

Human Environment Capability

Duties of the military Cultural Advisor

The Cultural Advisor is a critical function of the Human Environment Capability. All of his/her duties are directly linked to the various stages of the Human Environment Process : UNDERSTAND, OPERATIONALIZE, ADAPT TO, and ENGAGE the human environment (process description in Annex A). In this framework the Cultural Advisor's duties consist in,

- Developing Knowledge about and Understanding of the human environment
- Educating the unit personnel
- Improving the unit Human Environment related processes and tools
- Advising the unit personnel
- Engaging or supporting the engagement of the Human Environment

Developing Knowledge about and Understanding of the human environment

- Indirect Knowledge
 - The least efficient way to acquire knowledge about one specific segment of the human environment or a culture is by reading **books**. However, often this is how the knowledge development will have to start because there is no other means readily available.
 - This theoretical knowledge should be, as soon as possible, verified and completed through **reach back** to people who possess direct knowledge, people who are or have recently been in contact with the segment of the human environment the cultural advisor is inquiring about.
- Indirect knowledge is always insufficient. It needs to be verified and complemented as soon as possible by the **direct knowledge** acquired by directly **engaging the people** object of the study. Find more details on this under the paragraph "Engaging or supporting the engagement of the Human Environment" here below.
- **Time and space** are critical while trying to understand a segment of the Human Environment. It will always be sought to get closer in space and time to the population and the place the Cultural Advisor is interested in. What applies to one village does not apply to the next village. What applied three months ago does not apply anymore today. What one knows or understands needs to be continuously updated.
- The **continuity** or maintenance of the level of knowledge is also critical. The cultural advisor is responsible for ensuring that when he/she leaves none of the gathered knowledge is lost, but passes to someone else who is in a position to take it over. The systematic population of a **Knowledge Base** is recommended to support this continuity.

Educating the unit personnel

- Probably the most important task is to educate the unit personnel. Understanding and efficiently interacting with foreign culture in operation zone is a real challenge for the military. The main reasons for this include the security constraints and the very nature of western military organizational culture. The role of the cultural advisor is to help the military personnel acquire the **appropriate attitude** to approach cross cultural situations and to engage the human

environment. This education process concerns all personnel, from the bottom to the top of the hierarchy.

- When the appropriate attitude is acquired, the cultural advisor will ensure that the needed knowledge and skills are also learned. (see the training to understand foreign people paper)
- Successful education of the personnel requires that the cultural advisor has previously been accepted as a full member of the unit. This could sometimes represent the first serious cross-cultural challenge for the advisor and take a significant amount of time. Gaining the **support of the hierarchy** is a must.

Improving the unit Human Environment related processes and tools

- In most of the cases, the unit process and tools are not completely, or not at all, adapted to efficiently operate in a challenging human environment. It is the Cultural Advisor's duty to fix this.
- The cultural advisor will make the effort to thoroughly study the processes and tools to identify shortcomings and design improvements to propose to the hierarchy.
- The cultural advisor will closely monitor the implementation of the recommended improvements.

Advising the unit personnel

- Advising could be done formally, where and when it is foreseen by the unit processes. It can also be done informally whenever needed.
- Advises should be provided when asked for, but should also be proactively provided when the advisor sees the need or opportunity for it.
- All the unit personnel should be able to get cultural advice. But the first priority is to advise the unit Commander(s).

Engaging or supporting the engagement of the Human Environment

- As mentioned before, engaging the people is a condition to acquire the needed understanding of the environment, but this is even more important in order to establish rapport with the people. Rapport, or trust relationship, is what will generate support from the population and local actors to the military unit. Rapport is also a powerful conflict prevention and resolution asset.
- The various relationships should aim at creating a large network of people that can be leveraged for many purposes.
- The obvious way to establish rapport is through frequent and relatively long face to face engagements. Today's communication technology multiplies the outreach opportunities while allowing quality engagement over the internet. This means should be extensively used during an operation, and is the best means at the advisor's disposal in preparation of a deployment.
- The role of the Cultural Advisor is both to conduct engagements (face to face and online) and support other personnel engagement activities (face to face and online)

Annex A

Components of the Human Environment Capability

The goal of the Human Environment Capabilities is to provide military commanders with the ability to UNDERSTAND, OPERATIONALIZE, ADAPT TO, and ENGAGE the Human Environment. The Human Environment Capabilities consist of various assets (capabilities, concepts, functions and processes) coherently organized and coordinated to efficiently achieve this goal. Critical to the efficiency of the Human Environment Capabilities are the attributes of their personnel : knowledge, skills and an attitude (*) ensuring that the human environment is addressed as a priority in any situation and with the adequate approach, techniques and tools.

UNDERSTAND THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

The first step is to acquire understanding of the human environment. What needs to be achieved is that NATO actions really speak to the people and generate a positive perception in support of the operational and strategic goals. To do so, there is no other way than to sincerely know what they need, what they believe, their values, their language. The understanding of the people is a must; and need to be approached systematically. Such understanding cannot be acquired remotely or through books; it demands direct contact with the human environment. The second step is to ensure that the acquired understanding is maintained over time. To do so, a knowledge base needs to be built and updated. This knowledge base is also a tool that would support pre-deployment training. Finally, military success depends on how well you know your enemies and yourself. We must be prepared, at least at the start of an operation, to face an enemy we don't know yet. But we cannot afford not to perfectly know ourselves. Perceptions, needs, believes, values, and languages of the soldiers are part of the understanding equation too.

OPERATIONALIZE THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Operationalizing means making military sense of the understanding, translating it into objectives to meet, decision to take and actions to conduct. Concretely to identify what to do. Considering the human environment must always be a priority within the military decision making process. This cannot be efficiently done without taking into account the non-kinetic aspects of military actions and messages. The non-kinetic aspects are the effects things have on the people's perception. The use of non-kinetic tools, such as communicating a specific message to a specific audience, also needs to be systematically addressed within the decision making process.

ADAPT TO THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

If the operationalize stage was successful; the commander knows what to do. But the problem is not solved yet; since, in complex situations like the one often faced in current operations, the military tools are not always designed to perform all the required tasks. Most of the military units are organized, equipped, trained and minded for combat, combat support or service support. How can they do when their tasks have nothing to do with this? The objective is 'adaptation' to become an inherent characteristic of the armed forces. This of course requires specific education, training, processes and capability design to ensure the people and the structure can adapt to the specificities of any unpredicted human environment.

ENGAGE THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Engaging the human environment aims at shaping it so that it supports military goals. Concretely this translates in communicating, building trust, leveraging external capabilities, motivating military personnel. The conditions enabling efficient engagement have much in common with the ones enabling understanding it. They imply the direct and efficient contact with the people.

(*) See ISAF Mission Specific Training guidance for the understanding of the people of Afghanistan