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The "Operational Mentor":
The Critical Art of Cross-Cultural Competence
and Being Understood in the Contemporary Operational Environment

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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Preface

As wars and conflicts take place in the interaction between people, studies of cross cultural issues in the contemporary operational environment¹ are invaluable. This MMS is an attempt to describe the importance of cross-cultural competence and utilize social science theories to improve understanding of context and behavior when being embedded as an operating mentor in a culturally foreign country. My motivation for choosing the subject of the importance of cultural understanding, springs from my own experience as a mentor in Afghanistan in 2009-2010. After spending six months with the ANA, I undertook what anthropologists would call fieldwork based on participant observation. Consequently, this is a personal venture where I use personal experiences and narrative to analyze a specific case. As mentoring is a cost-effective and relatively cheap way to build partnering capacity (BPC), the Norwegian Armed Forces are likely to participate in similar missions in the future where BPC is relevant. Therefore, appraisals and considerations of applicable experiences from mentoring in Afghanistan seem particularly meaningful at this time.

I wish to acknowledge the direction and advice I received from my mentor, Dr. John W. Gordon from the USMC Command Staff College as well as Dr. Lauren Mackenzie from the USMC Center for Advanced Operational Culture Learning (CAOCL) for invaluable support. In addition, I wish to acknowledge Winston A. Gould and MacKenzie Duffield from the Marine Corps Research Library for their superior service and Linda, Andrea, and Stase from the Leadership Communication Skills Center for their feedback, support, and guidance not only with this MMS, but throughout the whole academic year here at Quantico.

Lastly, I have invested time in this MMS that could otherwise have been spent with my family. Lilljan, I would not have completed this thesis without your support and patience. Thank you!

Executive Summary

Title:

The “Operational Mentor”: The Critical Art of Cross-Cultural Competence and Being Understood in the Contemporary Operational Environment

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Thesis:

By cultivating a basic set of social science approaches and theories during preparations for deployment, the adaptation process when deployed, and the cognitive process of post assessment, practitioners could considerably improve both personal and organizational mentoring capability and cultural understanding, thus improving mission effectiveness. Cross-cultural sensibility and competence of the interactional and processual levels can reduce friction in the interaction between individuals, thus avoiding misunderstandings and conflict at both the micro and macro level.

Discussion:

As other threats and missions have emerged simultaneously and beyond Afghanistan and the ISAF mission, employment of OMLTs or similar forces will most likely be asked for in the future operational environment. As advising indigenous forces focuses to support, assist, and develop foreign security forces, attention and knowledge of cultural complexity will be useful to effectively mentor and succeed when building partner capacity.

The paper analyzes how a situation in an international conflict environment can be interpreted, explained, or even understood through a selection of basic social science perspectives. The analysis is based on an incident and confrontation between an Afghan company commander and the author during military security operations in Afghanistan. The relationship was negatively and unnecessarily affected because of lack of basic multicultural sensibility and understanding.

The paper is a personal and retrospective case study based on observational field data, and the implications are that cross-cultural competence and social science theories can help avoid or reduce cross cultural mistakes and misunderstandings as mentoring is a highly personal endeavor between a mentor and his counterpart.

Conclusion:

As the Norwegian Army moves into the future, one must seek to establish and structure a comprehensive educational approach to cultural understanding and cross-cultural competence. With an emphasis on social-science theories, one can educate soldiers how to effectively communicate and cooperate in the future culturally complex operational environment. From a short term-perspective, the conclusion of this thesis first aims to provide a base of universal knowledge through a selection of social science theories valuable to current and future OMLTs or equivalent units. Second, it provides a foundation and interest for further reading and enhanced understanding of the complexity an OMLT operating mentor can and will be exposed to in a culturally different landscape in the future operational environment.

Introduction

“Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not to win it for them. Actually, also, under the very odd conditions of Arabia, your practical work will not be as good as, perhaps, you think it is”

- T.E. Lawrence, “Twenty-Seven Articles,” 1917

Mentoring in the culturally different operational environment of Afghanistan was complex. The Norwegian Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team 3 (OMLT3), in which I was a company commander (CO) mentor, deployed to coach, teach, and mentor the Afghanistan National Army (ANA) as part of NATO’s International Stabilization Force in Afghanistan (ISAF). The team also provided a conduit for liaison and command and control and supported the operational planning and employment of an aligned ANA unit in order to support the development of a competent and self-sufficient ANA. And here I was, ready to face the challenge of building a relationship based on mutual trust and confidence, thus effectively coaching, teaching, and mentoring my Afghan counterpart.

Regardless of where you deploy, conceptual understanding and study of basic cross-cultural- and social science theories will universally improve your effectiveness as an embedded mentor. By cultivating a basic set of social science approaches and theories during preparations for deployment, the adaptation process when deployed, and the cognitive process of post assessment, practitioners could considerably improve both personal and organizational mentoring capability and cultural understanding, thus improving mission effectiveness. Cross-cultural sensibility and competence of the interactional and processual levels can reduce friction in the interaction between individuals, thus avoiding misunderstandings and conflict at both the micro and macro level.

The primary research questions of this paper are as follows: how can the interaction between my Afghan counterpart and myself be understood and explained through the lenses of multicultural and social science perspectives and theories? Consequently, how can these

observations and lessons identified better prepare soldiers of the Norwegian Army for equivalent missions in the future?

Preparations and performance are both easy to criticize in retrospect, and most of the time we are good at that. The goal is, however, not to raise negative questions about our preparations, performance, or mission accomplishment. It is an attempt to focus on cultural awareness and its importance as mentoring and training of local security forces has been, is, and will most likely still be decisive. To assist in and facilitate state building and the ability of host nations of failed and failing states to provide security for their own populations will be vital also in the future. Therefore, social science knowledge, and in particular anthropology, will be both useful and vital to succeed when conducting mentoring.

This paper is a retrospective case study based on personal observational field data collected during six months of mentoring, observing, and conversing with Afghan company commanders in 2009 and 2010. Within the limits of this paper, a selection of basic cross-cultural and social science theories will be analyzed and related to one specific incident that occurred and severely challenged both the relationship with my counterpart and mission success. Initially, a short and brief background of Afghanistan and the context will be presented. Thereafter, a description of what is considered to be relevant aspects and theories that can enhance and strengthen an operating mentor's abilities to succeed in his mission will be provided. After a recapturing of the specific incident, the incident and confrontation between the Afghan company commander and myself will be analyzed through the lenses of what Tamara Duffey defines as the two levels of analysis: the interactional and processual level.² Before the conclusion, I will briefly describe how the relationship between the CO and myself was restored and that in the darkest of hours, there are always possibilities to exploit.

Background - Afghanistan, OMLT, and Mentoring

“The road of learning stretched away from me into the unseen, uphill – “uphill all the way.””

- John Masters, “Bugles and a Tiger”, memoirs of a Gurkha Officer, 1956

Afghanistan is a mountainous and landlocked country in the heart of Asia, bordered by Pakistan to the south and east, Iran to the west, and Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan to the north. There is a short border with China to the far northeast, but it is in extremely inaccessible terrain. Afghanistan is an ethnically diverse country, with more than a dozen ethno-linguistic groups represented substantially in the country's population of slightly more than 31 million. The Pashtuns are the largest such group with the minorities of Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, and Turkmen constituting significant numbers as well.³ Afghanistan has been invaded by foreign powers on numerous occasions, going back to Alexander the Great's attempt in ancient times. In recent times, the Great Britain and the Soviet Union have made attempts to take control of the country in recent times. They both failed.

The Taliban, a group of fundamentalist Sunni Muslims, emerged as a major force in the war-torn Afghanistan in 1994. The group aimed, and still aims to reestablish an uncompromisingly puritanical Islamic state in Afghanistan. As unrest prevailed when the Soviet Union retreated in 1989, the Taliban took control of Kabul and the country in 1996. The Taliban offered Al Qaida a safe haven, and Osama Bin Laden and his network of terrorists could plan, prepare and train without much interruption. After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the United States and a large coalition of states attacked the regime. The three main strategic goals of what became *Operation Enduring Freedom* were to: (1) drive the Taliban from power in Afghanistan; (2) destroy Al Qaeda leadership, infrastructure and operations in Afghanistan; and (3) prevent the use of Afghanistan as a recruiting and training ground for future and other terrorist cadres.⁴ A

few months later, ISAF was established by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) by Resolution 1386.⁵ In October 2003, the UNSC authorized the expansion of the mandate of the ISAF mission throughout the whole of Afghanistan.⁶

The main focus of the Norwegian military and political engagement in Afghanistan was “to support the Afghan authorities in their responsibility to ensure stability, security and development.”⁷ Capacity-building of the Afghan National Army (ANA) was considered one of the most important military efforts as: “The Norwegian contribution to ISAF’s Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams (OMLT) is central to strengthening the capacity of the ANSF.”⁸ However, when the OMLT concept was introduced in 2006, it was all new to the Norwegian Army. The first contingents deployed as mentors to the Brigade leadership, and from 2009 the mission saw an expansion to also involve the kandak level. The conceptual foundation of the mentoring mission of OMLT was found in the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe’s (SHAPE) *OMLT Concept of Operations*.

However, the art and act of mentoring is nothing new. The origin and etymology of “mentor” is acquired from the literature of ancient Greece in Homer’s major epic poem of *The Odyssey*. Telemachus, son of Odysseus, was raised by the old and trusted Mentor as his father was away fighting the Trojan War.⁹ Neither Western mentoring of indigenous forces in Afghanistan nor its neighboring countries is new. The British fought the Pathans in the tribal areas until the end of World War II, in what today are the tribal areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The British equipped, trained, and mentored native Indians and Gurkhas in what had been a violent part of the world for centuries. John Masters, a British officer serving there with Gurkhas in the 1930s, described it this way: “It was only we who could pass it on to nonprofessional armies, and we would not be in one band of brothers, as her, but scattered everywhere in the expansion of war.”¹⁰ “Only we” give associations to Kipling’s *The White Man’s Burden*, but maybe we conceived it that way? What I do know is that we were there to

help and mentor the ANA, and mostly based on western techniques, tactics, and procedures as the training and doctrinal manuals were all written by the coalition, but for the new Afghan army.

One definition of mentor is “someone who teaches or gives help and advice to a less experienced and often younger person,” and “to teach or give advice or guidance to (someone, such as a less experienced person or a child): to act as a mentor for (someone).”¹¹ As Mentor was Odysseus’s counselor, today’s mentors are also normally recognized as older and wise counselors or advisors. However, of the company commanders I got to mentor throughout my deployment, I was younger than them by far. They could all have been my “Mentor” in the Homeric understanding and definition. The difference is a palpable indicator of difficulties.

OMLT 3, the third Norwegian contingency embedded in an ANA kandak (battalion), deployed to coach, teach, and mentor on kandak level and down to platoon level. The kandak was forward deployed and dispersed throughout a large area in the western part of Regional Command North’s (RCN) area of operations (AO) in northern Afghanistan. I was one of four company commander (CO) mentors, mainly focusing on the CO himself. We were deployed for six months until the end of June 2010, which gave us six months to build rapport and mentor our counterparts, and to pass on the skills and experience, despite how limited they may have been. Comparably, the Soviet advisors during the 1980s failed to train the indigenous military forces due to cultural reluctance and lack of time in the country. The Soviets normally served for two years.¹² They had two years to understand and gain mutual trust. We though, had six months.

On November 10, 2009, one month before deployment, General Stanley McChrystal, Commander ISAF (COMISAF), issued a memorandum on counterinsurgency (COIN) training guidance. McChrystal emphasized the importance of understanding “the people of Afghanistan” and emphasized that conduct of operations must be done in respect of their

culture, and on their own terms.¹³ After a series of briefings and conversations at SHAPE, with subsequent field operations in Afghanistan in 2008, General Barry R McCaffrey USA (Ret.), stated that Afghanistan “was in a misery” and that 2009 would be “the year of decision.”¹⁴ As we deployed in December 2009, McCaffrey’s words gave warning of what a formidable task we had in front of us.

The Social Science of Anthropology – Why Does it Matter?

From the Greek *anthropos* (“human”) and *logia* (“study”), anthropology is the study of humankind. The discipline of anthropology arose from the concept of culture.¹⁵ Social and cultural anthropology are two different terms, but with a blurred and insignificant difference.¹⁶ Cultural anthropology is a branch of anthropology, in which anthropologists study humans through a descriptive lens called the ethnographic method. Ethnography is the intellectual effort of establishing rapport, selecting informants, participant observations, and eye-to-eye interviews.¹⁷ The key concepts of cultural anthropology are the understanding of person, society, culture, and translation (verbal and non-verbal), supplemented by comparison, in a wider holistic context.¹⁸ Cultural anthropologists compare their findings with other societies, with an emphasis on avoiding ethnocentrism, the tendency to interpret a culture on the basis of own biases and cultural background.¹⁹ As very few armed forces work in splendid isolation in the contemporary operational environment, such an approach to understand yourself and the relevant “others” would be useful.

Cultural anthropology can be defined as “the comparative study of culture and society, with a focus on local life.”²⁰ General Sir Rupert Smith’s central thesis in *The Utility of Force*, is that contemporary conflicts take place amongst the people and the same local and social life that anthropologists study. Cultural anthropology can provide a useful way and means for mentors to understand local and social life, and the people one operate amongst. Furthermore,

cultural studies can give meaningful understanding of the military counterpart as an indigenous person in a foreign society, and in a very different culture. This understanding can explain why the counterpart behaves, and acts like he does. However, according to Geertz, anthropological writings are interpretations: “they are “something made.””²¹ As social life is not static and therefore changes with its surroundings, anthropological writings and theories will not always present the real truth. Anthropological knowledge, however, can help in making sense of the complex contemporary operational environment in which mentoring often takes place. While OMLT 3’s cultural preparations were simplistic, anthropologists are “fundamentally critical of quick solutions and simple answers to complex question,”²² thus they can provide military personnel balanced views, perspectives, and concepts, while offering “things to think about and things to think with.”²³

Culture and Cross-Cultural Competence and Understanding

Culture is not static; it is a learned, symbolic, and dynamic system.²⁴ Thomas Hylland Eriksen argues that: “the concept of culture is the single most difficult term in anthropology.”²⁵ EB Tylor, an English anthropologist, defined culture as follows in 1871: “Culture or Civilization, taken in its widest ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”²⁶ In 1952, Clyde Kluckhohn and Alfred Kroeber identified 161 definitions of culture in their book about cultural concepts and definitions, meaning new definitions would be added if republished today. The American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, defines the study of culture as: “the study of the machinery individuals and groups of individuals employ to orient themselves in a world otherwise opaque.”²⁷ Geert Hofstede, on the other hand, defines culture as: “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.”²⁸ Cross-cultural

competence, however, is defined by the United States Department of Defense as the “set of knowledge, skills, and affect/motivation that enable individuals to adapt effectively in cross-cultural environments.”²⁹ All definitions, although differently expressed, emphasize human interaction and that culture is the perspectives that defines relevant behavior in the social environment in which a mentor operates.

However, there is a misunderstood insistence on universal models only to explain culture and cultural contexts. From my own experience, both from preparations before deployments to Kosovo and Afghanistan, we made the same mistakes by reducing cultural understanding to a static checklist of do’s and don’ts. However, cultures change.³⁰ Culture is learned, borrowed, and shared as it changes with its changing surroundings and environment. Cultural anthropologist Robert F. Murphy writes: “Culture means the total body of tradition borne by a society and transmitted from generation to generation.”³¹ To understand culture as a list of checkboxes, would thus misguide the interpretation of what culture is. Cultural awareness was part of our preparations. However, it was reduced to a simplistic concept of stigmas. Our checkboxes failed when faced with reality. We had little in-depth understanding of the cultural landscape. Consequently, as many others before us, we turned to the dominant and visual narratives as they were simple, uncomplicated, and understandable.³²

Cultural Issues in Mentoring: Diversity and Unity

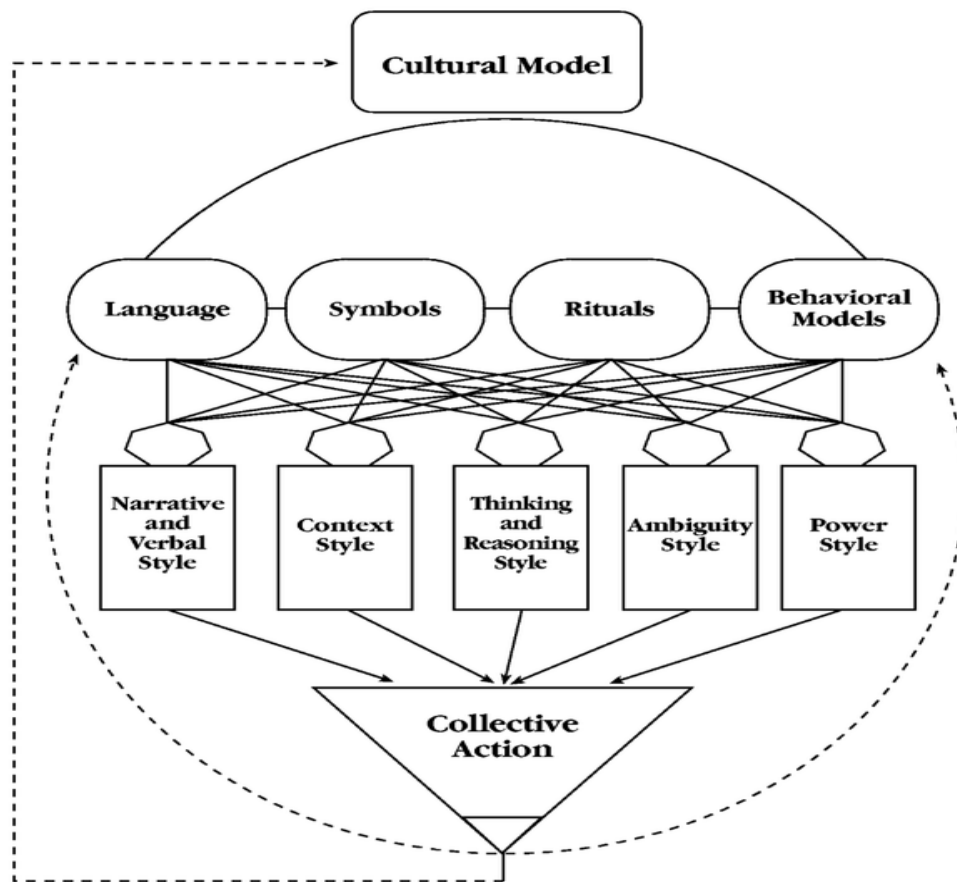
The contemporary operational environment requires a high degree of cultural sensibility in many dimensions. In a UN seminar in peacekeeping operations, differences in language and culture, were identified as the key problem areas.³³ The UN mandated ISAF brought together a large coalition of diverse actors as 51 NATO and partner nations contributed.³⁴ Military personnel from different countries and services worked together with international agents and civil servants, all with different personal, institutional, and national

backgrounds and goals. The amount of people from different societies with different culture, ways of behavior, language, and agenda can be overwhelming. As a mentor in Afghanistan, or in any country abroad, the local culture is very different in most aspects. Awareness of cultural norms, needs, and concerns therefore accelerates a mentor's effectiveness, as such diversity can rise conflicts, tensions, and culturally based misunderstandings.³⁵ The mentor lives in the culture, and is not only contemplating it from the outside. However, diversity is not something solely negative. Diversity widens perspectives, acceptance, and makes it possible to adequately understand the self and one's own culture.

Despite the diversities, Elron, Shamir, and Ben-Ari write that there exist common experiences, beliefs, and goals that unify culturally different military troops in a multinational environment. Military culture often centers around the "military profession", the shared factors of discipline, bureaucracy, hierarchy, and institutional organization of legal violence that may cross both regional, national, and international boundaries.³⁶ Such culture will differ dependent on how culturally different the countries they represent are. However, in a hostile environment, the mentor and his counterpart may build mutual trust and understanding based on common institutional values and the shared struggle. Another factor that fostered cooperation and pragmatism was the fact that most OMLT teams had access to certain capabilities the ANA did not have.

Levels of Culture, Cultural Models, and Situational Understanding

A culturally competent individual can use social science perspectives to respond to new and unfamiliar situations. Rubinstein's cultural model³⁷ can provide a possible way to interpret and understand how social relations are influenced in a group:



- Robert Rubinstein, 2003

When a mentor deals with cultural considerations, he must be aware of the dimensions involved, and avoid interpreting the situation through his own habitus.³⁸ According to Robert A. Rubinstein “culture is learned through practice.”³⁹ Practice, says Rubinstein, is the mechanisms of language, symbols, rituals, and behavioral models. The most common frameworks for understanding influence of social behavior and relations are narrative resources and verbal style, culture and context, thinking and reasoning styles; information processing style; and management of power and social relations.⁴⁰ However, these variables do not give a precise description of a certain culture. Even within the ANA company there was no such thing as one distinct culture, as it consisted of people from different ethnic and

ethnolinguistic groups from all over Afghanistan. What it does is to provide a tool that can simplify some of the most complex things to understand, human relations and behavior.

The field of international conflict resolution has mirrored western rationality, values and culture, thereby falsely implemented an “universal applicability.”⁴¹ To better understand and analyze cultural differences, Tamara Duffey has introduced interaction and process as two levels of cultural analysis. Interaction refers “to the interpersonal interactions” of individuals from different cultures. The purpose of the interactional analysis is to identify cultural differences and perspectives thus reduce and prevent misunderstandings between individuals - the micro-level. Individual interaction in this paper is related to the interaction between the company commander and me as individuals.

The process level is related to a more comprehensive understanding – the macro-level. The processual level includes cross-cultural studies and social science models in conflict resolution. The purpose of the processual analysis is to identify how cultural variations and contexts shape, or should shape, theories and methods of conflict resolution in “diverse cultural milieus”.⁴² Processual interaction in this paper is therefore related to the interaction between the company commander and me as representatives of culturally different military organizations and personal background, where common sense does not necessarily coincide.

According to Janet Bennett, “cultural knowledge does not equal intercultural competence.”⁴³ A mentor may have a certain level of knowledge, but that knowledge must preferably be utilized in a proper way in the relevant situation. Intercultural competence relies on awareness of one’s own culture and the emphasis of the process inherent in competence development.⁴⁴ The process of development can be seen in the context of the intercultural transformation and cross-cultural adaption theory of Young Yun Kim. He offers a three-pronged process model, the *stress-adaptation-growth* dynamic, to explain how and at which speed cross-cultural adaptation takes place. Through adaptive response of repeated stress

situations, an increased understanding of the environment occurs, an understanding that changes from monocultural to intercultural identity and orientation.⁴⁵ However, if the personal motivation and curiosity are lacking the foundation of developing and utilizing competence will be vulnerable. According to Bennett, the first challenge of curiosity and inquisitiveness is the ability to be open minded and able to suspend assumptions and judgements about the host environment. Furthermore, if the mentor has developed no culture maps, or even lack the desire to do so, shock, puzzlement, and “a teachable moment” can occur.⁴⁶

Situational understanding, not to be confused with cultural and situational awareness, is pivotal in understanding culture and values. Situational understanding on OMLT kandak level encompasses an in-depth understanding of the counterpart as part of the ANA, but also on a personal level. Organizational and personal values may be shared and similar, but they may also differ. Mentoring will likely not be effective before a minimum of personal relationship and rapport are established. In order to understand your counterpart, it is also important to understand yourself, your own cultural biases, and background. Prior to a deployment to a new country or region, you often have very limited time to train and increase knowledge, thus situational understanding is a challenge. However, incorporating social science studies and perspectives in preparations will contribute to increased understanding if utilized in a sensible way. The following case-analysis aims to illustrate this point, by applying Duffey’s two levels of analysis.

The Confrontation

During the six months with OMLT 3, I mentored three different commanding officers. The first CO I mentored was relieved from command only after two weeks because of mental illness and inability to lead and command. I barely got to meet him before he was relieved. The second commander I was embedded with was relieved from command after an additional

eight weeks because of the same problems. During seven weeks in *Ghowrmach*, where the security situation had deteriorated severely, most operations were led by the second in command (XO) of the company. It was eight weeks of frustrations and trying to make a difference. In the end, the CO was relieved by a third captain of the ANA. For the purpose of this thesis, the reasons for them being relieved are not important. However, building rapport, relationship, and maximizing the mentoring effect was severely halted due to the fact that they were not capable of neither commanding their companies nor being particularly responsive to mentoring.

As the new CO arrived, the company rotated to its main base in Meymaneh for two months of basic training and leave, while simultaneously being Kandak Quick Reaction Force (QRF). The new CO kept himself busy with micromanaging administration. During this period, the CO spent almost one third of the time on leave, while letting his XO take command of almost every QRF missions the company was tasked to accomplish. As two months passed by, it was time to move to a new FOB in the district of Qaisar. By now it was late April and I had only two months left of my deployment. The four previous months had been more frustrating than rewarding.

Qaisar represented a new start, at least a feeling of it, and I was eager and impatient to see progress. The company as such performed rather well, but it was despite the CO's influence, not because of it. A few days after we arrived at FOB Qaisar, we conducted a mobile and mounted patrol to a neighboring village some eight to ten kilometers southwards. During the preparations for the mission I insisted that the CO should bring the HUMWEE ambulance for force protection. As this was not standard procedure, and the fact that the ambulance belonged to another company, without being formally attached, we ended up in a small argument as he disagreed. I pushed on, and the CO finally listened and accepted my enforced proposal. Halfway on our drive to the village, the CO received troubling news from

the rear of the column. The ambulance had tipped over, and both of the crewmembers were injured, not severely, but the driver had probably broken his right forearm. The CO's response to me was immediate, direct, and aggressive: "What did I tell you? We should not have taken the ambulance with us. It is no honor in this, and it is your fault!" The ANA squad leader that drove behind the ambulance came to my rescue. He said that the ambulance had been driving too fast and made attempts of drifting before it tipped over. It did not help, it was all my fault he repeated. After the ambulance was recovered, the CO turned the column, and headed back to FOB Qaisar. When we arrived at the FOB he went directly to his container without a word, staring at me with this unfriendly hard look.

The Confrontation: First Level of Analysis - the Interactional Level:

According to Duffey, cultural differences can have powerful effects on the relationship between actors in a multicultural setting.⁴⁷ The Dutch social psychologist, Geert Hofstede, has defined six value dimensions that can be helpful when analyzing national culture relative orientations.⁴⁸ A definition of cultural relativism is "the view that every society, or every culture, has to be understood on its own terms, from within, and that it is neither possible nor particularly interesting to rank societies on an evolutionary ladder."⁴⁹ Consequentially, comparing results is not a question of who is "better" and who is "worse". The difference, or similarity, can give valuable information before social interaction takes place. Hofstede has not measured Afghan value orientations specifically, however, cultural notions and values of people living along the Durand Line are not that different. Therefore, and even though it is not optimal, one can argue that Pakistani value orientations are comparable and valid in order to analyze the difference of Afghan and Norwegian value orientations:

Hofstede's Value orientations	Norway	Pakistan	
Power distance	31	55	Norway has lower Power distance values
Individualism versus collectivism	69	14	Norway has significantly higher individualist values
Masculinity versus feminism	8	50	Norway has significantly lower masculinity values
Uncertainty avoidance	50	70	Norway has lower uncertainty avoidance values
Long term orientation	35	50	Norway has lower long term orientation vales
Indulgence versus restraint	55	0	Norway has significantly higher indulgence

When comparing Eriksen's and Geertz's definitions of culture, and Rubinstein's levels of analysis with Hofstede's structural value orientations, one can criticize Hofstede for being too general because of his emphasis on the national level. As culture is dynamic, non-linear, and evolves with its surroundings on much lower level than the national level, local differences may manifest and distinguish themselves considerably from national level characteristics. The main reason for analyzing through the lenses of Hofstede is that he has been used in the Norwegian military education system as a reference and introduction to cultural understanding. Brendan McSweeney, one of the critiques of Hofstede, is discrediting Hofstede's questionnaire responses and research for being reductive, invalid, misleading, and fabricated.⁵⁰ M. Soendergaard on the other hand, confirmed and concurred with many of Hofstede's predictions in his analysis when he compared replications of Hofstede's findings.⁵¹

Then, two questions remain: what must an advisor know about the host nation's culture, and how long time is it between the order to deploy and the actual deployment date? Consequently, what specific deployment training, reading, and preparation is possible within the given period of time when going to a new and foreign country. Because a mentor will significantly benefit from an understanding of the similarities and differences between the different cultures, the time required to adapt and develop this understanding may not be there, just a basic knowledge. Because of time constraints during hasty preparations prior to

deployment, Hofstede can serve as a starting point to the process of intercultural competence development. Despite his simplistic and possibly flawed assumptions and paradigms, as long as open-mindedness and curiosity prevails, Hofstede's value orientations can still be found valid in order to decipher and establish guidance and awareness about differences between cultures. Successful mentoring efforts are characterized by individuals and teams with a spirit of curiosity and inquiry towards the host environment and individuals. Consequently, a mentor must acknowledge uncertainty and complexity, and must be willing to spend time to get things right.

When Norwegians socially interact, behavior rarely reaches the "climax" of a Greek tragedy.⁵² In Geertz's terminology, there is an "absence of climax" in a social encounter in Norway.⁵³ However, when the ambulance overturned, I suddenly found myself in one. Social climax in Norway can be found in social gatherings, typically involving eating and drinking alcohol. Clearly, this was not the case along the road south of Qaisar. The explosion was the natural "*crescendo*" of a play, in which the CO played an important role. In his sharp and direct monologue, several value orientations came to expression.

Power distance is a cultural concept of how "near" or "close" people can become to persons in power or of the extent to which they accept the distance between the powerful and the powerless. While power distance might be the underlying cultural value that drives this behavior, the behavior itself is not power distance. Nevertheless, the CO had to maintain the status quo of a leader-follower relation to his subordinates, and possibly his superiors. The two of us were basically equal in terms of rank. However, he was considerable older, which has its significance when it comes to power relations in the Afghan culture, and he was still the CO. Being mentored by a younger officer may have weakened his credibility in the unit, or at least his perception of it. According to Hofstede, Afghanistan has a medium score on power distance, while Norway has a low score. In addition, the ANA has probably a higher

score than the average civilian population when it comes to power distance. Therefore, the power distance between the both of us was considerable even though we had a kind of common understanding of being peers. Or, at least I had that perception. From the first moment I met the CO, having difficulties with the relationship with my former counterparts, I did not treat him as respectfully as he expected. Power distance was clearly displayed in the CO's relationship with his subordinates, even his XO. My approach and appearance may have violated his expectations already from the beginning. Now, he had the opportunity to balance the score, and even place me below himself in the hierarchical system.

The difference of power values can be confusing, since it was expressed differently when we were just the two of us, or with the XO. The need to display power became less important, because the consequences of being on equal terms were reduced. The situation that occurred, however, made it possible, and perhaps necessary in his mind, to exploit and use the opportunity to show his surroundings that he was still the leader of his group to show his masculinity of him being the Alpha-male. According to anthropologist Eduardo Archetti, Norwegian views on equality and reciprocity are based on symmetry, and has short-lived connections as a basis.⁵⁴ In the Norwegian orientation, equality is established rather immediately in a social context, this is in contrast to the Afghan culture and the previously mentioned Soviet experience of relationships of trust being built over a long period of time. My approach, as a Norwegian, was characterized by a need to quickly even out the difference, making myself equal to him. I could have chosen to play along, but it did not feel natural. Did I have anything to lose to subordinate myself to him? Absolutely not. It was just that our perspectives did not match, and my imagination of equality and fellowship was wrong from the beginning. The Afghan culture and society are orientated towards power structures and formality, the Norwegian orientation is not, not even within the armed forces.

The Afghan value orientation towards power distance, collectivism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance has close ties to the concepts of honor, shame, and guilt. Honor is an imperative part of the Afghan culture. To defend your own honor is vital. The culture of Afghanistan, in which Pashtunwali (code of honor) has a strong influence, is based on personal respect and honor. Keeping face is extremely important for the Afghans. The Afghan sense of honor must not be violated because doing so will harm future mentoring efforts. According to Bourdieu: “A man’s honour is his own honour. In him, existence and honour are one. He who has lost his honour no longer exists.”⁵⁵ Every man in this patrilineal society, is extremely concerned with being honorable, socially respected, and accepted in the group he identifies himself with. However, a man’s public image and value orientations contains certain contradictions.⁵⁶ My counterpart clearly preferred to say and do what he thought the other Afghan officers and superiors expected of him. What I perceived to be important was on many occasions deliberately disregarded and neglected, but never directly to me or in public. This balance of gratitude had to be maintained. However, every encounter is “reversible and reciprocal,”⁵⁷ so hospitality varies and changes with its circumstances and surroundings.

In a culture based on collectivism and masculinity, the strive for recognition is a basic dimension to understand such concepts and their impact on individuals and group dynamics.⁵⁸ According to Archetti, there is a fine balance between the hope for honor and the risk of shame.⁵⁹ Potential good reasons for bringing the ambulance in the first place did not help. He had personally signed for the ambulance when it was attached to the company. Now it was wrecked, and he probably found that to be shameful. Therefore, in order to defend his honor, he needed support from a bigger audience. Directly addressing me in front of the company was his way out of the loss of dignity and the feeling of shame, thus projecting guilt became an attempt to reestablish honor. From my point of view, he was unreasonable, but I still felt a certain degree of guilt since I was the one that pressed for such a solution. That does not mean

I was guilty, but as Geertz points out, the “feeling of having done something reprehensible” was to a certain degree there.⁶⁰

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz uses the terms of “thin” and “thick” description to interpret social life. Geertz distinguishes between the more physical and visual action of “thin description”, versus a “thick description” that emphasizes a more contextual understanding of who did what, where, and why.⁶¹ In other words, the physical act depends on the context, and the audience understands and interprets these actions differently. Hofstede’s value orientations can, in such a circumstance, contribute to the understanding of why in particular as actions lead to judgements and assumptions of the why, what, and for whom. Consequentially, my assumption may be wrong, but knowledge of value orientations can severely minimize misinterpretation.

With regards to the analysis of the interactional level the theories of Hofstede can be used to understand the difference in certain value orientations, thus explaining why people with different cultural backgrounds think and act the way they do. The theories of Geertz and Bourdieu can supplement this understanding, as the CO’s reaction was not only about him and me. The emerging opportunity paved way to restore balance by using the bigger audience. If the decision to bring the ambulance was all his, this would not have led to the same result. Lack of respect, cultural sensibility, and understanding of the difference in value orientations created this situation.

The Confrontation: Second Level of Analysis - the Processual Level

People are attributed to different roles in all social settings. In his monumental classic “The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life”, sociologist Erving Goffman presented the theory of people as actors on a social stage. Goffman uses the theater metaphor with “front stage” and “back stage” performance and appearance. Goffman’s “setting” is comparable to

Geertz's contextual understanding, but related to Hofstede, Goffman's interpretation of social interaction is more processual through a "series of occasions."⁶² The implication of Goffman's theory is that roles are dynamic and change to the specific local and social setting, it is less about structural conditions. The social setting is thus not easily interpreted when one must interpret and understand not only what you see and hear, but also what is not done and said.

Goffman describes how different actors perform and portray themselves in the interaction with other actors and their common audience. According to Goffman, a performance is "the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants".⁶³ Frontstage and backstage performance are both verbal or symbolic. Through performance, one seeks to consciously or unconsciously manipulate others impressions of one self. Consequentially, social interaction is dynamic and processual in its nature, and perspectives of performance can be illustrative for the mentoring process.

Goffmann's theories are, at least indirect, applied in present day research in the United States military. From a US Army survey targeting 565 Army and Marine advisors in 2009, one of the two top skills reported as critical for a mentor's performance was impression management. That is, establishing rapport and making the counterpart receptive to advice.⁶⁴ Impression management activities are techniques that seek to influence role modeling, credibility, legitimacy, and counterpart perceptions.⁶⁵ To enforce a solution, is in many ways a pressure tactic. The danger of such a tactic is that the solution can be perceived as non-supportive and irrational, no matter what the mentor think about it. That was what happened in this case, reinforced by the circumstances when the ambulance actually tipped over. The consequences? Bad role modeling and reduced credibility and legitimacy.

The CO performed different roles as the context, other participants, and audience changed. The CO performed mostly in relation to me, my team, his subordinate officers, his subordinate enlisted personnel, civilians, and other representatives from the Afghan security forces and international forces among others. Therefore, as participants and audience constantly changed, leadership and linguistic communication was exercised differently. This difference in performance was highly related to the CO's own interpretation of expectations. The only time he clearly was back stage, was when the two of us, and my interpreter, was alone discussing in his container. In these situations, none of us had to play a role, we were more on equal terms as we were witnessed by no audience. No actor is continuously frontstage; therefore, I believe the CO actually appreciated being back-stage when possible. Back stage meant he could communicate without being cautious of what he expressed. In these situations, he could speak as a relatively free individual, and without consequences as Chatham House rules applied, at least officially. The CO's true-self was another man compared to when he actively exercised leadership outside his container. As the two roles somehow contradicted each other, the back-stage performance was only reserved of an inner circle of people: the CO's circle of trust.

Goffman asserts that "first impressions are important" on every stage and setting.⁶⁶ Retrospectively, it is possible to analyze and understand what and why things happened. My initial thought, until I became familiar with Goffman's theories, was that the issue was personal. The fact that I had highly likely pushed him too hard, became the interpretation of the situation. However, it is likely that I was just another actor on stage, and that the situation actually made it possible to perform in front of the company, his audience. During this performance, we were both definitely front stage. The CO had the possibility to show his audience who was the leader, emphasizing power distance. By publicly confronting and accusing me, he could clearly define the distinction between us. Still, I don't believe that his

behavior was because of his audience's expectations, but more the fact that it was his expectations of their expectations. Nevertheless, the most important part for the CO was that his audience could clearly see and hear him perform.

In his book, *The Gift*, anthropologist and sociologist Marcel Mauss argues that gifts have a social function, that they are never truly free, and that they bring about reciprocal exchange. According to Mauss, there are 3 institutional elements in a gift: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate.⁶⁷ Mauss includes among others acts of politeness and military services in his definition of gifts and gifts exchanges. Gifts are "the system of total services", not only economically useful goods.⁶⁸ Expectations that are not met within this concept of total services could create conflict since it is an important part of social life. From the beginning of our relationship, I ended up in a position of just demanding action of the CO. Although I "gave" away my knowledge and military capabilities like air support, in many ways a gift of substantial size according to Mauss's definition, the way I behaved did not balance the system of total services. To keep this system balanced, reciprocity must be balanced.⁶⁹ In the relationship between the CO and myself, the system remained unbalanced and contributed to the verbal climax.

Restoring Honor

The second act, in Goffmann's terms, took place the following day as a group of high ranking officers from the ANA, up to Corps level, came to investigate the incident with the ambulance. With the full audience of the ANA company, the CO was questioned, or rather personally accused for the incident. The play took place "on stage." After a while, the meeting continued in the CO's private container with a highly reduced audience. There the ANA CO got unexpected support, when I told the investigators I had insisted on the ambulance being brought forward. The message was primarily directed to the senior officer, a colonel from the

corps, whom I managed partly to convince. While explaining why it was a rational decision of the CO, the mood changed momentarily. From being highly accusing, the investigators all expressed a degree of agreement to the decision to bring the ambulance. The difficult part was that they all had been sent with the purpose to blame and demean the CO for his terrible decision. They had their roles to play, and they had learnt the manuscript. They had their message to deliver, and they had their audience in form of the ANA company and the OMLT mentors. Now, however, the setting was back stage since the bigger audience was gone. In the container, only the CO, the investigators, and the mentor were participating. They now signaled an understanding, without ever saying it was the right decision, of the ambulance being incorporated into the convoy. Back-stage they could express their thoughts relatively free, and without consequences. No manuscript needed. Consequently, honor was restored, both mine and the CO's.

The restoring of honor was a result of a rather fast learning cycle, where I had to adapt to a new and sudden situation. Young Yun Kim describes this adaptation process as: "the ability to communicate in accordance with the norms and practices of the host culture and actively engage in its social communication processes."⁷⁰ Since honor, or the breakdown of honor was directly expressed from the CO after the incident, I understood there was more to the incident than just a tipped over ambulance. The back stage setting in the container, although an unfamiliar term at that time, made it possible to restore honor as it required a certain audience. Honor is conditional to a social context, and the psychological and social reality of honor in Norwegian and Afghan terms are very different. To admit I forced the decision to bring the ambulance had no other consequences than a deteriorated relation between the CO and myself, something that was challenging enough, but not unrepairable or devastating to any form of personal honor. It was a role easy to perform, and it did not require any manuscript. From Bourdieu's perspectives of honor, the domain of honor in the Afghan

context reaches beyond the Norwegian concept of honor. It is not a question about life and death. From my perspective, this was not a question about honor in the first place.

Consequently, I did not lose honor, and could still exist.

The greater significance of Kim's perspectives of adaptation and development of deepened understanding, lies in the value it can offer to preparations prior to deployment, wherever it may be. Through training and conscious and specific cultural exposure, one can develop personal and organizational knowledge and understanding. By being exposed to numerous culturally realistic and relevant cases, one will adapt and develop a broadened and new cross-cultural understanding. One only needs to be exposed to what is different. Being an operating mentor in today's operating environment is a significant challenge. However, one can only embrace the difficulties and the differences, because personal growth does not only come from training. You learn as you go mostly in the host environment.

Main Findings and Recommendations

Social life is a complex matter, and every situation a mentor meets possibly has its own context. One of the most important competencies for every mentor in the operational environment is his or her cultural understanding. Cultural training and understanding have not been a prioritized part of the training prior to deployment of Norway's conventional forces. Today, too many recognize culture to be static and not dynamic, and too many consider culture to be understood and interpreted through a checklist of do's and don'ts. Experiences from Afghanistan is still an important part of the modern identity of the Norwegian Army, and mentoring activities were a significant part of our exit strategy, which in most cases is the preferred end state of partnering. With a continuing mentoring mission in Iraq, or in other operational environments in the future, it seems particular appropriate to emphasize the importance of cultural understanding this time.

As mission success in the operational environment most likely will rely on mentoring and partnering as a cost-effective solution in many potential scenarios and theaters for the years to come. Consequently, this paper has four recommendations. First, there is a need to define and establish a comprehensive academic and military approach to cultural understanding throughout the national military educational system, from the Norwegian Army Officer Candidate School, via the Norwegian Military Academy, to the Norwegian Defence Command and Staff College. Second, proper post-deployment gathering and utilizing of experiences and knowledge from returning personnel must be structured and used for educational purposes. Third, in order to prepare for the operational environment, one cannot only study culture itself. Rather, one must learn how to incorporate cross-cultural competence in practical military training. Fourth, basic social science theories provide the necessary cultural knowledge and curiosity on how to ask the right questions in order to effectively communicate, cooperate and coordinate in the future culturally complex operational environment.

Conclusion – the Future Operational Environment

While culture and the people in it develop in a dynamic matter, there exists no recipe to fully understand foreign cultures. Even understanding your own culture can be difficult. Relevant aspects of social science theories can enhance a mentor's ability to navigate in a dynamic setting and thus influence specific people during the accomplishment of a mentoring mission. Cultural anthropology in particular can explain some of the dynamics that happen when people interact. The encounter can sometimes be hard to decipher, but mentoring indigenous forces and building partner capacity is not done easily without a basic knowledge and understanding of the local culture, and how it can develop in a dynamic context. Awareness of cultural levels, cultural dimensions and frameworks could reduce possible

negative outcomes of the challenges that emerge from being culturally blind. If mentoring is to remain an effective part of building partner capacity, one should make an effort to understand the interactional and processual dynamics that can affect and anticipate outcomes, thus preventing cultural and devastating blunders. With improved and enhanced studies on social science theory during training and preparations, one could increase cognitive flexibility and the potential of mission success.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁰ John Masters, *Bugles and a tiger* (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), 232-233.
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- ¹⁸ Eriksen 2004, 40.
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- ²³ Eriksen 2004, 7.
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- ²⁵ Eriksen 2004, 26.
- ²⁶ Eriksen 2004, 26.
- ²⁷ Geertz, 363.
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- ³² Severine Autesserre, *Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Practices of International Intervention* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014), 131.
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- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 123.
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- ⁴⁷ Tamara Duffey, 144.
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