

# Teaching Cultural Competencies for Complex Socio-Cultural Contexts

## Evidence from a Realistic Decision-Making Simulation

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In the spring of 2009, one of this article's authors (Prof. Scott) had the opportunity to attend a conference on Small Unit Excellence held in Alexandria, Virginia. The conference featured forums on several topics, including decision-making. US Marine Corps General James Mattis, then commander of US Joint Forces Command, provided the opening remarks. To set the tone, General Mattis reviewed his reading of the transcripts from the trial of several Marines who had been charged in connection with the killing of 24 civilians in Haditha, Iraq, on November 19, 2005. Scott recalls General Mattis saying that he did not believe "our lads" at Haditha were murderers. However, the General concluded, "*This is not how Marines should act. I do believe we let them down – we did not provide them with the proper training*" on how to behave appropriately in this type of scenario. He then challenged those in the decision-making forum to address this issue. Later, Scott sent General Mattis an e-mail outlining some ideas for such training, to which the General responded:

Certainly the kind of vision you share for small unit decision-making is fundamental to how we wish to move forward. We need to make sure that tactical decision-making, with all its complexities and ethical dimensions, is at the heart of the training we construct for our lads going into the close fight. Both the Army and Marines are taking rudimentary steps along these lines now, but we need a giant leap in this effort... (General Mattis, personal communication, May 7, 2009).

Subsequently, the authors of this article have spent considerable time reflecting upon how to take up General Mattis' challenge, particularly in the education of our cadets at the US Air Force Academy. We have attempted this in steps. First, for the past two years, author McCabe has been the course director for *Introduction to the Behavioral Sciences*, a freshman-level course required of all first-year cadets at the Academy. McCabe added to this course a critical-thinking sequence based upon the suggestions of Paul and Elder (2002; 2010). Secondly, Scott added to his *Military and Society* class, a junior-level elective course for Behavioral Sciences' majors, a substantial section devoted to irregular warfare – what is it? How is it different than conventional warfare? What constitutes "winning" in irregular warfare? And what decision-making skills are necessary for success in irregular settings (Galula, 2006; Hammes, 2006; Nagl, 2005)? Finally, in the spring of 2011, Scott and McCabe designed a tribal engagement field simulation as part of a senior

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\* Views expressed in this article are those of the authors and may not reflect the positions of the US Air Force Academy, the US Air Force, or the US Department of Defense.

capstone course, *Sociology of Violence and War*. In this article, we describe this field exercise with a focus on developing cultural competencies for complex socio-cultural contexts and with an eye toward a wide range of applications, not just military ones.

## **Competencies for Complex Socio-Cultural Environments**

### **Making Morally Grounded Decisions**

As General Mattis' plea illustrates, competent leaders should make decisions that are consistent with the values of both the organization and society within which the behavior takes place. An entire field devoted to moral decision-making has developed in psychology, thanks largely to the pioneering work of Jean Piaget (1965), focusing on moral development, and Louis Kohlberg (1981), focusing on moral reasoning. Common to their theories are levels of moral behaviour for reasons ranging from fear of punishment, to willing conformity to others' expectations, to doing the right thing on the basis of personal commitment to a code of ethics.

Much of Kohlberg's work revolves around subjects' analyses – their moral reasoning – of what they would do in specified circumstances marked by ethical dilemmas. His consequent and well-known theory of moral development is based on the premise that the process of moral reasoning and subsequent morally-consistent behaviour is a rational one, i.e., one can consciously cultivate higher levels of reasoning and thereby insure ever more desirable behaviour. As a result, many organizations have initiated programs to instil desired moral values in their members. In general, while such exercises do increase individuals' awareness of ethical issues and do enhance their ability to analyze morally problematic situations, these characteristics do not necessarily increase the subjects' ability to *behave* in morally desirable ways.

One possible reason for this has been put forth by Jonathan Haidt (2001). While he does not dismiss the importance of moral reasoning, he argues that how decisions are made in specific situations is better described as an intuitive than a rational process. In other words, Haidt's theory suggests that a person might think about ethical considerations in the abstract very differently than he or she does in the actual moment of behaving. These two positions, the rational and the intuitive, therefore have given rise to competing views of what drives behaviour in complex, morally conflicted situations. Swiss military psychologist Stefan Seiler (2010) has identified the first of these as the “default-interactionist” model, which argues that only *one* of these processes is active at a time, and the other as the “parallel-competitive” model, which states that both are simultaneously operational and may feed off each other.

Seiler's own determination of how all this works conforms with the latter position and is summarized in what he calls the “interactional dual-process” model (IPD model) of moral decision-making. According to the IPD model, prior efforts at moral reasoning combine with several other factors, such as perception of the current situation, on-going conscious and subconscious assessments of the moral issues, and interactions with other people to produce moral and/or immoral behaviours. In his work training Swiss military

professionals, Seiler thus calls both for sessions to develop moral reasoning *and* for highly realistic training scenarios to improve on-the-spot decision-making.

### **Making Morally Grounded Decisions Rationally and Intuitively**

If an individual or team has adequate time and staffing, rational-choice decision-making might be, well, a good choice. Extensive review and application of the model began with its endorsement by Nobel-prize winning economist, Herbert Simon (1960). Its basic thrust is that decision makers can, or should, follow a logical process moving from collecting relevant information, to specifying alternative options, to making an informed choice that maximizes desired gains while minimizing costs. Some rational-choice theorists emphasize that, while calculations should remain very logical and systematic, the components themselves may reflect preferences that are not objectively rational.

Simon himself suggested a variation of rational decision-making, called *satisficing*, in which the decision-maker selects the first option that works rather than holding out for the optimum solution that best meets goals at the lowest cost – an observation that opens the door for more intuitive models. Cognitive psychologist Gary Klein (1999), for instance, began his research on commanders of fire-fighters with the assumption that they behaved rationally: arriving at a fire and under some sense of urgency, they would consider only two different courses of action (rather than a full range of alternatives), quickly make relevant observations, and, on the basis of this information, decide which of the two courses of action would be more effective. What he discovered is that fire-fighters do not do this:

We thought this hypothesis – that...they would consider only two [options] – was daring. Actually, it was conservative. The commanders did not consider two. In fact, they did not seem to be comparing any options at all. ...We discovered it at the first background discussion we had with a fire ground commander... We asked [him] to tell us about some difficult decisions he had made. “*I don’t make decisions,*” he announced. “*I don’t remember when I’ve ever made a decision*” (Klein, 1999, p.11).

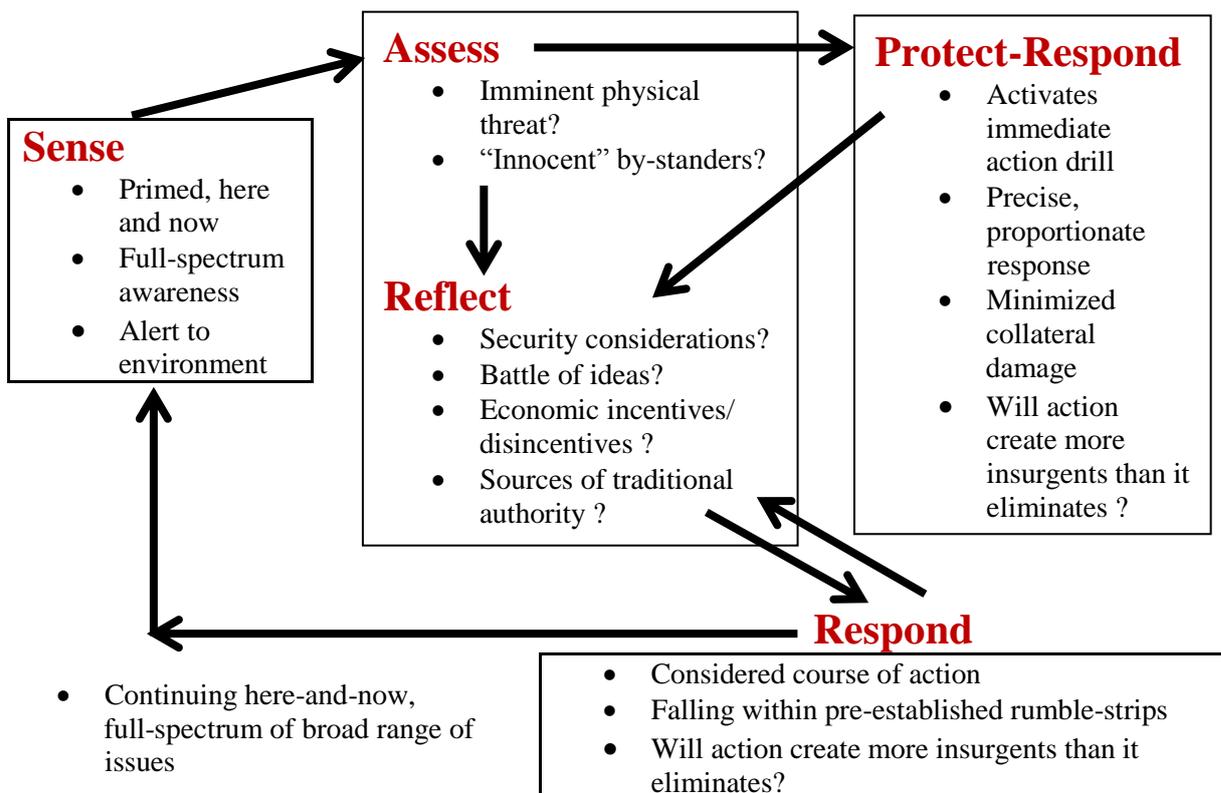
This fire-fighter’s self-analysis should not be taken to mean that he was indecisive. Rather, he followed a process Klein has come to call recognition-primed decision-making (RPDM). Arriving at a fire, the commander surveys the scene, asking himself, “is this familiar”, i.e., “is this something I’ve seen before?” He quickly reviews the characteristics of the scene to ensure it matches one he formerly has encountered. If so, he knows from experience there is a preferred action-sequence that works really well in scenes like this and picks that response. What is important for our purposes is that, before ever arriving at the scene, the commander has in mind several scenes that he might encounter and, associated with each, a prototypical course of action that works. The trick for him is to match what he encounters with the appropriate previously-experienced, previously-successful prototype.

Klein’s RPDM implies that prior preparation, in the form of experiencing and analyzing situations, lays the groundwork so that, while decision-making appears to be

spontaneous, it nonetheless is carefully considered. The careful consideration occurs long before the moment in which decisions actually are made and provides options that fall within a range of possible decisions that, later and in retrospect, would meet criteria of being sensible and desirable. Seiler (2008) argued that such decisions are quite likely to combine “success” and “ethics” when rehearsed in specially prepared, realistic, dilemma-training sessions. He suggested that the content of these sessions, especially in the case of military training, consider the mission, principles of human dignity for participants and bystanders, relevant formal rules of engagement, and the particulars of the situational context.

In an earlier paper, we presented a specific model (see Figure 1) consistent with Klein’s RPDM (Scott, McCone & Mastroianni, 2009b). It is intended primarily for training in irregular warfare scenarios where the leader must balance two competing, often conflicting values – establishing force protection, i.e., protecting oneself and one’s troops on the one hand, and, on the other, reducing collateral damage, i.e., minimizing injury to innocents. Termed the SAPRR model (Sense, Assess, Protect-Respond, Reflect, and Respond), it breaks down the decision-to-be-made in real time into a pre-rehearsed and elaborated checklist.

**Figure 1:** *The SAPRR (Sense, Assess, Protect-Respond, Reflect, Respond) Model*



The first step is Sense, i.e., the individual should enter an encounter with a primed, here-and-now awareness of the likely issues and dilemmas endemic to the situation. These correspond to the experience-based prototypes carried in the heads of Klein’s fire-fighters or the “success” and “ethics” checklists of Seiler’s military trainees. Since these can be

thought out, reviewed, and field-tested in advance, they may be rationally constructed. However, because there will be no time to re-consider them carefully and systematically during the encounter, they also must be familiar enough to be applied intuitively.

The next step, Assess, occurs when the first decision must be made. In this instance, there ensues a quick estimation of the imminent danger to oneself and of the hazard to innocents. If danger to self and troops is imminent, a Protect-Respond decision follows, i.e., the leader picks a pre-planned, immediate-action drill that matches the contingencies of the situation and rules of engagement. When danger is not, or is no longer, imminent, a moment of Reflection follows. This is not a full-fledged review but rather a flood of pre-rehearsed considerations that run the gamut of issues relevant to the encounter. The leader now is ready to Respond or to re-Assess, should some other development occur, again by selecting a pre-planned, immediate-action drill that matches the circumstances.

A critical element of these models, whether it be by Klein, Seiler, or us, is the necessity of prior experience. This experience should occur via careful training that is systematically derived, catalogued, and rehearsed prior to any decision-making under duress. This allows decisions made in compressed time nonetheless to be “thoughtful” and “spot on”. In the absence of prior experience, the decision-maker is left to spontaneously manufacture choices that often are ill-informed and later regretted.

### **Making Culturally Competent Decisions Rationally and Intuitively**

Making morally-grounded decisions under duress in situations where ethical dilemmas abound is difficult enough in mono-cultural settings, i.e., ones in which all the participants share a common culture. Doing so in cross-cultural encounters adds another layer of complications. In the absence of careful attention to the considerations these entail, the potential for error and outright harm increase dramatically. Ethnocentric decision-makers are almost certain to mischaracterize the intentions and behaviours of others whom they only dimly understand. They are then likely to misinterpret what is happening and choose responses that are not only inappropriate but counterproductive.

British management professor Christopher Earley and his Singaporean counterpart, Soon Ang, have advanced the concept of cultural intelligence to refer to skills needed to navigate cross-cultural settings successfully (Earley & Ang, 2003). Writing to assist business professionals and expatriates working and living in foreign countries, Earley and Ang identify three dimensions of being culturally astute: the cognitive, the behavioural, and the motivational. The first rests on increasing ones knowledge of another culture. This includes learning about the history, language, and customs of the society in which one will be operating. The most easily addressed of the three dimensions, this nonetheless is one frequently overlooked by Americans who anticipate that those in other societies will speak English in addition to their native language and be willing to adjust *their* behaviours to match American expectations. The behavioural dimension includes becoming savvy about differences in body language and other nonverbal cues. “Personal bubbles” when conversing, i.e., the amount of physical proximity considered to be close enough but not

too close, varies across cultures. Often the personal bubble assumed among American business associates can be a foot or more wider than those for many other cultures. Similarly, cheek-kissing as a form of greeting and holding hands as a sign shared status can create uncomfortable situations for the uninitiated. Finally, value differences between interacting members from separate cultures may be viewed as simply differences, each with their own logic, or may be perceived as offensive points of contention. For example, religious differences may be thought of as attributes of varying but vibrant faith traditions, or, as doctrinal divisions which separate the virtuous from the heretical. Culture shock, a visceral revulsion for another's cultural values and practices, is much more likely when differences are perceived as right-vs.-wrong points of contention.

Harvard University developmental psychologist and professor of neuroscience, Howard Gardner, best-known for his theory of "multiple intelligences", has for some time now studied kinds of intelligences that contribute to successful endeavours in cross-cultural settings (Gardner, 1983/2003; 1993). Gardner, who defines intelligence as "*the ability to solve problems, or to create products, that are of value in one or more culture settings*", notes that traditional intelligence tests typically measure only one kind of intelligence – the logical-mathematical. However, he proposes several other capabilities, along with the associated learning and behaving styles of each: verbal/linguistic, spatial/visual, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal.

Gardner argues that combinations of these intelligences are needed for operating successfully in cross-cultural settings. For example, high intrapersonal intelligence includes an awareness of those parts of who one is and what one does that are products of the cultural in which one lives. Persons inexperienced in cultural nuances tend to assume that they have no cultural style whatsoever, i.e., that they are just being themselves or behaving naturally. A broader cultural intelligence begins with awareness of the extent to which the contrary is so in one's own behaviour. Similarly, components of other intelligences may make one mindful of adjustments for successful interaction in other cultures.

These kinds of insights and skills must be incorporated into dilemma training for situations that not only are complex but also cross-cultural. For example, the SAPRR model, as described in the previous section, contains entries that balance adequate force protection and reduced collateral damage. For American soldiers preparing for operations in the Middle East, components should be added to reflect the cultural dimensions of these objectives. In fact, we have described dilemma training at a nearby military installation designed to do this (Scott, Mastroianni & McCone, 2009a). In preparation for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Armored Cavalry's second deployment to Iraq, their commander, then-Colonel H.R. McMaster, devoted portions of the regiment's training time to the learning of conversational Arabic, reading about Iraqi history and culture, and practicing planned interaction scenarios in a mock-Iraqi village peopled with costumed actors carrying out scripted complications.

## The Present Study

In the spring of 2011, authors Scott and McCabe taught a senior-level capstone course, *Sociology of Violence and War*, for Behavioural Science majors at the US Air Force Academy. Twenty-one of the twenty-two cadets in the class had previously taken related coursework. Readings in the course were selected to introduce the cadets to theories of violence (Collins, 2008), irregular warfare (Kilcullen, 2009), cross-cultural competencies (Gardner, 1983/2003; Peterson, 2004), naturalistic decision-making (Klein, 1998; Scott *et al.*, 2009a, 2009b), and applications to the Air Force (Wrage, 2003). Late in the semester, cadets then took part in a field exercise at a mock Afghan village – designated by us, *Villagistan* – located at a nearby military installation.

The incident at Haditha, Iraq, in November of 2005 served as a recurring case study (see Appendix A) for understanding how such encounters go awry and how to rehearse alternative courses of action based upon intuitive decision-making models. Briefly, this incident began as a Marine patrol in Humvees moved down a road near the town of Haditha. As they approached two houses near the road, an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated near the last vehicle. The explosion disabled the last vehicle and killed one of its occupants, Marine Corporal Miguel Terrazas. The patrol leader, Sergeant Frank Wuterich, exited his vehicle and, in the confusion that followed, spotted a car approaching a nearby house. It stopped and five young men got out. Seeing the disabled patrol, they took off running. Thinking they might somehow be connected to the IED, Wuterich and the Marines fired at them, striking them in the back and killing them. In the midst of this, the Marines thought they detected gunfire from one of the two nearby houses. Sgt. Wuterich ordered his men to clear the houses by tossing grenades in the front door and going in shooting. In quick succession, they cleared both houses. In the process, they killed nineteen of their occupants, including six children under the age of 12, and an elderly man in his seventies and in a wheelchair. The incident was not immediately investigated, but eventually Sgt. Wuterich was charged in a military court with nine counts of premeditated murder, later reduced to unpremeditated manslaughter.

The class, after reviewing a recounting of the incident, concluded that the Marine patrol, and in particular, Sgt. Wuterich as its leader, did not appear to have received any special training in decision-making for this type of encounter. For example, the method they used for “clearing” the two houses – toss in grenade, go in firing – would be appropriate for entering an enemy bunker on a conventional battlefield, but would be unsuitable in an irregular warfare setting populated by civilians and innocent bystanders, as the results that day in Haditha illustrate.

The purpose in having the cadets review the scenario was not to pile on Sgt. Wuterich but to formally identify the decision points, specify each decision made and its associated rationale, and weigh each of those against the outcome that followed. The question to the class then was : if we were to run the scenario over again, exactly as described, what different decisions could a leader make that might produce more desirable results? Though the cadets agreed that the outcomes that did occur were undesirable, they

had great difficulty specifying how they would have acted differently than Sgt. Wuterich. In particular, some argued that the patrol *had* been attacked (an IED killed one of their members) and that, though the Iraqi deaths were unfortunate, they concluded that the patrol merely was attempting to defend itself.

A second question then was posed to the class: how plausible is it that the residents of those two houses located next to the road would plant an IED in their own front yard? The class concluded this does not seem plausible – it is much more likely that someone else planted it there. Approaching the scenario with this insight caused the class to view the deaths of the five young men and the nineteen inhabitants of the two houses in a new light. They now agreed that, in the absence of more positive identification than offered by Sgt. Wuterich, the five young men should not have been fired upon. They also agreed that some other procedure could and should have been used to search the house. The method used provides maximum force protection at the expense of increased collateral damage – justifiable, they concluded, only if the patrol actually were under attack by people in the houses.

We should point out that these assessments and conclusions were by no means unanimous. Rather, the analysis and discussion provoked a fair amount of discomfort in several of the class members. In particular, some cadets felt “trapped”, i.e., they did not approve of the decisions made by Sgt. Wuterich, but they were not able to see desirable alternatives.

We have spent some time with this example because it illustrates precisely why prior realistic dilemma training is so necessary. First, in the absence of wrestling with these issues beforehand and landing on some firm, guiding principles, subsequent moral dilemmas likely will play out badly in real time. Further, as we have noted above, although one may want to act morally and may be able to analyze moral dilemmas in the comfort of the classroom, these qualities do not guarantee that one will in fact behave morally when called upon to do so.

## **Method**

With this preparation in place, we immersed the cadets in a simulation based on a tribal-engagement mission in Afghanistan. *Villagistan* has about 30 buildings, to include a mosque, marketplace, police station, town hall, and homes for villagers. Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have suggested improvements to make it increasingly realistic. A roster of local actors and role players is available to populate the village for selected exercises (at a fee). The village has available an impressive array of costumes and props. It also is wired for sound and smell, and a wide assortment of these can be pre-selected. For example, calls to prayer from the mosque and other sounds, as well as the smells of rotting garbage, open sewers, and the like, are offered. Finally, more than one hundred cameras in the village make video/audio recordings of what takes place, both in the streets and in specific rooms within houses. The action can be interrupted at most any time and playbacks used to review and critique what took place.

Cadets were issued a military-style warning order (see Appendix B) to define the basic purpose of the simulation: engage the villagers in order to collect data and support recommendations for mitigating violence and insurgent activity in the local district. Specifically, cadets were to rendezvous at a site about a mile or so from the village, approach the village in four Humvees, dismount, and enter the village. Their job was to talk with those in the street (i.e., shopkeepers and children), ascertain from them who the village elders were, and attempt meetings with the elders (in the case of male cadets) and the village women (in the case of female cadets). The cadets were divided into groups of 4-5 members. The authors sketched out basic guidelines for the class and the cadet-groups then planned how they would approach the village and villagers, compiled a listing of possible things that could go right or wrong, and specified a preferred course of action for each of these events. We chose to recruit “actors” from the friends, family members, and acquaintances of the authors and from the faculty and cadet wing. We then wrote detailed scripts for more than 20 role-players in the village and for 10 “aggressors” who would engage in hostile or suspicious actions outside or near the village (set off a simulated-IED on the approach route, flee from the village on foot, unarmed, as cadets approached, etc.). We were fortunate to have access to several people who have extensive experience in Afghanistan, are steeped in Afghan culture, and are intimately familiar with the ins-and-outs of irregular warfare. They reviewed our scenarios and provided suggestions for making them more authentic.

On the day of the simulation, the cadet groups ran four scenarios over the course of a five-hour period. A critique of what took place was conducted after each scenario. Several kinds of data were collected to assess the effectiveness of the simulation. A month before and again a week after the field exercise, cadets (using fictitious names to preserve anonymity) filled out three questionnaires – the Rational-Experiential Inventory, the New General Self-Efficacy Scale, and the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale. In addition, cadets wrote mission-critiques and pre- and post- self-assessments. Finally, range personnel video-taped *shuras* (consultations) between cadets and actors playing the role of villagers.

## **Findings**

Information from the three *pre-* and *post-*test questionnaires is summarized in Table 1. The Rational-Experiential Inventory, developed by psychologist Seymour Epstein and his associates, posits that people process information through two basic operating systems, the rational and the experiential (Epstein, 2003). Epstein argues that the two systems operate both in parallel and interactively. As the labels imply, one is more cognitive and logical, the other more emotional and intuitive. Some people rely more heavily on one than the other and the preference for one over the other may change over the life course or in response to experience. For our purposes, it is important to note that rational processing is more closely associated with “intelligent intelligence”, to use Epstein’s term, while experiential processing is more highly correlated with having social skills needed for what we have called “cultural intelligence”.

The Rational-Experiential Inventory (REI) consists of 40 items which form a self-assessment of how one likes to make decisions. A person can score high or low on either of the two dimensions without raising or lowering his or her score on the other. The mean scores REI in Table 1 show that cadets in the class characterize themselves as rational decision-makers more so than experiential ones and that there is no significant difference in how they do so before and after the live simulation. About two-thirds of the class falls in the “purely rational” or mixed “rational and experiential” category (not shown in the table), while about one-third fall in the “purely experiential” category as decision-makers.

**Table 1:** *Scale Scores by Pre-/Post-Simulation (Time1/Time2)*

	Mean	S.D.	<i>Paired-samples t-test*</i>
<b>Rational-Experiential Decision-Making</b>			
Rational Ability T1	3.9	.43	-0.794
Rational Ability T2	4.0	.44	
Rational Engagement T1	3.7	.61	1.340
Rational Engagement T2	3.8	.59	
Experiential Ability T1	3.4	.62	-0.345
Experiential Ability T2	3.5	.71	
Experiential Engagement T1	3.3	.74	0.507
Experiential Engagement T2	3.3	.67	
<b>Self-Efficacy</b>			
T1	20.3	2.43	0.001
T2	20.4	3.16	
<b>Intercultural Efficacy</b>			
Behavioral Flexibility T1	12.8	1.77	1.949**
Behavioral Flexibility T2	11.7	2.17	
Interaction Relaxation T1	17.2	2.78	1.984**
Interaction Relaxation T2	15.8	3.98	
Interactant Respect T1	12.6	1.19	-0.459
Interactant Respect T2	12.8	1.55	
Message Skills T1	9.6	1.43	-0.934
Message Skills T2	10.1	1.81	
Identity Maintenance T1	10.2	2.08	0.784
Identity Maintenance T2	9.9	2.53	
Interaction Management T1	7.2	.93	1.928**
Interaction Management T2	6.6	1.43	
* <i>n</i> of pairs (T1 and T2) = 20			
** <i>p</i> of difference between paired means < .07			

Turning to the second measure, the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001) shows no significant differences in the mean scores between the pre- and post-simulation periods. However, we did find that S-ES and being an experiential decider was positively correlated at Time 2 ( $r = .461$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and negatively correlated with being a rational decision-maker ( $-.201$ , though not statistically significant at the .05 level). These correlations are consistent with our impression from observing the students over the course of the semester. It seemed to us that the rational decision-makers felt more confident *before* the simulation but were a bit shaken or even discouraged afterwards. The reverse seemed to be true of those with a more experiential bent. The latter appeared to better grasp beforehand what complications they might encounter in the village and were more worried in their preparation. However, on the backside, they were more likely to report this is something they could do or maybe even would like to do in the operational Air Force.

Finally, we did find significant differences between the pre- and post-simulation scores for several dimensions of the Intercultural Effectiveness Scale (Portalla & Chen, 2009). The 20-item IES yields scores on following dimensions: behavioural flexibility (ability to observe and then adapt to a specific situational context), interaction relaxation (ability to interact comfortably in a cross-cultural setting), interactant respect (amount of value the person accords one's culturally different counterpart), message skills (ability to use communication skills to connect with one in another culture), identity maintenance (ability to uphold one's own identity and that of the culturally different counterpart), and interaction management (ability to express ideas and answer questions in cross-cultural settings).

We had hypothesized that the intercultural effectiveness scores would be higher following the simulation. However, the scores on three of the dimensions – interactant respect, message skills, and identity maintenance – were unchanged and the scores on the remaining three – behavioural flexibility, interaction ability, and identity maintenance – were significantly *lower* after the simulation than it. Why might this be so?

An answer may lie in a popular adult learning theory, conscious competence learning (Leopard-learning.com, 2011). Apparently there is some ambiguity about who developed the theory, though it often is attributed to Abraham Maslow (we could not find a related citation) or to Noel Burch, an employee of Gordon Training International, a business consulting firm. The theory states that the beginner typically is *unconsciously incompetent*, i.e., the individual literally does not know what it is he or she does not know. This does not mean that the individual is not doing things or making decisions, but rather that blind spots leave the person unaware of relevant shortcomings. There are several downsides – the person may make very bad decisions and, further, may stick truculently to uninformed and incorrect premises.

The transition to stage two, *conscious incompetence*, occurs when some event painfully exposes to the individual his or her lack of knowledge. The person now is aware of what it is he and she does not know. This at least sets up the potential to move forward, although such progress is not a given. While some people react defensively or take the

position that they do not wish to know any more about the subject, some do begin the slow process of acquiring the knowledge and skills to reach stage three, *consciously competent*. Here the individual is well-informed about the subject but still must exert conscious effort to perform effectively. However, with continued practice and persistence, the person may move to the fourth stage, *unconscious competence*. At long last, behaving in an effective manner has become “second nature”.

In retrospect, our hypothesis that participation in the simulation would increase cadets’ sense of intercultural effectiveness overlooked these potential steps. Given that most of them had little or no cross-cultural experience, many may have begun at the unconsciously incompetent stage and simply moved to the consciously incompetent one. For those who had prior exposure to other cultures, the move may have been another step toward the consciously competent. On balance, these changes would produce a decline in the average intercultural effectiveness scores from time 1 to time 2. Table 2 summarizes *pre-* and *post-*simulation self-assessments by twenty of the cadets.

**Table 2: Pre- and Post- Self-Assessments**

<b><i>Pre-Self-Assessment</i></b>	<b><i>Post-Self-Assessment</i></b>
<p><b><u>Two thumbs up :</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Would not have felt comfortable with a mission like this</li> <li>– I thought I had deployments all figured out, – couldn’t have been more wrong</li> <li>– NOT prepared, but didn’t know the difference</li> <li>– I had significant experience in another culture, so felt I had a leg up</li> <li>– Would not have known how to act, but willing to accept I had a lot to learn</li> <li>– I was not ready for anything like Villagistan and strange people</li> <li>– I thought this was going to be [fun] and easy. Little did I know!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– I now am confident, capable of making decisions on-the-fly</li> <li>– I feel much more prepared for real-life deployment</li> <li>– My readiness for real-world mission is high</li> <li>– I feel I could conduct a similar exercise, real time, real place</li> <li>– I think I now am more adept at how to carry out this kind of mission</li> <li>– I think I might be able to be part of tribal meetings in Afghanistan for real</li> <li>– Feel like I gained a lot of tools – I’ve made it my goal to learn Arabic, or at least try to</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>One thumb up :</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– I would not have been effective in exercise like this</li> <li>– Would not have considered myself Prepared</li> <li>– Feel my level of readiness was low ; I had only general ideas of what to do</li> <li>– I was in a way prepared, but would have been very defensive</li> <li>– Had faith in my abilities – I’m very good at blending in</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Exercise again – confident; for real – not as confident</li> <li>– Feel I have a strong overall grip on the process, but learned COIN can be extremely frustrating</li> <li>– My readiness level for this kind of ops now is high, but there’s so much more to learn</li> <li>– I developed many strengths but there’s still many weaknesses I need to work on</li> <li>– I’m better prepared to do COIN but scenario showed me I’m not as good as I thought</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I'm pretty flexible personality, felt I could handle most anything</li> <li>- My overall readiness for this kind of exercise was not up to par</li> <li>- My readiness for such an exercise was pretty much nonexistent</li> <li>- I was not prepared, felt very nervous about any type of combat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have gained so much knowledge, but still am worried I am lacking in knowledge</li> <li>- My cultural awareness is higher; I did find it very hard to overlook the absence of rights for women</li> <li>- Don't think I'm ready for a real-life version of this – no one gets hurt during an exercise</li> <li>- Feel sufficiently prepared for real thing but still worry about “force protect vs. collateral damage”</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>My thumbs got mangled :</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I knew you had to win hearts and minds</li> <li>- I was aware that I was not prepared in several areas</li> <li>- I had not given serious thought to anything remotely related to this</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I discovered I was not prepared; I experienced culture shock; I did not react well during exercise</li> <li>- I found it difficult to keep my emotions in check, was frequently angered by what I encountered</li> <li>- I had a difficult time, was constantly on edge, and lost part of my personality—immensely frustrating</li> </ul>
<p><b><u>Need to apply thumbs to something else :</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Somewhat confident, I have experience in other cultures, am empathetic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I could do basic COIN but village and conditions were sh**y, wouldn't want to be there</li> </ul>

Seven of these we have classified as “two thumbs up”, meaning that the second self-assessment indicates a step toward conscious competence. Examples of this are the statements: *“I feel much more prepared for real-life deployment”* and *“I think I might be able to be part of tribal meetings in Afghanistan for real”*. However, only one of these seven mentioned having prior experience in another culture. More typical of the other six are initial assessments like, *“I would not have felt comfortable with a mission like this”* and *“I thought this was going to be fun and easy – little did I know!”*.

Nine of the self-assessments we placed in the “one thumb up category”. These responses resemble movement to the consciously incompetent category. For example, we see statements on the order of *“I'm better prepared to do [counterinsurgency] but the scenario showed me I'm not as good as I thought”* and *“I have gained so much knowledge but still am worried I am lacking in knowledge”*. Seven of these nine said in the first self-assessment that their level of readiness beforehand was *“not up to par”* or *“pretty much nonexistent”*.

Three of the assessments we placed in the category “my thumbs got mangled”. These post-simulation statements are revealing: *“I experienced culture shock – I did not react well during the exercise”*, *“I was frequently angered by what I encountered”* and *“I had a difficult time, was constantly on edge, and lost part of my personality”*. None of these reported having culturally-relevant experience beforehand. Further, their assessments went on to note that they had little desire to confront and work on these weaknesses. For instance, one said, *“I will be extremely disappointed and cynical if I end up having to deploy and do something like this”*. This, of course, does not mean that they cannot or will not improve – simply they that are at this point frustrated and discouraged. They could stay there indefinitely or, under a later set of circumstances, embark upon a program of improvement.

Finally, we placed one respondent in the “need to apply thumbs to something else” category, at least for now. This cadet expressed confidence in his abilities both prior to and after the simulation, but concluded with statements asserting the “*village and conditions were sh\*\*y*” and that he would not want to do a tribal engagement (for real). This characterization of the village and conditions, though it may have some objective basis, does not reflect the tone and insight associated with an effective intercultural style of thinking and acting.

## Discussion

We began this paper by invoking General Mattis’ plea to develop training regimens that prepare soldiers (and others) for rapid, morally-based, mission-effective decision-making in complex and hazardous environments. As the number of words in the previous sentence suggests, this is a tall order. This much is painfully clear: simply being well-intentioned is not an option – putting even the most principled individuals in dangerous, compromising situations without specific training is likely to produce tragic results.

However, there is by now a growing literature that identifies some general principles and specific procedures for approaching this task. Dilemma training, for example, can serve as a hedge against calamity. As the ground-breaking research by Klein, and subsequent applications by Seiler, Scott *et al.*, and others, have shown, the purpose of this training is for participants to develop mental constructs which then serve as prototypes to be recalled and enacted in subsequent, similar-looking situations. We know that the scenarios must be robustly true-to-life if they are to fulfil our intended purpose. To serve decision-makers well, these prototypes must adequately match the situations in which they will be applied and be sufficiently detailed to allow nuanced application.

In the case of irregular warfare, the content of the prototypes further must contain entries that sensitize the decision-maker to the contingencies of maintaining force-protection on the one hand and reducing collateral damage on the other. As the decision-maker becomes more experienced, other layers of second- and third-order consequences can be added in. All this calls for abilities and considerations that military personnel may not be inclined to acquire without a significant commitment to the task by leadership at all levels. We have noted in one of our earlier papers a bit of port-a-john graffiti sometimes found in American military staging areas, especially during the middle years of the war in Iraq: “*Better to be tried by twelve than carried by six*”. This snippet of bathroom wisdom suggests that it is better to shoot-first-and-ask-questions later, even if innocent civilians die and one ends up being court-martialled – at least one still is alive. Left to their own devices, troops understandably might see this as their only sensible option. The role of dilemma training is to provide other mission-relevant, sensible options.

Finally, all this often must be carried on in cross-cultural settings. Here, the potential for miscalculation is high, particularly when the participants are blissfully ethnocentric. Our experience in teaching the principles of irregular warfare (where one wins by “winning hearts and minds”) is that students typically respond very positively to general conversation about these principles. However, this assent also tends to break down

very quickly when applied to specific cross-culture settings. Concerning the war in Afghanistan, for example, cadets' initial inclination is to think of the Taliban-based insurgency solely in terms of the attack on the World Trade Center, i.e., to proceed as if the insurgents in question, because they are Muslims, were part of that attack and are similarly motivated. This same brush usually is used to paint the intentions of villagers and bystanders even if they are "not insurgents". The first step therefore is to devote time to discussion of Afghani history and culture on the one hand and an analysis of the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaeda on the other. This provides a basis in dilemma training for discriminating among behaviours that might be generic human reactions to undesirable situations, ones distinctive to Muslim cultures, and those that are features of individuals committed to *jihadist* ideologies.

The scenario we developed for the simulation in *Villagistan* provides an illustration. Our initial briefing informs the cadets that neither the Afghan military nor the regional police force is able to provide adequate security for the village. There is a regional court system, but it is "unreliable" at best. Further, there are roving bands in the area, some simply bandits (having few other ways to make a living), some merely looking for ill-defined adventure, others dedicated for one reason or another to kicking Americans out of Afghanistan, and some devoted to holy war and establishing an Islamic state. These bands poach on the village's resources, from their young men and women to their agricultural assets. The village therefore has responded (as it has for hundreds of years in similar circumstances) by organizing its own "militia" to protect itself and its people. This militia has shown a willingness to engage most anyone who diddles with the village, whether it be one of these roving bands or a passing American patrol.

Given this context, does it make sense to regard all these moving parts as dedicated Taliban *jihadists*? Probably not. So, we challenge the cadets to identify the subgroups, their varying motivations, and the tactics that might be tailored to successfully win each of them over. Further, cadets are asked to consider the cultural lens through which locals interpret these goings-on and any attempted intervention by American forces. Finally, we devote preparation to the basics required to enter and interact within an Afghan village in a manner consistent with local customs and mores.

By this point in the course, we have covered our three phases of decision-making from its moral content to its mission-relevant dimensions to its cross-cultural component. This represents a mountain of substantive material and associated skills that must be compacted down to a set of prototypes for behaving sensibly in potentially violent contexts. As we have shown above, not everyone is equally ready or adept to do so in a single semester of preparation culminating in a realistic simulation. For some, simply moving from the unconsciously incompetent to the consciously incompetent stage of learning is a meaningful step forward. Where possible, therefore, this effort should be part of a longer-term process of learning.

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## APPENDIX A \*\*



Sgt. Frank Wuterich, USMC  
Squad Leader

November 19, 2005 : A US Marine Corps convoy from Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Regiment of the 1st Marine Division was struck by a roadside bomb in the town of Haditha, Iraq, killing LCpl. Miguel Terrazas. In the events that followed, 24 Iraqi civilians who lived in two nearby houses were killed. Killed : 5 teenage males, who lived in the houses but appeared to have the misfortune to return from school just after IED attack on Marines, plus 19 women, children, and two older males (one a 76-year-old in a wheelchair) who also lived in two houses.

Sgt Wuterich shot the 5 teenage males and gave the order to clear two nearby houses by throwing in grenades first, asking questions later. He originally was charged with 9 counts of premeditated murder, reduced to unpremeditated manslaughter.



On March 18, 2007, SSgt Frank Wuterich (W., in the transcript excerpts below) appeared on the television news show *60 Minutes* and was interviewed by correspondent Scott Pelley (P.).

**P.:** “As you understood them, what were the rules for using deadly force?”

**W.:** “The biggest thing was PID - positive identification. It means that you need to be able to positively identify your target before you shoot to kill”.

...[following the explosion of the IED, a white car drove up and five young Iraqi men got out]...

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\*\* Source: CBS News, “The Killings in Haditha: Wuterich’s Account” ([www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=2582353n](http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=2582353n)), 24 August 2008.

**W.:** *“So my immediate thought is okay, maybe this was a car bomb. Okay, maybe these guys had something to do with this IED. ...They got out of the car [and] as they were going around they started to take off, so I shot at them, ...as the men ran, [I] shot them in the back. ...They were military-age males, they were 100 meters away from that IED. Those are the things that went through my mind before I pulled the trigger. That was positive identification”.*

**P.:** *“How much time passed from the moment of the explosion to the time you killed these five men?”.*

**W.:** *“I would say about two minutes”.*

...[next Wuternich went to the Humvee damaged by the IED – he describes what he saw of L. Cpl. Miguel Terrazas, El Paso, Tex.]...

**W.:** *“Basically a pile of flesh, in essence. That may be a sight I’ll never forget. He was missing one of his arms. His legs were completely severed from his body, but they were still attached because for some reason his Cami’s didn’t rip completely. [I then heard] sporadic shots”.*

...[W. says he couldn't see where the fire was coming from, but a house to the south caught his eye]...

**P.:** *“You did not see fire coming from the house, correct ?”.*

**W.:** *“I did not see muzzle flashes coming from the house, correct. But that was the only logical place it could be coming from...”.*

... [next Lt. William Kallop arrived and gave the “okay” to assault the house. The Marines kicked in the door and threw in a grenade]...

**P.:** *“But when you roll a grenade in a room through the crack in the door, that’s not positive identification, that’s taking a chance on anything that could be behind that door.”*

**W.:** *“Well, that’s what we do. That’s how our training goes... I remember there may have been women in there, may have been children in there. My responsibility as a squad leader is to make sure that none of the rest of my guys died... There probably wasn’t [a threat], now that I look back on it. But there, in that time, yes, I believed there was a threat”.*

...[In the second house was the Younis family. A 41-year-old man, a 35-year-old woman, a 28-year-old woman, and the children -- Noor, 14; Sabah, 9; Zaine, 3; and Aisha, 2. They were all killed by the Marines in W.’s squad]...

**W.:** *“We reacted to how we were supposed to react to our training and I did that to the best of my ability. You know the rest of the Marines that were there, they did their job properly as well. Did we know that civilians were in there? No. Did we go in those rooms, you know, it would have been one thing, if we went in those rooms and looked at everyone and shot them. You know, we cleared these houses the way they were supposed to be cleared”.*

*“Everyone visualizes me as a monster, a baby killer, cold-blooded, that sort of thing. And, it's, you know, that’s not accurate... A massacre in my mind, by definition, is a large group of people being executed, being killed for absolutely no reason and that’s absolutely not what happened here”.*

*“What I did that day, the decisions that I made, I would make those decisions today. What I’m talking about is the tactical decisions”.*

*“It doesn’t sit well with me that women and children died that day. There is nothing that I can possibly say to make up or make well the deaths of those women and children and I am absolutely sorry that that happened that day”.*

*“...I’m not sure I want to go to sleep tonight, because I don’t know what I’m going to dream”.*

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Warning Order: Operation Mitigating Violence (MITVIO)**

Location : *Villagistan*

Commanders Intent: Engage the local population in order to collect data to support recommendations for mitigating violence and insurgent activity in local district.

Specific instructions: Your team will deploy from your forward operation location to the village and make contact with representatives of the local community in an effort to gain data about:

- 1) current conditions for individuals and families in the village ;
- 2) formal and informal leadership structures in the community ;
- 3) social development ;
- 4) economic development ;
- 5) educational development ;
- 6) health care needs ;
- 7) infrastructure improvements ;
- 8) law enforcement activity ;
- 9) support for the legitimate bodies of the national and regional government.

Data gathered on this mission will be used to develop a comprehensive plan, in the form of “White Paper”, that will be employed as part of the planning process to mitigate the conditions you believe are related to the occurrence of violence in the local district. You should form your recommendations with a macro sociological construct but be specific in your recommendations as to how micro sociological constructs will be addressed. Key emphasis should be placed on consideration of primary effects and or consequences of coalition efforts and on second- and third-order effects anticipated as a result of coalition efforts.

Your recommendations will be anchored in a theory of violence that plausibly explains the antecedents of violence and identifies points of influence in the community that you expect to promote alternatives to violence

Threat Condition : Recent attacks on coalition forces have involved the following:

- Sporadic harassing gunfire
- IEDs on main supply routes
- IEDs on Village streets
- Local population reports threatening night letters and revenge beating and killings
- Non-local bandits have been operating in this area extorting money from Govt. contract sites

Coalition Activity :

- Road and bridge building contracts in nearby towns.
- School and medical center restoration in nearby town.
- Ongoing Special Forces and Local National Forces counterinsurgency operations.
- Ongoing military embedded training teams with local police and healthcare providers.
- This region has a dedicated Provincial Reconstruction Team available to assist.