not for their own purposes; attraction for the military profession and a great respect for competence along with the desire to excel in military skills.

In essence, we can conclude that the military culture is a well defined process based on specific values, behaviors, norms, and attitudes specific to the organizational context.

3.2 Military communication

Organization and functioning of a military organization is largely influenced by communication. Military communication system is an essential form of adapting to the rapidly changing of the external environment. Nowadays we are dealing with multinational task forces, cooperation between armies, standardization, interoperability, etc., which requires a common language in order to fulfil the missions.

Military language is recognized as specialized language, and it is divided into many specialized terms that define and separate different branches within the military system. It contains specific terminology, abbreviations, acronyms, slangs, expression, etc. Last but not least, military communication system is influenced by the ranking system, relations of subordination, specific reporting rules, ways of addressing, etc.

Military system is based on several types of communication, such as:

- Vertical communication: is performed between different categories levels and between commanders and their subordinates; it's particularly intense and focuses on how receiver (subordinate) get the message, given his values, beliefs and aspirations; in this particular case, subordinate has access to commander experience, that enables him to understand what are his tasks regarding priorities, options and requirements;
- Horizontal communication: is performed between commanders or personnel within the same hierarchical level and its role is to ensure interdependence between structures and also to establish collaborative relationships and a pleasant social and emotional climate;
- Oblique communication: is performed between persons which are situated on different levels and working in different branches.

All in all, we can conclude that communication and communication techniques are extremely useful within the national military system, especially between foreign armies, due to the rapidly changing of the external environment.

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4. Intercultural Communication – an efficient „weapon” in multinational operations

Multinational missions under command of UN, EU, NATO, etc. whether to maintain or impose peace, involve the participation of a significant number of troops belonging to the armed forces of Member States of these coalitions.

So, there is an interaction between military forces participating in the mission but also between them and the locals in conflict areas. Appears thus also the need for communication and understanding between individuals who share different cultures and religions in order to create first off all a climate of respect not only tolerance. Therefore, in order to co-operate in an effective way, soldiers have to be trained regarding history, values, religions and behaviour of the region and peoples living in it. Thus, need arises for military training programs such as language courses, cultural knowledge and customs courses, specific legislation courses, all of this in order to develop social skills.

The most important skills that a military must develop are:

- Cultural social skills: Knowledge is reflected in social norms, rituals, taboos and conventions that govern a community, and also in the daily routine and how to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. Results appears when the individual is able to negotiate in a win – win manner some potential conflicts or cultural misunderstandings;
- Language / multilanguage skills: Knowing one or more foreign languages is a “must” for every participants in multinational missions, no matter age, nationality, rank or job position, in order to achieve intercultural understanding.

Regarding intercultural communication within missions, co-operation between contingents of an international operation is usually dominated by the lead nation procedures. That doesn't mean that staff officers and NCOs has to know only those procedures, also must be aware of the procedures of their own armed forces as well. In order to eliminate misunderstandings and fulfil all tasks, it is mandatory to have professional abilities not only in English language, but also a high competence in military terminology (acronyms and abbreviations). As it was mentioned before, this requires language training (especially English) during staff work, daily routine, as well as military exercises.

An important aspect is pre-deployment training, not only for those who speak English, but more importantly if the lead nation is a non - English speaking one. The goal of this kind of training is to get the soldiers of English speaking nations not to feel superior towards the other partners, but to be tolerant and empathic. Last but not least, everyone must be trained in using rules of engagement, which are fixed for an operation.

Nevertheless, relations with the local population is undoubtedly a key element of intercultural communication in multinational operations. In order to have succes in peace building process, co-operation with local authorities and population became a challenge for peace support troops. Even though they have the dominant position in the area, this fact must not transform in a dominant behaviour, otherwise the locals could become non – cooperating or worse, enemys. Therefor, it has to exist special trained personnel with excellent negotiation skills, who must be aware that the negotiations results could last longer than expectetion, having in consideration the circumstances of a different culture.

To summarize, if those things are put into practice it is very possible that we will be able to manage a conflict in a successful manner, and also to develop a good intercultural relationships by using a proper sistem of communication.

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5. Conclusion

The events not only in the past but in today's world, have shown that people interact more often, for many reasons such as economical, political, social, etc.

That's why need for communication is growing, and this phenomenon will prove his efficiency only when people will have the ability to understand or adapt to other cultures.

It is clear that this has major implications in the military system, because modern warfare is now based on multinational missions.

So an army whose soldiers are not trained to develop and acquire skills in areas such as intercultural communication, language development, social skills, motivation and values, will not be able to cope with present and future challenges.

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