CHAPTER 2 Culture General Concepts

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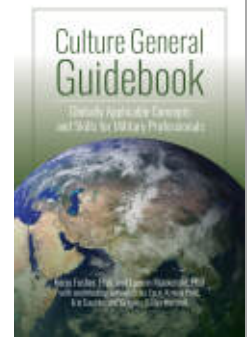Culture general concepts are those underlying thinking processes, ideas, and knowledge areas that help you identify, understand, and use region- and culture-specific knowledge more effectively. Whether first on the scene or a veteran in theater, these foundational concepts help you process the information you encounter, vet it against what you already know, and determine how best to incorporate it into your thinking, planning, and actions. No one has 100 percent understanding of culture at any time. No matter how much culture-specific preparation you do, your knowledge will always be imperfect. Culture general concepts help you refine your understanding, make adjustments for the misalignments between your preparation and reality on the ground, and deepen your insights into underlying connections among different aspects of life. They help you figure out the ways people organize themselves, think about their worlds, or construct their identities. Using these culture general concepts will prepare you to identify relevant information, ask the right questions, and identify change, challenges, and opportunity more readily.

You will see that we have broken down culture general concepts into a larger number of sections than you would commonly see in a planning framework or learning schema. This way of breaking up the subject matter is not intended as another framework. Instead, it is designed to convey as many useful concepts as possible in relatively short segments. The more concepts you understand, the more rapidly and easily you will gain the understanding you need to inform your thinking, planning, and interactions. First, we will describe some concepts for thinking systematically about culture: holism, variation, and change. Second, we will discuss some concepts for understanding behavior.

Concepts for Thinking
Systematically about Culture

When learning about culture, you often will hear people say things about how culture is constantly changing and how everything is interconnected. That may sound complicated, but there are three concepts—holism, variation, and change—that can help you navigate through this complexity.

Holism: Building Situational Awareness
with a Holistic Perspective

The concept of holism is a thinking tool you can use to ensure you maintain sufficient situational awareness. The frameworks that the military Services use to help you systematize your thinking about culture place cultural information into discreet categories. Regardless of the framework you use, you need to remember that the real world will not arrange itself perfectly to fit into it. You need to remain attentive to interactions and connections that crosscut any set of categories you use. Likewise, you need to remember that these interactions and connections mean it will rarely be effective to focus exclusively on one aspect of culture. Whenever you hear anyone say, "It is really all about . . . (tribes, economics, religion, politics, etc.)," you should immediately be suspicious. There are almost no questions to which a military person needs answers that can be fixed with an answer that begins with "It is all about. . . ." It is inconvenient, but it is true.

Holism is the idea that all sociocultural aspects of human life are interconnected in ways that vary greatly from culture to culture. From your own experience, you know that politics affects economics. Family structure affects job choices. Religion affects politics. Every aspect affects every other aspect in some way, even if it is indirectly.

As an example, in the United States, family ties and economic choic-

es are usually pretty loosely related. Children typically make their own choices about what job to take, though their family may try to influence them. However, family and occupation may be tightly related in other places. Young persons might be allowed to take only certain kinds of jobs approved by their families, or they may be raised to expect that their family members will be instrumental in getting them a job. With your own culture, you have a somewhat easier time predicting how aspects of culture affect one another. When operating within or analyzing another culture, it can be harder. What we think of as a culture is something like a fabric that is constantly being woven and pulled apart by all the people in a group. The threads are things like social organization, kinship patterns, symbols, political processes, systems for getting resources, beliefs, organized religion, identities, ideas about social status, etc. While people around the world have similar materials to use, they combine them into different patterns and use different styles of weaving. What is common across all cultures is that tugging on any one thread will tend to move other threads around.

If, for example, you tug on an economic thread, such as closing down a market temporarily for security purposes, you might think you understand what will happen. You could, therefore, end up surprised when the local reaction seems to be about religion or family instead of economics. This interconnectedness means that a cultural factor that appears to have little military relevance in many places may be highly significant elsewhere. Consider wedding rituals. They would not seem to be something worth learning about; however, once you learn that some ceremonies commonly involve firing weapons or that weddings may lead to heightened sensitivities toward mounted or dismounted patrols in close vicinity, they take on a military relevance.

If you do not try to figure out the local version of these interconnections, you will not understand how a local population, the population you are analyzing, or your partner military will react to your plans, presence,

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

and actions. A group's response to your operations may be hard to anticipate or appear nonsensical, leading the commander and staff to draw erroneous conclusions as to the source of the reaction. Failure to understand a group's reactions can significantly undermine your ability to carry out a mission. Many of you have probably thought about this when you have considered the second- and third-order effects of a decision.

Holism also explains why some information may seem to fit in more than one place in a database, checklist, or framework. Human life has not organized itself into categories or checklists for our convenience. There is no absolute framework for figuring out in advance what aspects of culture are going to be relevant to a mission or a campaign. However, learning to look for and trace the interconnections will help you make those assessments as you go.

So, what's the right approach? Do not limit your thinking to the obvious, the simple, or the singular. Looking at culture holistically means thinking about how your question or action might affect or be affected by many different things. Picture putting your question/action at the center of a circle. Around the edge of the circle are all the different aspects of culture that you know about. If you are considering helping the community build a clinic, how might a clinic be connected to other aspects of culture? Would you be helping or hurting part of the economic system, perhaps a taxi service that provides transport to a clinic farther away? Is there some part of the belief system that is relevant, maybe ideas about what causes illness? How might social structure and social roles be involved? Are women, men, and children all allowed to seek health care

in the same ways and from the same people? Are local political leaders likely to see the United States building a clinic as something that increases their power and influence or as something that threatens it? Will clinic leadership selection ignite a local power struggle? You cannot ever be 100 percent positive that you have considered all possible connections. Still, going through the process of holistically assessing a situation greatly increases the likelihood that your actions will have the effect you intend. It also helps you anticipate and mitigate or leverage potential second- and third-order effects.

Figure 1. Considering Culture Holistically
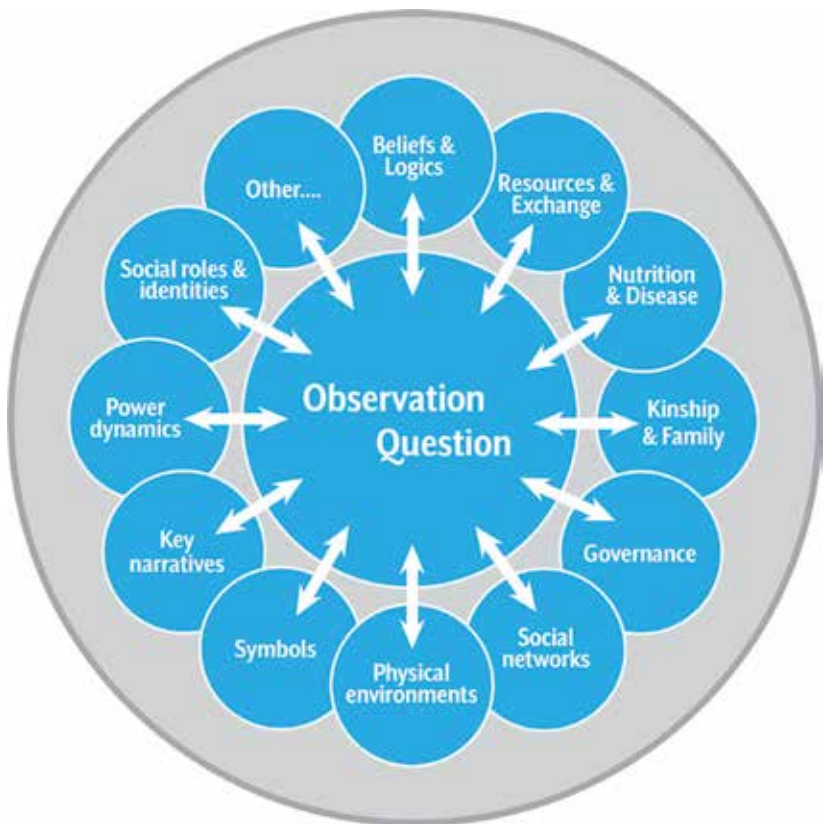
Variation

Marines are accustomed to women primarily being confined to the private sphere in Afghanistan, a conflict zone in a predominantly Muslim country. It is easy to assume that the same case applies in a country like Somalia, a predominantly Muslim country that is also a conflict zone. While men remain in place as decision-makers in Somalia, it varies from place to place; in refugee camps and in villages with a minority male population, women are more likely the decision-makers. In some cases and because of Somalia's intricate clan system, women have played a key role in mediation because of their role as wives and mothers; they are born in one clan and marry into another and are thus able to bridge clan divisions. It is therefore essential to be aware of the informal structures in place and how to tactfully involve women to meet objectives. Nongovernmental organizations in Somalia and in refugee camps outside of Somalia often reach out to women's groups when they need to mobilize or to negotiate contentious issues.[1]

[1] Example based on research/expertise provided by Catherine Kihara, Professional Solutions, a contracted regional analyst at CAOCL, who consulted the following source during development: Faiza Jama, "Somali Women and Peacebuilding," *Accord* 21 (February 2010): 62–65, accessed 7 December 2017.

Variation and Change

Variation and change are critical concepts for military personnel to integrate into their thinking about culture. How many times have you learned about a group of people only to find that what you learned did not hold true for a particular individual you met? It happens all the time. That is not to say there is no value in preparatory learning; there is. However, military personnel must always remember that people do not always do the exact same things in the exact same way even if they belong to the same group. That is variation. And what was true yesterday or last year may not hold today. Cultures do change, and, at times, very rapidly. Unfortunately, it is still fairly common to hear people talking about a culture that supposedly has not changed in thousands of years. There is no place in

the world where this is true. Even if not immediately apparent to outsiders, all groups are constantly making changes to their cultural patterns. If you allow yourself to believe that culture is static, you will set yourself up for surprise and missed opportunities.

The thinking concepts—variation and change—help you understand and move beyond the inevitable disconnect between what you may have learned in advance and what you see on the ground. They also help you avoid stereotypical thinking that can leave you surprised or confused and make it easier to anticipate challenges and seek out opportunities.

Variation

Variation is the idea that culture is imperfectly shared within a group. It is not realistic to assume that any particular individual will always behave in lockstep with a broad description of culture. People within a group do not all know and believe the exact same things or to the same extent. They may not practice beliefs and express ideals in the same way or even think the same things are beautiful, right, or logical. Even though they may have a great deal in common, individuals within a group will put their own spin on things. The idea of intragroup variation is very familiar in U.S. culture. For example, in the United States most people would say they value the idea of individual rights, but there is a great deal of variation in how they think individual rights should be balanced with other values such as equality, duty, and public safety.

You encounter these kinds of differences in every group, even those considered particularly cohesive, such as the Marine Corps. Within the group, there is usually a range of acceptable thoughts and behaviors. There may be general agreement about an ideal, but usually there is tolerance for deviation up to a point. So, when observing a group, you should not be surprised if people's actual behavior is a little different from what you have learned about the values and beliefs of the group.

Variation also is at play in cultural patterns that are shared across dif-

ferent groups. So, an aspect of culture may be shared across groups but be used differently. For example, large religions, such as Islam or Christianity, may be shared by groups around the globe. However, they are understood and practiced very differently in different places.

Visiting the congregation of a Catholic church in rural Guatemala would give you a very different understanding of how much religion influences behavior than you would get from visiting a Catholic congregation in a major urban area of the United States. Even within a smaller area, there can be operationally relevant differences. For example, let us look at *Pashtunwali*, the Pashtun honor code. Within and among Pashtun groups, it is not understood or used in a uniform way. People in the various Pashtun groups may emphasize some aspects of Pashtunwali and deemphasize others. Some may see Pashtunwali as a very important set of values and organize much of their behavior around it. Others may see it as an important part of their heritage but not something that guides day-to-day behavior. It is still important to understand the cultural pattern, but it is equally important to remember that there will be variation in how people use it. Whether the cultural pattern is shared around the globe or across the mountains, military personnel need to be cautious in drawing conclusions about a group of people based on past experience with or learning about similar groups to avoid cultural blinders that do not account for variation.

Change

Change is a normal part of culture and can arise for many different reasons, such as variation, innovation, and contact with other groups. Sometimes, change happens fast and is easily noticed. Other times, there is slow, incremental change over time. Understanding how change happens can help you notice important changes that are relevant to your mission and help you anticipate second- and third-order effects of your decisions.

Variation: The Shared Value of Commitment

Often, there is a tendency to use cross-cultural examples where two groups are very different from one another. Sometimes, it can be trickier to navigate military partnerships when values and practices appear to overlap. For instance, many Marines who have advised Georgian troops have remarked favorably on their tendency to endure hardships and be ready for the fight. Taking these reflections into account, it is possible to imagine how Marines and Georgians feel they have many shared values. For instance, a Marine and a Georgian officer may uphold the same values of honor, courage, and commitment. However, how they live out those values may differ considerably. A Georgian field officer could display such values by patrolling on point with their troops in territory where IEDs and firefights are common. To Marine field officers, this behavior is understandable but also risky. Their view of commitment could be to remain healthy so that they can fulfill their primary duties as leaders and remain in the fight for the long term. But to a Georgian officer, even if they are severely injured and have to leave the unit, they have demonstrated commitment by accepting the same/similar risk as their soldiers.[1]

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[1] Example from contributing author Kristin Post, based on conversations with an anonymous Marine during research conducted in collaboration with the Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group under USMC IRB Protocol MCCDC.2013.0003, Longitudinal Assessment of Security Cooperation Training (SCT), Culture Training, and Mission Effectiveness.

Internal variation is a common source of change. In the United States, what is considered normal and appropriate is not the same as it was 100 years ago. Those changes did not happen overnight. Often, they did not happen as the result of some outside force. Many of the changes happened as the result of gradual shifts in the daily behavior, thoughts, and interactions of hundreds of thousands of people. An idea held by a small part of the group may grow in popularity, becoming the majority opinion, as was the case with abolitionist views on slavery. In contrast, part of a group might give up an idea or practice, resulting in its gradual disappearance from the culture.

Changes resulting from innovation are more familiar. The introduc-

tion of the automobile contributed to change in many aspects of U.S. culture, for example, the way we think about distances, our ideas about what it means to be independent, the kinds of relationships we are able to maintain, where and how we work or go to church, our economic and foreign policies, and the idea of a beautiful automobile and the open road as classic symbols of the United States. The automobile alone was not enough to drive all these changes. Other things had to be in flux, too, but the innovation served as a catalyst for far more than just transportation.

Contact with other groups can be a major source of change. When groups come into contact, whether through trade, warfare, migration, or some other reason, they exchange ideas. In extreme cases, such as one group conquering another, change may be imposed on the losing group, although even in these cases, there is usually some change in both cultures. More often groups will adjust, sometimes exchanging ideas, sometimes coming up with entirely new ideas or practices as a result of interaction.

There are a few additional aspects of change that are relevant to military personnel.

1. **Change does not always happen in a way that is pervasive or consistent.** So, for example, in the United States we still "dial the phone" even though telephones with dials are extremely rare now. People who are 18 years old are allowed to vote and go to war but are not allowed to drink alcohol or gamble in most U.S. states. The United States has laws prohibiting discrimination based on sex, but most women continue to earn significantly less than men doing the same job. Within your own culture, these internal mismatches and contradictions often are accepted without much comment. In a cross-cultural interaction, they can be jarring or confusing. Do not assume that an individual or group is illogical just because everything about their culture is not perfectly consistent. It is also not safe to assume that some aspects of culture just have not caught up. There may be

Pink Is a Girl's Color—or Is It?

To those living in the United States today, pink might seem like a naturally feminine color, while blue seems inherently masculine. However, just the opposite was true prior to the mid-twentieth century, when pink—described as "a more decided and stronger color"—was typically a boy's color, and blue—"more delicate and dainty"—was frequently a color for girls.[1] More often, all infants, regardless of sex, were dressed in gender-neutral clothing that appears frilly and girly to the modern eye. For example, there is a famous and startling (to the modern eye) picture of Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the age of two, wearing what now appears to be a frilly dress and girl's hat, but are actually clothes considered appropriate for both boys and girls during that era. Families at that time could easily reuse infant clothing from one child to the next no matter the child's sex. Many factors contributed to the pervasive gendering of children that we see today, as well as to the regendering of pink and blue in the mid-twentieth century; one of these factors was the rise of consumer culture. Clothing manufacturers saw an opportunity to increase profit if they produced gender-specific infant clothing, which could not be as easily passed between brother and sister. Girls were to be dressed like tiny versions of their mothers, while boys had to look like their fathers, meaning that dresses were increasingly reserved for girls. And while pink ended up being the color more associated with the female sex, it could have just as easily remained blue, as neither color has an immutable and inherent association with either gender. These associations are instead fluid and produced through cultural mechanisms.[2]

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[1] "Pink or Blue?" (*Earnshaw's Infants' Department*, 1918), as quoted in Jo B. Paoletti, *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 85.

[2] Example based on research/expertise provided by Dr. Rebecca Lane, Davis Defense Group, a contracted researcher at CAOCL, who consulted the following source during development: Jo B. Paoletti, *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 89, 95. Note: a version of the Roosevelt image can be accessed on Wikimedia Commons.

other influences at play. To take the example of age restrictions on drinking, it seems illogical that people who can fight for their country are not allowed to have a beer afterward. Still, there is resistance to lowering the drinking age because of historical American attitudes toward alcohol and concern about alcohol-related injury and death rates among teenagers.

2. **Change often occurs during times of conflict or disruption.** Since military personnel are often early on the scene when a conflict erupts or a disaster strikes, it is important to recognize the role these major disruptions can play in shaping the local culture. During times of conflict or in a disaster, the usual methods for getting through the day may stop working for the local population, and they may begin to tinker with cultural patterns. They may try adopting new ideas or ways of solving problems. They may also try to preserve what is familiar, highlighting "traditional" ways of doing things and resisting efforts to introduce new ideas. They may switch rapidly among a range of possible behaviors. This is normal for people trying to cope with a new, confusing, or frightening situation. In these rapidly shifting, sometimes chaotic situations, older analyses of culture may become irrelevant and the predeployment cultural preparation outdated. Although it can be complex, tracking these small shifts can help you understand and perhaps influence the changes that are occurring.

As with holism and variation, the important part of thinking about change is to keep your mind open to it. You will never be able to perfectly predict change, just as you will not be able to perfectly predict connections among aspects of culture or the way an individual will interpret a cultural pattern. However, if you remember the concepts of holism, variation, and change, you will be alert to connections, variations, and changes that can affect your ability to accomplish your mission.

Culture General Concepts for Understanding Behavior

In this section, we discuss concepts and knowledge areas that will help you understand human behavior. Although the importance of a concept may be greater or lesser depending on the area, most apply globally. They are underlying concepts about the way humans live—how people organize themselves, interact with and explain their world, conceptualize self and other, etc. You can use these concepts to improve your understanding of available region- and culture-specific information and analysis of it and to help in times when such information is absent or incorrect to make sense of what you are observing and experiencing. For each knowledge area, we provide an overview and then, for some areas, we dig deeper to broaden or deepen your understanding.

Interaction with the Environment
Overview

This knowledge area comprises the different ways people interact with and use their varying physical environments to live and the cultural landscapes that result. All groups have a unique and interdependent connection with their physical surroundings. The physical environment—including resources such as land, water, food, and materials for shelter, terrain, climate, etc.—influences the people living in it by providing a range of possibilities within which they act. The physical environment may set certain limits on human actions. For example, in order to live, people need to build different types of shelter in hot versus cold climates. However, people have the ability to adjust to their physical environment and choose a course of action from many alternatives. These alternatives are cultural and vary from place to place. They are not predetermined by the environment. Consider the threat of river flooding. In one location, a group may choose to respond by building houses on stilts. In another lo-

cation, a different group may develop a park on the flood plain and build their houses farther away from the river. And in a third, the people may decide to ignore the threat of flooding completely and, for aesthetic and economic reasons, build low-lying houses on the flood plain overlooking

Different Approaches to Interacting with the Environment

In Afghanistan, the Helmand River floods on average every two or three years, flowing over its banks and destroying or damaging significant numbers of homes along the river.[1] U.S. forces stationed in Helmand have normally been tasked with humanitarian assistance/disaster relief when such an event occurs. It is difficult for Americans deployed to Afghanistan to envision that the flooding Helmand River is actually beneficial, as it drowns vermin and replenishes topsoil even as it destroys the mud brick structures Helmanders live in. The local Afghans, far from viewing this as a disaster, simply take the few important items they own (pots, pans, clothing, maybe a Quran) and self-evacuate away from the river, generally supported by local fellow tribesmen, as the stay is only temporary. Americans tend to want to overreact, treating every flood as something akin to a Hurricane Katrina-type event. It is difficult to do nothing, as U.S. military fitness reports, on which promotion is based, almost demand proactive activities. Yet, doing nothing except being prepared to assist may be the exact response required, perhaps just a requisition of thousands of water bottles to be provided to Afghan security and relief personnel to hand out. The destroyed homes will be rebuilt (with mud bricks reinforced with opium poppy stalks or sometimes with straw), the farmland is renewed, and the rat/mice problem is greatly diminished for months, saving on food loss. Still, imagine this U.S. Marine fitness report: "Did nothing, distributed nothing, Afghan locals became self-sufficient, mission accomplished." While probably culturally appropriate for an Afghanistan scenario, it is also likely very much against the proactive U.S. military culture in which accomplishment is everything.

[1] Example based on personal experience provided by Maj Vern Liebl, USMC (Ret).

the river. All three groups live in similar environments and face a similar threat, but they choose to interact with their environments in different ways. It is important to remember that the human relationship with the environment is an interaction rather than thinking only that environment is a driver of human behavior.

Military personnel need to understand the close relationship between a local community and its environment. Most importantly, when preparing an analysis or devising a plan, you need to determine what features of the local physical environment are used by people and how these features are used and understood. This is because your presence in any area of operation will affect locals' interaction with their environment and, without careful planning, could jeopardize the locals' ability to live and survive. For example, if your operations divert or impede access to resources such as food or water, they may inadvertently cause real shortages or upset the local balance of power by allowing greater access to one group over another. This, in turn, may lead to unwanted conflict. You need to incorporate such thinking into your plans and analysis. You also need to recognize that, since use of the environment is cultural, operational impacts may significantly differ from what would be an expected outcome in the United States.

People's interaction with the environment will also inform the range of options available to military forces entering an area. For example, understanding the choices people have made about transportation within the constraints of available resources, climate, and terrain in a local area can help military personnel make their own locally effective decisions with respect to the vehicles they use and the equipment they carry.

The ways people change and shape their physical environment create cultural landscapes that reflect their social, economic, and political attitudes as well as their beliefs and values. A careful reading, or interpretation, of a cultural landscape can provide useful information about the people who create it, use it, and live in it. Certain features of the cultural

landscape may be imbued with a significance or symbolic value that goes far beyond their mere physicality or utility. These items of cultural property, to include archaeological, historic, and sacred sites, are extremely important, as they represent a group's identity and heritage. Damage or destruction by either U.S. or enemy forces can create great distress among local populations and prompt mobilization in opposition to a mission. In contrast, protection by U.S. forces can aid in mission success. Unfortunately, items of cultural property are often not immediately obvious or easy to spot. However, careful reading of the cultural landscape using observation and interaction skills, discussed at length in chapter 3, can help uncover what is important to which groups and why.

Finally, as military personnel learn to read cultural landscapes, it is common for them to notice material culture. At its most basic, the term *material culture* refers to things people make. It includes everything from symbolic objects, such as religious totems or ceremonial swords, to the more mundane items that surround us in everyday life, such as furniture, tools, computers, and clothes, to the things we throw away, such as plastic wrappers and broken dishes. The value of particular items depends heavily on cultural context and personal meaning. For example, what might appear to be a worn, dull knife to an outside observer may be a valued family heirloom to its owner and, because of the object's heirloom status and the importance placed on family history in their culture, they may be unwilling to sell it, even if they are in dire financial straits. What a group takes time and resources to make, what they protect, and what they discard can provide insights that are useful in understanding interaction with the environment, but also other areas, such as exchange and beliefs. Also, the value of particular objects may not be obvious at first. The same observation and interaction skills can help military personnel successfully interpret material culture.

Getting, Sharing, and Saving Resources: Subsistence and Exchange
Overview

This knowledge area encompasses the concepts and information used to understand how people get, store, share, and exchange resources, commonly referred to here as *subsistence patterns* and *exchange systems* (or economies). Subsistence patterns refer to the primary ways a group gets the resources it needs and wants. A group rarely relies on only one mode of subsistence. For example, one group may engage in agriculture and herding to feed themselves and also plant more of certain crops, mine gems, and fish specifically for the purposes of being able to trade with other groups. In the United States, most people engage in wage labor for subsistence, and it is also common for people to garden, hunt, and trade, sometimes as a means of supplementing their own resources, for monetary income, and/or because they enjoy these other subsistence activities.

Exchange refers to all the ways a group stores, distributes, and exchanges resources. Exchange includes practices that are formally recognized as part of the economy as well as those that are not officially recognized, such as gift giving, charity, barter, reciprocity, and remittances.

It also includes practices that are considered improper or illegal in the group, such as bribery or the sale of prohibited items. With regard to this last category, it is important to remember that what is considered improper varies across and within groups. While some practices may be officially illegal, they still can be considered normal and proper by most people, as is the case in areas where it is normal practice to tip or bribe government officials.

When you think about economics, you may tend to think about money, banks, stores, the stock market, farms, factories, jobs, and the market system. This pattern is widespread now but is not universal. Military personnel need to think beyond these to gain a full understanding of

On Gift-giving

It is important to note the dilemma gift giving can present to military personnel as regulations forbid gift giving or receiving past certain monetary and annual amounts. Being handed a gift with nothing to give in return may place the individual in an awkward and embarrassing position or, because of honor and/or pride, it might also leave the person feeling in "debt" to the other individual. Always be aware of the policies in place regarding the giving of gifts and work out in advance how you will handle such situations. See also the section below on reciprocity for information on how to understand the kinds of social relationships that may be created by engaging in gift exchange.

the exchange systems at play locally. Money, taxes, and market exchange systems are common parts of exchange but rarely the only means by which resources are stored, distributed, and moved. Older, more persistent economic systems are often still at work. There is usually some degree of resource and labor sharing among family, friends, and social networks. Trading is still very common, even when money is supposedly available, as it may save time or provide access to a resource that cannot readily be purchased with money. Trading also can increase where local currency is so unstable that people choose to avoid it. Whether trading, sharing among friends, or something else, people are unlikely to entirely abandon older exchange systems quickly or ever. In a time of crisis, they may even rely on the old familiar ways more than a newer, market-based system. These other means of exchange may be less visible and harder to discover, yet they can still be critical parts of how resources are used and moved in a group or network.

Also, other aspects of nonmarket economic systems can be a little harder to see and understand. Even something as seemingly simple as the straightforward exchange of goods of equal value may not exist in some regions. Instead, the exchange may be partially about what we expect—moving resources—and partly about building a working relation-

Baksheesh

Baksheesh is a practice in parts of Asia and the Middle East that involves the gifting of sums of money for a range of reasons. Baksheesh can come in the form of alms given for charity or a tip given to a powerful or important individual as a form of respect. While some in the West interpret this as corruption, it can also be viewed as part of an elaborate system of interpersonal power relations.[1]

[1] This research-based example was provided by a contributor who wished to remain anonymous and who consulted the following source during development: Frank J. Cavico and Bahaudin G. Mujtaba, *Baksheesh or Bribe: Cultural Conventions and Legal Pitfalls* (Davie, FL: ILEAD Academy, 2011).

Subsistence Strategies—Past and Present Matter

Some common types of subsistence strategies include hunting and gathering, agriculture, nomadic herding, and wage labor. Although many groups now use some mix of strategies, there may be important aspects of collective identity, narratives, ideals, and beliefs associated with the strategy that was most prevalent in the past.

For example, many U.S. communities are proud of their agricultural or ranching heritage. Even in communities where few people still make their living by farming or ranching, their ideals, material culture, and rituals reflect this heritage. They may choose to display identity markers associated with this past, such as clothing or manner of speech. They may have agriculture-themed parades and events and people may wear Western-style clothing, even if most people in town now work behind a desk.

People in communities with strong ties to past subsistence strategies may hold positions on political or social topics that are more aligned with this past than their current situation. This can be confusing for somebody who is new and sees only current economic activity. However, the visible indicators, such as rituals and identity markers, can be important clues to the history and values of a group.

ship (see section on reciprocity below). If you fail to see what the local people expect from the exchange, it may be very hard to understand or anticipate people's behavior. Remember, in our economy, we focus on the goods being transferred. In other groups, it is very common for economic activity to serve a critical role in building and maintaining social relationships. In turn, these social relationships, rather than faith in an abstract idea about economic forces, ensure the stability and reliability of the economy. Consequently, if an outsider attempts to avoid the relationship aspect of an exchange, he or she may be seen as behaving rudely or as untrustworthy. Seeing economic patterns from the insiders' perspective will help you understand, use, and influence the system rather than being surprised and frustrated by it.

Subsistence and exchange are tied to other aspects of culture. A group's laws, beliefs, and values may limit how certain goods, such as family heirlooms, or kinds of labor, such as work by children, can be exchanged.

People with certain social roles may have limited access to some aspects of exchange. As mentioned above and below, certain types of exchange may be important in maintaining social relationships, as giving and receiving of resources reinforce the bonds among individuals. While not every aspect of exchange will be critical to military operations, it is important to be aware that there are different kinds of exchange taking place and that people may interpret assistance from or to military personnel in terms of a kind of exchange other than a simple transaction or gift.

Digging Deeper
Corruption

Across many types of missions and in all areas of the world, military personnel report seeing exchanges that, according to U.S. norms and departmental and Service-level rules, constitute corruption. However, some exchanges that we categorize as corruption are perceived very dif-

ferently and are actually just evidence of a different economic system at work. What we see as a bribe between villagers and the military may be perceived as a gift or normal payment by locals—the equivalent of bringing a bottle of wine to a dinner or tipping a waitress.

Something that looks like nepotism to us may be seen by others as honorable attention to family needs. In short, some practices that seem illicit to us may be not only acceptable but expected in other places. So long as everyone understands the rules, the system works. This does not mean military personnel should ignore corruption. The central requirement is opening your eyes to what is *really* there and how people are *really* getting things done rather than how you *expect* things to work or think they *should* work. Suspending judgment and perspective taking, two skills discussed in chapter 3, will help you determine how the action is understood by the people involved. That additional moment of data gathering and thought can help you make a well-informed and effective decision about how to respond.

Reciprocity—Connecting Exchange and Social Relationships

One particular aspect of exchange warrants special mention, reciprocity. In the simplest terms, reciprocity is a series of exchanges over time that creates or reinforces a relationship—the sort of thing that is implied in our expressions *what goes around comes around, return the favor, pay it forward*, and *you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours*. You buy somebody a coffee and, in U.S. culture, there is an implied need for that person to reciprocate—to return the favor—at some indeterminate point in the future. The fact that the exchange takes place over time creates or maintains some sort of relationship. The established relationship is not necessarily discussed openly, meaning you may be establishing and/or reinforcing it without realizing you are doing so. This can cause issues in the long run for military personnel.

Reciprocity and Holism

Reciprocity is an example of a common cultural process that does not fit neatly into any one dimension or category in the Service-level frameworks. Reciprocity is about building and maintaining relationships, so it is part of social structure. It also involves exchange and may be an important part of an economic system. Since reciprocity is commonly linked to people's ideas about fairness, honor, and other values, there also is likely to be a connection to belief systems. The most effective way to understand reciprocity in any cultural context will be to apply the concept of holism described above.

Perhaps someone you do not know well buys you a birthday present. It feels awkward because now you feel like you should reciprocate, and you may feel that the person is trying to build an unwelcome relationship. In the United States, reciprocity now seems like it is mostly about gift-giving and maintaining friendships and family relationships; most resources move around using a market exchange—what you would traditionally think of as economics. However, throughout history, reciprocity has been a fundamental mechanism in building and maintaining social organization and moving resources around in the population. For many people, this is still a fundamental way to get through life. Reciprocity is used to accomplish the following:

- **Create and maintain relationships.** The specifics of local culture influence the type and intensity of the relationships that are part of a particular kind of exchange.
- **Store resources.** Many cultures use reciprocity to build social networks that store wealth in the form of favors or resources that can be called on in time of need.

People can build relationships through reciprocity within a group and also across a social network or among groups. There are several types of reciprocity, but two matter most for military personnel.

Generalized reciprocity (**what goes around comes around**) is when people help one another and share resources without calculating on an individual basis. It is assumed that things will even out eventually. This is the strongest form of reciprocity in terms of supporting group cohesion and ensuring everyone has enough resources. When military personnel become enmeshed in this sort of network, it can build tremendous trust with and among the local population but presents dangers in that it can be difficult for the military personnel to extract themselves from the network without causing harm and creating the potential for conflict.

Balanced reciprocity (**you scratch my back, and I'll scratch yours**) is when both people involved know that an equal exchange is expected at some point. A foreign counterpart, interpreter, or local may offer a gift with the full expectation that the servicemember will, at some point, return a gift of equal value. This kind of reciprocity can be helpful in building trust with individuals and is somewhat less dangerous than generalized reciprocity. You have to learn how value is calculated with your counterpart in the exchange to avoid inadvertently over- or under-giving. It also is critical to understand that, in most cultures, the return gift does not end the relationship. Balancing the scales does not necessarily mean that you can leave the relationship gracefully. Instead, it may establish an expectation of future exchanges.

There can be negative aspects of building a reciprocal relationship. A person from another culture may presume a continuing relationship based on gifts given or assistance rendered (either by or to U.S. personnel), leading to misunderstandings and unintended offenses. A person may also deliberately try to use reciprocity to make U.S. personnel feel obligated to return favors. Not understanding the role reciprocity plays within and across cultures can lead to problems, as U.S. actions that disrupt or restrict normal social patterns may severely undermine the economic base and resource stability of an area by disrupting these

Making "Deposits": A Marine Corps Example

Marines who have lived with or advised foreign forces have described balanced reciprocity as a bank account. They often make "deposits" into the bank account in the form of the extra time they spend having tea and talking about nonmission related topics. They "withdraw" from this account when they advise their counterpart to do something that is unpopular (for example, not using cell phones on watch) or when they need to deny a request (such as not filling their trucks with fuel). Even though goods are not exchanged in this example, the elements of exchange and relationship building are present. It is important not to take metaphors like this too far. In a banking exchange, none of the people involved expect a personal relationship to develop, whereas in the situation these Marines describe, some form of relationship is expected.[1]

[1] Example from contributing author Kristin Post, based on multiple interviews with Marines conducted under USMC IRB Protocol MCCDC.2013.0003, Longitudinal Assessment of Security Cooperation Training (SCT), Culture Training, and Mission Effectiveness.

seemingly informal flows of resources and favors, which, of course, can have unintended second- or third-order impacts on your mission.

Division of Labor

In almost all groups, there is some form of division of labor; not everyone does every type of work that needs to be accomplished in a family or a group. Sometimes the division is formalized, but more often it is so deeply entangled in cultural patterns that it is seen as the normal and right way things work.

Division of labor is most often found along age, sex or gender, and class or caste lines, although you may also see distinctions made based on racial categories, ethnicity, religion, or some other factor. In the United States, with a few exceptions, children below a certain age are not expected or allowed to participate in wage labor. A small child may take on a paper route or do family chores, but most people would be shocked to see a child going to work in a factory in the twenty-first century. Likewise,

we have a general expectation that very old people should not have to work. These patterns do not hold true across the globe. There are many places where the very young and the very old are expected to work, whether inside or outside the household.

Stratification and beliefs about the inherited capabilities of people who belong to a particular segment of the population inform groups' division of labor. Stratification systems, such as the historical caste system

The Third Gender

In some reference materials, you will see the term *third gender* used to refer to a way that outside women are sometimes categorized by a group that does not normally have women in whatever role the outside woman is performing. While the term is problematic for a number of reasons (and also does not apply only to women), the basic idea has relevance for military personnel.

For groups that place restrictions on the roles females can hold in society, encountering women serving in the military, as aid workers, or in other professions locally perceived as male-only roles can be challenging. Rather than changing their beliefs or rejecting the presence of the new woman, they may choose to socially process her as a person who is neither male nor female. They may already have a category and associated words and expected behaviors for such encounters or they may simply try to avoid using gender-related language and behavior around the woman. While this arrangement can ease a potentially tense situation, it bears watching, as the novel categorization may not be accepted by all or seen as an acceptable excuse/explanation for all behaviors.

This pattern is not well studied with regard to female military personnel. Therefore, if you notice it happening, it is important to pay attention and not make a lot of assumptions about how it will affect people's attitudes and behavior.

Note that this use of the term *third gender* is complex. It does not necessarily indicate a formal social role or ascribed identity (as discussed later in the guidebook). Rather it is more a process people are using to address or manage an anomaly.

in India, limit the educational and employment opportunities of people based on the caste into which they were born. Similarly, many societies divide labor based on sex, with women doing work around the home or in limited sectors of the market economy and men being more involved in economic activity outside the domestic sphere. In the military and law enforcement, service in particular positions or levels can be restricted based on sex, race, class, or some other factor, such as tribal affiliation.

As with all aspects of culture, division of labor can change, even in very rigid systems. In our own history, we have seen changes in division of labor based on sex, with more women entering the wage labor market and more men taking on responsibilities for domestic work. Also, both men and women have access to a broader range of occupations than they did a century ago. Men now work as nurses, a historically female profession, and women work as engineers, a profession limited to men in the past. Other groups have and are managing similar changes.

Military personnel need to be aware of division of labor to ensure they understand the expectations of locals and military partners about who can and cannot be involved in certain activities. Observing how labor is divided also can provide clues about historical or current assumptions about subgroups that may be important in understanding social structure, politics, or some other relevant aspect of culture.

Resources—Distribution, Access, and Ownership

Certain aspects of exchange are often involved in cross-cultural misunderstandings. Thus, we want to reiterate the following about resources:

Distribution. Most groups now participate in some form of market exchange and a system of taxation, but some may continue to distribute resources in other ways, a few of which were addressed previously. Other forms of distribution frequently reinforce some aspect of social relations or beliefs. For example, charity redistributes wealth in a community and

can simultaneously reinforce a belief that those who have been fortu-
nate have a responsibility to share that fortune with others. In contrast, in
some groups, charity reinforces social stratification, emphasizing socio-
economic differences rather than mitigating them. The important thing
to remember is that all forms of distribution, including market and taxes,
are connected to other beliefs, relationships, and power dynamics. When
getting involved in the distribution of resources, it is best to find out as
much as possible about these other connections to anticipate second-
and third-order effects of your proposed actions.

Access. It is important to remain mindful of the fact that parts of the
population will have differential access to resources and the means of
distributing resources. As with division of labor, access to resources can
be limited by such factors as sex/gender, age, religion, etc. You may find
that one sex is not allowed to have money or that only some parts of a
population have access to public utilities, such as water. People in lower
classes or castes may not be allowed to open a business, or there may be
quiet discrimination that makes it harder for them to get an education,
a loan, or some other resource that would allow them to improve their
socioeconomic status. While differential access is an important aspect of
exchange systems in all places, its relevance is highlighted in situations
where military personnel are involved in the distribution of resources. If
you provide resources to a government official for distribution to people
who have just experienced a natural disaster, it is good to know if that
official will distribute them evenly across the population or will be using a
social calculus different from your own.

Ownership. Although Western concepts of formal ownership are be-
coming more pervasive, military personnel may still encounter alterna-
tive models from time to time. For example, grazing lands may not be
owned by any one individual, but each family may have a right to use

them, a factor that becomes relevant when thinking about whether to set up a facility on land no one person owns. The same may be true with resources such as wild game or plants. Additionally, some groups retain some sense that ownership is affected by need, not only by purchase or possession. This could lead to confusion about whether an act is theft, a misunderstanding of the concept of ownership, or somebody deliberately manipulating an older concept of ownership to get away with taking something. It is not always easy to identify these other conceptions of ownership in advance, therefore, it is worth remembering that they may be a factor when interpreting behavior.

Organizing and Interacting:
Relationships, Roles, and Identity
Overview

This knowledge area encompasses the concepts and information needed to understand a group's patterns of roles, relationships, and social organization as well as how people use those patterns to shape interactions within the group and between the group and others. It includes topics such as social stratification, subgroups or other divisions, kinship, status, and identity. This is a particularly complex knowledge area because many different patterns are likely to coexist within one group, and there may be people both within and from outside the group trying to change the accepted patterns.

Every group has common social roles that involve expectations about behavior, status, and interaction, such as politician, sibling, priest, spouse, or community leader. Social roles often, but not exclusively, are linked to kinship or occupation. A person may take on a different social role depending on context or at different stages of life. There also is variation in the flexibility or inflexibility of social roles both within and across groups. For example, in some groups, there may be an absolute expectation that part of the social role of being an adult son or daughter is to

Jami'ya

Jami'ya is an informal banking/loan-giving system in Egypt. It is interest-free and is based on an honor code where formal contracts are not involved and members join through referral after being vetted and then approved by the group. The term *Jami'ya* in Arabic means organization, club, association, committee.

This informal economic practice also takes place in different countries, mainly in the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa. However, it has different names in different countries. It is called *Selfa* (loan) in Iraq, *Sanduq* (box) in Sudan, *Cammittee* (committee) in Pakistan, and *Chama* (group) in Kenya and Tanzania. It is considered a vital lifeline for many middle-class and low-income families, where the family's future plans revolve around these different (small and big) *Jami'yas*. The *Jami'ya* can be organized for a big project such as buying a car or house, a wedding, religious pilgrimage, or a down payment for a startup business, to small *Jami'ya* to pay debts and cover monthly household expenses.

This informal loan-giving is mainly a women's affair. A group of women convene once a month to contribute with an equal amount of money, decided on by the organizer and members of the group, on a rotational basis. The collected money is then given to a member of the group each month. The sequence of this informal loan-giving is based on a name drawing that takes place at the beginning of the establishment of this *Jami'ya*. There are often exceptions to this order, especially when a member is in dire need. However, all members of the group must approve of an advance payment. Also, it is common for the organizer to demand that she be the first person to receive the *Jami'ya*.

This informal loan-giving has evolved over time. It started among housewives of close-knit neighborhoods where members of the group had already established comradery and trust. As women entered the workforce, the practice also moved to the work field, where men started to contribute to this informal exchange. The *Jami'ya* exchange in the workplace usually takes place around salary payments. Trust is already established between members as they happen to work at the same place, vetted by employers, and members of the *Jami'ya* are aware of each other's paydays.

(continued)

provide for older relatives, but a different group may see that responsibility as being balanced against the individual desires and aspirations of the adult children.

Social roles and identity patterns share a reciprocal relationship. When a person assumes a certain role, such as community leader, that role may become an important part of their personal identity. Also, some social roles may be restricted based on identity factors, as was the case historically in the United States when married women were not allowed to be teachers and people identified as a race other than White were not allowed to serve in political roles. Some social roles and aspects of identity are ascribed, meaning they are determined by the group and cannot easily be changed by the individual. Other aspects are achieved or avowed, meaning the individual has some ability to choose them.

Social roles play an important part in the way people structure their relationships and interactions. For example, when interacting with an elected official, people often behave more formally and respectfully than they might if interacting with the same individual in a different role, such as a child's sporting coach. In such cases, people are shaping their interaction around the social role, rather than the individual occupying it. Both social roles and identity are commonly linked to social status with some roles or identities being perceived as more or less valuable, important,

or privileged. In turn, social status can affect how people interact. For example, a person who has a high social status may expect deferential behavior from people with lower status, and there may be serious consequences if this expectation is not met.

The concept of social organization (also sometimes referred to as social structure) refers to broad, enduring patterns of roles and relationships. You can learn a lot about a group of people by the way that they organize themselves. One of the most basic forms of social organization is kinship, which takes many different shapes and levels of importance across groups. For example, family tends to be a very important theme throughout all cultures, but the exact meaning of the idea does vary from place to place and people to people. In the United States, many of us share the idea of the nuclear family (father, mother, and children) as the basic unit of family. That basic unit may interact with other related family units, but it generally moves along its own course, making financial and lifestyle choices that will be of most positive impact for that unit. However, the idea of a tightly bounded nuclear family as the norm is a fairly recent development in the United States and is not particularly common globally. Other groups put different levels of importance on the idea of family and may have much tighter connections to what we would think of as extended family members, both horizontally (e.g., cousins) and vertically (e.g., great uncles). For example, it is not unusual for cousins to be linked as tightly as siblings.

Two other variations in how people think about kinship are worth mentioning here—differences in the kinds of ties we think of as kinship and differences in the importance of kinship ties over generations. In the United States, we tend to think of the most important ties of kinship being biological and legal (marriage or adoption) and across only a few generations. Yet, people tend to use kinship categories creatively as ways of indicating ties that extend beyond biology or legal documents. Many of us grew up in families with a friend of the family who was referred to and

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thought of as an aunt or uncle, suggesting a kinship-like tie and mutual responsibilities. Similar practices are common throughout the world, and these ties may be seen as every bit as real and important as biological or legal ones. The number of generations deemed important also varies considerably cross-culturally. In the United States, most people think of distant ancestors as of minimal importance in terms of kinship responsibilities. However, in many places, these historical connections may take on more significance. The fact that two people share an ancestor 200 years ago may be seen as creating an important kinship relationship with an obligation to support or assist one another.

Relatively few military personnel will be expected to fully understand complex kinship systems or the detailed family relationships in a specific group. However, it is important to keep in mind that people's sense of who counts as family may differ from your own and that these relationships sometimes come with a sense of obligation. (See also the discussion of social networks below.)

Another form of social organization is the formation of subgroups or sectors within a larger group, based on things like ethnicity or race, occupation, religious beliefs, or socioeconomic status. These subgroups may or may not be tightly organized and formally recognized. Such subgroupings have significant influence over people's perceptions of how they can interact with one another. Most groups also have some form of social stratification, ways in which some parts of the population have more privilege than others, such as socioeconomic classes or a caste system. As is the case with individual social status, these broader stratification patterns can be closed (for example, the Indian caste system), meaning the individual has no ability to change their position within the hierarchy. Others may be more flexible, giving individuals at least some possibility of changing position, as is the case in some socioeconomic class systems.

Social organization also includes the institutions people create and use to organize their lives. These institutions may look familiar to people

from the United States, such as churches, educational or legal systems, governance, and social services. Other institutions may be less easy to recognize, such as a system of apprenticeships that is handled separately from the educational system. Oftentimes, those less visible or understood receive less or no attention from those outside the group. That makes sense to an extent, as they are unfamiliar and may not be called out in official documents. However, all institutions—whether formally and officially structured or just understood throughout the group—are important and powerful social tools to the group and need to be accounted for when analyzing, planning, and engaging.

One final aspect of social organization is social networks. Social networks cross the more easily perceived social boundaries of groups, subgroups, and social stratification and give people a wider range of possible interactions. For example, social networks based on school ties, religion, or political affiliation may make it possible for somebody to have interactions that normally would be made difficult by the boundaries of social groups or stratification.

Digging Deeper
Groups and Networks

It is common to hear groups and networks discussed interchangeably; however, they are not the same thing, and it is important to be intentional in how you think about and use these concepts of social organization. Simply put, groups are able to act as a unit; networks are not an entity and do not act as a unit.

A group is a set of people who share some sense of collective identity and perceive boundaries around themselves. There are people who are in the group and people who are not, although members can be added or subtracted. There is at least the possibility of them acting as a unit. Organizations, businesses, religious institutions, school classes, hobby

clubs, political parties, tribes, military units, professional associations, etc., are all types of groups. All have the capacity to act as a unit.

Networks are ways of describing the relationships among individuals. A chart of one person's network would look somewhat different from a chart of the network of a close friend of his. Network analysis is useful for understanding the relationships among people and how those relationships might be used to move information, things, or assistance. It is erroneous to assume that everyone in a person's social network is part of similar groups. For example, the fact that someone is in a social network with a person who is part of a violent political group does not necessarily mean anything about the first person's politics. They may be in a relationship based on school ties or some other affiliation that is too weak for the second person to effectively mobilize the first person.

Identity

Identity is people's idea of who they are and how they fit into the world. Identity is commonly defined as a set of social expectations related to us and others that is shaped by such factors as profession, gender, race, social class, ethnicity, family, sexual orientation, religion, and language. People's sense of identity shapes how they behave, what options they believe are open to them, and how they are perceived by the people around them. In times of conflict, it can be the symbol for which people fight. There are some aspects of identity that are products of choice and personality and others that are shaped more by contexts and relationships (including ascribed—imposed—identity). An individual may shape their sense of identity using different combinations of elements, such as

- Ethnicity
- Corporate group membership—tribe, clan, military service, etc.
- Gender (sex, sexual preferences, social roles)
- Kinship roles—child, parent, sibling, cousins, etc.
- Nationality and state affiliation

- Race
- Religion
- Resource status—wealth/poverty
- Social status (possibly defined by several of the other identity aspects)
- Occupations
- Other group memberships
- Political affiliations/memberships

The elements people choose to emphasize in an interaction will depend on the situation in which they find themselves. For example, a soldier may choose to introduce himself by his military occupational specialty in some situations and as "Jason's Dad" in others. It depends on where he is and with whom he is interacting. Identity contributes to the many roles we play in our lives and is always changing and evolving. With these roles come role expectations. Role expectations are sets of behavior and characteristics associated with particular situations. Meeting a person in their parental role at a soccer match sets up certain expectations about how they will behave and how the two of you can interact. However, if you meet the same individual a few weeks later in a work context and find out they are a general officer, those expectations may change. The key to remember is that just because you meet a person in one context does not necessarily mean that they will privilege (or that you will observe) the same aspect of their identity the next time you interact.

How we pick up on other people's identities is somewhat culturally dependent, and the signals from one culture may mean something very different in another culture. For example, the concept of men holding hands is generally given sexual connotations in the United States. Yet, in Saudi Arabia, for example, male touching is not assumed to be sexual, and men might be very offended at the suggestion. In the United States, gender does not give as many clues about possible occupation as it might

elsewhere (although, still, a male nurse may be teased for choosing an occupation historically held by women). Also, many of us in the United States tend to be less attuned to picking up on kinship roles, which are somewhat less important to us than they are elsewhere. So, when conducting business, you may not care whether your business partner has a lot of relatives in the area, but in a culture where they are obliged to share profits with all of them, it might be good to know about their family.

There also is a great deal of variation across cultures in how flexible or changeable different aspects of identity are and how they interrelate. In the United States, actively supporting political causes opposed by your family or to having a different set of religious beliefs may be uncomfortable but is often possible. In other places, a son or daughter might not have this flexibility. What is and is not flexible about identity will vary, but military personnel can be attuned to noticing the differences. Just keeping in mind that what seems like "no big deal" to us may be a very big deal in other places is a good place to start.

In general, military personnel need to be attuned to identity indicators that help them figure out how to interact and what to expect about

- danger or safety in a situation,
- likely behavior of counterparts or locals,
- changes in the behavior of counterparts or locals,
- traction points (commonalities/differences), and
- how the person does/does not share your affiliations and loyalties.

Figuring out how to navigate identity issues can seem very complex, so it is worth pointing out that you already have the understanding and skills to identify someone's identity. It is something that you do every day. You may not be fully conscious that you are doing it, but you read clues, assess people, and make determinations about their identity all the time. The challenge is to be disciplined to look for cultural differences in the signals you are reading when encountering an unfamiliar culture.

Race and Ethnicity

As noted above, race and ethnicity are elements that figure into identity formation. These concepts tend to be used very loosely much in the same way that people tend to use the word *tribe* to mean all kinds of things. In fact, they mean different things. Race refers to categories that group people primarily according to perceived differences in physical characteristics. Racial categories vary greatly across cultures with distinctions made on different characteristics or at different places on a spectrum of difference. For example, many South American concepts of race, like those in the United States, are somewhat based on skin color but include more categories between Black and White. In many African countries, there are racial categories based on physical distinctions among people someone from the United States would categorize as all being Black. Categories within one culture also change over time. In the United States, there used to be a racial category of Irish that was different from being White. While there is no scientific basis for any culture's concept of race, the categories are socially significant. You may see racial categories, and related power structures, in a foreign military. The officers may be primarily from a dominant racial category or be mixed-race, while the enlisted are primarily from a race with lower social standing. Learning the local definitions of race can help in figuring out how people align themselves and how outsiders—like U.S. forces—are perceived.

An ethnic group is a group that shares a sense of common history and culture and often geography. Ideas about race may form part of an ethnic identity, but not always. It is possible for two people to be socially the same race and have different ethnic identities or vice versa. In an increasingly mobile world, ethnic identities often take on a transnational aspect, with people maintaining family and cultural ties across great distances. Like racial categories, ethnic categories have no scientific basis. They are ideas entirely constructed by the group. The criteria used to include or exclude members may change over time for political or other

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reasons. In fact, entire ethnic identities may be constructed rapidly with potentially devastating consequences. For example, historically, the "ethnic" identities of Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda seem to have been fairly fluid social groupings based on a distinction between farmers and herders. These identities were made more significant and expanded into quasiracial identities by the actions of European colonists who used them to categorize the local population. Those colonial distinctions became a useful way to mobilize the population during the genocide in the 1990s, where many of the Tutsi ruling minority were injured or killed by the majority Hutus.[1]

Both race and ethnicity vary in importance at different times in a group's history. While the sense of shared racial or ethnic identity may barely be mentioned during times of peace, in times of tension or conflict, people may rally around an identity, lending it more power for a time. This points to an important consideration when assessing a situation where a particular element of identity, such as race, ethnicity, religion, etc., seems to be at the core of the problem. Sometimes, people outside of the culture and the conflict assume such conflicts have been going on for thousands of years and are, therefore, unsolvable because they do not understand how elements of identity can be mobilized. Making observations about the role of race, ethnicity, and other elements of identity in a conflict is important, but it is equally important to determine why people are rallying around those particular identity elements and to elicit examples of how the groups managed to get along in the past. Again, what is important is not our terms—*race* or *ethnicity* or something else—but recognizing the criteria local people use to categorize each other (and us) and understanding the current significance of those categories. (See also the discussion of mobilization later in this section.)

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[1] Jack David Eller, "Rwanda and Burundi: When Two Tribes Go to War?," in *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict: An Anthropological Perspective on Ethnic Conflict* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 195–241.

Group Membership

Group memberships also inform identity formation. People belong to many different groups at the same time, such as hobby groups, churches, political parties, or the military. Each group affiliation provides each member something, such as a sense of belonging, security, purpose, opportunity, etc. At times, the various groups to which people belong hold conflicting beliefs or ideals, and members reconcile this incongruity in different ways. Furthermore, the fact that a person belongs to a particular group does not necessarily mean that they believe in everything the group espouses (remember variation above). In the United States, many people are members of churches or political parties without fully sharing the ideals of those groups. Throughout the world, people join groups because they think it will advance their careers, find them a better spouse, make their parents happy, or just help them get through their days more easily. This may be particularly true in authoritarian regimes, such as in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. People may have joined political parties or tried to marry into a tribe or clan not because of any deeply held belief but simply because they thought it would make life easier.

This means that you should not assume that every member of a group is going to move in lockstep with its purposes. Even in places where religion or tribal identity or a political party is strong, there are members who pick and choose which parts of a group's expectations to follow. People also may behave differently depending on context—perhaps being more relaxed at home, but carefully following the rules in public. Understanding the importance of context and how people make decisions about their behavior can be key in avoiding accidentally embarrassing, alienating, or angering a potential ally. Additionally, in any group, there are almost always a few members who are open to different ideas. If they can be identified, these people may be helpful in shifting the group's opinions or understanding the group. On the flip side, do not underestimate the power of these affiliations. They shape the way a person

thinks about things, sometimes even when that person is not fully invested in the group. For example, in the United States, people tend to think in terms of a two-party political system, not even imagining what it would be like to have an equally powerful third or fourth party. It is not that they do not like the idea; it just does not really occur to them to think about it. Even for people who are not Democrats or Republicans, the traditional dominance of those groups tends to create mental blinders that do not exist in countries with multiparty systems.

Organizations

One type of group needs specific attention: organizations, such as businesses, militaries, churches, and nongovernmental organizations. It is easy to start thinking about an organization as though it is one entity and forget that it is really just a group of people that has come together for a specific purpose and, thus, has created shared patterns of meaning, behavior, and symbols just like other groups. People in organizations create some of these patterns deliberately as a way of creating cohesion among members, and some patterns emerge over time from the habits and ideas of members. Each organization develops particular decision-making processes and has preferences for how to interact with outsiders. For example, do they do business with outsiders only in meetings or do they prefer quasisocial settings? This consideration is especially important if you are advising or training a military partner. For instance, you could have several meetings in the commanding officer's elaborately decorated office and never get anywhere. It is not until you happen to share a ride in a vehicle with them one day that you end up agreeing on a training schedule in less than half an hour. Military personnel who have worked alongside military counterparts from different countries usually notice similarities and differences between the military's culture and the cultures from which military personnel are drawn. When working with organizations, it is important

Military Culture and Organizational Culture

As you learn more about cultural concepts, you may come across discussions of "organizational culture" and "military culture." These terms can be useful in focusing your attention on a particular group or subgroup. However, as indicated in this chapter's section on Organizations, there is usually no need for a separate set of concepts and skills for learning about and interacting with people in these types of groups. The ones in this guidebook will work.

Some military personnel have reported that the most important aspect of understanding the cultural patterns of militaries and other organizations has been managing their own expectations. When you are busy or there is an ongoing crisis, it is easy to assume that a partner's cultural pattern, such as appropriate behavior between officers and enlisted personnel or how mission success is defined, will be the same as they are in your own military or organization. Keeping your own assumptions from blinding you to relevant differences can be especially difficult when working with partners who share some, but not quite all, of your patterns. Skills such as suspending judgment and perspective taking, described in the next section, can help you notice and manage differences so you can focus on the mission.

to remember that those within the organization are shaped both by their organizational affiliation and by their affiliation with other culture groups. You should approach trying to understand an organization and those within it just like you would any culture group and its members.

Tribes

Another type of group warrants particular attention: tribes. Within the DOD, there has been a tendency to see any substate group as a tribe. In reality, there were and continue to be many different types of social/

political organizations other than nation-states.[2] Then there is a further assumption that all nonstate groups are organized the same way and will operate and make decisions the same way. Historically, in the U.S. campaigns against Native Americans, this led to a number of different problems. First, commanders wanted to see every group as a tribe because it would mean that there would be a convenient leader with whom to negotiate. In reality, many Native American groups had different leaders for different aspects of life. Many groups with band structure (based on small kin groups who come together only for special events) did not have anyone who would have been recognizable as a political leader to Western eyes. This led to negotiations being conducted with the wrong people. A commander might make an agreement with one family elder, mistaken for a tribal leader, only to find out too late that other families did not think the agreement applied to them. It is understandable that a commander with experience with tribes in one area (Iraq, for example) might try to apply that experience in a new place (Afghanistan or the Philippines, for example). This may work, so long as the commander realizes that tribes are organized and make decisions in very different ways. Even something as seemingly unrelated as a clan structure that cuts across tribal lines or different marriage patterns can make a huge difference in the way tribal leaders determine courses of action.

Tribe is just a convenient catch-all word that we use instead of having to list all the specific characteristics and expressions of this type of group. In social science terms, a tribe is simply a nonstate corporate group (*corporate group* just means that it has membership rules) at a certain level of organizational complexity. There are many types of tribes. Most have

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[2] In reality, the term *tribe* is so vague that it does not have much utility as a means of understanding social organization and political process. It is used to describe small groups of indigenous people attempting to keep themselves distinct from a larger nation-state but is also used to attempt to explain the complex entanglement of kin-based relationships with the functioning of a nation-state in Iraq. For this and several other reasons the term is rarely used in scientific discussions of culture. However, it is firmly rooted in military documents and, therefore, must be addressed.

somewhat more formal leadership than would be found in smaller units of social organization. Most are made up of smaller segments. Most tend to use kinship as an organizing principle, often with clans or lineages involved that may cross-cut tribal lines. Some organize into confederacies but usually only for special events or threats, preferring to maintain autonomy at other times. Leadership can be inherited, but there is usually some flexibility to allow leadership to pass to those who have achieved recognition for their actions. Leadership often is based on persuasion rather than the ability to exert force or withhold or provide resources. However, none of these things holds true for all tribes in all places. Just like with any other group, military personnel must remain open to observe, be critical of what they see, and avoid being blinded by familiarity, as assuming familiarity can lead you to false conclusions and, thus, impact your effectiveness.

Cohesion—Ritual, Narrative, and Symbol

Groups stay together during long periods of time, even through changes in cultural patterns, for many different reasons, such as shared interests or beliefs, habit, identity, etc. While these reasons for group cohesion may be discussed overtly, especially in times of change or stress, there are subtler ways that people reinforce the importance of the group and a collective sense of identity.

Three of the most easily observed ways are ritual, narrative, and symbol. Celebrations, ceremonies, stories, myths, jokes, music, and symbolic objects (flags, emblems, etc.) can be used to give individuals a shared experience that reinforces their sense of belonging or the importance of group membership. For example, military life is full of these constellations of symbols, stories, and activities that reinforce group identity. Unit insignia, Service symbols, the stories units or Services tell about themselves, all of these help people define the group and their membership in it. In situations where a sense of collective purpose and identity has to be

forged, such as in a complex multinational operation, people often will create symbols and rituals to help the emerging group cohere to accomplish its purpose.

The ways rituals, narratives, and symbols are used can highlight important values of the group or can indicate when a group is being mobilized for a political purpose. These aspects of social organization are useful to remember for crafting working relationships and shared purpose when different groups have to work together. Also, they can be very important to a group when it is trying to recover from conflict or catastrophe. For military personnel, it may be necessary to support people's attempts to bring the group together via these means, even when it seems like time and resources are needed elsewhere.

Mobilization

The concept of mobilization warrants specific attention, as it has been mentioned throughout this section on organizing and interacting and is particularly significant to the military profession for the role it can play in both fomenting and quelling conflict. When we talk about something being mobilized, it means the process of how people's attention, conversation, and behavior start to crystallize around some element or marker of identity. You might see more of a certain kind of poster or distinctive clothing. You might notice people talking about social problems in terms of ethnicity when you know that there are political, religious, and economic reasons for those problems. People might emphasize a religious or political (or other) part of their identity in how they dress, how they talk, what they talk about, and how they choose to spend their time. Being able to recognize when people are mobilizing can help you anticipate reactions and perhaps shape behavior.

Note: In other reference material, you may read discussions of superordinate or group identity as distinct from individual identity. Concepts related to group identity can be useful in analysis and understanding

group behavior over time. However, it is important to remember that any group identity is really only a collection of overlapping individual identities and can shift over time. Also, in the mobilization process, people are rarely consciously thinking or talking about a clearly defined group identity of the sort that would be useful in analysis. Any description of group identity should be used as a general tool and not assumed to be a good predictor of the thinking or behavior of any specific individual.

Many aspects of culture tend to stay in low gear or neutral until something happens to focus people's attention. After 11 September 2001, people in the United States who had never given the flag much thought started to fly it, wear flag pins, or put flag stickers on their cars. During election years, people often think and speak more about their party affiliation. In times of conflict, sometimes people make ethnic or racial distinctions between themselves and their adversary in ways they rarely did before. During peacetime, these sorts of things can come and go without much cause for concern. During times when tensions are high and the potential for conflict is great, mobilization can be an indicator of danger. For example, if people talk about their problems in terms of ethnic differences and emphasize their own ethnic identity, it may lead to their simplifying a complex problem and blaming it on another group. Over time, as this kind of talk gets more common, it becomes easier to simplify, to blame, and then to think about doing harm.

Sometimes mobilization happens without manipulation as a result of a social or environmental change. However, sometimes the mobilization is orchestrated for political purposes. For example, a leader or group hoping to gain power might encourage people to identify with a particular political party by linking the party to important values in the group. In times of stress (economic problems, political change or disruption, violence, etc.), people often rally around a particular group or identity even if they were not particularly invested in it previously. Paying attention to how people talk about group membership and changes in the degree to

which they seem to be playing by the rules of their groups can give you clues to how the operating environment is changing. Take note, as this can reshape the operating environment in a very short period of time.

While mobilization of aspects of identity can lead to tensions, it also can help resolve them. For example, a group that mobilizes around a common sense of community membership may find it easier to down-play religious or ethnic differences. Leveraging a local historical counter-narrative to one causing disruption can help people reframe the situation using their own culture. It must be emphasized that mobilization is not inherently good or bad. When people mobilize, the results can be positive, negative, or neutral in terms of U.S. interests. Mobilization is simply a process, a way to motivate people, albeit a very powerful one, and one that you need to be adept at identifying and using if the need arises.

Answering Questions:
Beliefs, Logic, Questioning, and Investigation
Overview

This knowledge area encompasses the beliefs, logics, values, learning, knowledge, and modes of questioning and investigation of a group (sometimes referred to as a *worldview*). It includes, but is not limited to, topics such as religion and other beliefs, what people perceive to be logical and rational ways of thinking, what people believe is right and important, how the group thinks about and accomplishes learning and teaching, and the myths, history, and narratives that are important to the group. As with other aspects of culture, it is very common for multiple patterns of belief to coexist, even when an outsider might see them as conflicting. People may be very devout in a monotheistic religion that instructs people to believe that a deity controls all activities in the world. However, the same people may place great emphasis on scientific logic and also have shrines to ancestral spirits.

People use beliefs and knowledge to think about not only spiritual

questions but also more practical matters of how the world works, why things happen, and what is right or wrong. Beliefs need not be explicitly linked to religion to have significant impact. In the United States, many people place great value on individual rights and responsibilities. This value is reinforced by some religious traditions in the country but also is shared by many nonreligious people. Myths, historical stories, and other narratives—all of which are vehicles for beliefs and values—also are important in how people interpret events and make decisions. For example, a group with many narratives or myths about past invasions may be more inclined to be wary of U.S. military presence than a group without this sense of shared history.

Groups or subgroups also form orientations, shaped by beliefs, toward developing knowledge through learning. Some kinds of learning are perceived to be the responsibility of the family or community, others are expected to be covered in more formal educational systems, and others are seen as things that will be handled during employment or apprenticeship. Access to learning can be linked to social roles, status, or stratification, with some parts of the group restricted in what kinds of learning opportunities they have. Some groups prevent female children from attending formal school. Instead, these children are expected to learn from their families everything they need to know to fulfill the restricted set of social roles available to them. It is important to remember that people's beliefs are not always reflected in official policies. For example, even in places where people place a high social value on education, this value may not be reflected in government distribution of funds, and access to all or higher levels of education may be restricted to those who can pay.

People also use beliefs about knowledge to structure how questions get asked and by whom. In a group where scientific ideas about causation are accepted, questions about the cause of a disease would be perceived as being best answered by medical or scientific professionals using a structured scientific method. Yet, in a group that sees cause and

effect as driven by supernatural forces, people see it as more appropriate for a person connected to spiritual matters, such as a shaman or priest, to answer such questions.

The core considerations for this knowledge area are that ideas about what is logical and rational are not universally shared and that beliefs, values, and systems of logic are entangled in all aspects of life. It is important to learn as much as possible about these aspects of culture and to watch for their influence across all other aspects.

Digging Deeper
Questioning and Investigating

The processes of developing and challenging knowledge are heavily influenced by many aspects of culture, such as beliefs, social roles, division of labor, and power. In the United States, we have a division of labor that has created specialists, such as scientists and law enforcement officials, who are considered the appropriate people to investigate certain kinds of questions. It would be considered unusual, dangerous, and illegal for a regular citizen to attempt to conduct genetic experiments with pathogens or to investigate suspected criminal activity. Other kinds of questioning, such as challenging political and religious positions, are (at least ideally) seen as the right of all citizens, regardless of their position or status. There also is a fair amount of freedom of choice in the types of evidence or expertise people use to answer questions. When confronting questions about the origins of the universe, people are free to rely on explanations provided by scientists, philosophers, religious leaders, or some combination.

This type of arrangement may seem natural and normal to people who have grown up in the United States, but it does not hold true in all places. Most military personnel who have traveled outside the United States have encountered situations where political and/or religious dissent was illegal or restricted only to some subsection of the population,

based on wealth, kinship, age, or gender. It also is possible for academic or scientific questioning and research to be restricted to certain topics. For example, a group might welcome scientific explanations related to some aspects of biology but restrict scientists' ability to publish on evolution.

A group's arrangements for who can question or investigate certain subjects can affect interactions with U.S. military personnel in a number of ways that may not be easy to identify initially. These patterns affect what topics are acceptable for conversation in certain contexts, who can answer questions or make decisions on certain topics, and what kinds of arguments or evidence will be persuasive. They also can affect work with military partners, as there may be different patterns in who can question orders and who is allowed to raise difficult questions to superiors and how. Since many patterns about questioning and investigation are so deeply rooted that they are assumed to be natural, people may not think to tell you about them in advance. Using the skills in chapter 3 will help you identify and navigate these different patterns.

How People Use Beliefs and Logic

At its most fundamental level, the terms *belief*, *belief system*, and *worldview* refer to the ways people answer basic questions such as: What is important? What is good or bad? Why do things happen (ideas about cause and effect)? What counts as legitimate evidence when you are trying to figure something out? Who are we as a group? The terms also refer to the specific details of beliefs as well as the practices, narratives, sayings, symbols, and material culture that are used to experience and reinforce beliefs.

Connections: The use of the term *system* with regard to belief should not be taken to indicate that a group's beliefs will form a consistent, predictable set of ideas and practices. It is very normal for a group to hold

beliefs that, from an outside perspective, seem to contradict one another. It also is very normal for beliefs to appear to be a sort of patchwork. Folklore and local myths continue to be an important part of life even when many people accept a new religion or a new official history. Rituals that were developed as part of one religion are co-opted by a new one, and new stories are told to explain the ritual's purpose. People tinker with old ideas to accommodate new knowledge or opportunities.

Despite the fact that beliefs may appear to be only loosely connected, it can be difficult to insert new ideas or change old ones. Some aspects of belief do reinforce one another and also are influenced by other cultural factors. In a place with no microscopes, where people believe illness is caused by magic or divine judgment, your assertion that disease is actually caused by tiny, invisible creatures in the blood might make you seem a little crazy.

Beliefs often connect many different elements of life, sometimes in unexpected ways. That is why you may take an action that seems very simple to you, such as building a clinic, only to suddenly find people outraged because this tugs on an important element of their beliefs, perhaps the idea that taking ill people out of their homes and away from the protection of their families makes them vulnerable to witchcraft.

Explaining ordinary life: People use aspects of belief to explain ordinary things that happen in daily life, such as erratic behavior, illness, good fortune, the seasons, weather, why dropped objects fall rather than rise, and so forth. They also use belief to help answer more abstract questions such as what happens when people die, why some behaviors are acceptable and others are not, how the universe works and why it exists, or how their group came to be. Additionally, the practices, stories, and symbols that reinforce aspects of belief can be a very important means of maintaining group identity and cohesion.

Supernatural explanations: When people in the United States think of belief, they tend to focus on ideas about the supernatural. For example, organized religion can be one important part of belief. Other explanatory frameworks for the supernatural, such as animism, witchcraft, luck, and magic, may be present instead of religion or exist alongside it.

Using history and myth: Not all aspects of belief involve supernatural answers to questions. Groups often develop a sense of history that may be only loosely connected to what we might think of as the real facts. Sometimes, this history takes the form of myths, stories, or parables that only some in the group take to be the literal truth. Even supposedly true histories take liberties, emphasizing some events or people and neglecting others, casting rivals in a negative light and skimming past the flaws of heroes.

Choosing kinds of logic and evidence: Groups use different types of logic and value different sources as evidence. Many people emphasize the scientific method or a particular type of logic as objective ways to explain the world around them. These ideas are broadly accepted as useful, but it is important to realize that they, too, are rooted in certain beliefs about cause and effect, what counts as evidence, and which topics and kinds of questions are most important. For example, contemporary Western medicine has long relied on the scientific method for diagnosis and treatment. However, it took more than two centuries for the modern Western medical profession to apply those same methods to mental illness rather than assuming the cause was personal weakness or something spiritual. In contrast, some cultures have always treated emotional and cognitive issues as important parts of health.

Different ideas about what is logical or rational can be especially difficult to discover and understand. In the United States, we tend to think there is only one kind of logic and one kind of rationality, but our systems

Perceptions of Causality and Evidence in the 2001 Hainan Island Incident

On 1 April 2001, a Chinese Shenyang F-8 fighter jet and a U.S. Lockheed EP-3 surveillance aircraft collided over the South China Sea, resulting in the death of the Chinese fighter pilot, Lieutenant Commander Wang Wei, and severe damage to the American EP-3, which was forced to make an emergency landing on the nearby Chinese island of Hainan. What followed was a culturally grounded, intense dispute over the related issues of causality and evidence, as the United States sought the timely return of both its plane and aircrew, while the Chinese pursued a formal apology for both the collision and the EP-3's unauthorized landing at a Chinese airbase.[1]

The Americans, operating in a Western analytic framework that encourages zeroing in on the single most important causal factor, noted that the propeller-driven EP-3 was much larger, slower, and far less maneuverable than the nimble, jet-powered F-8. With its comparatively superior agility and speed, the F-8 must have crashed into the EP-3, rather than the other way around.

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[1] "EP-3 Collision, Crew Detainment, Release, and Homecoming," 2–20 July 2001, AR/695 Collection Finding Aid, Naval History and Heritage Command, Washington, DC, Navy Yard.

are based on certain assumptions that may not be shared in all cultures. We assume that to make a rational choice you have to strip out your emotional reactions and focus on facts. The exclusion of emotion is a choice. There is no absolute reason why emotion needs to be discounted from rational calculation, except that in our culture, emotion is seen as interfering with an idealized version of the kinds of evidence and thinking we prefer.

In contrast, if you are in a place where people think it is natural to include emotions in their decision-making, your attempts to exclude it may seem very strange. It might come across as excluding an important factor for an arbitrary reason, as if you were asked to determine the market value of a load of fruit and refused to count the bananas because

Perceptions of Causality and Evidence
in the 2001 Hainan Island Incident (*continued*)

Contrasting with the United States' narrow examination of causality and evidence, the Chinese worked within an Eastern analytical framework that encourages a holistic assessment. The Chinese, therefore, placed the collision within its larger political context, which included the 1999 American bombing of China's Belgrade embassy, the George W. Bush administration's declaration that China was no longer a strategic partner but a competitor, a marked increase in the number of U.S. EP-3 flights near the Chinese coast, and U.S. determination to build a missile defense shield that could potentially counter China's nuclear weapons capability. The Chinese consequently argued that questions of airplane speed and agility were secondary to the issue of why the jet fighter was compelled to intercept the U.S. spy plane in the first place. In part because of the culturally grounded disagreement about causality and evidence, the Hainan Island incident had to be resolved via diplomatic compromise, rather than agreement of fault. Eleven days after the collision, the American aircrew was repatriated following a U.S. statement of regret that the Chinese publicly equated with an apology. The EP-3 was also sent home, albeit disassembled and in crates.[2]

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[2] Example based on research/expertise provided by a contributor who wished to remain anonymous. The contributor based the example on information from Peter Hays Gries and Kaiping Peng, "Culture Clash?: Apologies East and West," *Journal of Contemporary China* 11, no. 30 (2002): 173–78.

you do not like the color yellow. It is easy to imagine a meeting of U.S. military personnel and people from such a group where both parties leave a negotiation frustrated. You might feel that they were unwilling to have a rational conversation because they kept bringing feelings into the discussions. They might feel you were unwilling to be rational because you refused to address the emotional aspects of the problem or players. If neither of you realizes that different concepts of rationality are at play, you could have a hard time reaching an agreement.

Filtering experience: People use beliefs as filters. These filters can have a profound influence on how people experience the world, affecting what people notice and ignore, how they categorize things, what seems logical, what feels right or upsetting. The resulting view of how the world works is often taken to be absolute reality rather than a reflection of the belief.

Change: Still, like all aspects of culture, beliefs change over time through all the same processes described in this document. Like all cultural change, it may happen in a way that appears disjointed, with individuals changing behavior but still professing beliefs that are out of sync with how they are acting. It is not enough to simply insert a new idea and find that people like it. Even as behavior changes, it can take a long time for other aspects of the belief system to shift so the new idea can be accommodated. It also can take a long time for the group to adjust or create associated practices, narratives, sayings, symbols, and material culture that are used to integrate the idea and to pass it on to subsequent generations.

Influencing: Power and Making Decisions
Overview

This knowledge area encompasses the officially recognized and unofficial ways that power and influence are gained, lost, and used by a group (sometimes referred to as formal and informal political systems). It also includes how different kinds of decisions are made and who gets to make them.

Broadly speaking, power and control are about getting people to do (or not do) something. Authority refers to the official or popular acknowledgment that a person has the right to exert power. These two things do not always come in the same package. It is possible for somebody to have power without authority, especially if they control resources or have

Simply put, no, there is no such thing as an ungoverned area. Wherever there are people, there is some form of governance. It may not look like the kind of government you would recognize, with officials and bureaucracy. Expecting to see that kind of government can create cultural blinders and make it difficult to see the local system that people are using to govern themselves. Watch for how decisions are made and who is consulted before action is taken. Look for patterns in the way resources and people move in the area. Listen to people's stories for hints about where authority lies. Also, be aware that there may be more than one form of governance at work in a particular place. They may be in conflict, or they may simply apply to different groups who have worked out how to coexist.

the means to use force, as is the case with drug cartels. It also is possible to have authority but no real power, something that can be a significant challenge for officials in newly formed or unstable governments.

A further consideration is *legitimacy*, which is the degree to which authority and the use of power are perceived as being correct and are accepted by a broader population. It is possible for an official structured authority to be acknowledged as powerful but perceived as illegitimate. This perception may undermine an individual's or organization's ability to exercise power effectively and create problems for the people in the community, as they navigate different power processes. Legitimacy can be a particularly important concept for military personnel because there can be great differences in perception within a community or between a community and outsiders. What is seen as legitimate authority and use of power by U.S. military personnel may be understood very differently by people in the local area or region. When these kinds of differences arise, it is important to avoid focusing exclusively on trying to create the perception of legitimacy. It is just as important to understand why people are not accepting something and what alternatives they would propose.

In the United States, people tend to think about power and con-

trol in terms of formal political processes, government institutions, and nation-states, all arrangements that have the sort of structured authority described above. These are important aspects of how people organize power in many places, but they are not the only aspects of this knowledge area that matter for military personnel. The ability to wield power may be very direct in cases where people have structured authority or control something, such as resources, the use of force, or the ability to give definitive interpretations of important guidelines, such as laws, religious doctrine, regulations, or history. However, people also wield power—and are perceived as legitimate—in more indirect ways, through influencing the beliefs and positions of others or by more subtle control over any of the things listed above. It is very common in many groups for high status community members, such as elders, religious leaders and scholars, highly educated individuals, the wealthy, or people from families with a long history in the area to have great influence and legitimacy. Individuals without high status may gain legitimacy through advocacy for a sector of the population that feels the formal political structures are not acting in its interests. Also, people who can effectively leverage their social networks to achieve their objectives can have significant influence within a group (consider how the "old boys" network in the United States or *wasta* in Arab societies work). Even individuals whose social role or status prohibits them from formal participation in politics or decision-making can have a great deal of indirect influence. This can be seen in any place where women are not allowed a recognized political voice, but who—as individuals or collaboratively—wield power and affect decisions through male relatives. Keeping track of the social roles and individuals who have influence in particular aspects of culture can seem daunting, but over time, patterns will emerge that make these aspects of culture easier to learn about and understand.

Power and authority intersect with decision-making for groups in complex ways. Official decision-making structures and processes are

often layered on top of other expectations about how decisions should be made. For example, a government official may have the authority and power to make decisions about resource distribution for education. However, they may realize that their final decision will be seen as more legitimate, accepted, and acted on more readily if they consult with community leaders, important religious figures, and other influential organizations or individuals. In many cases, this kind of consultation is not officially required and may not be pointed out as a formal part of the decision-making process, but it is still expected by all stakeholders. Also, sometimes the decision-making process can depend on context and topic. For one topic, one or a handful of individuals with authority may be expected to deliberate and make decisions for the group. For another topic, a process such as voting can enable the group to make decisions based on the will of the majority of those allowed a voice in the matter being debated. These kinds of practices should be familiar to U.S. military personnel who have observed military and civilian authorities socializing ideas and building consensus prior to making and announcing a decision. It is as important to observe and understand the activities and narratives leading up to a decision and the processes expected for particular kinds of decisions as it is to know who makes the final call.

One final note on the intersection between power and decision-making involves implementation. Many of you will have encountered situations, at home or abroad, where a decision is made but not acted on in the expected way. People may creatively reinterpret a decision to suit their own purposes or simply find ways to ignore it. In some cases, this kind of disconnect between decision and action results from lack of authority or legitimacy, as described above. It also can result from corruption, lack of trained personnel to do necessary work, or other problems. However, in places where part of the population does not have access to the formal political system and other decision-making processes, not acting on a decision or deliberately undermining the de-

cision in small ways may be a form of resistance and protest. People may believe, often quite correctly, that this type of resistance is the only political action available to them, a situation that can have a significant effect on mission accomplishment.

As is always the case, this knowledge area is connected with all the others. Social roles, organizations, and status have a major impact on who can wield power and how. Religious convictions are often deeply entangled with political decision-making. Ideas about how knowledge is gained or what counts as a valid argument are very important in decision-making. Symbols and the built environment are often used to create or reinforce legitimacy. Recognizing these connections will make it easier for military personnel to understand and anticipate the use of power and decision-making processes.

Digging Deeper
Contract and Personal Trust

The mechanisms groups use to reach agreement warrant additional attention, as U.S. military personnel, at times, express frustration or confusion about the different processes they encounter. Through recent operations, many military personnel have gained experience with the role of personal trust in the day-to-day affairs of other groups. They tell stories of long strings of meetings in which participants took a great deal of time to get to know one another on a personal level before making decisions or the importance of relationships developed during multiple deployments. Some people have had a difficult time adjusting to the seeming intrusion of personal matters into what they perceived should have been a largely impersonal, professional process. Part of the reason for this adjustment period has to do with the way people in different groups construct trust—through formal, codified practices (collectively referred to here as *contract*) or personal relationships.

In the United States, as in many other places, we place a great deal

of emphasis on the formal mechanisms of decision-making, governance, social control, and agreements. People in the United States may shake hands on a deal, but most will also want a document that makes the agreement official in some way. We do have many ideals, stories, and aphorisms about the importance of personal responsibility and integrity (e.g., *a man's word is his bond*, or *will you shake on it?* or *reputation is everything*) and often prefer to elect or do business with people we trust. However, in practical terms, we tend to place our trust in contract—processes, structures, positions, and rules—rather than individual people. Given the choice between buying a car based on a handshake and personal assurance about the vehicle's condition on the one hand and a written warranty on the other, many of us would take the warranty. When we buy groceries, we like to be able to rely on a system of governance that requires certain levels of sanitation and safety rather than having to get to know each farmer and baker supplying the store. The use of contract rather than personal trust provides a shortcut, a way around the complexities of assessing the personal integrity of every individual with whom, directly or indirectly, we interact.

In contrast, many groups emphasize personal trust as a necessary precursor to other types of agreements. There is more to this than simply drinking tea and discussing family at the beginning of meetings. Entering into a trust relationship often carries with it the expectation of personal responsibility for ensuring that agreements are carried out. It may also carry an expectation that the relationship carries over into other issues and agreements. Cultural patterns that emphasize personal trust also have an effect on the way social networks are used with information, resources, and instructions moving across a network, perhaps cross-cutting or avoiding formal channels, without the need for official arrangements or hierarchies. Most importantly for U.S. military personnel, when personal trust rather than just contract is required, we lose our familiar shortcuts. This has to be taken into account when planning, whether a meeting or

a campaign. As Anna Simons pointed out in her report on challenges in developing knowledge for conflicts outside the cosmopolitan West, "What is much less well appreciated is how trust is routinely secured in the non-western world: never by money, always by time."[3]

Social Control and Managing Conflict
Overview

This knowledge area encompasses ideas and practices people have developed to regulate social relations, individual behavior, and the rules of a group as well as establish patterns in how rules are used and what happens when people violate them. It also includes accepted processes for disputing and for managing or resolving disputes and conflicts. As such, it includes things familiar to U.S. military personnel like legal systems, structured law enforcement, and official punishment and sanctions as well as different concepts of justice and different ideas about how disputes should be handled, which may be less familiar to you.

All groups develop rules to govern behavior and interactions. The term *norm* is generally used to refer to rules that are commonly understood (although sometimes contested) but not codified in a group. The term *law* refers to rules that have been codified into a formal system, which generally includes concepts and processes for enforcement, dispute resolution, punishment, restitution, and reconciliation. The degree of emphasis placed on aspects of a legal system can vary. For example, in the United States our concept of justice emphasizes punishment and sometimes restitution. In places with different concepts of justice, restitution and reconciliation may be seen as the more important outcomes.

For military personnel learning about social control in a group, it is critical to recognize that while laws may be easier to learn about, norms

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[3] Anna Simons, *Improving Human Intelligence in the War on Terrorism: The Need for an Ethnographic Capability* (Washington, DC: Office of Net Assessment, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2004), 11.

may have as much or more power in governing behavior. Norms are the expected and accepted range of variation in a behavior—what counts as the normal for a given situation. People learn group expectations and limits as they grow up or become members. Stories about what happens to people who break the rules or do not fit in are usually deeply embedded in that learning. In our own cultural settings, we pick up on visual and verbal cues and use the knowledge gained over our lifetimes to pick up on the norms for a particular setting. We are able to figure out the applicable norms for a new situation without needing to spend a lot of time analyzing it. For example, in the United States nobody feels the need to formally teach children not to be cannibals. Children learn it deeply from jokes, horror stories, and the reactions of adults to news stories about violations of this taboo. Also, we do relatively little explicit teaching about norms of career success, what relationships should be like, or how you should treat your family. Despite that, people feel a great deal of social pressure to conform to norms in all of these areas.

The challenge in intercultural situations is that norms are not always called out explicitly in rule books or laws, and people may not be conscious enough of them to warn you about them. This is because, to the people who have lived with them all their lives, norms often seem like the obvious, correct, natural way of doing things. Obviously, you do not eat people, right? Norms usually go unmentioned and unnoticed until somebody violates them. Consequently, it is important to try to learn about norms in advance and equally important to be able to manage your interpersonal interactions using the skills in chapter 3 so that you can recover when one of you, inevitably, makes a mistake.

It is common to talk about rules as means to maintain social order, and this is true in the basic sense. However, it also is important to recognize that rules, the group's norms and laws, also frequently serve to reinforce social stratification and inequalities, providing advantages to some parts of the group and disadvantages for others. This latter effect is

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sometimes overt and acknowledged, sometimes more subtle. Likewise, rules do not always form a coherent system. Groups can have some rules that seem contradictory, especially during times of significant change. For example, long after women in the United States were legally allowed to vote, there was still a strong norm of women being expected to vote as directed by a husband, father, or brother.

When rules are broken, there are patterns in how the group responds. In the case of norms, all or part of the group is likely to respond to a rule breaker through social sanction. Social sanction can take many forms including, but not limited to, providing guidance, snubbing or shunning, gossip, shaming, or even violence. When a group believes somebody has behaved in a way that is beyond acceptable limits, members may expend a lot of energy expressing their displeasure through obvious gossip, publicly humiliating the individual, or excluding them from activities and

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Saving Face

In many societies, personal status or prestige is a significant aspect of an individual's identity and classification within the social hierarchy. As such, public praise or condemnation can have significant consequences to an individual or even their entire family. Therefore, you need to take care in how you approach both. In some cases, you need to avoid personal identification when assigning blame or poor decisions (especially for senior individuals) not only because of the insult to the individual but also because of the real possibility of loss of trust in you by the entire group about concern that they could also suffer loss of face. For example, you may need to speak more indirectly, such as, "Certain actions have led to unintended consequences that we need to work through" vice "Bill didn't listen to my advice, and now we all have extra work to do to clean up his mess." Everyone will likely know that Bill is at fault. This allows recognition of the problem without creating unintended consequences of insult or broken trust, gives the other side the space to handle it as necessary, and shows your counterparts that you act honorably.

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conversations. These activities demonstrate the group's disapproval and warn the rule breaker to change their ways. These mechanisms can be incredibly powerful influences on behavior. The social sanction employed by the group members can depend on the individual as much as the offense. For example, if a child violates a norm of deference to a person of high social status, they might be gently corrected. An older person might be forgiven the offense without sanction, while a middle-aged offender might be shunned or beaten for the same behavior. As many military personnel have experienced, most groups are willing to make allowances for outsiders not understanding norms. Offenses may be ignored or gently corrected. However, it is important to understand that in almost all situations, the outsider is expected to learn correct behavior over time.

When a law is broken, the situation is usually taken up by the formalized system of justice. This system may look like a familiar arrangement of police, courts, jails, and so forth, or the system may consist of a group of elders convening to hear about the situation and making a decision about what should be done. The system may be multifaceted, with some matters being handled by local mediators or judges and others entering into a system of courts. No matter what the system looks like, underpinning it will be a set of assumptions about what should be considered in decision-making and what constitutes a desirable, just outcome. In the United States, our ideal is that individuals should be equal before the law, that a person's social status, race, sex, and other such factors should not be considered in the judgment, and that an individual is innocent until proven guilty. Also, while our judicial system is expected to consider some aspects of context, such as killing in self-defense, other aspects are not allowed, or their consideration may be contested. The ideal of equality before the law is not a cultural universal, and many groups consider it very appropriate to judge a person differently based on personal characteristics or the particular situation. Likewise, the kinds of evidence that can

be considered are influenced by other aspects of culture. So, in a place where many people believe sorcery can cause loss or death, evidence of a person practicing magic might be seen as a legitimate consideration.

Perhaps more importantly, there also is a great deal of variation in what people see as the desired outcome of a judicial process. In the United States, people expect that a judgment will include the declaration of guilt/blame or innocence and a prescription for some type of punishment for the offender if found guilty. Again, this expectation is not universal. In some places, the outcome of a judicial process is expected to be the restoration of social harmony through restitution and acts of reconciliation rather than blame and punishment. In fact, placing blame and imposing punishment may be seen as making things worse, as exacerbating tensions rather than reducing them.

The preceding paragraphs focused mainly on violations of rules by individuals or small groups. All groups also have ways of handling broader disputes and conflicts that occur within the group or between groups. All groups have tensions of one sort or another with other groups, and these are generally managed rather than fully resolved. It is far more com-

Centuries-old Conflict

U.S. military personnel often find themselves in the middle of something that the U.S. public thinks of as an intractable conflict that has been going on for centuries. In reality, violent conflict is usually the exception rather than the rule. The raw materials for conflict exist in every group in every place. However, tensions between different religious, political, ethnic, tribal, or other groups are often managed without violence for hundreds of years. There may be jokes at each other's expense, and there may be discrimination, but more often than not, people figure out how to get along. People rarely fight one another just because they believe different things or act differently. So, the question is usually not whether you can fix the underlying tensions. They usually do not need to be fixed, but the population may need some help to get the situation back on a stable footing.

mon for such tensions, even very difficult ones, to be managed rather than to erupt into violence. When a tension reaches a point where one or both parties feel some action is required, there are culturally accepted ways of disputing. For example, many forms of public protest, strikes, mediation, seeking greater political power, and legal action are all considered acceptable in the United States. In many places, these disputing practices are not allowed, but there may be others, such as gaining an audience with a ruler or religious leader and persuading him to intervene.

Even when a conflict results in collective violence, there generally are forms of violence that are accepted and forms that are not. Historically, some groups have accepted raiding and feuding as legitimate means of addressing grievances. The international community continues to try to impose rules on large scale warfare, such as distinctions between combatants and noncombatants and treatment of prisoners of war.

When violence does occur, the right question to ask is: What happened that led people to take violent action? When answering this question, it is critical to remember three things:

1. **There is rarely only one cause for social unrest or violence, although one thing may serve as the match that sets off a ready pile of firewood.** Common causes of conflict include resource shortages, changes in land ownership rules or the ability to access resources on certain pieces of land, prolonged differences in economic resources among different groups in an area, rapid social change as a result of cross-cultural contact and/or industrial development, discrimination (actual or perceived), political repression, outside forces mobilizing some part of the population, etc. Any combination of factors, in addition to the perception that the normal means of managing tensions are not working, can lead to violence. Normally, if you are trying to find the answer to this question, you will hear many explanations for the violence, many of which are likely to be true. Be-

The Rise of Fascism in Germany

Germany suffered greatly during the Great Depression after World War I. Pervasive economic and political instability contributed to feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness among the citizenry.[1] Through his anti-Semitic movement of violence, intimidation, scapegoating, and nationalism, Adolf Hitler took advantage of the social instability and rallied many behind one of the largest systematic actions of group violence in human history: the Holocaust.[2]

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[1] Bernd Widdig, *Weimar and Now: Germany Cultural Criticism—Culture and Inflation in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 223.

[2] Widdig, *Weimar and Now*, 224.

cause of cultural variation, not everyone in a group will be reacting to the same conditions.

2. **The reasons people give to explain violence may not always be accurate.** This does not mean they are lying. It simply means they may be thinking and talking in terms of politics or religion, for example, when the underlying causes may be economic or ethnic (or any other combination) or when there are multiple reasons. This second factor is particularly true when local or regional leaders are trying to mobilize people to a cause. For example, they may feel that couching their goals in religious terms is more likely to get the response they want than if they talk about politics or history.

3. **It is not common for people to resort to group violence unless they feel all other options are gone or unless they are led to it.** Sometimes, people are led to violence by a leader who mobilizes their feelings of patriotism or faith or their sense of having been discriminated against. People are more easily manipulated by leaders if they feel they have no other options. If they cannot make things physically or economically secure for their families and believe that they do not

have recourse to any centers of authority, they may become willing to believe violence will bring about the change they want.

Again, the tensions that underlie the conflict are not necessarily going to be resolved; they need to be returned to a state where they can be managed. The goal of a mediator in any conflict is to help the parties reach that state. For navigating daily operations, you have to develop information that will help you understand the range of reasons for the violence, how those reasons might be mobilized and by whom, and what lines of influence can be used to manage the situation and produce a greater sense of security for the population.

Finally, all arrangements of social control, disputing, and conflict resolution rely on some mixture of perceived legitimacy and the threat of force or sanction (in the form of confinement, banishment, violence, or some other punishment). When some part of a population or an entire group does not have access to or does not accept the legitimacy of the social controls and patterns of dispute/conflict resolution being imposed, the members of that group or population may try to pursue the conflict in ways that are perceived by other stakeholders as illegal or immoral. In the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan between 2003 and 2014, each side accused the other of illegal and immoral acts, in part because there were different concepts of what actions were acceptable within the conflict. Conflicts in which the rules of disputing are, themselves, part of what is being disputed can be particularly complex to resolve, especially through nonviolent means.

Communicating:
Information Flow, Sources, and Trust
Overview

This knowledge area focuses on very basic aspects of individual and group communication, including anticipating intercultural communica-

tion mishaps, communication patterns, and different modes of sharing information. For this knowledge area, the most important thing to remember is that almost all human behavior involves communication of some sort. All humans communicate, and symbolic communication is one of the few human universals. To do so, humans use verbal, nonverbal, and paralinguistic cues as well as objects, space, and various forms of behavior. We communicate nonverbally (via cues like body stance, gestures, and facial expressions) about such things as our perceptions of the social roles and status of the people in the conversation, power dynamics, or willingness to compromise. We convey meaning with tone or pitch of voice or with speed of speech (paralinguistic cues). By accepting or rejecting hospitality or a gift, we communicate something about the kind of relationship we have with the person making the offer. We build structures that communicate subtle cultural cues about the purpose of the structure and expected behavior, such as the use of high arches, pillars, and large open spaces associated with public and religious buildings in the United States. Even very large-scale, complicated group behavior communicates a message, such as when the United States communicates the capacity for force by placing a carrier group off a coast.

The meanings associated with particular behaviors or symbolic objects and structures can vary a great deal, and misinterpretations of communication are some of the most common intercultural errors. Getting very close, making large gestures, and speaking loudly may be interpreted by us in the United States as rudeness or aggressiveness when the speaker is intending to convey sincerity and engagement. You may see your foreign military partners' showing up late for an exercise as lazy or disrespectful when the partners did not intend to communicate anything of the sort. Likewise, actions by you can be misinterpreted in intercultural contexts. For example, establishing a dumping area in a field used for grazing might have been a simple mistake but be interpreted as your communicating absolute disregard or contempt for local farmers. In any

intercultural interaction, the more stakeholders can learn about each other, the easier it is to avoid and recover from potential problems.

Learning about communication also involves understanding different communication patterns. It is a mistake to think about communica-

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Question-asking in Afghanistan

In 2008, while employed in the Canadian Task Force Afghanistan, I and a small number of Canadian and Afghan soldiers deployed to Maywand District, Kandahar Province, in what was to be the first permanent Coalition presence in the area to date. After a couple months of operations, we wished to implement some [measures of effectiveness] to give us an azimuth check regarding our strategy. We canvassed the local population, asking such questions as: Do you feel secure? Are you happy with the government? Do you trust the Coalition and the Afghan security forces? Inevitably, the responses were overwhelmingly positive; one would think that we were hugely successful—undoubtedly unrealistically so.

What we did not understand was that there were social norms, part of the cultural dimension of belief systems, at play when the local population was answering our questions. It was eventually explained to us by our Afghan security force partners that, when locals are engaged in conversation with people in positions of authority, the most likely responses are generally very positive in nature. Essentially, they were saying that most Afghans simply tell you what they think you want to hear. They do this primarily because they want to give the impression of being a good citizen and, second, because they do not want to cause trouble for themselves by appearing to be critical of the authorities. From a Western perspective, our questions were designed to elicit direct and honest responses, regardless of whether these responses may have been an indictment of our efforts. Our failure to understand this social norm (also, perhaps, the Afghans' inability to understand our true motives in asking the questions) led to an inaccurate evaluation of the population's true perception of their environment, something that eventually became clear to us through the actions of the population as well as the insurgents.

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tion as purely transactional, a simple exchange of information. Communication involves behaviors (such as tone, style, physical stance, presence or absence of honorifics, inclusion or exclusion of personal information) that people use to signal things about social relationships, the relative status of people involved, the stakes involved in a discussion, and so forth. Social roles, status, and situation can have a great deal of influence on who can communicate with whom and the way such discussions play out. The following example relayed by a major from the Royal Canadian Infantry Corps illustrates this point: The more you learn about social organization, social norms, and other aspects of culture, the easier it will be to anticipate common patterns of communication.

Communication also involves different modes of sharing information and means to determine the legitimacy of information. All groups have many different ways of sharing information. There are usually at least some structured channels such as official announcements, education, town halls, sermons, public lectures, organized protests, scholarly publication, and news media. There also are always less structured

ways information is passed, such as gossip, individual media broadcasts or publications, street corner sermons and talks, and ad hoc gatherings. The availability of internet access has made some of these less structured venues available to far broader audiences than in the past. Less structured information channels offer great insights into the ideas and concerns of the population. Understanding how information is passed and consumed is critical for military personnel in gaining a deeper understanding of the local environment and ways to influence it. Also, if you need to control modes and content of communication, it is important to remember that these less-structured modes are harder to gain control of, as they are not easily shut down, and if they are shut down, people simply create new ones. It may sometimes be possible to build relationships with influential voices, thereby making it possible to shift the content rather than trying to control the communication venue.

Groups determine legitimacy of information in various ways. Sometimes, it is the source that offers legitimacy. In the United States, people often perceive information from structured venues as more legitimate and place value on the perceived objectivity or fairness of such a source. Other groups, especially with populations with high inequality or segregation and in times of conflict or disaster, may place more emphasis on the social position of the source. They may trust an account from a neighbor or local religious figure more than official pronouncements or news accounts from people whose motivations and allegiances are unclear. Little or no value may be placed on the idea of objectivity. Sometimes, it is how comfortably the information fits with what people already know or believe. People often place more legitimacy on information that fits with their existing ideas. For example, in places where foreigners are believed (sometimes with good reason) to have spread disease in the past, people may not immediately believe in the good intentions of foreigners responding to a medical crisis. They may distrust official messages about the response and be more willing to believe a local leader or media

> ### Empacho
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> *Empacho* is an illness in Latin America that is associated with indigestion, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and other minor symptoms. It is believed to be brought on by a mass of food becoming stuck within the digestive tract and is treated by some local healers—*curanderos*—with powdery substances known as *azarcon* and *greta.*
>
> During the 1980s, there were recorded instances of young children being brought into emergency rooms exhibiting signs of heavy metal poisoning. Parents told medical care providers that their child was suffering from *empacho*. After investigation, doctors found orange or pink powder inside the stomachs of the children brought in for the condition. Testing of the material revealed that the children had ingested *azarcon* and *greta*, which contain lead tetroxide and lead oxide respectively. The materials were responsible for the deaths of many children throughout the region.
>
> How could this have happened? Why would the families not go to the hospitals in the first place? In this case the families in these situations are dealing with two separate medical systems at the same time. On one hand, they are dealing with Western biomedicine when they bring the child to the hospital. Going to a *curandero* or medicine man is a different type of medical system. It is important to note that people rarely stick to
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> (continued)

personality spreading rumors about outsiders' bringing disease to kill the people and take their land.

Staying Well and Dealing with Illness: Health, Nutrition, and Wellbeing
Overview

This knowledge area encompasses the beliefs, social relationships, institutions, and other aspects of culture that intersect with the overall health and wellbeing of a group. It includes topics such as beliefs about the causes and treatments of disease, power dynamics that affect access to sufficient water and food, how beliefs and social relations affect how

Empacho (continued)

one medical system, often seeking help from multiple sources. Even in the United States, a person who contracts a type of cancer will go to a special doctor and begin radiation treatments. That same person may also go into church and ask that their congregation pray for them to be healed. One course of action is physical and scientific, while the other is metaphysical and faith-based.

As military personnel, it is important to understand the medical systems you may encounter when deployed and how they interact. The medical assistance offered by the United States is a very specific kind of medicine based on our understanding of science and the physical world. Locals may have other medical systems you have not heard of that play an important role in their lives. Taking time to understand how locals conceive of disease and illness as well as how they treat it will help reduce the possibility of unwanted surprises when it comes to treating the population in question.[1]

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[1] Robert T. Trotter II, "A Case of Lead Poisoning from Folk Remedies in Mexican American Communities," in *Understanding and Applying Medical Anthropology*, ed. Peter J. Brown (Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing, 1998), 279.

care is provided, and how people are expected to behave when sick or injured. It involves not only what we would think of as physical health and nutrition but also cultural orientations toward mental health and whether health is an individual or social matter. It also includes the health and treatment of wild and domestic animals that may be important for subsistence, labor, exchange, or symbolic reasons. Cultural ideas about health matter not only for medical missions but also more broadly for any type of military operation. Because health and other aspects of culture (beliefs, social relations, exchange, etc.) are frequently tied together, a disease event or some U.S. action related to health may have a ripple effect throughout the group that may impact your operations.

Health issues affect other aspects of culture in both short-term and

long-term ways. For example, in many countries, epidemics of AIDS occurred at times when there were weak public health and medical infrastructures, and aid from the international community was insufficient to provide the levels of care common in the West. The outbreaks killed many young and middle-aged adults, leaving large numbers of children and elderly people on their own. During long periods of time, this resulted in significant changes in economic patterns and family structure. It also altered social roles, with the elderly and children having to head households and support their families. As is often the case with lingering illnesses or debilitating injury, caring for the ill added additional time and resource burdens on families and communities. Disease burdens or health and nutrition insecurity can contribute to instability as well as affect the social, political, and economic contexts you will encounter when carrying out your missions.

When assessing the health situation of a group, the physical, psychological, environmental, veterinary, agricultural, and infrastructure aspects of health matter. It is important to include both individual medical issues and broader public health challenges, such as those arising from insufficient clean water, nutritional problems, or the presence of environmental toxins, in your assessments. It also is necessary to assess less visible aspects of health, such as beliefs about what causes disease and how it should be treated or how social divisions, roles, and status may affect people's ways of seeking care. In many places, you need to be aware of the involvement of different kinds of practitioners, such as midwives, religious figures, herbalists, and community leaders in parts of care that may seem unusual to you, as in the case of *empacho* on the preceding page. Overall, the goal is to balance learning about the community's health from the standpoint of American ideas about health with learning how the community thinks about health and what is necessary to maintain it or solve problems.

In the case of health and wellbeing, many common assumptions in

the United States are decidedly uncommon elsewhere. Consider what aspects of U.S. beliefs and norms about health may be considered unusual by the local population. Many military personnel are familiar enough with other cultures to recognize that certain normal U.S. practices, such as a male physician treating a female patient, may be seen as unacceptable among certain groups. However, in some places, even more basic assumptions may not be shared. For example, most people in the United States believe that many diseases are caused by tiny organisms, invisible to the naked eye, that travel in people's blood and other bodily fluids. To some people, this may seem stranger than believing disease is caused by witchcraft. The idea that teeth and eyes are not part of routine medical care in the U.S. system seems illogical to people in many other areas, as does the idea that mental illness is something separate from physical illness. Even the idea that a patient might be divided from his family or social network during treatment, something we take for granted, could be perceived as strange or dangerous to other people. This last assumption caused problems in some past responses to the Ebola virus when people became afraid, sometimes even hostile, as relatives disappeared into isolation and treatment centers. In some areas, responders were able to remove tarps around treatment units so that families could monitor how patients were treated and communicate with them, greatly reducing tension.[4] Understanding such differences in fundamental beliefs and values can help you understand reactions and plan more effectively.

At the most basic level, having an understanding of the health situations and practices of a group will help military personnel understand what the community is contending with that can affect the mission. For example, if you know your local partners are coping with exhaustion from malarial parasites or worried about malnourished children, you can

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[4] For an overview of cultural considerations in Ebola outbreaks, see Barry S. Hewlett and Bonnie L. Hewlett, *Ebola, Culture and Politics: The Anthropology of an Emerging Disease* (Belmont, CA: Thomson, 2008).

make more realistic plans for how much can be accomplished in a day. At a more complex level, understanding the cultural aspects of health can provide insights into many other aspects of culture as well as help anticipate the second- and third-order impacts of and on operations.

Learning and Teaching
Overview

One of the most important things groups do is share knowledge across the group and to new generations as they grow up. While there is great variety in the details of learning and teaching, most groups have broad-based processes for helping new members learn the cultural patterns of the group (socialization) and more structured processes for learning specific knowledge and skills or for explicitly passing along a particular ideology (educational institutions).

All groups pass on cultural patterns to new members—children, immigrants, etc.—through both overt and subtle means that are collectively referred to as socialization (or sometimes acculturation). Children and other new group members pick up their sense of right and wrong, beliefs, understanding of social roles and behavioral expectations, and a host of other knowledge through observing and interacting. Some aspects of socialization are more formalized with specialized learning for a population segment (a sex or an age group) or for particular topics (such as religion, keeping house, hunting, etc.).

U.S. military personnel all experience socialization processes as adults when they go through basic training and as they move through ranks. As recruits and at each promotion, military personnel experience some learning that is explicit and organized, and they also learn a great deal simply through observing or doing, through the subtle cues given by peers, superiors, and subordinates and through stories and images. As is the case with socialization into a military group, group members may not always be able to explain all the details of how socialization works, but

they can usually provide examples of how members set good or bad examples or tell stories about awkward or funny moments in a new member's learning. These stories can help you learn about how socialization occurs.

Why might understanding socialization matter? If you are trying to introduce something new, perhaps a new kind of training for military partners, simply saying "do it this way" may not be enough. To stay with the example of military partners, you might be working in a situation where there is no explicit prohibition on enlisted personnel taking initiative, but personnel have been strongly socialized against it. If what you are trying to accomplish requires initiative, you need to understand what might be causing personnel to resist or not act on what you are teaching. Once you understand the background, you can figure out whether it is possible and desirable to overcome the socialization or if you need to adjust your approach to accomplish the goal.

Groups generally also have a more structured process for ensuring that new group members are able to gain the knowledge and skills that are thought to be useful for the population as a whole and/or to formalize transmission of ideology. These more structured processes are referred to as educational institutions. Often, educational institutions now look like the types of schools familiar in the United States with classrooms, professional teachers, and clearly defined subject matter. However, other educational institutions may be present or emerging, and it is important that the familiarity of the other type not blind you to their presence and influence. For example, apprenticeships may be the only route to a particular occupation. Also, the role and status of educators within these institutions vary considerably across groups. In some places, anyone can set up a class or school. This is increasingly true online in places where internet access is broadly available. In other places, educators must have some type of official sanction, whether religious or governmental. Standards for educators also vary a great deal and may be lower or higher than

those found in the United States. Additionally, within some groups, educators are highly respected and influential community members, even though they may not have an official role in political or legal structures. Whether formally or informally, they may be involved in decision-making on a broad range of community issues, not only those involving schools.

Each group establishes policies and practices that regulate access to educational institutions. In some places even primary school must be paid for and is not always within financial reach of the whole population. In the United States, wealth makes it possible to have greater choice in the kind of education your children receive. Segregation by sex, race, or other factors is also still in place in many areas, sometimes by official policy and sometimes as a result of custom or the geographic separation of different subgroups in a population. Understanding who has access to which types of institutions and the types of learning is helpful in understanding the levels and types of capabilities of your counterparts, which helps you shape your actions and interactions accordingly.

Expressing Ideas and Identity: Arts, Literature, Media, and Performance
Overview

This knowledge area encompasses the different ways a group engages in expression of ideas and the use of different expressive forms to reinforce, challenge, or change aspects of culture. It includes history, myth, stories, oratory, the arts, and literature as well as venues, such as various kinds of media, public performance, museums, and archives. The military relevance of this knowledge area may not be immediately apparent. However, the concepts and information included in this area can provide critical insights into every other aspect of culture—values, beliefs, rules, identity, etc.—as well as into how people in the group may interpret current events and how they think about their own history. Just as importantly, creative expression often is a means of challenging old ideas or trying out new

ones. This can help you assess when and how ideas are evolving in the local environment.

Forms of creative expression, such as art, music, literature, and performance are found in every group. These kinds of expressions convey a great deal about both group identity and aspects of culture that are being contested, as can be seen when a painting or film creates controversy. Artistic forms sometimes enable people to convey feelings or ideas that have few other social outlets. For example, the fact that young Bedouin men in Egypt write poetry was surprising to many of the U.S. personnel who first encountered it, but really this is no more unusual than the fact that male country music performers in the United States can sing about feelings that many men would feel uncomfortable bringing up in normal conversation. While creative expression can be an important part of individual and family life—the private sphere, military personnel are most likely to encounter it first in more public forms. Many groups expect that almost every individual will be involved in some form of public creative expression, even if only through participation in group events involving dance and music or by incorporating creativity and beauty into daily work. In such places, efforts to dismiss creativity as unimportant or impractical may be met with confusion or be rejected.

Every group constructs stories about its past and present that contribute to people's sense of shared identity and help them interpret new events. When narratives, whether about history or current events, are constructed, certain aspects are included and emphasized while others are not included or are de-emphasized. In some cases, this is deliberate, such as when a political party wants to emphasize particular values or de-emphasize the contributions of a subgroup. In extreme cases, a government or powerful subgroup may seek to insert deliberate distortions into narrative to shape public perceptions. However, in many cases the selection of information is less deliberate, following patterns in people's expectations about what stories and histories should include. For exam-

ple, in the past, U.S. history textbooks rarely included information on the roles of minorities or women and focused on major political figures and events rather than the daily lives of people. This was not so much a deliberate choice on the part of the scholars as it was a reflection of the assumptions and values of the time in which they were writing.

Myths, parables, and folktales are no less important than efforts to report factual accounts of past events. These kinds of stories often provide important insights into the beliefs and social relations of a group. In some groups, telling such stories can be an important social event, which can be important for building rapport. Additionally, telling a story can be used as a way of conveying information about a current event or expected behavior if the speaker feels it could be dangerous or rude to speak more directly. Children in the United States often heard stories about Davy Crockett or Paul Bunyan and the frontier of the American West.[5] These tales contained some facts, some distortion, some fiction. They are not useful as historical accounts of the formation of the United States, but they do communicate a great deal about group values such as rugged individualism and the importance of the ideas of frontiers, exploration, and wilderness in the formation of early collective identity.

Likewise, fiction, poetry, movies, television, and other means of telling stories can be important for understanding values, changing or controversial ideas, and deep patterns in how people expect events to unfold. In the United States, stories have a fairly straightforward progression of characters and events, heroes and villains, clear resolutions, and happy endings, a particular kind of narrative optimism. Therefore, people from the United States may sometimes have difficulty following the thread of stories constructed in different patterns or identifying the

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[5] Davy Crockett (1786–1836) was a legendary American frontiersman and politician who was known as the "King of the Wild Frontier" for his upbringing and eccentric behavior. Paul Bunyan was a lumberjack and folk hero in Canadian and American literature who was renowned for his superhuman labors and log-hauling pet, Babe the Blue Ox.

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intended message. As with many other aspects of culture, being able to understand these kinds of expressions can be difficult at first, but patterns will emerge over time.

Often, more powerful parts of a group try to impose restrictions on creative expression intended for the public to control what counts as artistic, whether through overt political pressure or more subtle social pressures. Restriction of public creative expression also can happen more subtly as a few individuals become professional artists, writers, or performers through finding a patron or being able to exchange their work for goods and currency. These restrictions can have the effect of reinforcing social stratification or other social distinctions. In some cases, as part of an overt political strategy to promote a particular ideology, political leaders use or impose restriction on the arts, literature, and music. Under these

circumstances, creative expression by people or in forms that challenge these controls can be an important part of protest and mobilization.

As open access to the internet has become more common around the globe, more individuals have the ability to contribute publicly to stories, historical narratives, and forms of creative expression as well as use creative expression for political purposes. Involvement of many individuals is not necessarily new, but the medium of the internet does introduce some differences in terms of access, processes, and scope. The long-term implications of how people choose to use and/or restrict the internet are not yet known. However, it is important to pay attention to how people use various internet venues, including but not limited to social media, to construct and contest identities and narratives, support and challenge values, norms, and ideologies, and engage in various forms of creative expression.

Having Fun: Leisure, Play, and Humor
Overview

This knowledge area encompasses activities that people in the United States would typically consider distinct from work, done for enjoyment, or as personal pursuits. It includes things like sports, social gatherings, hobbies, sport hunting and fishing, using media (films, television, websites, etc.) or reading for pleasure, relaxing at home, and outings or vacations. It also includes the special rules and expectations that apply to these activities.

Leisure activities can give important insights into a group's culture. At the most basic level, things people choose to do with free time can show what they think is important or provide windows into other values. Some groups spend a lot of leisure time in sports or other activities that provide opportunities for individual or team competition. However, competition is not universally valued, and people from other groups may choose to spend their leisure time on activities that focus on artistic expression or

more directly building social bonds. Additionally, some groups do not have clear distinctions between work and leisure activities and times. Most frequently, military personnel will encounter groups in which there is a broad range of available leisure activities.

All groups have ideas about, and activities they consider to be, fun. Talking about and participating in leisure activities are well-established ways of building rapport. Many military personnel have reported that discussions of sports, hunting, or movies are the initial icebreakers in discussions with partner forces and local populations. What groups consider fun is not necessarily shared across groups, as there are cultural differences in what counts as fun. For example, local people may enjoy a goat roast and spend as much time discussing all the details of killing and preparing the goat as you might spend discussing the nuances of a football game. The global entertainment industry and increasing internet access mean that it is now sometimes easier for military personnel to encounter people who have seen the same films, websites, and television shows. These commonalities can be useful for rapport building, but interactions should not be limited to what is familiar and comfortable. If facing an unknown leisure activity, observe and ask about any special expectations for behavior. For example, when an individual is invited to a dinner party at a family home, some groups expect the guest to bring a small gift. However, in other places, such a gift may be perceived as rude because it suggests the host cannot provide for the guest. There is no universal pattern. It is necessary to observe and ask questions.

Social stratification, roles, and status may be reflected in who chooses (or is allowed) to participate in certain activities. In the United States, attending the opera tends to be associated with the upper socioeconomic classes, although the only formal barrier to other people's attending is cost. Participation in sports is still segregated by sex and/or race in many places, and the rules about segregation can be very strict. There also is cross-cultural variation in assumptions about who should have leisure

time and why. People in the United States often assume that children and the elderly should have more leisure time than young and middle-aged adults, in particular that they should not have to be involved in wage labor. In other groups, this may not be perceived as desirable or may be impractical. This does not necessarily mean that children and the elderly are unhappy. They may value the chance to make a contribution to the family or community.

As is the case with artistic expression, leisure activities are sometimes a context in which broader issues are challenged. For example, watching sports matches and sport hunting were traditionally male-only activities in the United States until recently. Over time, more women have chosen to challenge traditional gender stereotypes by openly displaying their interest in these activities or participating in them. In cases where one part of a group is disadvantaged in ways that are not openly acknowledged, it can sometimes be safer for people to highlight the issue in leisure activities rather than openly challenge the more powerful group. So, it might be easier for people to try out the idea of ethnic integration in a series of soccer games than in the political process. This is not to suggest that people perceive leisure activities as unimportant. After all, Jackie Robinson and Larry Doby received threats after breaking baseball's color barrier in 1945, hardly a response to something unimportant. However, as with the arts, sometimes people are more willing to allow challenges and exploration in these kinds of activities.

Digging Deeper
Leisure and Work: Are They Two Different Things?

The idea of leisure and work as separate activities is not universally shared. In the United States, people often compartmentalize the times and spaces where leisure activity is to take place. These kinds of separations are not followed in many places military personnel may operate. The concept of leisure, in the way it is commonly understood in the

The Fable of the Banker and the Fisherman

An American investment banker was vacationing in Africa. While visiting a coastal fishing village, a lone man in a small fishing boat pulled up to the pier. The American walked over to the boat to see three large tuna inside. The American complimented the fisherman on the quality of his catch and asked how long it took. "Only a couple hours," the fisherman replied. The American pointed out the nice weather and how early it still was in the day. "Why don't you stay out and catch some more?" he asks. The fisherman said that he had enough for his family's current needs. "But what will you do with all the rest of your time?" the American asked again.

"Well, this morning I slept in a bit then walked with my kids to school. I'm about to take a nap, then will go get my kids from school. I'll play with them and the dog on the way home, where I'll meet my wife. We'll go to the market and see some of our friends, try some new wine that somebody's selling down there. After that we'll have a nice big dinner and relax, maybe play some guitar." The American's eyes light up enthusiastically. "Aha!" he exclaimed. "I can help you out! What you need to do is start working longer days. Catch two, three, even four times as many fish! Sell the fish you don't need at the market and keep the money. Save up and buy a bigger boat and hire a crew too! That way you can catch even more fish. Eventually, you'll have enough money to buy more boats! From there you can move into a bigger city and look into ways to process and distribute the fish as well! You'll own your own company!"

The fisherman raised an eyebrow at the American, a quizzical look on his face. "How long will that take?" The American responded, "Probably fifteen or twenty years, but you'll be rich! And then you can retire!"

"But what would I do then?" asked the fisherman. The American replied, "You could move to a small fishing village, sleep in, walk your grandkids to and from school, take naps, spend time with your wife, drink wine, spend time with friends, and play guitar!"

As illustrated by this tale, groups of people conceive of leisure time differently. The basic Western idea surrounding work and leisure is that you do your job first, work hard, and eventually be rewarded. Other groups do not always draw such hard boundaries around what is or is not considered work, nor is there a universal emphasis placed on a hard day's work.[1]

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[1] Note: This vignette is a fable rather than a factual account of an intercultural conversation. Many different versions of it, often involving different nationalities, can be found online.

United States, seems to be a fairly recent development in human history. This is not because people in the past never had time to relax or pursue activities purely for enjoyment. It is just that the perception of a need to make a distinction between work and leisure does not seem to have been widespread. Blurred lines between work activities and nonwork activities have sometimes created friction for military personnel. A typical example is when a meeting includes time spent socializing, gossiping, making and eating food, and other activities military personnel think of as not work-related. U.S. personnel may become frustrated, wanting to get down to business and stop wasting time, or become uncomfortable because they feel this is not acceptable/legal behavior for them when on official business. The other people at the meeting may see no reason that a business meeting should not also be enjoyable. They may see the maintenance of relationships and exchange of information and hospitality as being equally important to the specific topic of the meeting. In fact, the lines between leisure and work are also blurred in the United States. Most military personnel have had to participate in "mandatory fun," where something cast as leisure was really just an extension of work. Most people in the United States also have had experiences where an activity that we might normally characterize as work, like helping somebody move, took on some characteristics of a social gathering.

It is not critical to determine what counts as leisure and what counts as work in the group being studied. Just keep in mind that the separation between work and leisure activities is not universally shared. For interaction, what matters is being able to identify opportunities for participation and the different assumptions that may cause friction if not addressed and being able to understand what leisure activities mean to partners or local people and what clues they provide to other aspects of culture.

Conclusion

The culture general concepts presented in this part of the guidebook serve to help military professionals improve their understanding of human behavior and the connections among different aspects of culture they may observe. The concepts describe the underlying thinking processes and knowledge areas that are relevant no matter your counterpart or operating environment. As indicated in many of the examples, the concepts describe aspects of culture you already know and have experienced in your own life but need to learn how to see in other places with other people. In short, the concepts just give you the words to help make familiar ideas more transparent and transportable. For example, you have probably engaged in reciprocity many times, but knowing the concept helps you notice reciprocity at work, even if people are not acting or talking about it in familiar ways.

As you read through the text, you probably were eliciting examples in your mind for each of the areas discussed, drawing from your personal and professional experiences and previous learning. Having a firm understanding of these concepts will serve you well as a military professional and help you be more effective with your analysis of and in your encounters with people, both those within your groups and those without. Now that you have a solid understanding of the underlying factors shaping behavior, the next chapter discusses the culture general skills that you can use to shape your own behavior to improve your effectiveness in your military career.