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## **COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES IN THE NEW MILITARY ENVIRONMENT**

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**Abstract:**

Communication is a very wide spectrum of behavioural deeds, skills, means and tools of self-expression, own values, thoughts, decisions and attempts. Some people possess incorporated communicative abilities: they are more social, have better communication with others, more precisely transmit their stances. Others are to learn communication life long, attending less or more useful trainings. Achieving our objectives or goals depends on how we manage to make ourselves clear in describing them, communicate them, socialising among our network and asking for support. Communication is vital to enable the creation of a functioning network and to explain and overcome the differences between perspectives, courses of actions, concepts or ideas.

*Key words: communication, challenges, military, environment*

### **1. Introduction**

Communication is a very wide spectrum of behavioural deeds, skills, means and tools of self-expression, own values, thoughts, decisions and attempts. Some people possess incorporated communicative abilities: they are more social, have better communication with others, more precisely transmit their stances. Others are to learn communication life long, attending less or more useful trainings.

It is worth to mention that efficient communication never occurs as single sided only. That means effective communication takes place when, as mentioned before, feedback happens, when a receiving person comprehends the message and an addresser is convinced that those processes took place indeed. In other words, appropriate communication is, in nearly all types of cases, a dialogue or a conversation.

What is more, it is not only verbal, conscious and intentional but also non-verbal, subconscious and unintentional. The behaviourists claim that “the rational verbal communication is only 7 percent of an entire message – a receiver reads and interprets also a way of addresser’s speaking (approximately 38 percent) as well as the body language (as much as 55 percent)” (Mehrabian and Ferris, 1967, p. 252).

The way of speaking (that is a sound of speaker’s voice, its volume, intra-sentence intonation, intonation of certain words in a phrase, pause, paralanguage) as well as non-verbal communication (mimic, communication by touch, maintaining of a personal distance, gestures, pose, overlook) are dominating here. It means, that if the content of pronounced words is not coherent with the speaking manner and the body language then a receiving person trusts more in non-verbal message than the content of words (Filipiak, 2004, pp. 51 – 53).

With regard to the military organizations – it is of paramount importance how the commander communicates as it enhances or weakens the strength of relations between him/her and soldiers. If he/she is a proficient communicator, conscious of the power of the body



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language and manner of transmitting the contents, his/her chances of becoming a real leader significantly increase.

## **2. Individual-Level Communication Challenges**

The new military environment is more dynamic, active and challenging. The actions against an enemy are a mixture of hard and soft power, which are spread through the entire depth of his territory. Therefore, while the prioritization and discarding when needed must be in place throughout the entire decision making process, *the military commanders* should remain focused on a single goal: how to raise the operational effectiveness of the forces under their command.

But the burden of being a commander is that of taking decisions whilst trying to contain as much as possible the risks and effects of his orders. When the operational environment is spread through all 5 domains, integrating joint functions and having different layers of OOD (Opponent Options Denial), the comprehensive operational picture is extremely complex and it contains a lot of elements, information and resources, which must be coordinated and effectively engaged to achieve the mission objectives.

The commander is supposed to have access to all relevant, transparent and authentic information in a timely manner, to influence his decision or to help him delivering his direction and guidance (D&G). And in the same time he must practice the principles of mission command throughout the entire cycle of planning and decision making process.

Therefore, one of the biggest challenge for a commander in charge is having the ***complete information*** before taking a decision.

*The junior officers* came with a different background. Being raised in an environment where everything is technological and information - sharing based, their behaviour is different than the one of senior generation. The channels of communication are different and even the language is specific. Their capacity of analysing and transmitting principles, concepts or ideas is maximized by their ability to use different platforms and means. For them, it is easier to communicate via social platform, without the need of face-to-face interaction.

The information is rapidly spread to the decision factors, and the ***feedback*** is received in no-time. The network is sometimes established without any physical interaction and the workload is shared between all the people in charge. However, in order to make this happen, there's a need of creating a shared understanding of information throughout the entire network. And to build the mutual trust that everyone is doing his job in a timely matter, in a professional way and to a certain established standard, it takes time and it is hard to educate furthermore.

However, in military domain, the communication has a ***structure*** and sometimes it is difficult to find the sources of information which could help your work flow. Many times, the old generation leaders don't take in consideration the junior officers' needs of information and, by ignorance, they don't establish ***clear procedures*** for the flow of information/channels of communication. The formal way of communicating is still predominant, with boomerang effects for commanders when it comes to take decisions in a timely sensitive matter, motivated and sustained. The awareness is spread through different levels and the comprehensive approach is hard to realize. On the other way, ***being transparent*** and ***sharing information***, communicating effective and throughout all levels of hierarchy, could raise the common awareness and comprehensive approach but in the detriment of ***information overload***.

*Specific qualities for a staff officer nowadays:*



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- Extensive experience utilising different Office tools
- Experience implementing collaborative workspace solutions.
- Ability to provide presentations to a range of stakeholders
- Good interpersonal skills and communication skills
- Poise and tact.
- Must be able to work as a member of a team.
- Able to work independently.
- A pro-active approach to assess, identify and address system weaknesses before they critically impact on operational users.
- Capacity to analyse and resolve complex problems, particularly those related to organisational processes
- Flexible and be able to work under pressure and still produce high quality results.
- Able to work in a multicultural environment.
- Find the owners of information in your HQ. Find out how the information flow works and collect it before starting your point paper.
- Write the first point paper; you'll have 80% of solution. The rest of 20% is details.
- Present your briefing in a timely effect based way. By time – find the opportunity, don't be in a hurry but not late also

## **2. Headquarters Level Challenges**

The communication challenges therefore are exponentially tied with the complexity of operation. We cannot have commanders or leaders as experts in all domains, but they must exercise their trust in subordinates and in their advice. In the past few years, there has been a rapid proliferation of tools and resources for conducting operations at joint level. While there's no question these tools have helped us to bring our communications approach to a whole new level of sophistication – from gathering and sharing meaningful data and metrics, to engaging our audiences in new and exciting ways – they've also created quite a lot of clutter. The focus at individual level should be, however, not on More tools and instruments, but on Better. This is because we had more tactical activity, more pushing out content on more channels; ever more new technologies and collaboration platforms.

And all those tools and systems, which are feeding the military decision elements, are delivering a huge volume of data which, in a lack of proper procedures and experience, can be easily disregarded or uncorrelated. As example, a battle rhythm at a corps-level headquarters is extended throughout a period of four days, while at joint headquarters level the battle rhythm is extended throughout seven days period.

The commanders communicate via VTC or by phone on a daily matter and the D&G are issued accordingly. But if a working group or a board is planned in a different day, then the information flow might be already broken. For this reason, teams responsible for managing the flow of information and experience between departments are decreasingly centralized departments of specialized skills, and increasingly mission-based teams of experts.

The NATO HQs however have a designated information manager (IM) planner post, who, together with the information and knowledge management office, establish the procedures, the information flow, and contribute to the development of HQ's battle rhythm. Information management is an emerging field responsible with the infrastructure to collect, manage,



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preserve, store and deliver information. The IM planner provides IM planning and delivery support for a nominated NATO headquarter as part of a Project Team. The IM Planner also supports the analysis of future capabilities to support the communication flow into the HQ and Electronic Working Practices (training the functional area systems, specific systems).

The information and knowledge management office is responsible within the HQ with the creation, sharing, using and managing the knowledge and information of the designated HQ. It refers to a multidisciplinary approach to achieve HQ main goals by making the best use of his knowledge. The main characteristics are:

- Focus on improved performance, competitive advantage, innovation
- Sharing of lessons identified/learned
- Integration
- Continuous improvement of the organisation.

All those characteristics are overlapping with organisational learning and might be distinguished as a strategic asset encouraging the sharing of knowledge.

### **5.Strategic Communication Integration**

External communication between organization and audience has evolved rapidly in recent times. Communication methods to reach key external groups has blossomed with digital platforms allowing one-to-one or one-to-many channels. In addition to well-established approaches, such as telephone or postal communication, we now have a vast array of messaging tools that have pros and cons depending upon the role required.

Strategic communication is a way to achieve cognitive information effects using any means available. Strategic communication simply employs capabilities (limited only to the imagination) to support the achievement of a military objective. Just as a commander integrates air, land and sea capabilities into military planning and execution, he can and should integrate strategic communication capabilities.

The planning process is not new. The focus on and understanding of this new concept and its capabilities, however, may be. First, planners must define the information environment and its physical, informational and cognitive dimensions. How does the target audience receive their information (TV, radio, internet, rumour, religious services, etc.)? How does culture play into the message? Who are the credible messengers? Next, planners need to consider the desired effect on the cognitive dimension, i.e. the ends or outcome. Does the end-state include changing perceptions, influencing people, gaining acceptance, gaining credibility and trust, gaining support? This will drive how the operation will be conducted where themes and messages are necessary, but not sufficient. Any military planner will quickly see how this logical thought process fits neatly into the established military decision-making process (or campaign planning process). The information environment is considered in the analysis of the overarching operational environment. The commander’s intent establishes an end-state. This must include a statement of the desired information environment end-state. A properly stated information end-state in the commander’s intent will guide staffs in the selection of appropriate courses of action and drive subordinate units in the way they conduct operations to achieve that end-state. A selected course of action will then be wargamed using the traditional friendly action, expected enemy reaction, and friendly counteraction methodology. The war gaming process must also occur with an eye toward information effects. This becomes especially important in counterinsurgency operations where the enemy uses information as an asymmetric strategic



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means and where changing indigenous populations' perceptions can turn them from a neutral position to one in favour of coalition forces. But it also applies across all levels of the spectrum of conflict in an environment where military operations will likely be covered in real time by both mainstream and “new” media sources.

Currently staff sections exist at both the service (e.g. the G7 in the Army) and joint (the J39 for IO) levels to focus on the information environment for the commander. Most combatant commands have also established strategic communication directorates or incorporated strategic communication planning into effects cells. Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) have recently been employed in Afghanistan at the brigade level to support a focus on the information environment in planning with very positive initial success. These teams include a social scientist with expertise in cultural issues. The education pipeline, however, is not overflowing with trained information experts...and most brigades will likely never see a social scientist assigned to their staff. On the other hand, it is less important to have a school-trained information staff section than to have the command understand the value and importance of information effects and incorporate strategic communication means to achieve those effects.

## **5. Conclusion**

The communication issue is not new. Achieving our objectives or goals depends on how we manage to make ourselves clear in describing them, communicate them, socialising among our network and asking for support. Communication is vital to enable the creation of a functioning network and to explain and overcome the differences between perspectives, courses of actions, concepts or ideas.

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