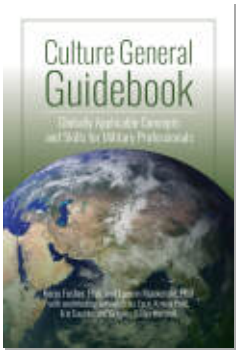
CHAPTER 1 Introduction



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For more than a decade, various members of the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) have been discussing differing perspectives and strategies for teaching culture to military personnel. It is very easy to get tangled up in different policies and white papers describing what DOD's "cultural capability" should be, the roles of different kinds of professional development, who needs what kinds and depths of learning, how individual and collective capability should be measured and tracked, along with a host of other issues. It also is easy to be overwhelmed by all the different and sometimes contradictory approaches, frameworks, and definitions that are codified in policy, concept papers, doctrine, and program documentation throughout the department. This guidebook does not take an official position on any of these issues. Rather, it is intended to provide scientifically sound, operationally relevant information that can be used within the context of many different programs, policies, and frameworks.

In designing and writing the guidebook, we were guided not only by our scientific backgrounds and experiences with military education and training, but also by extensive interactions with military personnel from all the Services. We are grateful to them for the time and good advice they provided. We also were guided by the knowledge that this is not the first time the U.S. military has focused on how to prepare its personnel for culturally complex operating environments, as publications such as the Marine Corps' *Small Wars Manual,* Fleet Marine Forces Reference Publication (FMFRP) 12-15, demonstrate.[1] We were able to draw on and

[1] *Small Wars Manual,* Fleet Marine Forces Reference Publication (FMFRP) 12-15 (Washington, DC: Headquarters Marine Corps, Department of the Navy, 1940, 1990 reprint).

learn from that history. While many past efforts were laudable, not all were successful. For those who are interested, the references in appendix D include several critical assessments of the DOD's efforts to integrate social science and cultural knowledge. However, as this is a guidebook rather than a scholarly book, we have focused the narrative on placing its contents within the contemporary context and presenting concepts and skills military personnel can use.

The remainder of this chapter situates the guidebook contents in the contemporary DOD context, provides an overview of the concept of culture, and discusses different frameworks. If readers want to jump right into the concepts and skills, we recommend skipping to chapters 2 and 3.[2]

The Relevance of Culture General for the Military

Military personnel use cultural capabilities across the full range of military operations. The most obvious ways personnel use cultural capabilities is when engaging with foreign military partners or populations and in mission planning to anticipate and account for the way cultural patterns (of a local population or an adversary) will intersect with operations and the second- and third-order effects of operations. Less obvious is the value of these capabilities during everyday interactions with others, when navigating organizational culture patterns in joint operations, or in interactions with other government agencies and nongovernmental organizations. In each type of activity, military personnel have to be mentally prepared to learn something about the other people involved in (or affected by) the activity. This preparation is not only about making interactions go

[2] Except where explicitly cited, the descriptions of concepts and skills in this guidebook were developed based on the general educational, research, and experiential backgrounds of the authors and contributors. Whenever possible, military personnel were consulted during the selection of which concepts and skills to include and how to describe them.

smoothly. It also helps military personnel understand contextual factors that may affect their mission and to anticipate second- and third-order effects of their actions.

It goes without saying that the wide range of missions across the U.S. military, the hierarchical rank structure, and the variety of military occupational specialties (MOSs) require a broad, multidimensional approach to culture training and education. Such an approach involves diverse programming, diversified content, and a range of delivery methods. The content area that is the focus of this guidebook is the interplay of intercultural concepts and skills—the more generalizable thinking processes, concepts, and skills that will help you make sense of and act effectively in any operating environment. We refer to these as *culture general concepts and skills*. The concepts, addressed in chapter 2 of this guidebook, provide some ways of understanding and managing information as well as clues about what to look for. Chapter 3 provides skills you can use to recognize when information is available and how to get it and improve your ability to accurately interpret it. Mastery of these concepts and skills is fundamental to developing cross-cultural competence.

We do wish to stress that culture general concepts and skills are only some of the cultural capabilities relevant to military personnel. Although they are our focus for the purposes of this guide, they are at their most useful when combined with knowledge and skills from other learning domains. The most commonly referenced culture-related learning domains are described in the next section.

We have written this guidebook for you, the military professional, to deepen your understanding of this content area.[3] In it we capture and attempt to make accessible what contemporary social science says about

[3] This guidebook serves to inform curriculum development as well. Curriculum developers for military practitioners will find this guidebook useful in explaining the culture general concepts and skills military operators need to carry out their missions and can leverage its content in their curricula.

culture, the experiences of our military colleagues, some of our own experiences, and those of civilian colleagues. As much as possible, we have written this guidebook so that you can look at sections independently of one another rather than needing to move linearly from beginning to end.

Culture General in Context: The Learning Domains in DOD's Cultural Capability

The culture general concepts and skills we discuss in this text comprise part of the DOD's cultural capability. You will see references to LRC (language, region, culture) or LREC (language, regional expertise, culture) in both departmental and Service policies and programs. Individual organizations break up the associated knowledge and skills in different ways according to their different functions or the training, education, and experience opportunities they can make available. Common among them are loosely categorized learning domains, such as region-specific, culture-specific, and communication or language. The various learning domains provide you a sense of the scope of capabilities encompassed in the DOD's cultural capability and the learning areas involved in cultivating it. It is important to remember that these descriptions are not necessarily universally shared across the services or within the department. This lack of universality within DOD should not be a stumbling block for you. Instead, read the following with an emphasis on the content of each to gain insight into the types of knowledge and skills involved.

Region-specific Knowledge

This learning domain includes information about a broad geographic area, such as transnational issues, nation-state interactions, trends, and cultural patterns that are common or prominent in groups of the region. Region-specific learning focuses on strategic-level knowledge and trends

that will improve your understanding of the global security environment. Having an understanding of the region-specific component is useful for you, as this can help locate your missions in the global context and reveal potential connections that can influence the outcomes of what you do.

Regional designations are useful, but they do have a few limitations. The boundaries drawn around regions may not always be perceived as relevant by governments or populations in those areas. People are unlikely to organize their activities and relationships neatly within such defined lines. It is important to remember that how regions are represented or broken down reveals the interests and needs of the group defining them, not necessarily how other groups or the groups being defined view the region. DOD commonly aligns regional knowledge with combatant command (COCOM) areas of responsibility (AORs). This regional configuration represents U.S. security interests, resource considerations, and, in some cases, political positions. You may encounter other approaches to regionalization that make more sense for other purposes. For example, some regionally oriented offices or education programs may focus on a subset of a broader region, such as the Trans-Sahel rather than all of Africa. Likewise, there are some issues or threats where it may be more useful to consider a country or area in a context other than COCOM AORs. For example, many issues in Afghanistan need to be considered in the contexts of Asia, Russia, and Europe rather than U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). Additionally, the greater transportation and communication afforded by globalization mean that regional geography is not always a sufficient lens for understanding an area that is influenced by distant economic and geopolitical trends, nonstate actors, and transnational relationships.

Culture-specific Knowledge

This learning domain includes detailed information about the cultural patterns of a particular group or network. Sometimes groups and

networks are geographically defined, and other times they are not. For example, through diaspora and migration, a group may become geographically dispersed but maintain network connections and continue to have some cultural patterns in common. There is usually at least a little overlap between region-specific and culture-specific knowledge. However, not all regional patterns hold true for every group in the area. For example, in a particular region, Catholicism might be the predominant religion, but there are likely to be specific groups who practice other faiths. Culture-specific learning focuses on fine-grained knowledge that will reveal this variation and help you plan and interact with distinct groups.

It is common to find cultural products that provide an overview of culture across an entire country or large population—think travel books or field guides for Afghanistan and Iraq in the DOD. These can be useful starting points to provide you context and some general information about potential cultural patterns within the group. It is important to keep the limitations of such texts in mind, as they often present generalizations about a group of people that are not universally shared by all members. This potential for generalization is similar to the limitation of region-specific knowledge. In this text and recommended readings, you will learn that *culture* does not really mean a set of beliefs and behaviors that members of a neatly bounded group all follow in the same way. The anthropologist Tim Ingold wrote that it is "more realistic, then, to say that . . . people *live culturally*, rather than that they *live in cultures*."[4] What this means is that no one simple description of a culture is going to hold true for every subset of a population or for every situation or for every individual. Although this may sound complicated, having a more accurate understanding of what culture is actually simplifies things. For exam-

[4] Tim Ingold, "Introduction to Culture," in *Companion Encyclopedia of Anthropology: Humanity, Culture and Social Life*, 2d ed., ed. Tim Ingold (New York: Routledge, 2002), 330, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203036327.

ple, if you have been reading about cultural patterns in Guatemala and are assigned to work with military partners there, keeping in mind the limitations of such information will help you anticipate some differences between broader cultural patterns and military culture. Anticipating this variation better equips you to notice relevant differences and operate more effectively.

Language and Communication

This learning domain contains two areas, both of which are useful for military professionals. The first is the ability to speak a language, often referred to as *linguistic competence*. This ability facilitates rapport-building and operational effectiveness on multiple levels. The other area is the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in context, often referred to as communication competence. A key component of communication competence is intercultural communication. What does this mean? Intercultural communication looks at the transferable concepts and skills associated with communication competence, such as identifying communication styles, decoding nonverbal cues, and managing paralinguistic (e.g., tone, gestures, facial expressions, etc.) use and perception. It helps the military practitioner think through such questions as: How does paralanguage influence the way I perceive and am perceived by others? How can I manage my nonverbal communication so as to be more effective in my intercultural interactions? How can differences in communication styles affect the production and interpretation of messages? What are some common communication barriers that stand in the way of achieving intercultural competence?

The duality of this domain is often underemphasized in the DOD, with many DOD language efforts focused on linguistic competence. It is important to keep in mind the difference between the ability to speak a language and the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in context. This distinction can be illustrated in a number of ways and is

captured well by the attempt of television producers in Dubai to bring the series *The Apprentice* to Arabic-speaking viewers. The producers translated the show's signature phrase of "You're fired!" to "May God be kind to you"—noting the importance of formal indirectness in the Arabic language.[5] This interpretation highlights both the importance of understanding how cultural values manifest themselves in communication behavior as well as how language can be used differently by culture groups in conversation. Although there is no question that linguistic competence is important and a great start, it is not enough to ensure effectiveness in both your personal and military endeavors. This text focuses on intercultural communication skills as part of the culture general skills; they are discussed in more detail in chapter 3.

Culture General

The culture general learning domain that is the focus of this book involves concepts and skills that will help you learn about, plan for, and interact in many different intercultural situations. U.S. military personnel come from many distinct cultural backgrounds, work with U.S. interagency partners and nongovernmental organizations, partner with foreign military personnel, interact with local populations abroad, and try to understand and anticipate adversary intent. Each of these activities involves understanding interactions among cultural patterns of different groups, sometimes in times of significant change or disruption. Culture general concepts and skills are the underlying thinking concepts, content areas, and skills that help you be better consumers and users of available information and find your way when specific information is not available or is rapidly changing.

Culture general knowledge is similar to how you learn broad principles about driving a vehicle. When you get into a new car, you know that

[5] Ian Parker, "The Mirage," *New Yorker* 81, no. 32 (17 October 2005): 128.

you will probably find controls for things like headlights, windshield wipers, monitoring speed or fuel level, adjusting the seats, and shifting gears. They may not be in the same place or work the exact same way as the last vehicle you drove, but you can look around, identify them, and figure out how to use them fairly quickly. You also know that not every vehicle has the same set of features. Your last vehicle may have had a gauge for revolutions per minute (RPM) and a backup camera. If you find that your new vehicle does not have these things, you will not assume it is broken. You will know it is in the normal range of features and be able to adapt your driving accordingly. Culture general concepts and skills give you a range of things to look for and some general principles for how to adapt. Because they are abstract, some people find these concepts and skills a little harder to learn, but the more you understand them, the broader the range of situations you will be able to navigate.

Cross-cultural Competence

Cross-cultural competence (3C) is the capability for thinking and interacting that a person develops through combinations of experience, education, and training across all of the learning domains above: region-specific, culture-specific, language/communication, and culture general. It is a term you will see across DOD and Service-level policies and programs and as an outcome of the Services' culture training and education programs. 3C is often described as a multidimensional construct that includes various knowledge components, skills, and characteristics. Each branch, of course, approaches the definition slightly differently. Robert Greene Sands and Allison Greene-Sands review each military branch's definition as well as the research, policy, learning, and application considerations for military contexts, to include the histori-

cal development of 3C in professional military education and training.[6] Also, a "living" annotated bibliography devoted to 3C in the DOD surveys the hundreds of articles, reports, and book chapters that have emerged from a wide variety of academic disciplines and military branches in the past decade.[7] Throughout the department, you may encounter different terms (such as *intercultural competence*, *cultural competences*, or *cultural capabilities*) that seem to explain the same or similar ideas. There are nuanced differences with each of those terms, some policy-related, others scientific, that are beyond the scope of this text. In this guidebook, we generally use *cross-cultural competence* or 3C, as it has broad recognition in the DOD and captures the totality of the cultural capabilities that military personnel need to be effective throughout their careers. The information presented here is designed to help you build a foundation for cross-cultural competence through deepening your understanding of culture general concepts and skills.

What Is Culture?

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs.
>
> ~ Clifford Geertz[8]

The emphasis on the term *culture* is an artifact of the historical gap in relations between DOD and certain scientific disciplines. By the late 1990s,

[6] Robert Greene Sands and Allison Greene-Sands, *Cross-Cultural Competence for a Twenty-First-Century Military: Culture, the Flipside of COIN* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014).

[7] Jessica A. Gallus et al., *Cross-cultural Competence in the Department of Defense: An Annotated Bibliography*, Special Report 71 (Fort Belvoir, VA: U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, 2014).

[8] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

fields such as cultural anthropology had stopped using the term beyond introductory level classes or as a broad umbrella term for more precise concepts. Unfortunately, the lack of communication between field social sciences and DOD meant that, after 2003, when military organizations increased efforts to prepare the military to operate effectively among and in partnership with different groups, they did not have easy access to scientific developments of the past 40 years, and most programs used the term *culture*. The term has little value in terms of explaining human behavior and tends to introduce confusion, rather than clarity, into discussions. Still, given its continued use in DOD documents and programs, it is important to clarify how we are using the term here.

Establishing a universal definition for culture is a difficult if not impossible task. Both within and across disciplines, social scientists cannot agree on a set definition and resort to broad statements to capture complex processes that prove of little practical value. Is this just academic turf warfare? No, it reveals the complexity of the human experience and the messiness of people.

Culture is how we get through the day, make decisions, figure things out, etc. In more scientific terms, culture is the creation, maintenance, and transformation of semishared patterns of meaning, sense-making, affiliation, action, and organization by groups. In a practical sense, this means that culture is not an unchanging set of rules and beliefs that controls every aspect of people's behavior. People in a group have developed roughly shared patterns of understanding about how the world works, how to behave, how to interact with each other, and so forth. There is a reciprocal (feedback) relationship between individual thoughts and behaviors and these patterns. On the one hand, individuals perceive patterns and use them to understand what is going on around them and how to behave. You know how to behave differently in a cafeteria and a fancy restaurant because you have learned patterns that clue you into the situation and expected behavior without anyone needing to give you

a list of rules each time you go out to eat. You have a sense of what "the right thing" is in many different situations because you have learned patterns of values that help you make choices.

On the other hand, these patterns of meaning and behavior do not appear out of thin air. It is common to hear people talk about "U.S. culture" or "Iraqi culture" as though culture is a thing that floats around and magically influences people's behaviors. Of course, you know from your own experience that this cannot possibly be true. The reality is a little more complex. These patterns are created by people and are maintained or changed by people repeating them. Sometimes people deliberately try to change a pattern or keep it the same, but more often patterns emerge and evolve just by people going about their normal daily lives. In the United States, it used to be very normal for sons to follow in their fathers' footsteps, to take over a family business, or to go into a similar line of work. While there always were exceptions, that was a common pattern that people understood then as right and proper. Over time, individuals made other choices, sometimes taking advantage of other changes in society, and this pattern has changed. Some children do still follow their parents' occupational choices, but it is just as common for children to choose a completely different career. In some cases, people work very hard to maintain existing patterns. This can be seen in the military Services, where people spend a great deal of time talking about, enacting, and conducting ceremonies related to values such as honor, commitment, and courage. In short, the patterns exist and stay the same or change only through people making choices about how to think, behave, and interact.

To help you understand the meaning of culture, you should keep in mind the following general principles about culture:

1. **Culture is something people are doing, not something they live in.** Culture is not a predetermined set of rules that drives behavior but rather semishared patterns of meaning and behavior that peo-

ple develop and use (often creatively) to understand the world and interact with one another.

2. **Culture is learned.** People are born with the capacity to live culturally and learn the patterns of people around them as they grow up. Over time, ideas and behaviors may be so thoroughly learned that they seem instinctive. It is important to remember that they were learned. This aspect of culture is especially important to remember when you encounter ideas or behaviors that pose real challenges to your ideas of right and wrong.

3. **Culture is shared, but not perfectly.** You will encounter internal variation and should not expect individuals to behave in lockstep with a broad description of their culture.

4. **Culture changes all the time.** Sometimes this is very slow. Sometimes it happens quickly. The key is to not fall into the trap of expecting that a broad description is going to hold true over time, especially in conflict or disaster.

A Note on Service Frameworks

You will encounter different ways each Service approaches organizing cultural (e.g., regional- and culture-specific) information. Typically, they divide the information into domains, dimensions, or categories to facilitate management of such information at both the organizational and individual level. When the original version of this guidebook was released, the Marine Corps used 5 dimensions while the Air Force used 12 domains and the Army used 4. Regardless of changes over time, these organiza-

tional strategies, or frameworks, can be used to feed information into planning tools across the Services, such as ASCOPE and METT-TC.[9]

Each framework draws attention to certain aspects of culture while minimizing attention to others. Each may be more useful in some applications than others. A framework with only a few categories can be easier to remember and to use for short reports or presentations. However, smaller frameworks also can mask details. For example, while a category called "social structure" can be used to include things like gender roles and identity, it does not specifically call attention to those considerations. A framework with more categories will remind you to look at more cultural considerations in greater detail but may be unwieldy for reporting or recording observations in the field. Another example is that the Air Force domains included one that specifically called out health. There is no reason you could not look at health using the Marine Corps dimensions, but you would have to remember to do so on your own. There are some missions where health matters a great deal, such as those involving humanitarian assistance, and some where it may be less important, such as a large-scale exercise of major equipment with foreign military partners. So, it is not necessary that you memorize any one set of domains as long as you are able to remember to pick a set that will help you focus your attention on what matters for a mission.

Keep in mind that these frameworks serve to familiarize you with a new operating environment on a basic level but are unlikely to prepare you to navigate the more unpredictable events that may occur when boundaries are blurred and you are faced with unexpected intercultural interactions. The value of culture general concepts and skills lies in the fact that they are transferable (in other words, applicable regardless of

[9] ASCOPE is an acronym for area, structures, capabilities, organizations, people, and events. METT-TC is an acronym for mission, enemy, terrain and weather, troops, time available, and civilian considerations.

the specific culture) and can be elevated to higher levels of learning.

A culture general foundation can help you identify and understand relevant information and, by employing these thinking concepts, content areas, and skills, determine connections among different aspects of culture. For example, a general understanding of how people think about and use kinship relationships might help you identify and understand the way kinship relationships are being used to move resources and information. Furthermore, it provides tools for taking full advantage of culture-specific information using different lenses so that you are a better consumer and user of such information. For example, when you are provided a culture-specific predeployment briefing, you are not just receiving basic facts about that culture group. Culture-specific information focuses on the patterns of behavior and meaning that are specific to a particular group or network at a particular time. This information is sometimes relevant to more than one knowledge area and, if you are tuned into potential connections, can help you understand better both the *what* and the *why* of what is going on around you. The fact that older men make most of the decisions in a group is a piece of information that can add to your knowledge about social roles, who has authority to influence decisions, and the values of the group. Understanding the multiple layers of meaning beneath the surface of your observations can assist in mission planning, in your interactions with others, and in your ability to anticipate second- and third-order effects of your decisions.

Rules of the Road

Before you start the next chapter, we think it is helpful to consider the following four basic rules of the road:

Rule 1. ***The local people have not organized themselves, their beliefs, or their behavior patterns for your convenience.***

Figuring out what is going on can be complex. Accept it and move on.

Rule 2. ***Things you take for granted may not be true here.*** Basic concepts such as honesty, fairness, respect, winning, finished, ownership, and agreement may mean fundamentally different things to local people. Be prepared to cope with both your confusion and theirs.

Rule 3. ***You do not have to like it to understand it.*** Some things you learn about the local people may anger or puzzle you. That is okay. View these differences as significant factors that shape the area of operations and affect a unit's ability to carry out missions. Figuring out what is going on (that means getting inside local peoples' heads) may require temporarily suspending your own beliefs, assumptions, and expectations as much as possible to focus on learning over judging. This takes mental discipline.

Rule 4. ***Local people are not just reacting to YOU.*** They are reacting to their entire perception of U.S. influence. Before the first U.S. forces hit the ground, local people have a perception of the United States based on American products, media (such as films and television), and perhaps U.S. companies, nongovernmental organizations, or charities. These previous experiences shape the way people will react to you.

These rules serve as overarching guidelines for navigating the complex cultural situations you will encounter in your military profession. Keep them in mind as you read through the next two chapters on culture general concepts and skills.