Mastery Levels to Support the Education and Training of General Cultural Competence

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Executive Summary

Across their careers, U. S. personnel are assigned to work with people from a wide variety of cultures. The choices they make in these encounters can affect national security outcomes and strategy.

They must be able to build, grow, and maintain professional relationships with people who are culturally different from themselves. In sensitive situations, they need some skill in tactfully dealing with diverse people to attain U. S. objectives.

The Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) has the task to identify, validate, and prioritize requirements for cultural capabilities that support national security objectives.

An ongoing issue is determining how to best prepare people for this cultural aspect of their jobs. A key challenge is that personnel may receive assignments to relocate to possible destinations across the globe. U. S. personnel have to be ready to quickly adapt to new areas of operation. And to interact and work with people who come from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds.

Further complicating matters, the amount of cultural content that could be taught is practically limitless. The vast availability of information makes it very easy for cross-cultural instruction to overburden training and education programs.

Hence, personnel need a bounded set of cultural skills that apply no matter where they hit the ground. We refer to this core set of skills as general cultural competence. Guidance on the core cultural skills and knowledge that support mission effectiveness is needed to provide a foundation for developing readiness plans.

In order to meet these challenges, DLNSEO commissioned the development of a model of general cultural competence for the Total Force. The model is called, Adaptive Readiness for Culture (ARC). It was developed based on studies of the ways personnel with extensive experience in multiple regions cope with cultural challenges in a wide range of assignments. ARC describes knowledge and skills that apply across all regions of interest.

DLNSEO has used ARC to inform the guidelines and requirements specified in section 8 of DoDI 5160.70. This policy document provides guidelines for career-long cultural sustainment and enhancement training and education programs across the DoD.

Early versions of ARC described knowledge and skills that made up each of the competencies, but not levels of mastery. Mastery levels give a sense of what good (and less skilled) performance looks like.

The purpose of the current study was to define levels of mastery for the 12 ARC competencies. Before describing the levels study, we first provide background on the technical approach to develop ARC and a high-level description of the core model.
Background

The approach for developing ARC is consistent with best practices for competency modeling. Useful competency models describe the behaviors that job holders can meaningfully engage in to meet or exceed their organization’s objectives. Studies to develop competency models need to identify what skilled performers do within the context of their jobs. Not what someone thinks they should be doing.

ARC was developed using a cognitive interview technique. This method focuses on how skilled and experienced job holders handled challenging incidents they encountered on their jobs. It is an effective technique for uncovering the tacit knowledge and skills that contribute to performance, taking work demands into account.

ARC development was informed by academic literature and filtered through military experience. An alternative approach sometimes suggested by researchers is to draw directly on scholarly literature to build competency models. This gives priority to academic ideas over the experiences of seasoned military personnel.

One problem with this approach is that academic literature generally describes studies of non-military populations. It does not take the job context or demands that military personnel contend with into consideration. This can lead to the introduction of new requirements that are not clearly relevant, or even run counter to the DoD situation.

A second problem with this approach is that it tends to rely heavily on academic jargon to define competencies. This creates unnecessary barriers to adopting a common language and promoting shared understanding across all members of the DoD and Total Force. The inclusion of jargon makes competencies more difficult to acquire, reducing the time available to practice applicable skills.

In contrast, analyzing the experiences of personnel on the job yields insights into practical and achievable skills that can be described in behavioral terms with ready-to-use vocabulary. For these reasons, DLNSEO’s cultural competency model is informed by the broader literature yet grounded in practice and expressed in the language of job holders.

The skills that comprise ARC were identified in an initial study of 20 Marine Corps and Army service members who successfully engaged across cultures as part of their jobs. They served in roles that required considerable interaction with foreign populations or partners.

Participants also had to have worked in multiple cultures. Specifically, only personnel who had deployed or been assigned recently in at least two different regions were included. 75% had worked in three or more regions. This unique aspect of the study was essential to tease out general skills from specific area knowledge.

A second study extended the sample to determine how well the model applies across the DoD and Total Force. The second field study included another 95 members of the DoD who also served in high contact roles in multiple regions overseas. On average they spent 8.2 years overseas in 6.6 unique countries.
The second sample included Officers and enlisted members of the four services. Foreign Area Officers, intelligence professionals, Special Operations Forces, and DoD civilians were also included. The sample ensures the relevance of the model to the work demands and language of DoD.

We used critical incident interviews to uncover knowledge and skills in the context of lived situations. The approach enabled us to examine hypothesized competencies from academic literature against what skilled personnel actually think and do when they engage across cultures. The data collected also allowed exploration of the presence of new competencies, because the interviews used open-ended responses.

Participants reported more than 200 incidents from all over the world. We analyzed critical incidents from the two studies to develop and test ARC.

ARC includes twelve competencies that are organized in four broad domains. It is fully described in the Appendix. A brief summary follows.

**Diplomatic Mindset**

Knows ways that cultural understanding and relationships help support mission objectives. Recognizes that own view of the world is shaped by personal background and culture. Manages attitudes and reactions to work productively with members of other cultures.

**Cultural Learning**

Takes a proactive approach to learning about cultures. Draws on a variety of sources to gain cultural information and considers their potential biases. Reflects on experiences and seeks feedback to improve cultural relationships, skills, and knowledge.

**Cultural Reasoning**

Attempts to make sense of puzzling situations or people. Explores a variety of reasons why people from other cultures may behave differently than expected. Considers the point of view of culturally different others.

**Intercultural Interaction**

Engages with others and builds relationships, even when uncertain about the culture. Prepares and plans communications before challenging interactions. Considers objectives and present oneself in ways to achieve intended effects.

These first two studies provided instrumental evidence regarding general cultural competence as applied by experienced professionals in the DoD. The results also showed that ARC
generalizes across the services, ranks and across a broad range of communities. The ARC competencies were prevalent across these diverse samples of seasoned professionals.

ARC defines the core skills, knowledge, and behaviors that contribute to mission success in a wide range of DoD jobs that require cross-cultural interaction. The model provides a common vocabulary for talking about general cultural competence that can be readily understood and adopted by personnel across the DoD.

The ARC competency definitions include precise behavioral statements needed to support instructional design, development, and evaluation. As mentioned above, these initial studies were not designed to provide mastery levels for the competencies. Mastery levels break the elements of overall competence down into manageable chunks, providing a more smoothly graded roadmap for development.

**Current Study**

The purpose of present study was to define levels of mastery for ARC. Mastery levels describe the quality with which people enact a competency. In this way, levels indicate a progressive trajectory of competency development.

In the current study, we developed ARC mastery levels based on behavioral response data. Cognitive interviews were conducted with personnel who had attained different degrees of cross-cultural experience. Ninety-one personnel who had varying amounts of experience working with members of other cultures participated in the study.

We defined strict criteria to delineate high, intermediate, and low experience groups, and recruited approximately equal numbers of participants from each group. On average, participants in the high experience group spent 10.4 years overseas in 4 different locations. Intermediate group participants spent 4.5 years abroad, on average, in 1 or 2 places. Participants in the low experience group had spent virtually no time outside of the U. S.

As before, the sample included Officers and enlisted members of the four services. Foreign Area Officers, intelligence professionals, Special Operations Forces, and DoD civilians were also included. Basing the investigation on a variety of DoD groups, ensures that ARC serves as a DoD wide framework that, at the same time, allows reliable customization to specific applications.

The present study used a scenario-based interview method grounded in real work examples that represented a variety of regional settings and mission types. Scenarios were constructed based on critical incident interview data collected in our previous studies for DLNSEO. The interview materials gave participants the opportunity to demonstrate their competencies to the level they had developed them. This approach provided a way to systematically compare cognitive performance across groups of interviewees with varying levels of intercultural experiences.

We identified and coded specific behaviors, skills, and strategies associated with each of the 12 competencies. These measures were used in an initial analysis to segment the data, from which 3 mastery groups emerged. We then performed quantitative comparisons to map the precise knowledge and skill elements to levels of mastery.
In addition to the quantitative comparisons, we conducted qualitative analyses to refine and amplify the level descriptions. Finally, we wrote descriptions of the three Mastery levels for each competency based on the evidence from the quantitative and qualitative results.

The resulting ARC Mastery Levels describe the distinct ways in which competencies are enacted at three different stages of development. Detailed descriptions of the levels for each competency are presented in the Appendix. The following is a brief summary that highlights a few of the high-level differences.

**Master**

Develops relationships and works with locals and foreign partners to further the mission. Uses sophisticated strategies to manage attitudes towards other cultures and learn about them, while appreciating one’s own background and role. Uses multiple, credible sources to get at root causes of behavior, and derives principles across cultural experiences. Draws on social, cultural, and situational factors to explain behavior, consider others’ points of view, and plan communications accordingly. Prepares for cross-cultural encounters, while avoiding paralysis and rigidity. Adjusts interaction style to social and cultural context, as warranted, to accomplish intended objectives.

**Proficient**

Builds rapport and casual relationships with members of other cultures. Recognizes that own view of the world is shaped by cultural background and attempts to avoid negative attitudes to other cultures. Casually learns about other cultures on own and seeks feedback to successfully adopt some cultural customs. Tries to understand puzzling interactions and recognizes that taking others’ perspectives can help to anticipate and influence their decisions. Attempts to use some language or cultural knowledge, even though it’s limited. Plans before engaging members of other cultures and avoids unnecessary conflicts.

**Less Skilled**

Struggles to relate culture and relationships to mission accomplishment. Reacts to cultural differences with personal judgment, and routinely expects others to adapt to U. S. ways. Relies exclusively on assigned training for cultural preparation and accepts information as complete and absolute. Evaluates rather than analyzes the behaviors and points of view of people from other cultures. Resists use of any language or cultural customs in everyday encounters. Tends to be reactive rather than intentional during cross-cultural interactions.

The current study contributed empirical evidence to support distinctions between ways ARC competencies are applied at different levels of mastery. The Results section provides
descriptions of the ways different levels of cultural competence were demonstrated along with examples from the participants’ interviews.

Overall, ARC was successfully extended to apply to a wide range of skill levels for cultural interaction across the DoD. Across studies to date, the organization and language of ARC has supported the reliable analysis of interview data. ARC has aided the identification and coding of competencies, as well as the underlying knowledge and skills that now define competency levels.

The ARC competency definitions include precise behavioral statements needed to guide instructional development efforts to prepare personnel to enter new cultures and interact with foreign populations and partners. The language of ARC is tailored for a DoD practitioner audience, with input and review by military cross-cultural SMEs from a wide variety of operational backgrounds.

Finally, the base ARC framework has been peer-reviewed by intercultural scholars and accepted as an original contribution to the scientific literature on intercultural relations. The methods and results of previous supporting studies have led to other publications in scientific journals, as well.

ARC informs the development of programs that provide career-long cultural sustainment and enhancement education and training across the DoD. As the latest advancement, defined levels of mastery enable instructional designers and program managers to chart courses of action for moving students from current levels of cultural competence to more advanced levels.

ARC competencies can be incorporated into multiple kinds of training programs. These include stand-alone courses on general cultural competence, as well as infusion in regional analysis courses and language training. We have also observed field exercises that address the competencies well in live practice. These possibilities are described further in the training and education implications section of the Discussion. Recommendations for integration of the competencies with existing programs are addressed, as well.
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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to extend a model of general cultural competence that was previously developed for the Defense Language and National Security Education Office (DLNSEO) by defining levels of mastery for the included competencies.

DoD personnel must be ready to work with people from a wide range of foreign cultures. Whether they are tasked to collaborate, teach, or influence, personnel face tough challenges when it comes to understanding and engaging people with divergent worldviews. A key challenge in providing guidance for readiness is the unbounded volume of cultural content that could potentially be included in education and training programs. To meet the challenge, DLNSEO, with participation from numerous DoD organizations and communities, has been working on an extensive, multi-year effort to develop a suitable competency model.

The model, *Adaptive Readiness for Culture* (ARC), describes foundational cultural competence that supports performance in any region, as well as across military services, ranks, and roles. ARC was developed from studies of the ways personnel with extensive experience in multiple regions cope with cultural challenges in a wide range of military assignments. Because ARC was based on investigation of a variety of DoD groups, it can serve as a DoD wide framework that, at the same time, allows reliable customization to specific applications.

The current effort defines levels of mastery for this general cultural competence model. Well-founded descriptions of levels of mastery provide a sound basis for the services and specialized DoD communities to develop rubrics and learning assessments for cultural competence that address their particular challenges and mission requirements.

A cultural competence model and associated mastery levels should possess several features to meet DLNSEO’s objectives. First, DLNSEO provides DoD-wide policy for training and education to support readiness and sustainment. Hence, a service-, rank-, and occupation-general cultural competency model is needed to provide widely accepted DoD-level guidance and direction. Although research conducted for more localized groups can yield useful input into the process, primary development efforts should address the broad perspective.

Second, in efforts to describe the competencies that allow military personnel to be effective working in any new culture, care should be taken to ensure that the key attribute of study is general cultural competence, as opposed to proficiency for specific regions. For example, regional specialists who have had the opportunity to develop expertise in a single foreign culture use different competencies than generalists who have repeatedly had to adapt to a variety of different cultures (Endicott, Bock, & Narvaez, 2003). Finding individuals who have had the opportunity to adapt to more than one culture is difficult and time consuming. But it is necessary for the purposes of defining culture-general competence.

Third, model development should proceed from a solid base of evidence. Ideally, competencies and mastery levels would be derived from direct behavioral data, in which people show how they solve problems. Less direct kinds of data include having people report on their own abilities (i.e., self-report), or asking experts what competencies they think are important. While indirect methods can provide useful information, a model of the core cultural competencies for military operations is best grounded in behavioral evidence.

DLNSEO’s primary objective is to develop a competency model that can be used to provide guidance for training and education. Thus, it is important that the model focus on describing knowledge and skills, as these provide clearly usable inputs to instructional design and development. Other possible components include personality traits related to multicultural
effectiveness, such as openness or open-mindedness (Van Oudenhoven, 2002). Such factors may help with selecting or excluding people for certain jobs and positions, though are less well suited for informing learning objectives. That is, an actionable cultural competency model to guide training and education should only prescribe what people can do to perform well, not who they should be in order to be considered a good fit.

Finally, cultural competencies and mastery levels need to be relevant to DoD job demands and requirements. That is, care must be taken with respect to importing academic theories and research to the DoD context, as they may not apply or even run counter to military needs. For example, recommendations based on research involving students studying abroad do not necessarily take the situations that DoD personnel contend with into consideration. Additionally, academic jargon can often provide more confusion than clarity when taken out of its precise research context. The aim should be to describe competent behaviors in their clearest, most straightforward terms to facilitate communication of the model. For these reasons, reviews of academic literature can make a good start, but are not by themselves an effective basis for promoting large-scale change and sustainable, institutionalized learning agendas.

**Background**

There are a few existing models based on some form of empirical evidence that seek to provide a description of developmental stages or progressive levels related to cultural competence. One frequently referenced model of this kind is Bennett’s 1986 Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). In this framework, intercultural sensitivity refers to a person’s orientation or attitude towards cultural difference. The DMIS model describes six stages intercultural sojourners can go through as they develop intercultural sensitivity. This model was initially developed through an investigation of study abroad students spending significant time in a single foreign cultural environment (Bennett, 1984). The researchers noticed that there were systematic patterns in the ways students conceptualized and reacted emotionally to the cultural differences they encountered during their sojourns (J. M. Bennett, personal communication, July 2018).

The DMIS describes long-term attitudinal changes that can occur over time in people’s psychological responses to coming into contact with ideas and values that are different than their own. It outlines six stages capturing a transformation in which a person’s response to difference changes from negative to positive and culminates in the ability of the individual to experience respect for and empathy towards another culture. The DMIS focuses on describing changes in a person’s experience and reaction to cultural difference, rather than a progressive improvement of skills employed to adapt and interact interculturally.

Within DoD research, a developmental model was created for the Army Research Institute. This model focused on levels of cross-cultural competence for Army small unit leaders (McCloskey, Behymer, Papautsky, Ross, & Abbe, 2010). The model was developed based on a review of literature, including the DMIS. It includes five factors: Cultural Interest, Cultural Relativism, Cultural Acuity, Relationship Orientation, and Interpersonal Skills.

In an initial empirical study of the model, researchers asked Soldiers to rank their teammates ability to handle cultural situations, and then to describe personal attributes of the teammates to justify their rankings. The descriptions were then used to define four levels of

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1 Although we are presenting the results of a scientific study in this technical report, the model as described in the Appendix represents current best efforts at common, clear language.
competence for each of the factors. In a second study, the researchers had Soldiers respond to a hypothetical tactical scenario in a central African country. In these interviews, Soldiers were asked to choose potential courses of action as the overall tactical situation unfolded. Researchers then sorted participants into the four competence levels, based on their responses.

With respect to participant backgrounds, no systematic sampling requirements were reported to control for cross-cultural experience. But, a range of time spent abroad was reported. The overseas experience of Soldiers in the initial study ranged between 6 months and 15 years (average experience was not reported). Participants in the second study had 1.5 deployments, on average.

Another military framework that includes levels of cultural proficiency was developed through research commissioned by DLNSEO. Researchers conducted a set of studies to develop the model as a reference for operational planners that enables them to identify Regional, Expertise, and Culture (REC) capability requirements during the planning process (Wisecarver, Ferro, Foldes, Adis, Hope, & Hill, 2012). The resulting REC framework has provided a basis for guidance of LREC Capability, Identification, Planning, and Sourcing in Joint Staff instruction CJCSI 3126.01A.²

The research team defined an initial set of hypothesized competencies based on a review of academic and military literature. They then conducted focus groups with three different planning communities to obtain reactions to the included elements. The participants in these focus groups also provided their thoughts regarding the organization of model components, including mapping to levels of proficiency. The resulting REC planning framework includes three competency domains: Core, Regional/Technical, and Leader Functions.

The team tested the REC proficiency framework with a survey questionnaire administered to 788 personnel from across services. Respondents were asked to determine whether the competencies were needed or not for typical missions they planned in regional settings. Participants in the studies were retired military members who had worked in a role involving cross-cultural requirements. Extent of cross-cultural experience was not reported.

Each of these models is informative and has been shown useful toward their original purpose. Nevertheless, none of these models are sufficient to describe levels of mastery for cultural competence training and education purposes across the DoD. They share a few common problems for this purpose. In all these instances, progression stages were identified for a local audience and application. Similarly, the models do not clearly attempt to disentangle development of proficiency within a specific culture from growth of culture-general skills. In addition, these models incorporate personality traits along with malleable knowledge and skills, obscuring which aspects are trainable and which would be better used for personnel selection.

We have taken a distinct approach in our studies to develop the ARC model of cultural competence to meet DLNSEO’s requirements (Rasmussen, Sieck, & Duran, 2016; Rasmussen, Sieck, Crandall, Simpkins, & Smith, 2011). Specifically, our aim was to develop a model of general cultural competence for the DoD that is grounded in best practice, rather than based on theoretical ideas from the literature or opinion data about what DoD personnel should be doing. We also sought to ensure focus on culture-general competence that is relevant to DoD tasks and

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² DoDI 5160.70 provides policy guidance to all DoD Components, including the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff, for establishing and maintaining effective LREC capabilities for DoD personnel. The CJCSI 3126.01A provides guidance for the administration of the Defense LREC Program (as described in DoDI 5160.70), and its associated planning, resourcing, and execution within the Joint Staff.
missions across services, ranks, and jobs, as well as to define the model in such a way as to be most useful as a basis for developing training and education.

In order to tap into what skilled personnel actually think and do when they engage across cultures, we developed a new critical incident interview guide. The information obtained in the interviews reflected the participants’ experiences on the job, rather than their perceptions or opinions of cultural competencies. While other researchers have attempted to use critical incidents in previous studies, they reported significant difficulty with incident elicitation and so relied on other methods, such as having participants judge their teammates’ cultural competence in a ranking task (Ross, 2008, p. 6).

We introduced new features in our study to mitigate against the potential problems with incident elicitation. First, we designed an opening question that did not use the word culture. Instead, participants were asked to recall occasions when they had encountered human challenges when they operated in a foreign environment. This design decision was intended to ensure that, rather than share experiences participants thought might fit interviewers’ conception of culture, they would share experiences where underlying cultural differences in beliefs and values presented interaction challenges. The guide also included a series of follow-up questions that allowed us to explore hypothesized competencies, should these arise in the situations the interviewees described. We derived these questions by first analyzing the RACCA Working Group report, which provides a useful summary of many hypothesized characteristics of cultural competence based on prior literature reviews (McDonald, McGuire, Johnston, Selmeski, & Abbe, 2008). To do this, we distilled clear behavioral statements from the academic theories and concepts included, separating out the jargon. We supplemented this process by examining relevant cognitive literature, and finally creating the follow-up probes to target the hypothesized competencies in everyday language.

A second aspect of our studies that promoted reliable incident elicitation was the sampling criteria. We defined criteria to include only highly experienced individuals who were likely to have encountered critical incidents to report. In addition, we established the participant sampling criteria to make sure we could examine culture-general competence, not region-specific proficiency. To be included in our studies, participants were required to have experiences working with foreign populations or partners in at least two different foreign regions. This meant that multiple assignments in a single region, like Iraq or Afghanistan, was not sufficient for inclusion. In the final sample of participants in our validation study, 75% had worked in four or more different regions. On average, study participants had spent 8.2 years overseas in 6.6 unique countries.

In order to meet DLNSEO’s objective for a DoD-wide model, we sampled a cross-section of service, rank, and major job categories that require specialized applications of cultural skills and knowledge in one of our studies (Rasmussen, Sieck, & Duran, 2016). These included officers and enlisted personnel from four services, as well as DoD specialists, such as Foreign Area Officers (FAO), Special Operations Forces (SOF), and Intelligence professionals. The study confirmed that each competency in the model was used by a majority of participants within all of

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3 Although the RACCA report provided useful input to the modeling effort, it is by itself an inadequate basis for formulating training and education requirements for the DoD. It does not follow best practices for competency modeling, and suffers from the same limitations as other broad academic literature reviews. The recommendations are based on studies of students and other non-DoD participants, so their applicability to DoD work demands is unclear. They are written using considerable academic jargon, presenting an unnecessary barrier to adoption. And, they include concepts describing fixed personal characteristics that could not likely be developed through training and education.
the sampled communities. This means that the model generalizes to the four services, across ranks and across a broad range of jobs within the DoD.

By analyzing the critical incidents from across these groups, we identified and validated 12 common competencies participants used to cope with cultural challenges on their jobs. We also derived precise behavioral statements of knowledge and skills needed to support the development of education and training.

ARC prescribes the target cultural knowledge and skills all members of the DoD community need in order to be effective. As such, it allows DLNSEO to clearly articulate a common direction towards which all efforts to cultivate, maintain, and assess cultural competence across the DoD can ultimately aim.

DLNSEO has used ARC to inform the guidelines and requirements specified in section 8 of DoDI 5160.70. This policy document provides training guidelines for career-long cultural sustainment and enhancement training and education programs across the DoD. By using empirical research in this way, DLNSEO has taken an innovative and forward-thinking approach to involving the stakeholders who at the same time benefit from and bear the burden of regulation in the policymaking process itself.

Since the publication of DoDI 5160.70, several training and education development efforts using the ARC framework have begun and gained recognition within the DoD culture communities. Such efforts include the CultureReady Basics entry-level online cultural competence trainer (“CultureReady Basics,” 2018), the Cultural Competence Activities for Basic Spanish language infusion developed for the Army Special Warfare Education Group (Rasmussen & Duran, 2018), and the Virtual Cultural Awareness Trainers (“VCAT Training,” 2018).

However, there is much work still to be done to ensure that throughout the DoD, effective, coherent programs of instruction are offered that systematically cultivate and sustain cultural competencies in personnel. A critical question to address is: How can these target cultural competencies be developed in personnel? Defining levels of mastery for ARC competencies is a necessary next step towards answering that question.

**Present Study**

The purpose of the current study is to define levels of mastery for ARC. Mastery levels describe the quality with which people enact a competency. In this way, levels indicate a progressive trajectory of competency development. The general use of competency levels is assessment. However, unlike performance rating scales, mastery levels are descriptive rather than evaluative. The key idea is that behavioral responses can be matched to level descriptions, rather than being directly judged or graded.

Competency levels and associated assessments can be used for several purposes. For example, they can be used to select personnel for different jobs. Or, they can be used to aid in the training and education of personnel. The primary purpose of DLNSEO’s cultural competence model is to support instruction. ARC mastery levels should enable instructors and instructional developers to chart a course of action for how they will move learners from their current level of competence to a more advanced level. To do this, the model should clearly point out the aspects of a person’s mindset, thinking, learning, and interaction style to work on, as well as provide specific feedback to advance from one level to the next. Hence, we worked to adhere to several criteria to create useful levels for training and education purposes (cf. Brookhart, 2013).

As mentioned above, we sought to define levels of mastery using language that describes behavior, rather than evaluating it. The idea was to capture actions and thought processes that
could be observed and matched to a freely spoken or written response to a problem, or behavior demonstrated in a simulated interaction.

Second, we strove to write qualitatively distinct levels, both as an aid to learners and so that responses can be reliably categorized as belonging to one level or another. An inherent challenge in describing how skilled performance develops is that people who have more expertise do not just do certain things more, they do them differently. Individuals who have developed higher levels of expertise see different opportunities in situations, and they come up with different strategies for solving problems than individuals with no, or low levels of expertise (Klein & Hoffman, 1993). To optimally support instruction, our objective is not to just relay that advanced performers do competencies more frequently. For example, it is not particularly useful to note that higher level performers take the perspective of cultural others more often than less skilled personnel. Rather, our aim was to provide clear, actionable descriptions of the qualitative differences in how they do things differently than lower-level performers.

We also aimed to keep the level descriptions as a coherent set of knowledge and skills within each competency. That is, we worked to keep descriptions at the mid-level roughly parallel to the those below and above it. There is a tension between providing parallel descriptions and describing qualitative distinctions within a competency, as mentioned above. Fortunately, the clusters of knowledge and skills included for each of the competencies of ARC provided a useful starting point to that end. The knowledge and skill elements in ARC were developed based on studies of personnel on the advanced end of the cultural competence continuum. These knowledge and skill elements for each competency vary in complexity. That is, some of them take more cognitive effort than others to apply. For example, in the case of Cultural Perspective Taking, simply considering another person’s perspective is not as complex as using cultural knowledge to try to figure out what another person’s perspective is. In this example, levels for the given competency are distinguished by differences in the nature and complexity of the associated activities, rather than their intensity, frequency, or accuracy.

The last education-oriented criterion for levels is to cover the full range of demonstrated performance. Levels of proficiency to be used for personnel selection might begin with only positive behaviors or those tapping the upper ends of the spectrum. The reason is that meeting the requirements for the lowest level would still show suitability for some task assignment. Folks who do not hit that level are not selected. In the context of education and training, instructors need information that sets realistic expectations for the readiness of students they could face. Thus, descriptions of less skilled responses need to be included, even if they seem to miss the target.

In addition to meeting these requirements oriented specifically to constructing levels of mastery for training and education purposes, we also followed the same standards as in our previous work to develop a competency model that is interpretable and can be readily applied by the wide range of individuals who develop and deliver culture-related training and education across the DoD.

**Technical Approach**

A key consideration in the current study was to develop usable mastery levels (and achieve the above criteria) based on behavioral data. Several noteworthy technical aspects of our approach enabled us to accomplish this aim:
1. Constructing a scenario-based interview guide for data collection that retained the methodological advantages of the critical incident approach used in ARC competency modeling efforts to date, while ensuring comparability of measurement across participant experience levels.

2. Collecting data from a participant sample that includes a wide range of experience profiles to characterize differential competence mastery, in addition to representing services and relevant specialties within the DoD.

3. Conducting fine-grained coding of the ARC knowledge and skill elements for each competency to provide inputs for objective, quantitative analysis.

4. Performing quantitative and qualitative analyses to map knowledge and skill elements to levels of mastery.

In the following, we describe these aspects of the technical approach in more detail.

**Scenario-based interview guide.**

In the previous studies to develop ARC, we used a critical incident interview approach (Campion et al. 2011; Flanagan, 1954). Within these semi-structured interviews, experienced participants described in detail how they handled some of their most challenging intercultural interactions on the job. Frequent indications of demonstrated knowledge and skills found in the verbal reports provided evidence of relevant competencies. Hence, this approach is advantageous for competency modeling purposes because it requires that study participants spontaneously generate and apply competencies in the context of their own lived intercultural problems.

In the present study, we constructed a scenario-based interview protocol that is similarly grounded in real work examples and requires participants to demonstrate culture-general competence by freely generating responses. We have successfully used this kind of approach in the past to compare the cultural reasoning strategies of personnel who had different levels of cross-cultural experience and training (Sieck, Smith, & Rasmussen, 2013). In this scenario-based, structured interview approach, all participants respond to the same set of intercultural scenarios and probes instead of describing their own experiences. This helps to compare across groups of participants with varying levels of intercultural experiences. This aspect is especially important in the current study, as novices will not have any experiences of their own to draw from.

Within the scenario-based interview approach, participants think out loud as they reason through culturally challenging situations (Ericsson & Simon, 1993). This enables us to capture the cognitive behaviors DoD personnel engage in when they use cultural competence to accomplish their missions, along with the words they use to describe them. Capturing what cultural competence looks like in practice allows us to make sure that level descriptions reflect both DoD work demands and language. Doing so helps to ensure that the ARC mastery levels describe practices that can feasibly be carried out within the constraints of DoD jobs. It also helps instructors and other users of the model recognize when a person is expressing the competencies and to what level.

Note that the think aloud method focuses on cognitive performance within social situations, rather than on direct observation of interpersonal interactions per se. This is reasonable, as the cognitive domain typically accounts for most instructional objectives, and is the primary gateway
for delivering and assimilating feedback to develop competence. As described in the discussion, ARC has also been successfully employed to analyze interpersonal interactions in live field exercises.

The core of the interview guide included scenarios describing cross-cultural interactions. We crafted the scenarios so that they presented the opportunity to use the range of ARC competencies and were readily comprehended by participants in different DoD-related jobs. By reviewing critical incident interview data from our past research for DLNSEO, we were able to construct realistic scenarios that describe intercultural interactions occurring within specific missions in a variety of foreign regions.

The interview guide also incorporated two phases of questions for each scenario. The first phase included broad, open-ended questions. During this first questioning pass, interviewers listened for instances when participants spontaneously applied competencies. A second phase included questions to target the specific skills and knowledge pertaining to a competency. These were designed to give participants another opportunity to display their acquired skill.

The interview materials were designed to elicit ARC competencies in a systematic manner from DoD personnel with differing degrees of overseas experience. They gave participants the opportunity to demonstrate their competencies, to the level they have developed them. This approach provided a way to systematically compare performance across groups of interviewees with varying levels of intercultural experiences.

**Sampling criteria.**

We used similar sampling criteria as in our last studies to ensure that we continue to examine culture-general competence, as opposed to region-specific proficiency. In addition, we recruited participants who have different extents of cultural experience in order to ensure that we sample across the continuum of cultural competence development.

High experience personnel had served overseas in high contact roles on multiple assignments, in culturally distinct locations. High contact roles are those that involve intensive daily intercultural interactions, such as advising, mentoring, training, partnering or negotiating with foreign military personnel or civilians. We also strove to recruit participants for this group who have been nominated by peers or supervisors as effective in their high-contact assignments. Intermediate experience personnel served overseas once or twice in a role that involved at least some intercultural interaction. However, these tended to be far less intense than for the high-experience personnel. Low experience personnel had virtually no overseas experiences.

In addition to experience groups, participants came from across the DoD. Specifically, the sample included General Purpose Force (GPF) enlisted and officers from each service, as well as a mix of personnel from SOF, FAO, and Intelligence specialty communities, along with DoD civilians.

**Coding schemes.**

Coding processes are used to obtain quantitative frequencies from verbal report data (Chi, 1997). The coding in our past studies focused on identifying overall cultural competencies, such as Cultural Perspective Taking. But we also expected that there are differences in the manner in which participants apply competencies. In order to support the determination of levels of mastery in the present study, we sought to detect aspects of competence with greater granularity.

Specifically, in previous studies, we coded the presence or absence of competencies within cultural situations the interviewees described. For example, in the case of the competency Cultural
Perspective Taking, there were a number of different types of behaviors participants could engage in that demonstrated this competency (see Table 1).

Table 1. *Study 1 and 2 competency level coding of Cultural Perspective Taking.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior in Data</th>
<th>Competency Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Clearly, there are a lot of different viewpoints out there in the world</em></td>
<td>Cultural Perspective Taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Pole was very diplomatic about it. He didn’t say anything. If I had been sitting in his place, I would have been very offended.</em></td>
<td>Cultural Perspective Taking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Studies 1 and 2, both of these examples were coded as Cultural Perspective Taking. In follow-up qualitative analyses of the data for each code, we then identified specific knowledge and skills associated with each competency (see Appendix 2 in the ARC validation study report, Rasmussen, Sieck, & Duran, 2016).

For the current effort, in order to define levels of mastery, we needed to be able to detect differences in the quality with which participants apply competencies. The knowledge and skills previously specified for each competency in ARC provide a foundation for determining the qualitative degree to which a competency is applied, and therefore for distinguishing between levels of mastery. For example, the two behaviors listed in Table 1 are respective examples of a knowledge element and a skill that supports Cultural Perspective Taking. As illustrated in Table 2, it is possible for a person to understand that people from other cultures view the world differently (knowledge), but they may not have developed the practice of trying to figure out what other people’s thoughts and motivations are when they interact with them (skill; see Table 2). If that is the case, the person may be demonstrating a lower level of Cultural Perspective Taking competence.

Table 2. *Example Cultural Perspective Taking knowledge and skill elements.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior in Data</th>
<th>Knowledge or Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Clearly, there are a lot of different viewpoints out there in the world</em></td>
<td>Understands that people with different backgrounds view events differently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Pole was very diplomatic about it. He didn’t say anything. If I had been sitting in his place, I would have been very offended.</em></td>
<td>Attempts to consider the point of view of others during intercultural interactions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hence, in the present study, we developed more refined coding schemes that allowed us to identify aspects of competence at the level of knowledge and skills that make up each competency. The current coding schemes included detailed descriptions of the verbal indicators of knowledge and skill elements in ARC (see Table 3 for examples). These descriptions enabled analysts to reliably identify demonstrated knowledge and skills in the data.
Table 3. Example verbal indicators for knowledge and skill level coding of Cultural Perspective Taking.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge/Skill Definitions</th>
<th>Example Verbal Indicator Descriptions</th>
<th>Behavioral Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands that people with different backgrounds view events differently</td>
<td>States that there are differences in people’s perspectives or the ways they think</td>
<td>Clearly, there are a lot of different viewpoints out there in the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts to consider the point of view of others during intercultural interactions</td>
<td>Describes another’s thoughts, feelings, desires, or experiences Uses the word ‘perspective’ or imagines being in another’s place</td>
<td>The Pole was very diplomatic about it. He didn’t say anything. If I had been sitting in his place, I would have been very offended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses cultural knowledge to adjust expected way people from that culture view events</td>
<td>Uses cultural constructs, ideas, beliefs, customs, norms, or values in descriptions of another’s perspective</td>
<td>They have this notion of cultural “machismo” which means they’re coming from the view of “we don’t need any help, we can figure it out ourselves.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extending our coding to the level of knowledge and skills allows us to detect differences in the quality with which participants apply competencies. And, this provided a solid basis for establishing mastery levels.

**Analysis approach.**

The knowledge and skill level coding of the data yields prevalence, or frequency of occurrence values for specific knowledge and skills associated with the cultural competencies. These values provide an empirical basis for determining levels of mastery.

In general, it is possible to empirically determine the mastery level for an element of knowledge or skill by comparing groups that are at different stages of cultural competence development, and determining which groups display the element to a greater or lesser extent. We describe how such competence groups can be operationally defined shortly.

First, to understand the comparison process, consider two hypothetical skills, “Skill A” and “Skill B.” For Skill A, only a small percentage of the group associated with lower competence displays the skill. Also, the skill is common among intermediate and high competence groups. As the skill first appears in the intermediate group, the evidence suggests the element belongs in mid-level mastery. For Skill B, few people are showing the skill. It is only commonly witnessed in the high group. Hence, Skill B maps to the highest level of mastery (see Table 4).
Table 4. Example of Determining Mastery Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competency Groups</th>
<th>Skill Placement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill A</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill B</td>
<td>Few</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This approach ensures that definitions of the criteria that would put a person at a certain level are based on empirical evidence, and so provides a solid foundation for cultural competence training delivery and assessment.

In the current study, it would be reasonable to use experience groups as an operational definition for overall competence. For example, consistent with our sampling criteria, Chang and colleagues found that cross-cultural adaptability increased with sojourns involving high levels of involvement, such as work assignments and longer-term stays (Chang, Yuan, & Chuang, 2013; also see Wolff & Borzikowsky, 2018). In the present study, for instance, the high experience group could stand in as the high competence group. Although the operational and theoretical assignments may not overlap perfectly, we would expect close agreement given the exceedingly stringent sampling criteria adopted for this research. However, modern statistical techniques enable us to improve on this approach, and more precisely specify overall competence groups for comparison purposes. We discuss these techniques further in the quantitative data analysis section.

In addition to quantitative analyses, we also conducted qualitative analyses of the verbal report data. Qualitative thematic analyses were used to look for previously unidentified knowledge and skill items for each competency, as well as pertinent contextual factors that may influence skill placement. For example, examining the novices’ verbal reports helped us to identify misconceptions and behaviors not seen in the highly skilled participants we studied previously.

Taken together, the quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data have allowed us to develop empirically derived mastery level definitions, as well as concrete behavioral examples of the knowledge and skills that characterize each level of mastery. The results of the qualitative analysis include narrative accounts that provide illustration of the revised version of ARC (see the Results section).

Method

Participants

Ninety-one personnel who had varying degrees of experience working with members of other cultures participated in the study. In the following sections we first describe our approach for recruiting participants. Then we provide an overview of the overall characteristics of the sample.
Recruiting.

We used stratified sampling to recruit groups of participants who had different degrees of cross-cultural experience. Specifically, we established strict criteria to delineate high, intermediate, and low experience groups, and recruited approximately equal numbers of participants from each group.

The high experience group included participants who had three or more extended overseas assignments (each of at least 6 months duration) that required daily interactions either with members of the local populations, foreign partners, or both. Participants in this group were additionally required to have lived and worked in at least two different regions in the world. Finally, we also strove to recruit participants who had been nominated by peers or supervisors as effective in their high-contact assignments. High contact roles are those that involve daily work focused on collaboration with local and foreign partners, such as for example advising, mentoring, training, or partnering with foreign military personnel or civilians.

Participants in the intermediate experience group had at least one extended overseas assignment that involved only casual or occasional work-related interactions with foreigners. Participants in the low experience group had no significant experiences abroad.

We used these stringent criteria for defining the experience groups to ensure that we sampled across the continuum of cultural competence development that currently exists within the DoD. In addition to experience groups, we recruited participants from across the DoD. Specifically, the sample included Officer and enlisted GPF personnel from each service, as well as DoD Civilians, and personnel from each of the following specialty communities: SOF, FAO, and Intelligence Professionals.

We used a hybrid recruiting procedure that involved reaching prospective participants both through the research team’s professional networks and through contacts to leadership within DoD programs and organizations. We have used this procedure successfully in the past to recruit culturally experienced personnel (see Rasmussen, Sieck, and Duran, 2016).

As a first step in recruiting, we initially reached out to a small set of personal contacts within our team’s existing social networks. These were well-respected individuals within each of the DoD communities we were sampling from. Some of these contacts themselves met our sampling criteria and participated in an interview. Others did not meet the criteria, but instead knew others who did, and were willing to reach out to those individuals.

We also reached out to service culture centers and LREC programs, as well as individuals in supervisory positions within a variety of DoD organizations. These contacts passed instructions for participating to individuals within their organizations who were qualified and potentially interested. Each time we finished an interview with a participant, we asked them if they knew others who did, and were willing to reach out to those individuals.

To ensure that participation remained voluntary, we provided a standard email script to share for all outreach. This email script specified that interested parties should contact the research team.

Smaller groups of participants were recruited from the following organizations:

- John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School (JFKSWCS)
- Air Force Culture and Language Center/ Language Enabled Airman Program (LEAP)
- USMC 2nd Radio Battalion
- HAF/A1D-LREC, AF Language, Regional Expertise, and Culture Office
This recruiting approach ensured the potential inclusion of a broad array of the agencies, organizations, commands, units, etc. that exist within the DoD. And, it allowed us to reach personnel in a wide range of occupational specialties, such as, to name a few, combat pilots, Navy SEALs, submarine Captains, interrogators, intelligence specialists, human resources specialists, public affairs specialists, and construction engineers who had worked overseas to support a variety of overseas missions, such as combat missions, humanitarian missions, security force assistance, and diplomacy.

As only a small number of participants were identified within each organization and most participants were reached individually through professional networks, the final sample is a diverse segment of the DoD population.

Characteristics of the sample.

The final sample included 91 participants drawn from three different overseas experience groups, as defined above. High-experience participants \((n = 30)\) completed an average of 6.3 overseas assignments greater than six months in duration. They had resided in an average of 4 places outside of the United States and spent an average of 10.4 total years abroad. Participants in the intermediate experience group \((n = 31)\) completed, on average, 1.7 extended assignments in 1.5 locations. They spent 4.5 total years abroad, on average. None of the participants in the low experience group \((n = 30)\) had been on an assignment greater than six months, and they had spent virtually no time \((M = .003\) years) outside of the United States.

With respect to locations visited, most of the participants in both the intermediate and high experience groups had worked in Iraq or Afghanistan, and often both. However, across the sample participants had worked and engaged interculturally all over the world, in countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, and South America.

Participants in the intermediate experience group mentioned a total of 47 six-month or longer assignments in 16 unique countries. Participants in the high experience group mentioned a total of 160 six-month or longer assignments in 47 unique countries. Across the sample, participants reported experience working in 51 unique countries. Figure 1 shows the 20 countries participants mentioned most frequently as places they had worked.

Many participants in the high experience group had worked overseas most of their careers. Those whose work also included frequent, shorter trips, chose to summarize those, saying for example “numerous shorter assignments in Europe and Asia.” Also, participants who had been stationed in places like Japan, Germany, and Italy often used those installations as jumping off points for assignments in other areas. For example, one participant who had a 9-year assignment in Japan shared that he had worked in Korea, Philippines, Thailand, Australia, and East Timor during those years. However, not all participants chose to provide details on all the places they traveled to from permanent duty stations overseas. As a result, estimates of the duration and variety of participants’ overseas experience are conservative.
Many personnel belong to multiple DoD communities over the course of their careers. For example, we found that it was common both for FAO and SOF personnel to work in Intelligence fields. We also came across several personnel who had transitioned from active duty careers to civilian careers in which they continued to work overseas for the DoD and other U.S. government organizations. A great example was a Middle East FAO who was also an intelligence professional and was currently working for the DoD in a civilian capacity. For purposes of analysis, we tabulated all the communities that each participant belonged to.

Twelve participants belonged to the FAO community (13%), 34 to the intelligence community (37%), and 18 to the SOF community (20%). Ten (11%) had worked overseas in civilian capacities either as defense contractors, other government service, in support of non-DoD organizations such as the State Department, Department of Homeland Security, and the United Nations, or had completed study abroad as preparation for foreign service positions.

Overall, 41 participants were officers (45%) and 41 were enlisted (45%). The remaining 8 (9%) were ROTC cadets. The lowest enlisted rank was E2 and highest E8; the median enlisted rank was E5. The lowest officer rank was O1 and the highest O6; the median officer rank was O5.

Forty-eight percent of the participants had Army service records (n = 44), 13% were in the Navy (n = 12), 21% were in the Marine Corps (n = 19), and 11% were in the Air Force (n = 10).

With respect to background, 9% of the sample reported having a bicultural upbringing, meaning they had spent at least a decade of their childhood outside the U.S. or had grown up in the U.S. with first-generation immigrant parents. Forty-six percent of the sample had spent at least nine months in a foreign language program after High School. Fourteen percent were female.

![Figure 1. Number of mentions for 20 most frequently visited countries.](image-url)
Materials

The materials consisted of a set of brief scenario exercises and accompanying interview guide. The scenarios were constructed based on data from previous critical incident interviews. The focus of the previous interviews was on challenging intercultural interactions that highly experienced DoD personnel encountered during their overseas assignments. The scenario exercises were representative of real-world challenges faced by DOD members, providing important cognitive components, such as key decision opportunities, background context, social cues, and objectives. In addition, a variety of locations, job situations, and foreigner roles were represented across the set of scenarios. Foreigner roles included civilian members of the local populace, tribal leaders, local officials, and partnered forces.

Each of the scenario exercises were constructed to align with specific ARC competencies. That is, the central dilemmas included in different scenarios were intended to tap into distinct aspects of cultural competence. In addition, the interview guide contained a set of open-ended questions that were also designed to obtain detailed information about specific competency areas. Importantly, there were not clear right and wrong actions or answers to the scenario problems. And no “multiple choice” options were given. Instead, the free-response exercises provided opportunities to reveal thought processes associated with cultural competence. The questions corresponding to each scenario were asked systematically in every interview, following a structured interview protocol.

Further information about the process for constructing the scenario exercises is given in the next section. Here, we provide an example of scenario exercises that target the Self-Directs own Cultural Learning and Perspective Taking competencies respectively:

**Sitting Bangladeshis**

You’ve studied a list of local norms and customs in preparation for your upcoming deployment to Bangladesh. One of the rules is not to show the bottoms of your feet to another person, as this act is seen as offensive. Shortly after arriving you find yourself as part of a team meeting with locals in a village.

You notice that during the meeting your teammate is sitting cross-legged on the ground exposing the bottoms of his feet to the local leaders. The Bangladeshis do not appear to be offended.

1. How do you interpret the situation?

**Jordanian Commander**

You are part of a U.S. team that has been assigned to train Jordanian forces. When it comes time for the final evaluation of the Jordanians’ urban house clearing skills, you and your teammates rig a building with traps and different obstacles. The Jordanians’ task; go in and secure it.

The day before the exercise, the Jordanian commander comes to you with a request. Could you take him and his team on a walkthrough of the building before they go in tomorrow?
1. What would you do?
2. What do you think is going on with the Jordanian commander?
3. What would he be thinking?

Scenario-Task Construction

We constructed scenarios based on data gathered from previous ARC competency model development studies. The purpose of reviewing the data was to ensure that final scenario exercises were representative of real-world challenges faced by DOD members, providing important context, cues, and goals. The interview data came from participants with backgrounds that varied in job, rank, experience, and location. This allowed us to construct scenarios to apply to a diverse assortment of participants. A set of scenarios covering all 12 competencies and their existing knowledge and skills was developed. As described below, we followed an iterative process to create multiple scenarios targeting each competency (see Figure 2).
Review interview data.

In the first step of the scenario development process, we reviewed critical incident interview data from our past studies of cultural competence. These data yield a wealth of raw information from which to construct scenarios. They do not, however, provide ready-made scenarios. Although critical incident interviews tap into real incidents people have experienced, people don’t report their experiences in a linear, straightforward way that highlights all the relevant details for our purpose. Instead, the interview process includes multiple rounds of questioning to elicit the relevant detail, which is shared in piecemeal fashion. In addition, the intent is not to use the exact accounts people report, but rather to draw on those experiences as a basis for constructing comparable, representative scenarios.

Figure 2. Overview of the scenario development process.
We examined interview transcripts and notes to tease out key events and cognitive components related to competencies of interest. The fragments obtained included critical decisions and assessments regarding intercultural interactions, background factors and conditions in the environment, with an eye towards those that made the intercultural interactions challenging, and perceptual cues that were noticed in the immediate situation that influenced the original decisions or assessments made. We focused on aspects of the accounts that exercise particular cultural competencies in ARC. For example, in order to test sensitivity to source validity and engagement in source evaluation, we noted questionable information sources described within the original interviews.

**Construct draft scenario exercises.**

Members of the research team drafted an initial set of brief scenarios, comprised of several sentences up to 3 short paragraphs, along with accompanying probe questions. Scenario authors targeted specific ARC competency knowledge and skill elements that were intended by each scenario exercise. The idea was to make sure the scenarios cumulatively provided the opportunity for participants to exercise all the knowledge and skill elements for the target competency.

The process for authoring scenarios was, first, to decide on the key problem to focus on. Next, a quick introduction was sketched to briefly set the scene with a few background details to clarify the general setting. Then, the author worked out the sequence of actions and events leading up to the main decision or assessment to be faced in the exercise. Throughout the storyline, scenario authors wove in cognitive components relevant to the target competency, as previously identified in the interview data review. Authors also determined elements to leave out of the description to test participant assumptions and attempt to vary the difficulty. A general tension was to create scenario exercises that were sufficiently open-ended so as not to appear too obvious or leading, while including enough structure to tap into relevant aspects of cultural competence.

In addition to writing the body of the scenario, authors also drafted a series of open-ended questions to complete the exercise. These typically started with a general decision or assessment probe, such as “What would you do?” or “What do you think is going on?” Subsequent questions were written to elicit more details on the participants’ decision-making considerations and rationale. In addition, specific probes were occasionally introduced to directly elicit competency-oriented responses. These were used sparingly and only included later in the sequence, as they added a layer of scaffolding that supported the production of a competency. That is, they introduced another variation on difficulty which was captured in the coding process.

Finally, the scenario exercise authors wrote two kinds of possible answers to the scenarios as a check on plausibility. First, they wrote a focal response, which included information what the expression of the competency might look like. Then, they wrote an alternative response, one that did not include the target competency. When authors were not able to generate plausible alternatives, they reexamined the scenario and revised or replaced it.

**Review, select, and revise exercises.**

Once initial drafts were completed, researchers engaged in several rounds of review and revision of the scenarios. Drafts were shared among team members and reviewed for potential issues:

- Overall alignment between scenario and focal competency
- Whether the exercise included a problem or dilemma that tapped higher level cognitive processing
• Specific scenario word choices, including emphasis or de-emphasis of cues and contextual factors that affected scenario clarity and difficulty
• Appropriate generality and specificity of the line of questioning
• Plausibility of the focal and alternative responses
• Whether a plausible focal response clearly indicated the target knowledge and skills
• Applicability of scenario exercise to a range of experience levels, and its ability to adequately differentiate levels of experience

Once any problems were identified, the scenario exercises were revised or replaced, as needed. In addition to checking these primary potential problem areas, reviewers also considered whether scenario exercises captured any other competencies, or other knowledge and skill items from the same competency. The reviewers also considered alternative ways to modify the exercises to more effectively elicit competency information. They also attempted to generate other ideas for better approaches to target the intended competencies. At the end of this phase, researchers had prepared and vetted a set of scenario exercises covering the knowledge and skills items of all 12 competencies.

Pilot test exercises.
In the last phase of the scenario development process, we conducted pilot tests to empirically check the adequacy of the exercises. We relied on our existing contacts, including former interviewees to serve as participants for this purpose. The primary aim of the pilot was to ensure reasonable coverage of competencies across scenarios. We also took note of the following during these sessions:

• Flow and order of the exercises
• Time to answer each exercise and overall time of the sessions
• Indicators of competency expression
• Unanticipated sample responses to the scenarios
• Any questions or lack of clarity in the scenarios
• Any issues with line of questioning for each scenario

Finally, we modified the materials based on the pilot outcomes and participant feedback given to construct the final interview guide used in the study.

Procedure
Participants were interviewed individually in a private session with a researcher, and informed consent was obtained. The researcher explained that they were interested in how people thought through challenging situations that involve interactions with members of foreign populations. Fifty-nine interviews were conducted face-to-face, and the rest were completed by video conference.

Participants were asked to provide information on their background and professional history, focusing on their overseas assignments and experiences. Participants were then presented with short scenarios, one at a time. For each, they were asked to read the scenario, and describe their understanding of the situation or what they would do. Participants were then asked additional...
open-ended questions to elicit more detailed descriptions of their thoughts and reactions to the scenario.

All participants were presented with the same scenarios and questions, per a structured interview protocol. The interviews were audio recorded with the permission of the participants. Each session lasted about two hours.

Data Preparation and Analysis

Data Preparation

The interviews were transcribed by human transcriptionists. The resulting interview transcripts were between 11 and 43 pages long (single-spaced), with an average length of 22 pages. Each transcript contained between 3,614 and 25,872 words, with an average of 9,404 words. Each transcript was scrubbed of any information that could be used to identify the participant. If participants named other individuals during the course of the interview, such as people they had interacted with in the course of their own experiences, such information was removed as well.

The participants’ responses were analyzed separately for each scenario to promote reliability. In preparation, we reorganized the transcript data by scenario, collecting all of the participant responses to a given scenario together in a single file. We then segmented the textual data, such that each response to an interview question was defined as a single unit of analysis for coding and data processing. Each of the interview segments had the potential to include the expression of one or more competency items.

Development of Task-Specific Coding Schemes

We developed coding schemes for each of the scenario tasks. The individual codes for each scheme indicated distinct knowledge and skill elements that pertained to the task. Data from the coding offers evidence to determine how the knowledge and skill elements map on to levels of mastery.

An alternative to the task-based approach for coding would have been to create a general coding scheme that would apply across all tasks and competencies. However, we adopted the task-specific approach to reduce the cognitive load on analysts performing the coding and enhance reliability of the results.

We created 25 task-specific coding schemes to manage the wealth of information generated from the interviews. These were fine grained schemes, focusing on actions and concepts that indicated specific knowledge and skills in the context of the scenario tasks. The coding schemes were constructed following an iterative process. First, senior members of the team selected interview responses from nine participants (three from each experience level) to form a block of data to support the development. For each scenario, a senior researcher conducted a thematic analysis on the development data block to identify task specific indicators of knowledge and skills. Based on the analysis, the researcher then prepared a draft coding scheme for that particular task. The scheme was then reviewed by another senior researcher, and revisions suggested. The revised scheme was then tested by having two analysts independently code the development data block. The two analysts then engaged in a consensus process, in which they identified and resolved disagreements. At this point, they requested any clarifications from the coding scheme author. In
addition to testing the coding guide, this trial coding process also served to train the analysts on the scheme. Once the consensus process was complete, the analysts gave any remaining feedback, which was incorporated as minor tweaks to the codes or instructions for improved clarity. This finalized the coding scheme for the scenario task.

**Coding Knowledge and Skill Indicators**

Analysts followed a structured process to code the verbal report data that pertained to each of 25 task-specific coding schemes. For each segment of data, analysts first read the response to the interview question. They then reviewed the knowledge and skill indicators included in the coding scheme, one by one, and made an independent presence or absence decision for each. More than one indicator could be applied to the same segment. Each code was assigned an indicator variable (1 or 0) to denote presence or absence of a knowledge or skill element. These codes formed the basis for the quantitative analyses.

Reliability checks were conducted on 16% of the total responses. After training on an initial block of data as part of the coding scheme development process, pairs of analysts independently coded additional data segments to determine inter-rater reliability. Across the coding schemes, the mean percent agreement was 91% (min 87%, max 96%).

After completing each round of reliability coding, analysts engaged in a consensus process to continue the development of consistent coding practices. For this process, analysts first compared their coding results and identified points of confusion or disagreement. Then, for each coding disagreement, they discussed their individual rationales and came to a consensus regarding the applicability of any knowledge and skill indicators to the segment.

Lastly, the remaining data were divided among the analysts, who completed coding following the scheme for the scenario-task at hand. In all, 267 knowledge and skill indicators were coded across the ARC competencies. In addition to the formal coding, analysts made note of any strategies or activities that the participants were engaging in that appeared related to cultural competence, but were not captured by the current task-specific coding scheme. These notes were reviewed again as part of the qualitative analysis (see the Results section).

**Experience and Competence Groups**

The overall aim of the quantitative analysis is to determine which levels are indicated by each of the codes corresponding to knowledge and skill indicators in ARC. A straightforward way to do that is to use experience level as a proxy for overall cultural competence, and so determine how the codes discriminate between experience levels. For example, if far more high experience participants express the skill indicated by the code than do low and medium experience participants, that provides evidence the skill is Level 3, rather than Level 1 or 2.

However, we improved on this approach by refining the groups so that they are more directly associated with competence. Specifically, we can think of participants as belonging to underlying subgroups that represent different degrees of overall competence. Further, the participants’ group associations are not known, though we expect them to be correlated with the experience levels defined in the present study.

We can thus refine the analysis approach by first identifying these underlying competence groups, and then using those as the basis for comparisons. Specifically, we can use a statistical technique known as finite mixture modeling (FMM) to identify overall competence groups based
only on the data collected (McLachlan & Peel, 2000). That is, the FMM method allows us to represent clusters of participants within the sample who responded to the scenarios in similar ways.

The statistical theory involved in FMM is well-understood, and several software packages are available for fitting mixture models. We used the FlexMix package in the R statistical programming language to conduct the analysis and represent the underlying competency groups (Leisch, 2004). As input to the analysis, we first aggregated the competency indicator variables into a single overall measure of cultural competence. Then, we used the R statistical package FlexMix to fit mixtures of Gaussian distributions to the data set, with one to three possible component groups. The Bayes Information Criterion (BIC) statistic was used to determine the best mixture of components. In general, a lower BIC implies a better fitting model. For this data set, the minimum BIC was achieved with a mixture of three components (min BIC = 3662.5), indicating the presence of three distinct competency groups. We refer to these as low, medium, and high overall competency groups.

Competency group level was highly correlated with experience group level \( (r = .62, p < .0001) \). Nevertheless, competency grouping assignment based on the FMM results was more restrictive than the experience groups. Specifically, the three overall competency groups included 39, 31, and 21 participants, with the fewest number in the high group. Also, a follow-up analysis found that background characteristics, including specialization, officer status, and gender were not significantly related to overall competence, after accounting for experience group.

In subsequent analyses, we use these derived overall competency groups to achieve purer comparisons of code use than would be afforded by experience groups.

**Mapping Knowledge and Skills to Mastery Levels**

To summarize, at this point in the process, we coded the verbal report data for indicators of knowledge and skill for each of the competencies. The result is a quantitative data set with frequencies of knowledge and skill that pertain to each competency. Then, we determined overall competence groups using the FMM statistical technique. This step resulted in high, medium, and low competence groups. These constitute a refinement of the experience groups to use for knowledge and skill comparisons.

In the next step of the analysis, we compared the frequencies between the overall competence groups to determine how knowledge and skills map onto competency levels. That is, we examined the patterns of results to determine whether each knowledge/skill indicator was discriminating between Less Skilled and Proficient, or between Proficient and Master levels. In general, a code was taken to indicate Master level performance when it was observed more often for the high group than in the low and medium groups. When a knowledge/skill indicator appeared more frequently in the medium and high groups than in the low group, it was mapped to the Proficient level.

Two codes that indicate specific knowledge and skills are provided in Table 5 for illustration. The first knowledge/skill indicator pertains to the “Self-Directs own Cultural Learning” competency. The second is for the “Takes Perspective of Others in Intercultural Situations” competency.
As can be seen in Table 5, the pattern of results suggests the first knowledge/skill indicator discriminates the low from the medium and high overall competence groups for the Self-Directed Learning competency. This result implies that the knowledge/skill item belongs in the Proficient level.

The second code discriminates the low and medium groups from the high overall competence group for the Takes Perspective competency. This suggests that the knowledge/skill item belongs in the Master level description.

In order to check the mapping from knowledge/skill indicators to the Master level, we aggregated them into an overall measure of Level 3 competence. Similarly, we combined knowledge/skill indicators mapped to the Proficient level into an overall measure of Level 2 competence. The two sets of measures were created for each of the ARC competencies. In addition, the measures were standardized using z-scores to promote comparability across levels and competencies. Standardized variables have a mean of zero and standard deviation of one. Hence, negative values reflect scores below the overall sample average, and positive values reflect above average scores.

The Results section shows the Level 2 and Level 3 standardized measures for each competency. To check the mapping assignments, we tested whether the mean Level 2 measures for the high and medium groups exceed those from the low group. Also, we tested whether the mean Level 3 measures for the high group exceed those of the medium and low groups. Specifically, we used Helmert contrasts to test these planned comparisons (Chambers & Hastie, 1992). Helmert contrasts compare the second level of a factor with the first. And, they compare the third level of a factor with the average of the first two levels. Helmert comparisons are reported as t-tests.

As will be shown in the Results section, the mean Level 2 competency scores for the medium and high groups are significantly greater than those of the low group. And this pattern of results holds for each of the competencies. Likewise, the mean Level 3 competency scores for the high group are significantly larger than for the medium and low groups. These results provide evidence that the knowledge and skills are mapped to the appropriate competency level descriptions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge or Skill Indicator</th>
<th>Overall Competence Groups</th>
<th>Mapped Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario - Sitting Bangladesh</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learns independently by observing people on the ground</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scenario - Jordanian Commander</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses social, cultural, and situational factors to adjust expected way people from that culture view events</td>
<td></td>
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Table 5. Example Knowledge and Skill indicators and associated levels.
In addition to the quantitative comparisons, we conducted qualitative analyses to refine and amplify the level descriptions. Qualitative review additionally enabled us to derive examples and develop a coherent account of the systematic differences that were uncovered by the statistical results. In this part of the analysis, the researchers reviewed the transcripts of verbal report data to determine the strategies participants in the three groups used to think about intercultural challenges, to make decisions and to engage. In addition, researchers scrutinized responses that did not receive knowledge or skill codes in order to uncover and better characterize thoughts and actions that pertain to the Less Skilled level.

Finally, we wrote descriptions of the three Mastery levels for each competency based on the evidence from the quantitative and qualitative results. The Mastery level descriptions resulting from this extensive process are presented in the Appendix. Detailed findings from the analysis are presented next in the Results section.

Results

For each of the ARC competencies, we present quantitative comparisons as a check on the competency level definitions. We then provide descriptions of the ways different levels of cultural competence are expressed, supported by excerpts from the participants’ think-aloud protocols.

Maintains a Mission Orientation

Master.

Figure 3 illustrates the Level 3 Mission Orientation standardized scores by overall competence group. As can be seen, scores for the High competence group were about a standard deviation above the sample average, whereas the Low and Medium group scores fell slightly below the mean. Planned Helmert contrasts indicated that the high overall competence group differed significantly from the average of the medium and low groups, t(88) = 6.43, p < .001. However, no significant difference was found between the medium and low competence groups, t(88) = 1.29, ns. The results indicate that the knowledge and skill items are reasonably assigned to the Master Level.

![Figure 3. Mean Level 3 Mission Orientation (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)
Master level responses show an understanding that developing and sustaining relationships with members of local cultures or foreign partners support mission accomplishment. In such responses, participants talk about building intercultural relationships to achieve mission objectives, rather than describe relationships that are good to have for their own sake.

Additionally, at the Master level, responses demonstrate that participants are purposefully seeking strategic relationships that can fulfill specific needs—such as for example provide information, buy-in, or leverage.

In the example below, a participant describes a strategy for locating an individual who can fill such a role. Someone with whom developing a relationship can be valuable to the mission. In this case, they consider the social standing an individual has with their own people to ensure they are someone who can help garner support for future mission-related activities.

Well, I need to understand the structure of the area that I’m working in, meaning who are the village leaders, the provincial leaders? How do the people respond to them? Do they respect them and when they speak they listen? Then I would start there and develop those relationships. If the leader in the area is a police captain that’s very corrupt and the people don’t trust, don’t like I would try and find the unspoken leader and not necessary use that guy who is perceived as corrupt as the guy who I’m going to get information. Does that make sense?... A lot of times the village elder will be the guy who’s sitting back just listening and he’ll put a spokesman upfront just to watch him see how I interact with him, so it’s important to be sensitive to that. [P48]

At the Master level, responses also show concern for maintaining existing beneficial relationships. In tasks that require decision making, responses show explicit consideration of potential effects actions or messages might have on relationships that could be important to the mission.

You can’t really call him out. I think the better thing to do is to find a solution that way both parties win instead of calling him out, making a big deal about it and him just getting mad and then that whole advice and assist just got broken up and everything you worked up to just got shattered over some tents. [P37]

Responses also demonstrate that participants are not seeking out relationships based on the perceived positive traits of the cultural other, for example, people that are “likeable.” In fact, many responses at the Master level show willingness to overlook character traits that are perceived as negative if the relationship will support mission advancement.

In the example below, the participant indicates that they would not interfere in a confrontation between a Korean Private and Captain. In this situation, the participant deems that the Captain is taking an unacceptable action but weighs which is the most valuable relationship to preserve in this situation.

I wouldn’t do anything to jeopardize the relationship with the Captain. What’s the Private going to do for me? Can the Private agree to work with me as a liaison? No. Would I like it? No. I know that sucks. [...] But you’re going to have to violate some international law. [Otherwise] I will not compromise a mission that’s going to be diplomatic for both nations. And I wouldn’t compromise that because of some
kid being cold and having to wash cars. [...] You know you’re going to see some screwed-up shit. [But], for us, the relationship is the most important thing. I need you to work with me. [P25]

Master level responses also demonstrate the ability to recognize situations where mission objectives conflict with cultural norms. These responses include solutions or courses of action that manage that conflict.

In the following example, a participant responds to a scenario where a partner military commander requests a preview of the challenges in an upcoming final training exercise designed by the U.S. In the response, the participant demonstrates that they understand the tension between what the exercise is trying to accomplish—test the soldiers’ skills—and how the test might be viewed within the culture. The participant ultimately manages the conflict by accommodating the request but leaving it up to the foreign commander whether he passes on the information.

You have to understand that Royal Jordanian Forces because they are under the scrutiny of their leadership they don’t want to – they have to save face and you may turn around and just walk them through the building. As long as they grasp the training, the fact that you are giving them a set of unknowns may put them in a – the loss of the messing up and having an accident during the dog and pony show would basically lose any value added that you have gained of their trust, of their cooperation. [...] You would have lost any of the nation building goals, any of the camaraderie that you would have built.

What I would recommend is I would probably take the commander through and not necessarily his team and show him that we’re not giving them anything that they are not ready to handle and let him make that decision. If he passes the information on to his team so be it. [P52]

In this example, the participant accommodates the request, and gives the foreign commander a walk-through of the challenges. Another participant, who also demonstrated the ability to recognize culture-mission conflicts, handled the situation differently. In the next example, the participant turns down the request, but, recognizing the conflict, they still proceed in a way that is sensitive to the issue.

My answer would be no. I would certainly explain the reasoning for it and why it’s necessary for it to be – you wouldn’t want any inadvertent – not that I would expect that they would share what they saw, but I would certainly want to preclude them inadvertently disclosing anything so that they have as realistic experience as possible and that any surprises that are planned are kept a surprise, because that is what’s necessary to fully evaluate their competency in the drill.

I would anticipate this. And again, this is very common in the parts of the world that I’m familiar with that there is a certain zero-defects mentality when it comes to maintaining one’s face and it wouldn’t reflect well upon the commander or his senior staff if the team did poorly. Therefore, they would want to have a little bit of insurance that that wouldn’t happen, that their team wouldn’t fare poorly and that they would have a fighting chance to go through this thing and shine because that
reflects upon the commander and the commander’s ability to maintain face not only in front of his forces, but in front of his seniors. In a lot of countries, particularly in that part of the world, your ability to move up depends a lot upon your ability to please your seniors, and one way to not please them is to do poorly on those sorts of evaluations. I would anticipate that what he’s trying to do is get a leg up on the game. Recognizing that I wouldn’t want to call attention to that, but I would want to deflect that and present it in a way that in fact we want to protect him and his staff from inspecting the process in anyway inadvertently. [P40]

It is important to note that in general, the tactical, operational, or strategic decision that is made in a certain situation does not by itself necessarily determine or reveal whether cultural competence is applied. That is, a response can demonstrate a cultural skill whether someone’s action or decision is ultimately accommodating or disobliging. This makes it possible to determine that a skill is applied without establishing whether a particular decision made is ‘right or wrong.’

**Proficient.**

Figure 4 displays the Level 2 Mission Orientation standardized scores by overall competence group. As shown, the high and medium groups had significantly larger Level 2 Mission Orientation than did the low group, \( t(88) = 4.21, p < .001 \). However, no significant difference was found between the medium and high groups, \( t(88) = 0.06, ns \). The results suggest that the knowledge and skills in the Proficient Level definition, described below, adequately discriminate responses as intended.

![Figure 4. Mean Level 2 Mission Orientation (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

Proficient level responses show that participants set relationship goals and direct efforts toward developing rapport and relationships with members of other cultures. These responses focus on building rapport for the sake of “getting along” with members of the host culture, generating good will, and being “good guests” in general.

Proficient responses reveal that participants have the sense that it is good to have people on your side. But these responses do not indicate that relationships are strategically developed as a means to achieve mission objectives. Responses show that individuals at this level tend to decide who and how to engage based on judgments of character traits (such as for example courage,
competence, honesty, loyalty, or moral fortitude). If cultural others behave in ways that are perceived as incompetent, dishonest, or immoral, then they are not readily perceived as individuals with whom to develop rapport and relationships, indicating that the individual neglects to recognize the potential value of the relationship to the mission. In the example below, the participant describes a general goal to connect with local people to make friends and have someone in your corner.

Getting on a personal basis with people, especially when you’re new to an area, it’s nice to have friends anywhere you go. So, getting to know them personally would build a bond between us for sure hopefully, whether good or bad. And so, it’s always nice to have somebody on your side when you go somewhere foreign, somewhere that you’re not familiar with. [P54]

At the Proficient level, responses show a concern for maintaining relationships with members of the host culture. These responses reveal that participants pay attention to the status of existing relationships and repair them as needed. But, again, these activities are not driven by mission objectives.

In the example below a participant describes their course of action for repairing the potential damage caused during a social interaction with partner forces, in an effort to continue ‘getting along.’

Try to find out what I said because apparently it made things awkward enough for them to leave so I could have either disrespected them or upset them in some type of way. After I’ve found that out, try to go up to them and apologize and let them know that I only [know] a little bit of Spanish and that I was learning and made sure that things were okay basically because once again they are partner forces, so you want to get along with them. [P63]

At the Proficient level, participants also indicate that they have developed an understanding of specific ways cultural information can help you achieve mission objectives. That is, they are aware of practical ways cultural information could be used to accomplish tasks. For example, being able to demonstrate that you know a little about some key political players in a region and talking to partners about them can give you a read on their loyalties.

Responses at the Proficient level also show that participants pay attention to mission boundaries when working in foreign cultures. Specifically, they appear aware that making other cultures more ‘American’ was not part of the mission. That includes recognizing that American rules and values should not be imposed on locals, and a need to stay out of situations that ‘are not our business,’ as in the example below.

Let [the confrontation between Korean Captain and Private] happen, in this case. I mean, it’s not necessarily my job to correct somebody else when we’re in their country and this is obviously an internal matter. I mean, it’s not my job and it’s not my place, unless he’s about to kill the kid, to try to intercede because this is just how they do things. [P22]
In addition, responses at this level indicate the ability to recognize when local ideas or solutions ‘work’ within a given situation. These responses include tempering expectations about what local solutions should look like in the context of trying to accomplish the mission.

I think you’ve just got to balance, and it’s really hard and it may sound counterintuitive, but sometimes you’ve got to be, in this case, “Iraqi good enough.” If he can get to a 60-70 percent solution on his own, that’s better than an American doing it for a 100 percent solution in my opinion, depending on the circumstances of who he’s impacting. [P9]

**Less Skilled.**

Less Skilled responses were those that did not meet the standards set in the Proficient or Master level definitions. We examined those responses as part of the qualitative analysis to determine suitable descriptors to define the level. Less Skilled responses demonstrated that participants were hyper-focused on task completion. At this level, participants did not appear to recognize relationships as levers for accomplishing mission relevant tasks. Further, they did not consider possible effects of decisions and actions on relationships. As a result, these responses in general showed less flexibility in how tasks were accomplished.

The following example can be compared to the preceding Proficient example. In both examples, the participants thought through a situation where they were working closely with a higher-ranking Iraqi partner who was not taking initiative in his job as an intelligence officer. Whereas at the Proficient level, responses considered flexibility in accepting a local solution to achieve mission objectives, Less Skilled responses demonstrated a “my way or the highway” approach. The response below dismisses the partner for not behaving in line with expectations and shows no consideration for relationship maintenance.

If you seem capable, but then when it comes time to do your job and you’re not able to, then you need to be moved out of that position. You’re in that position for a reason, yet you can’t accomplish the tasks, then give me someone that can. I’m not going to hold your hand. I’m not going to give you tips or tell you how to do this and that because it’s your show, not mine. I’m the American, you’re the Iraqi you need to be able to do this when we’re not here. If you can’t then you need to be moved. It’s crappy, but it’s the truth. [P12]

This response highlights a tendency of responses at this level to appear to miss opportunities to build relationships in order to achieve mission objectives. The response also demonstrates focusing exclusively on accomplishing the mission at the task level. In this case training the Iraqi to the point where he can do his job independently, leads to the decision to replace the individual without consideration of the consequences this could have on the broader relationship.

Responses at the Less Skilled level also show a tendency to be distracted by native behaviors that were perceived as not in line with the mission, U.S. values, morals, or practices. Further, in thinking about how to deal with or respond to such behaviors, participants neglect to consider which actions or decisions were within their purview. That is, inside the scope of ‘what they are there to do.’ This kind of reasoning often leads to a desire to intervene in the observed practice or behavior in an attempt to make the behaviors more in line with accepted U.S. practices.
A Less Skilled response to the confrontation between the Korean Captain and Private illustrates this.

I think it’s a junior officer having a power trip and needs to be reprimanded immediately. If not reprimanded, then at least brought up to somebody. My personal reaction to this situation depends entirely on my rank, so if I’m currently the E4 that I am right now, I go and tell someone on my side, the American side, that, “Hey, the Korean officer is pretty much putting his dude’s life in danger.” And let’s say I’m [a] Colonel, then I go up and reprimand him myself because I know how the command structure there works. That’s not okay in any situation. [P84]

This response indicates that the participant does not evaluate the situation in terms of what the intervention or confrontation could cost in terms of relationship maintenance and mission accomplishment.

**Understands Self in Cultural Context**

**Master.**

For Level 3 Self scores, as shown in Figure 5, Helmert contrasts revealed that the high overall competence group scored significantly higher than the other groups, \( t(88) = 4.84, p < .001 \). The medium and low groups did not differ significantly, \( t(88) = 0.87, ns \).

![Figure 5. Mean Level 3 Understands Self (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

At the Master level, responses show that individuals are able to use what they knew about their own cultural values and customs to understand new cultures.

Why did they just come in and cut him off? Is that a custom over there in the country or they just did it because he’s an American and then try to send a message. There might be rules that we just don’t know, just like here in the PX. When we go, a person in uniform, they cut ahead in line between 11:30 and 1:00 because they got to go back to work. [P69]
Comparing behaviors and events that at first appear different and possibly strange to what might happen in a similar context ‘at home’ often seems to lead to a richer understanding. It also appears to help reduce apprehension and negative attitudes towards the person or occurrence that is at first perceived as different or strange.

At the Master level, responses also demonstrate that participants recognize situations where underlying cultural differences might affect behavior and engagement. In the example below, the participant recognizes that Nigerian partners may not follow the U.S. custom of taking copious notes during briefings. They use this insight to adapt their expectations for holding joint meetings.

I think it’s just a cultural difference. I know that a lot of African countries don’t have the same literacy rates that we do. So, they may do a lot better than we do at just remembering from oral, because that’s just what they’re going to be used to. And going through high school and stuff here, we get very used to taking notes to help us remember. But if they aren’t given that as a device, then they aren’t going to rely on it in a situation like that.

I would just continue [with the meeting]. I’m not going to be like, “Hey, all of you guys should be taking notes. I’m an American. I know better than you.” I’m just going to say, “They probably just do it differently than us,” and carry on. [P75]

Finally, at the Master levels, responses show that participants consider how their own presence and the presence of the U.S. in a foreign region in general influence others. This can mean being aware of the impact of having ‘an American’ in the room on other’s willingness to be agreeable, share information, or reveal their level of competence in a certain area.

In the example below, the participant attributes an Iraqi officer’s deferring decisions to a lack of confidence, in the face of the difference between U.S. and Iraqi intelligence technology and capabilities.

My assessment is that either he doesn’t—I don’t know if it’s self-confidence or if it’s cultural. Maybe he thinks I’m smarter, we’ve got all the toys. Or, maybe he just hasn’t worked with us. But if I sense he’s capable and he isn’t performing at his capability maybe, I would want to talk him one on one […] get him around the water-cooler [and] just say, “Hey, can we talk for a second?” [P57]

**Proficient.**

Figure 6 illustrates the Level 2 Understands Self standardized scores by overall competence group. The high and medium groups had significantly greater scores than the low group on Level 2 Self, \(t(88) = 2.93, p < .001\). The high and medium groups did not differ significantly, \(t(88) = 1.40, ns\).
At the Proficient level, responses show that individuals realize that their own way of viewing the world is biased. That means they understand and keep in mind that they themselves interpret events in ways that are likely different than people who have a different personal background, history, and culture.

These responses demonstrate appreciation that there is more than one way to understand and perceive the world. In the two examples below, participants show that they understand that there are different ways to think about punishment and money.

I don’t know if [this type of punishment] it’s a tradition thing in Korea. Maybe they have all different cultures and values, but because of my background, I think it’s abuse of power. [P73]

[Knowing that his sons are everything to him,] it allows you to understand the guy, what he places his value in. We tend to put [value] in things, in money in America, but a lot of other countries don’t have that luxury, so they put it in different things. [P33]

At the Proficient level, responses also show that individuals know distinctive U.S. cultural values, views, and ways. That is, they are aware of the aspects of U.S. culture that makes it unique and different than most other cultures in the world. In the following example, the participant describes an aspect of U.S. culture they have discovered is different from other cultures in the world.

The typical American mission focus and impatience of getting everything done in the first pass, I’m guilty of that myself. Sometimes, it’s just not going to work sometimes and it’s something to be aware of. Pace is important. Unfortunately, it’s something we don’t have. We just have one speed – fast, get it done, and we’re not a culture – sometimes it’s one speed and we don’t get it done, and we have to be aware of that. [P31]

Proficient responses also demonstrate that individuals are paying attention to how they are viewed by members of other cultures. They are aware that people in other cultures may have
admiration or disdain for U.S. values and behaviors. And, that they may see them individually as extensions of those values and behaviors as Americans. Accordingly, they often seek information about local views on Americans as part of preparation to work abroad, and they use this information when they make decisions about how they behave and engage.

I probably just wouldn’t have said anything and kind of skidded my way in line a little more maybe. Yeah, it’s not worth portraying yourself as a rude American or fulfill the stereotypes. [P14]

Interacting with them, seeing how they are with Americans is going to be a firsthand on itself. You’re going to learn very quick if they like Americans or if they don’t want you there. [P12]

A lot of people get their information of the world from movies. So, if the only movies you’ve seen is True Lies and a bunch of Arnold Schwarzenegger flicks they think Americans are always big buff crazy sons of bitches. So, I need to understand that and work with that. [91]

**Less Skilled.**

At the Less Skilled level, responses expose an assumption that U.S. laws, values, and customs generalize to other places in the world. At times, such responses may show awareness of differences, but, at the same time reveal beliefs that the American way is the ‘best’ way.

In the example below, the participant is responding to a situation where an Afghan commander has purchased tents for his men that appear to be a poor match for the conditions the men will be working in.

A lot of times what is good quality to Americans is not the same for Afghans. So, Afghans may have … they can get by with less than the Americans can. They have a lower standard. [P77]

In this case, the participant acknowledges that there are different ways to think about quality but suggests that the American standard is high—while the Afghan standard is low. Perhaps as a result of believing that American standards and values are superior, these responses often also reveal an expectation that others to should adapt to the individual’s own or the U.S. way of thinking or behaving.

In the example below, the participant faces a situation where Nigerian partners appear to be paying attention during a mission briefing, but they are not taking notes.

[If the Nigerians didn’t take notes, I’d] offer my notes to them and say, “Well, you didn’t take notes, but we all did, so here you can take these notes and study them,” and just pay attention to them from there. Because the completion of the exercise in the most advantageous way is still the highest priority. And if they decide to not be at the same standard we are, it doesn’t mean we can just let the exercise go without completion. [P85]

Here, the participant reveals the belief that taking notes during an important meeting is the only way to behave. If people do not participate in this custom, it must be because they are not paying attention, or, at least it will result in them being less prepared. In general, responses at the
Less Skilled level tend to show that individuals do not recognize that other cultures differ from their own. For example, if people in other cultures behave in a way that would be considered rude in America, individuals at the Less Skilled level describe the behavior as rude.

**Manages Attitudes towards Culture**

**Master.**

As can be seen in Figure 7, the high group had significantly higher Level 3 Attitude Management than did the medium and low competence groups, $t(88) = 4.59, p < .001$. However, no significant difference was found between the medium and low groups, $t(88) = 0.06, ns$.

![Figure 7. Mean Level 3 Manages Attitudes (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

Responses at the Master level reveal that participants use a variety of sophisticated strategies to manage attitudes. These strategies tend to be active and effortful. For example, participants will try to investigate the root of their own negative feelings, try to understand what is behind the cultural practices that they find themselves reacting negatively to, or try to reframe the situation or behavior.

At the Master level, participants also demonstrate that they adjust to culture as a routine, ongoing process. In the example below, a participant responds to an observation from a colleague about the tendency of many U.S. soldiers to reach the end of their patience after ten months in the Philippines.

I mean it’s easy to say that you can be understanding of other cultures and norms and work with it, but it’s not as easy to do as it is to say. It causes conflict and frustration and it changes [over time]. So, say I made it to the ninth or tenth mark before changing that’s pretty good, but then you can reassess the whole situation and remember your roles and remind yourself again and make sure you’re taking the best approach too. I mean you’ve known each other for a while then, too. You actually have relationship partners, you’ve been there nine months. [P32]

The response demonstrates multiple indicators of Master level performance. First, it shows an understanding that attitudes will shift over the course of a stay in a host country. It also demonstrates an awareness that maintaining a positive attitude can be challenging and takes work.
This response further goes on to describe a strategy for managing attitudes which involves turning inward to assess one’s own place in the situation and determining whether any adjustments can be made to one’s own behavior to help manage one’s outlook. In this case, the participant is not reacting by blaming or unloading the negativity onto the cultural others. In fact, the participant purposefully creates a positive connection between themselves and the cultural others by shifting attention to the intercultural relationships they have worked to build over the past nine months.

Master level responses indicate that participants recognize that the conflict between how things are accomplished in other cultures and one’s expectations about how they should be accomplished can be a consistent source of frustration when working with other cultures. These responses show that participants inoculate themselves against this inevitable frustration in advance by actively managing their expectations about what and how much can be accomplished within intercultural interactions.

The following excerpt gives an example of how a participant mentally prepares himself to avoid getting frustrated over the pace with which progress is made in another culture. They describe the importance of understanding cultural practices and the difference in the availability of resources as a way to adjust expectations about what can and should be accomplished.

We want everything fast. We want everything done, done right, and we want it now. Many cultures around the world, they don’t operate that way. Many cultures in Latin America, they take a break to drink their tea religiously. That is mandated, so when you’re here, you’re expecting them to be working and they’re taking the tea. It can get—it can start becoming a building issue which turns into a boiling point and then eventually it can cause frustration and then disruption of the relationship. So, it is important to understand things happen in different ways in different places. Resources are different here and if I need more wood, I go to Home Depot and buy more wood. Over there, it’s not that easy. They might have to order it from another place, bring it, so it’ll slow down whatever project they’re doing or whatever they’re doing in general. So, it’s important to understand, number one, the culture and the way they do things. [...] So, it’s understanding that and just understanding how they do things, how they do business, and prepare mentally for it. So that way, at nine, 10 months, you don’t get frustrated when you still have three more months to go and then you start damaging that relationship that you have built within the last nine months. [P69]

**Proficient.**

For Level 2 Attitude Management, shown in Figure 8, the low group scores were significantly smaller than the other groups, $t(88) = 6.00, p < .001$. However, scores for the medium and high groups did not differ significantly, $t(88) = 1.28, ns$. 
Figure 8. Mean Level 2 Manages Attitudes (standardized) by Competence Group.

Responses at the Proficient level show that participants understand that their personal attitudes, values, preferences can get in the way of establishing critical intercultural relationships. As an example, when presented with a situation in which a colleague has concluded that Iraqis are not smiling during a meeting “because they hate Americans,” one participant responded in the following way.

Try not to assume things. Try to go figure out what’s happening before I make an assumption and just start operating under the assumption that they’re acting that way because they hate Americans, because then it changes the way that I act towards them and then the way that they receive me. [P82]

Proficient level responses show that participants attempt to manage negative attitudes towards members of a host culture expressed both by themselves and others. In the following example a participant responds to a scenario where a colleague describes the construction methods used in another culture as “inferior quality, shabby craftsmanship.” This participant highlights the need to restrain the expression of negative attitudes and makes an effort to reframe the judgment in neutral terms.

I’m glad he was just thinking that [Ethiopians have shabby craftsmanship] in his head and didn’t express that to the Ethiopians because I mean am sure their standards of living are not the same as ours. [P6]

Responses at the Proficient level also demonstrate that participants anticipate that their attitudes about cultures will be put to the test and will fluctuate over time based on evolving circumstances. These responses also show that participants actively work to maintain a neutral or positive attitude towards other cultures. This means they make attempts to temper the expression of negative attitudes, reactions, or judgments.

However, at this level responses show that participants use simpler and more passive techniques to manage their attitudes, as opposed to more sophisticated strategies. For example, they appear to minimize, ignore or distract themselves from the negative feelings.
Being in different cultures I guess wears on you a little bit. Nine, 10 months in, dealing with something that’s kind of irritating, yeah. I lived in Italy for two years and there were things that they did that bothered me the whole time and—but in the end, you just got to kind of accept that it’s different and try not to let it get to you, I guess. If it stresses you that bad, go for a run or something. I don’t know. Try not to think about it. [P23]

So, I mean, you might not like that when you walk around in Manila, everybody is trying to sell you something. Cool. You don’t have to like that. Just ignore it. [P82]

**Less Skilled.**

Less Skilled responses show a tendency to react to cultural differences with negative evaluation, emotion, and judgment. Responses at this level demonstrate that people often interpret ambiguous behavior by members of other cultures as intentional or malicious.

In the following example a participant responds to a scenario where it appears that two Italians have cut a colleague in line at the post office. The initial response indicates a negative reaction to the incident. Although this response acknowledges the ambiguity of the situation, the interpretation about what is going on is that the American is intentionally being targeted for the indiscretion.

[He is] rightfully pissed. […] These guys were probably jerks who got in front of him, but I don’t think there was a good understanding of what was going on in that room. There may be anti-American Italians in there who didn’t want to help him. [P11]

This participant went on to assert that they would confront the Italian postal worker, to push back against the perceived anti-American sentiment.

In general, responses at the Less Skilled level show a lack of strategies to manage the negative reactions, and emotions. These responses often adopt an avoidance approach to such reactions, and describe ways to get out of the situation, or to replace cultural others deemed responsible for causing the negative reaction.

In the example below, the respondent suggests reducing deployment times as a solution to the challenges of deployments to the Philippines. Alternative strategies are not suggested as ways to manage attitudes and emotions during deployment.

I think that – I'm assuming the Filipinos might be difficult to work with in one way like maybe they're stubborn or their way of working with you might be irritating and so, after a while you just have enough of it and you might treat him the way that person did in that class. That commander saying, “yeah you guys don't know any better anyway,” sort of mentality. I mean that's unfortunate. I think – I like to think if you have to work with them for that long then maybe suggest sending new people in every once in a while, because sometimes you can't keep your discipline for a long period of time and I guess I would recommend filtering the people out, you know quicker rotations. [P6]

Less Skilled responses also show that negative stereotypes and other unflattering information about cultures and cultural others are readily accepted without question. This
demonstrates one potential way these participants develop negative attitudes towards cultural others in the first place.

Another characteristic of Less Skilled responses is attributing negative reactions to the specific situation, without considering the general context. In the following example a participant responds to the description of U.S. personnel changing the way they deal with Filipinos after a 10-month deployment to the region.

So, I’m guessing whatever it is about their culture or their personalities or how they do things in the Philippines, the Filipinos are clearly for this person and people around them. If it’s around him or her they are able to put up with so much of it and then obviously after a long while of dealing with it there’s only so much that they can handle, and they give up. They don’t care so much for good relations anymore, they’re done, they’re finished with having to deal with, the Filipino’s culture maybe has a lot, it’s very different from our own, I’m guessing. And so, they give up with, good relations don’t matter so much anymore to them after a while I’m guessing. [P54]

This response attributes the individual’s frustration to challenges with Filipino culture specifically. In this case, the participant does not appear to consider the more general challenge of being on a deployment in any other culture and away from home. This line of thinking appears to encourage and reinforce the development of negative attitudes and feelings towards specific groups of people.

**Self-Directs own Cultural Learning**

**Master.**

For Level 3 Self-Directed Learning, as shown in Figure 9, scores for the high group were significantly larger than the medium and low competence groups, $t(88) = 2.75, p = .007$. The difference between the medium and low groups was marginally significant, $t(88) = 1.94, p = .055$.

![Figure 9. Mean Level 3 Self-Directed Learning (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

Responses at the Master level demonstrate that the individual is active and proactive in learning about new cultures. Responses at this level anticipate information needs and describe how
specific topics help accomplish certain goals in the host culture. These responses often cite mission objectives as motivation for learning. They outline how cultural information can help with understanding people to anticipate their courses of action or their reactions to U.S. presence and interventions. They also describe how cultural information can help develop relationships that support the mission.

In the first example below, the participant describes reading local literature and listening to local music to have information that can be used to engage. In the second example, another participant talks about wanting to know about how people think, to anticipate their decisions.

I always tell my [people], you learn two songs, two poems and read two books in the language. It sounds like an easy thing except if you know Chinese the read three books part is a very challenging thing. Why do you do that, because you’re creating a basis for interacting with them within their own culture and their own model. You don’t tell them let me tell you about Huckleberry Finn – they don’t know that. But if you turn around and talk to them about the four books or [local songs] they’ll be “that was a hot novel, how’d you know about that”? [P31]

I like to understand why people think things they do. So, if I know the current situation and I know the history of those people and why they’re in the situation they’re in, I kind of have an idea of why they’re making the decisions, and from that, can maybe expect to understand the decisions they will make based on certain courses of action that we execute. [P11]

Beyond formulating learning needs, Master level responses also describe sophisticated strategies for learning about culture. At the Master level participants appear to understand that there are different types of information that are useful for different purposes, and they have strategies for examining topics in depth. For example, the participant who provided the answer above went on to talk about how they would go about figuring out “why people think the things they do.”

[I’d want to know] current events obviously and I think politics are tied into those current events a lot, especially in African countries. So, I would start at the most recent story and kind of like build backwards, like why did this happen, because of this. I like to have it backwards. The historical context of the population is something that especially interests me, how the cultures kind of formed, so go back to some early Kenyan history and kind of figure that out. And of course, as far as political climates, like current people – I hate to use the word “targeting,” but identify certain people so that you kind of have a clue as to what you want to tailor your plan to and how to tailor your plan to that person. [P11]

At the Master level, responses tend to reveal that individuals are critically evaluating and assessing what they know about a culture. That is, they are continually looking for ways to improve their skills and hone the accuracy of their current understanding of a culture.

First, you will plug into the American embassy or consulate there, who are going to tell you the fives, who, what, when, where and why of this space. Their dynamic which is always slightly different because it’s local. And they try to flavor it, then
you do what you do in ICT (In Country Training). You probably plug into a French class or the local Kenyan school or tutor. And then over that structured envelope you get out and explore. [...] Depending upon your comfort level and your personality, depending upon your rules of engagement you go ahead and interact in a way that fleshes out your understanding of the rules and elements that are never – the texture that is never covered in books in a way that makes sense.

And, by the way, bouncing literature off people is a very good way to do that. You know you say, “have you read this great book I read in China?” Or, “is this risqué in China, I think it is in America.” [...] You get something out of that, those are tools to verify, tools to engage and the engagement verifies your understanding of what the culture is. [P31]

**Proficient.**

The high and medium groups, as can be seen in Figure 10, had significantly larger scores than the low overall competence group on Level 2 Self-Directed Learning, $t(88) = 3.40, p = .001$. However, the high group scores were not significantly different from the medium group, $t(88) = 1.03, ns.$

![Figure 10. Mean Level 2 Self-Directed Learning (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

Responses at the Proficient level demonstrate that the individual sees themselves as an active participant in being prepared for working in new cultures. These responses indicate awareness that cultural learning is an ongoing process that takes place prior to, during, and post deployment. As a result, responses at this level describe efforts to seek out opportunities to improve cultural understanding beyond any mandatory training the individual may have completed. And, they tend to describe cultural information or training provided by the military or government as a baseline or starting point.

I wouldn’t frame all my interactions with the locals based on just everything I’ve been taught in the course, because the course is never going to teach you the little nuances of a culture. That’s stuff you have to pick up on or you have someone who lives there to show it to you. You don’t always learn that in a course. [P8]
Similarly, responses at this level show that participants learn independently from people on the ground. There are several strategies that were mentioned, including passive observations, mimicking local behaviors, and explicitly consulting interpreters or locals with insider knowledge.

If the Bangladeshis aren’t offended no problem, but at the same time don’t be sitting out there putting your feet up showing them your heels. Don’t cross the red line, he might be pushing it – and the Bangladeshis, unless I’ve noticed it because I’ve studying the local norms and customs, unless I’m missing something that’s within the cultural norms, so I can mimic that without exceeding it. Another idea is just to mirror their body language because you’re never going to go wrong with just doing what they are doing. [P6]

I would probably go to my terp and ask what the local customs are as it relates to standard greetings or how do they greet each other. [P48]

However, responses at the Proficient level show that participants are less targeted and systematic in directing their cultural learning than participants at the Master level. At the Proficient level, responses list topics or categories of information that seem relevant to learn about. But they lack an objective or motive for learning that can help guide and bound information gathering. In all, responses at the Proficient level show that participants have a less rich understanding of the ways different types of cultural information can be used, and thus lack a framework for seeking such information.

A related trend in proficient level responses is an emphasis on wanting to learn cultural do’s and don’ts. While Master level responses emphasize learning topics to support understanding people to anticipate their courses of action or their reactions to our presence and interventions, Proficient level responses show the motivation to learn in order to avoid upsetting people or committing social faux pas.

But if that’s the goal is to try to prepare you for how things really are, that would be great. Learning cultural dos and don’ts, and particularly the ones that are big faux pas, would be really a good thing. And so, that can help you from being and appearing awkward and offending people, so in that sense it’s all good. [P71]

Less Skilled.

Less Skilled responses demonstrate that participants think of cultural learning as either uninteresting, or something that others will provide for them. These responses express confidence that the cultural training provided as part of an individual’s pre-deployment, in-country briefs, or military education pipeline is enough to be fully prepared to work in a foreign culture.

The example below shows a response from a participant who expresses the idea that someone else in their chain of command will know what the team needs to know.

I’ve been told of everything I need to know, and I need to learn that from the course. [My chain of command] have determined that this is what I need, and so I need to absorb that training to the fullest. [P76]

At times, responses like this show the assumption that there will be someone on the ground who will “take care of the culture and language stuff.” That is, the individual believes there will
be someone else either on or supporting their team who will be responsible for knowing about the local culture. Thus, these individuals do not perceive the added value of learning on their own.

Accordingly, Less Skilled responses reveal the belief that cultural learning begins and ends with what is provided through formal channels, be it in the classroom, briefings, or supplemental materials like field guides.

I think that this is a good way to prepare yourself—to take some sort of a course before going on an overseas mission. I know that cultures all over the world are different than ours, so it’s great to brush up on the locals. That way, you can act in accordance with their expected customs and courtesies. [P86]

Individuals with this mindset tend to fault their superiors, trainers, or their organizations when they are confronted with something they do not know, or when they commit a cultural faux pas. The line of reasoning appears to be, that “since it is their responsibility to adequately prepare me, they must be to blame for my lack of knowledge or mistake.”

In the example below, the participant is confronted with a situation where they have used a phrase in a foreign language and receive an unexpected reaction.

I would think I might have been taught the wrong greeting or maybe an outdated greeting. […] I don't think – if they're stiffer and more formal, they aren’t really laughing at me so that’s good, but I would definitely try to find out what I'm doing wrong. I think I would more blame how I was taught other than my execution of it. [P6]

Less Skilled responses demonstrate that participants ‘don’t know what they don’t know’ when it comes to culture. As a result, they struggle to figure out where to begin when they are confronted with the task to learn about a new culture on their own. Responses at this level also show that participants are not sure why they should learn about culture in the first place. These participants have a difficult time identifying how cultural understanding can improve relationships and decisions related to their mission, beyond avoiding offending the locals.

[I'd want to know about] religion, social practices, family dynamics, maybe dress—how they dress—and that’s about it. […] Basically, what maybe not to do that would offend them in their culture. [P78]

The result of not recognizing the value of cultural information can be the avoidance of learning about cultures. In the example below, a participant shares their thoughts about a training course to help when working abroad. The participant expresses that they do not see the need for the course, because they have an alternative method for coping.

Well, that is easy, don’t talk. Don’t go out of town and follow the script you’ll be fine. Only show up for the meeting and leave and dress in the uniform of the day every time and mind your own business. Okay. [P57]
Develops Reliable Information Sources

**Master.**

For Level 3 Source Evaluation, as indicated in Figure 11, the high competence group scored significantly higher than the other two groups, $t(88) = 3.40, p = .001$. However, the medium group did not score significantly higher than the low group, $t(88) = 0.85, ns$.

![Figure 11. Mean Level 3 Source Evaluation (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

Responses at the Master level show that people do not take cultural information at face value. These responses demonstrate that individuals question both the reliability and generalizability of cultural information provided to them. These responses indicate that individuals actively try to examine the trustworthiness of sources of cultural information to get a sense of validity. The response below describes the general idea that information provided in a cultural training course should be validated.

> [Once I get on the ground] I would then be testing what I learned in the course and the classes prior to going there. […] You need to test it to ensure that the information that you got was current, was valuable and was correct. [P90]

At this level, participants appear attentive and able to discriminate opinions from facts. This means they critically evaluate the information they receive from culture trainers and instructors, as well as colleagues. For example, participants at this level pointed out that a colleagues’ conclusion that an Iraqi partner “just hates Americans” was merely his opinion and indicated that they would drill deeper into that topic.

Responses at this level express that the individual would not rely on any single information source and show awareness of specific ways in which cultural information can be inaccurate. This includes information that is faulty, dated, either deliberately or inadvertently present a biased point of view, or too generalized. Such responses often describe the characteristics of sources believed to have a higher probability of accuracy. Some such qualities mentioned include coming from cultural insiders, such as members or the culture, or at least from people who have first-hand experience living or working in the culture.
I would like to know about their history. Not the history that is in the book, but on the ground, what they perceive their history is. That background. Because nine times out of 10, as an outsider, we don’t have a—we have one side of the story. Because what we perceive as an outsider might not be the same thing that they perceive as the person on the ground. And we want to make sure that we think like they think, so that way we can allocate the resources and efforts on what they really need and not what we think what they need. [P69]

Responses at the Master level describe strategies for assessing credibility and bias. Such strategies include consulting with alternative, and often multiple alternative sources. These can be written sources, or people whom individuals consult. In the following examples, participants describe verifying information learned prior to a deployment.

Sometimes people will conflate because, okay, Arabs don’t like to see the bottom of the feet, then all people don’t see the bottom of the feet. So, I’ll never show my feet to Pashtos. But when I got to know people I’d ask them like, “Is this a thing,” they’d be like, “I don’t really care.” So, I would assess that it depends on who told you this – they may be conflating two cultural faux pas or whatever. [P79]

I would start with the leader, whoever the leader or the elder is. Just building that relationship, that trust, that bond. Asking him to explain to me the current situation—why would they do something versus not doing something? And then I will try to collaborate his vision and his perspective with the people on the ground as I’m walking around interacting with their own security forces, with the kids that come. They always come and talk to you because you are an outsider, so they want to know as well when you interact with people, you might get stuff from that. So, trying to—you start with the top as a show of respect, but then you validate with other sources. [P69]

At the Master level, responses also demonstrate awareness of the limits to the generalizability of cultural information. At this level, participants express that while norms, customs, or ideas may be prevalent within one group of people in a region, that does not mean they necessarily extend to another. They also express the awareness that not all members of a local population may follow local customs, as described in the example below.

I know that they’ll give me briefs on cultures in general and basic guidelines that they follow. Not everyone from those countries strictly adheres to them necessarily. They could just be younger guys that really don’t care about that. [P20]

Proficient.

As can be seen in Figure 12, the difference between the low and other groups was marginally significantly on Level 2 Source Evaluation, t(88) = 1.96, p = .054. The high group did not differ significantly from the medium group, t(88) = 0.30, ns.
Figure 12. Mean Level 2 Source Evaluation (standardized) by Competence Group.

Responses at the Proficient level acknowledge that potential bias exists in cultural information sources. However, compared with Master level responses, they do not describe strategies for validating sources.

So, I think the first thing is obviously do your homework on the front end. Once you get in the country and you get a partner force, hopefully you leverage whatever experience those people have, even if it’s just a local driver. The only thing you’ve got to be careful of is just taking a bunch of that stuff with a grain of salt. I have experiences from Afghanistan where the ANA, the Afghan National Army guys are one tribe, and the people in your area are a different tribe, and they hate each other, so they’re going to give you a bunch of bad information about the people because they don’t like them. [P9]

Proficient responses also show that individuals are familiar with and use a variety of sources for obtaining cultural information. They usually show awareness of a number of different military and government resources, as demonstrated in the example below.

I’m going to start with the Air Force Culture and Language Center to find some things. But, there’s the CIA Fact Book has a lot of great information about the countries. I could go to Google and type in [the country] and start with their Department of State site have a lot of things that have to do with travel. Those types of things, being on the street doing it, those are the things that come up in the CIA Fact Book and Department of State website. Go to Google and start looking at maps. Those are the types of things I would start to do. [P46]

And, they also describe leveraging several alternative civilian sources of information such as for example fiction and non-fiction books, newspapers, web sites, music, television, and local informants once they are on the ground.

4 Only one participant mentioned the service culture centers as a source for cultural information.
Less Skilled.

Less skilled responses demonstrate unqualified trust in cultural information obtained through formal channels and show little hesitation to use such information to guide decisions or actions. In the example below, the participant describes what they would do if a colleague appeared to be breaking a cultural rule that had been taught in training, but where the locals did not appear to mind.

I would go over to my teammate and ask him to change how he’s sitting so that the bottom of his feet is not exposed because this is what we were told. [P12]

In this case, the response does not reveal less skill because the participant acts on cultural information they are given. What does reveal less skill is the fact that the participant fails to attend to the cue in the scenario that the information may potentially be off the mark in this region, context, or with the specific cultural others in question. This means that the participant does not question the potential reliability of or bias in the source (the training course), they fail to acknowledge exceptions, and instead treat the cultural information as absolute.

This failure to notice cues to unreliability and question cultural information extends beyond rules and facts to other people’s interpretations of situations and events that occur within a culture. At the Less skilled level, responses reveal a tendency to unquestioningly assume that colleagues who have spent more time abroad have a better understanding of the culture and therefore better judgment. In the example below the participant is presented with a situation where a foreign partner has spent money in a way that was unexpected—but, where the motives were ambiguous. In the scenario, a U.S. Captain who has been working with this partner interprets these actions as an attempt to skim money.

Obviously, the Captain has a better relationship with this guy than I do. So, I’ll just go with his assessment and say it’s probably pretty possible that he’s skimming money off the top. And if he’s doing it with the tent money, he’s probably doing it with a lot of other places too. And knowing that, I’d probably give him less opportunity in the future to have any ability to influence or do that. [P9]

At the Less skilled level, responses also show that individuals struggle to identify alternative sources that could be used to gather additional information or verify information they have been given. When pressed, such responses tend to focus exclusively on formal military information channels such as colleagues “who have been there” and contractors who they expect will have been hired to provide such information.

I don’t know completely what resources would be there. I don’t know if you’d have a class or if you would have access to online information or [something like] that. [P27]

Reflects and Seeks Feedback on Intercultural Encounters

Master.

The level 3 Reflection score, illustrated in Figure 13, was significantly larger for the high group than for the others, $t(88) = 3.09, p = .003$. In addition, the medium and low groups also
differed significantly, $t(88) = 2.28, p = .025$. The pattern of results suggests an ongoing progression in quality of responses across groups, culminating at the high group.

![Figure 13. Mean Level 3 Reflection (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

At the Master level, individuals are apt to identify opportunities to reflect on situations or interactions that they could potentially learn from. And, they appear to be motivated to understand the underlying rules or principles of new cultures. This means that they tend to treat gaffes and mistakes as opportunities to learn more about a culture.

In the below example, the participant is faced with a situation where they have used a phrase in a foreign language and receive an unexpected response.

> In this sort of situation, I think the best thing is to ask. Maybe after the fact they leave, it’s clearly because you didn’t understand what was going on because of the language barrier, so I think the best thing is just to ask questions. Clearly no harm was done, or you can find out what you said, and if you said something wrong, then of course apologize and figure out the correct way of saying it in that language or how to make the saying correct. [P65]

In this case, the participant not only seeks to find out what they said wrong and what phrase they should have used—they also appear to seek to understand the rules or conventions that would allow them to generate more correct phrases or responses in the future. That is, responses at this level demonstrate that individuals seek to understand why things are done a certain way, not just the right answers in particular situations.

At the Master level, responses also reveal that individuals reflect on past cultural situations not only to identify similarities and differences. They appear able to generate new conclusions, take-aways, or rules that can guide future actions and decisions. For example, in the study, participants were presented back-to-back with scenarios in which Jordanian in one case appeared to try to prevent, and Japanese partners in the other appeared to try to cover up mistakes. A small number of participants identified that both situations exemplified a desire to preserve face—and, derived the overarching principle that this can present a challenge to teaching the value of learning from mistakes in the context of conducting training, advising, or assistance missions.
In some ways I see [these situations] as different, only moderately so, in that this [the Japanese situation] was after the fact, the other [the Jordanian situation] was before the fact. This is now after the fact where he [the Japanese pilot] has performed, and that performance wasn’t quite what he wanted, and now we’re trying to learn from that.

So, it’s again an issue of leadership and acceptance of mistakes in training that’s critical to learning in training. So, I guess they [the situations] are similar. He’s probably trying to retain some amount of pride, especially in interacting with his American counterparts. So now it’s sort of the Japanese efficiency is superior, and they need to go up and explain why you shot this dude, because now it’s going to make the whole Japanese force look bad. I don’t know, but I’ve got to figure out a way to disarm some of that, so we can talk about the effectiveness of the training that we did.

It doesn’t have to be a Japanese guy. Everyone wants to assume they did the right thing. They don’t want to appear like they made an error. But it’s important that you talk through, especially in these training things, the importance of being candid in training so you can be more accurate in execution afterwards. So, I think we need to talk more, maybe in this environment, maybe not, of that more overarching concept of being willing to accept mistakes in training and talk about them so that everybody can benefit from it, not just the one pilot. [P49]

Finally, at the Master level participants appear to not only generalize knowledge and principles learned in other cultures to new ones, they also customize or adapt existing knowledge to the new culture they are in. In the following example, responding to the scenario where an Afghan commander has purchased different tents than expected, a participant shares a similar experience he had working in Iraq. In the excerpt, they describe how they would customize or adapt cultural information he learned in Iraq to a situation in Afghanistan.

Many things may have taken place. That may be all they have, or he did skim it to get money. I remember – going off on kind of a tangent – I was part of a border fortification team in Iraq, and we were on the border of Syria. The main goal for the first three months we were there was to ensure that no something like this is going on where they’re skimming money, and no one’s taking money to let things through. But after a while, we realized that that’s their culture. If that goes away entirely, no one is going to be shipping anything across. So, then it became a certain level of allowances observed. So, he’s going to take an extra $10 because that’s what’s supposed to be happening through their cultural aspect.

So, it’s best knowing what’s going on here, [in this specific situation]. So that’s what he’s going to be doing because he wants more money – I can’t say he shouldn’t do it, but if he’s doing it and he’s harming them, then you would have to step in. [P35]
Remembering that in Iraq a certain level of allowances had to be made to keep things running, this participant determines that they would need to figure out exactly what was going on in this specific case, and how process works in the current cultural environment they’re in.

**Proficient.**

The high and medium groups, shown in Figure 14, had significantly larger scores than the low overall competence group on Level 2 Reflection, $t(88) = 3.27, p = .002$. However, the high group scores were not significantly greater than the medium group, $t(88) = 0.86, ns$. Although there appears to be a slight drop from the medium to high group, the differences are not statistically significant. Hence, there is not sufficient evidence to ascertain whether the difference is “real.”

Figure 14. Mean Level 2 Reflection (standardized) by Competence Group.

At the Proficient level, responses show that individuals seek feedback about their own performance in intercultural situations to figure out what they did wrong so that they can improve performance in the future.

In the following example, the participant sees a colleague who is possibly eating a local delicacy the wrong way at a formal dinner. In this case, the individual frames this situation as a learning opportunity to figure out how to improve performance.

I feel like him trying to use the chopsticks incorrectly might offend them because that is their custom. So, it just might be offensive to them if you can’t do it right. Or I don’t know if this would be too risky, but maybe ask if he’s doing it right. If he feels like he’s doing it wrong, maybe see if you can find out how to correctly do it. Because I’m sure that they’d be able to teach him. [P60]

Proficient level responses indicate that individuals seek feedback during intercultural interactions, as in the previous example. They also describe seeking pointers and advice after interactions have ended, as in the examples below. Both strategies appear to be used to support improved understanding and skill development.

Reflect on what you said and look it up or all things that are in slang, find a local that you trust or interpreter and explain how the conversation went and try to get
some feedback of where it went wrong and why. Then following that, see the same people and you come with an apology and explanation. [P83]

Maybe just hitting those books when you have time to just making sure you’re saying and conveying what you want to say and not something else. [P18]

However, rather than trying to understand the rules or conventions that underlie cultural customs or patterns of behaving, at the Proficient level the motivation for reflecting and seeking feedback appears to be to discover the correct way to be or act in specific situations. That is, responses at this level demonstrate that individuals seek to understand ‘what’ to do, rather than ‘why’ things are done a certain way.

At the Proficient level, responses show that participants can compare different cultural experiences and identify general commonalities as well as differences between cultural groups. For example, participants saw two scenarios back-to-back which occurred in very different regions and cultures (Jordan and Japan). In these scenarios, foreign partners were in one case trying to gain access to privileged information to prevent a mistake and in the other acting in a way to cover up a mistake. Participants at the Proficient level were able to compare between these different cultural situations and notice the underlying similarities between the behaviors and motivations.

Probably similar motivations. At the end of the day, they don’t want to – [they are] both traditional societies where honor and face are very big deals, both for individuals and the government, so it makes sense. Yeah, probably similar motivations and structures, if not styles. [P84]

At this level, responses also show that individuals are attempting to generalize knowledge and skills that could be useful across different cultural contexts. That is, they are seeking to come up with general “rules of thumb” that could potentially apply to a variety of locations and situations. In the example below, a participant identifies a rule about avoiding embarrassment that can be applied across multiple countries.

They are both an issue of trying to avoid embarrassment although one is, like I said, avoiding the potential for embarrassment and one is trying to deal with embarrassment that is actual. The need to avoid embarrassment is a common in a lot of countries, not just Jordan and Japan. [P88]

**Less Skilled.**

Less Skilled responses show that individuals do not spend time reflecting on situations that seem puzzling or present challenges in an effort to learn from them. Rather than reflect, these responses reveal that individuals instead try to avoid similar situations in the future.

In the example below, a participant responds to a situation in which a foreign partner appears to be covering up a potentially critical error. When invited to reflect on the situation, the participant deflects.

Not really too sure [what’s going on here], to be honest. So, I don’t know. I’d probably just stay out of this situation and just avoid it. [P62]

When confronted with situations where they have either themselves committed a cultural faux pas, or have seen someone else do so, responses focus on describing the negative outcomes
of the mistake. These responses often describe how offended the cultural others must be, and the implications for how they (or colleagues) are perceived. At this level, mistakes are seen as something that should be avoided and as preparation failures. Responses at this level do not reveal attempts to examine errors or seek feedback. Furthermore, participants tend to respond defensively, or ignore feedback that is spontaneously offered to them by others.

In the example below, the participant responds to a situation where a colleague is possibly eating a local delicacy the wrong way at a formal dinner. The response does not recognize this situation as an opportunity to seek feedback and thereby learn about the appropriate way to eat the delicacy.

I’d say he probably looks like a fool. He’s probably doing something not quite right. Maybe he’s not eating it the normal way that they should be. It sounds like in Japan, for instance, if you’re eating with chopsticks and you put the chopsticks in your rice bowl, that’s not a good thing. So, he may just be doing something that is not right or maybe something that is childish. [P33]

At this level, responses reveal that participants have a difficult time seeing past the superficial aspects of cultural situations, and therefore struggle to compare between cultural situations at a more abstract level. For example, at the Less Skilled level, responses to the two situations describing partners seeking to prevent and cover up mistakes in different regions reveal that individuals have trouble spotting the underlying theme—that the partners are seeking to avoid embarrassment and preserve face.

I don’t think [these situations] really compare a whole lot. I mean kind of because you’re a joint country there, but at the same time, I’d say it doesn’t really compare. [P62]

The only similarity between the situations that this participant sees is that it involves the U.S. military working with foreign partners. The response reveals that they are unable to draw general lessons from these situations, which would allow them to begin to perceive differences and similarities between the cultural customs and behaviors they see.

Copes with Cultural Surprises

Master.

As shown in Figure 15, the high group had significantly larger scores than the other groups on Level 3 Coping with Cultural Surprises, $t(88) = 4.59, p < .001$. However, the medium group did not score significantly higher than the low group, $t(88) = 1.13, ns$. 
Figure 15. Mean Level 3 Coping with Cultural Surprises (standardized) by Competence Group.

Responses at the Master level demonstrate that individuals are aware that no matter how much they prepare, and how much knowledge they acquire about a foreign culture, there will always be surprises.

You’re always going to have a surprise. They can’t possibly teach you everything. I think it’s good [to] get a general introduction of the cultures, but there’s just some stuff that you’re not going to be prepared for. [For example], they can tell you that they’re going to get close to you, but until it happens it’s still going to be a surprise. […]. [P74]

When confronted with unexpected behaviors or events, individuals at the Master level seek information to help them understand it in an open-ended way. They tend to treat their first interpretation of the situation as merely a guess. So, they ask open-ended questions that can help them uncover alternative reasons or causes, and they seek out sources and ask questions that can give them an inside angle on what might be going on.

At the Master level, individuals overcome the urge to rely on initial interpretations, even in situations where cues steer them towards a particular conclusion. That is, even in situations where the underlying reason appears obvious. In the following example, the participant faces an Afghan officer who addresses them as a jerk in a first, public encounter.

[How would I respond to him calling me a Jerk?] There are a lot of good people there. I wouldn’t get angry about it. I might confer with the interpreter later like, “All right, why did he say that?” I would not become confrontational at all because that’s what’s going to get everybody inflamed, especially being the new guy. [P79]

The response above can be contrasted with responses at the Proficient and Less Skilled level which show that individuals are steered towards a particular interpretation of this behavior—mainly that they themselves committed a cultural faux pas and that is what angered the Afghan officer. However, individuals at the Master level overcome the urge to fixate on this possibility and describe attempts to find out if there are alternative things that could be going on.

At the Master level, responses further show that individuals consider that the ambiguity may be due to a cultural difference in general. That is, the other person or people may behave
differently than expected because they have a different cultural background. And, they seek to determine whether observed behavior is cultural. That is, they actively try to figure out whether a person engages in a behavior because it is part of a cultural script or custom. This often means they try to read the reactions of other members of the culture who are present, as in the example below. In the example below, the participant is responding to a situation in which two Italians appear to have skipped ahead of them in line at a local post office.

Maybe you just got to figure out why – is this an acceptable practice? If you find out that this is not an acceptable practice in their culture and then you realize, “Oh hey, they were just taking advantage of me,” and now you know better for next time. [P9]

Determining whether behavior is “normal” or typical within a culture appears to be particularly advantageous in situations where a behavior could easily be interpreted as an insult or offense. Asking the question “is this cultural?” appears to help individuals at the Master level distinguish situations where the perceived affront was culturally motivated and unintentional, from situations where they truly are being slighted or taken advantage of.

Proficient.

Level 2 Copes with Cultural Surprises, indicated in Figure 16, differed significantly between the low overall competence group and the others, \( t(88) = 6.68, p < .001 \). The high and medium groups did not differ significantly, \( t(88) = 0.20, \text{ns} \).

![Figure 16. Mean Level 2 Coping with Cultural Surprises (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

Responses at the Proficient level demonstrate that individuals notice and attend to behaviors and events in other cultures that are surprising or violate their expectations. And, they accept personal responsibility for figuring out what might be going on in these situations.

In general, responses at the Proficient level show that individuals actively engage in sensemaking when they encounter surprising situations that they do not perceive to have obvious interpretations. This means that at this level, participants ask open-ended questions and otherwise seek information to understand cause of puzzling interactions or anomalous foreign behavior. But, only in cases where the behavior does not fit a clear familiar pattern. That is, if they feel they can
account for the behavior based on their existing knowledge and experience, they are not as likely to continue trying to make sense of it.

In the following example, the participant is making sense of why Kyrgyz school officials only want help to restore the windows in their run-down school and are turning down assistance with plumbing and electricity.

I would try to figure out why they’re saying no. Why they’re saying they don’t have a problem with the plumbing or electricity, even if it is, from what I see, clearly not working and why they only want windows. But I would try to talk with them—figure out why it is that they want windows repaired. That’s—that’s kind of curious to me. [P21]

At the Proficient level, individuals proceed by asking open-ended questions that can help acquire information they did not already have, to help them understand the underlying cause of puzzling interactions or anomalous foreign behavior. This means that participants at the Proficient level do not rely on their first instincts about what cultural others’ reasons, motives, or feelings might be. They actively seek information to gain more accurate insight on these topics.

Less Skilled.

At the Less Skilled level, responses show that individuals at times do not care why ambiguous behaviors or events occur or they are highly confident in their initial interpretations of ambiguous situations. When they are confronted with a surprising situation, instead of analyzing the situation to understand it better, they often focus their attention on evaluating whether the observed behavior is right or wrong, or productive or unproductive.

In the example below, the participant was confronted with a foreign partner, a Captain, whom it appears has failed to translate an instruction to his team.

If he’s deviating, I really don’t care why he deviated, because it’s not the right way. It doesn’t matter, it’s not the right thing. The right thing was doing it according to the plans that we would have, and [the] Captain is not compliant. [P2]

Responses at the Less Skilled level indicate that when participants are pressed to speculate on what is going on in ambiguous situations, they are often highly certain about their own interpretations. The assumption that they already know what is going on means that they are not identifying the behavior or event in question as surprising. This, in turn, means they are missing opportunities to engage in a process to make sense of what is going on.

In the following example, the participant responds to a situation where an Afghan Officer has addressed them as a jerk in a meet-and-greet. This response shows that at this level, individuals are highly confident in their own ability to understand the situation. At the same time, they also tend to expect that they will have received the information they need ahead of time to handle such situations.

They are obviously confronting you and, to me, that needs to be addressed. Why that is I don’t know. Hopefully you’ve gotten some kind of briefing on the situation. I would hope that you have been forewarned about this that these types of things could happen. [P43]
Responses at this level also show that high confidence levels tend to lead participants to look for information to confirm their initial interpretations, rather than ask open-ended questions.

Well, I did something wrong, it seems like. So, I would try to figure out what that was and explain to them that it was not intentional, that I want to do nothing but respect them and what they are doing here, and just make sure he sees that. [It seems like] he interpreted what I did as an insult and an insult that was done on purpose. [P24]

You could ask another one of the other Afghans, is this guy anti-American or is it because I’m not Islamic and so he doesn’t like me? (P92)

Individuals at the Less Skilled level tend to construe surprises as failures to prepare, and often expect that they would or should receive instructions up front for dealing with all the unusual situations one might experience abroad.

**Develops Cultural Explanations of Behavior**

**Master.**

Figure 17 illustrates that for level 3 Explanations, the high group scores were significantly larger than the others, \( t(88) = 6.50, p < .001 \). The difference between the medium and low groups approached significance, \( t(88) = 1.85, p = .067 \).

![Figure 17. Mean Level 3 Explanations (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

At the Master level, responses show that when confronted with puzzling or unexpected cultural behavior, individuals spontaneously generate multiple, alternative explanations. Generating more than one initial explanation for a behavior decreases fixation on a particular interpretation, which increases the chances that the individual gets closer to understanding what is going on.

At the Master level, individuals are also more likely to incorporate local cultural concepts into their explanations for behavior. And, also to consider ways social or situational factors may have influenced the behavior.
In the example below, a participant is confronted with a situation where an Afghan partner has spent money in a way that is unexpected—and, where the motives are ambiguous. The participant is informed that the U.S. Captain in charge of the situation believes that the Afghan Officer was attempting to skim money. This participant comes up with four different possible explanations for what the Afghan Officer did. The numbers are added to make it easier to see each distinct alternative explanation this participant offers for the Afghan’s behavior.

[Do I think the Captain is right that the Afghan Officer bought cheaper tents to skim money.] My assessment depends on what kind of tents—what do the tents they already have look like? So, first you have to know what they already have. If he bought tents like the ones he already has, then that’s what they have.

1) Different militaries have different standards and very different ways of supplying them. As in Ethiopia, Ethiopians have canvas, but they don’t have individual tents. The American Army, if you’re out in the field a long time, you have a half-tent—a sort of two-person tent. You have one half. The other guys got the other half. You put it together. In the Ethiopian army, they have some shelters that they’ll put up to shelter from the sun and we sleep on—we have sleeping bags if it’s cold, but we sleep on usually an air mattress. Ethiopians sleep on the ground, and if they manage to scrounge some cardboard, they sleep on that cardboard. That’s what they got. And so, the Afghans, his soldiers really might be fine with an open-ended tent. But if the standard is different with closed tents and all that stuff and he discovers that these are not the same, it could be one of two things.

2) It could be that the unit doesn’t have as much money, and so he bought as many as he could with the money he had.

3) Or it could be that he did skim the difference for himself. Either way, if you actually think that’s what happened, and he took the money for himself and did that, before you do anything or accuse him of anything, you need to understand the culture he’s operating in, because there is in a lot of societies and in Afghanistan in particular, there’s a certain amount of cultural back and forth. If the village elder is involved in helping you get a job as a policeman or as the—particularly as like a village chief of police, there is a certain amount of give back required—expected. And it’s the way the society works, sort of back and forth.

4) And also, sometimes the police aren’t paid very well in different countries. One of their—what happens is the—this is true in Mali, the commissioner of police skims money off the top and then the chief of police skims some money. He gets a certain amount of money, and so when it gets back down there, they don’t pay a living wage to the police because they can extort money on their own. And so, the attitude is, “Yeah, I took some of this, but you can get the rest of the money for yourself.” And if that’s what’s going on here, he’s had to—maybe he didn’t get as much money. Maybe the money that skimmed over the top came from the general and now it’s down to the Captain. He may be doing the best he can in the situation he’s in. [P71]
In this response, the participant shows that they can come up with multiple potential reasons for the Afghan Officer’s actions. This means that when faced with ambiguity, they are able to simultaneously entertain more than one equally likely interpretation. They also demonstrate that they take social, cultural, and contextual factors into account, rather than focus exclusively on perceived internal goals or desires of cultural others.

In general, at the Master level, participants are able to develop explanations of cultural behavior that acknowledge that multiple causal factors can be at play and that show how these factors work together to drive behavior. In the example below, a participant explains why a Korean Captain might be compelled to punish a subordinate in a manner that seems severe to an American.

Well given the Korean culture’s sense of very, very strong and strict discipline, again, this is not surprising […]. I mean ritually and culturally, this looks to me from what I know of Korean culture, like something that’s fairly common. The Captain is trying to discipline his men and he feels that if he doesn’t discipline him very harshly that the point won’t be gotten across to him. Part of that’s cultural and part of that I believe is from the situation that we are in our comfortable little bubble where we have air conditioning and can generally walk places without worrying if artillery is going to fall on us, which especially given all the tensions with North Korea in the present day, it’s escalating again, but it has ebbed and flowed for the past 60-some odd years since the end of the Korean War. They realize that hard discipline is very important because any sort of indiscipline, because we talk about looking at him with silent contempt. I offer an example in the demilitarized zone in Korea, soldiers in the ROK or the DPRK are not allowed to look at each other because they worry that one askew glance and then somebody turns into words and then one guy pulling out a gun, and now you have re-escalation of the conflict. So that sort of discipline is something he feels is really important in that kind of scenario. [P76]

In this response, the participant acknowledges that there are social and cultural pressures on the Captain to behave in a certain way. And, that these pressures are tied to the geographical and historical context that he finds himself in. These are all factors that describe the unique context that this foreign Captain is acting in; a very different context than the one American military leaders work in when they decide how to discipline subordinates.

**Proficient.**

The high and medium groups, as shown in Figure 18, had significantly larger scores than the low group on Level 2 Explanations, \( t(88) = 2.28, p = .025 \). However, the high group did not differ significantly from the medium group, \( t(88) = 0.59, ns \).
Responses at the Proficient level show that individuals acknowledge that there can be more than one explanation for a behavior. At this level, participants appear to recognize simplified or overgeneralized explanations of foreign behavior, like “the Iraqis are not smiling during a meeting because they hate Americans.”

Responses at this level entertain the possibility that a number of factors can be at play in complex situations, but they often struggle or hesitate to describe what they could be. In the situation where the Afghan officer has purchased lower quality tents than were expected, Proficient responses often indicate that the U.S. Captain may be right that the purpose was to skim money.

It’s possible [he’s skimming money]. I couldn’t prove it. Am I going to verbalize it out loud? No. I think it’s a good possibility. [But] perhaps they’re more accustomed to the cold out there – there could be some other reasons why to have open tents that can’t be closed up. I’m not sure what they would be. [P46]

At this level, responses show that individuals seem to remain open to alternative interpretations, but only tend to volunteer alternative explanations when prompted to do so. In the example below, a participant initially suggests that Bosnian students are refusing to ride a U.S.-protected bus because they have lost faith in the U.S. protection and do not feel safe. After this participant was prompted with the question “are there any other reasons or factors you can think of that explain what happened?” they were then able to come up with alternative interpretations.

There might be, it could be that there are tensions in the area that threaten the family. Maybe they graduated college and they’re done. Maybe there was an incident on the bus that bothered them, and/or they didn’t like how the convoy was going or it was going too slow or the convoy rep was too predictable and always going the same way and they didn’t vary how they were getting from our place to the school. [P2]

**Less Skilled.**

Responses at the Less Skilled level show that individuals struggle to generate alternative explanations of puzzling cultural behavior. In the response below, the participant responds to a scenario where two Italians cut in front of his colleague in line at the post office.
I mean it seems like they did something rude, I don’t know, I guess a lot about the situation, but I don’t know why they did it, if that was to be rude or not. [P37]

In this case, the participant has a difficult time coming up with an alternative to their initial interpretation, specifically that the behavior in question is intentional and malicious. This line of reasoning is consistent across scenarios for this level and is also illustrated in a scenario where an Afghan commander has purchased tents of lower quality than expected.

Basically, the commander doesn’t really care about his soldiers and how they sleep. He’s fine with his soldiers sleeping on the ground basically. So, he’d rather keep the money than make sure his soldiers are sleeping fine basically. [P63]

In the Afghan tent scenario, participants were first asked to give an assessment of the situation. Next, they were asked to evaluate the U.S. Captain’s interpretation that the Afghan is skimming money. The example below illustrates that the participant first accepts this interpretation. When prompted to think about this explanation critically, instead of coming up with an entirely new interpretation, they simply reverse their originally negative explanation to make it positive.

So clearly […] I find that this Afghan company commander doesn’t care so much for his men. But instead of caring so much for his men he took all the money and spent it on something cheaper so that he could keep the rest. So obviously financial gain is more of importance than the morale and the caring of his soldiers.

What do you think about the Captain’s interpretation?

I definitely wouldn’t assume that, because first off, he doesn’t know and to have that thought of somebody is not good. […] For all he knows maybe he did spend all the money and maybe he just didn’t spend it all correctly or something like that and it was an accident and he actually does care for his guys. [P54]

This response shows two additional aspects of the way individuals at the Less Skilled level generate explanations for behavior. First, they tend to be highly certain about the explanations they come up with, using terms like clearly, basically, definitely, and obviously. They also do not tend to acknowledge that there could be aspects to the situation or influencing factors that they have not considered.

Second, the example demonstrates that responses at this level often show discomfort with ambiguity and uncertainty. As a result, responses show either/or thinking. Events are interpreted as either good or bad, right or wrong. This leads to stereotyped, overgeneralized explanations of foreign behavior that avoid the need to generate explanations for uncertainty and ambiguity.

[Skimming money,] that’s pretty common in that part of the world so it’s probably what happened. [P7]

Participants at the Less Skilled level also struggle to generate alternative explanations even when the behavior in question is not one that they interpret as potentially malicious. To illustrate, a participant responding to the scenario in which students were refusing to ride a U.S. protected
bus had a difficult time coming up with alternatives to the interpretation that the students do not feel safe.

Obviously, they don’t feel safe. Obviously, they are removing armored vehicle escorts; the Serbs do not feel safe.

*Are there other reasons that you could think of that explain what happened?*

From what this is saying I just don’t feel like they feel safe and the families probably don’t seem safe. [P5]

**Takes Perspective of Others in Intercultural Situations**

**Master.**

As can be seen in Figure 19, Level 3 Perspective Taking differed significantly between the high group and the others, \( t(88) = 8.24, p < .001 \). The scores for the medium and low groups did not differ significantly, \( t(88) = 1.09, ns. \)

![Figure 19. Mean Level 3 Perspective Taking (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

At the Master level, responses show that individuals spontaneously consider what foreign others might think, want, or feel as part of their routine decision making during intercultural interactions. In this study, participants were often presented with situations where the motives of cultural others were ambiguous. For many of these situations, they were first asked to describe what they would do, or how they would proceed.

Master level responses showed that participants spontaneously attempted to figure out what the cultural others were thinking, or what they were trying to achieve, before settling on a course of action. This means that when they were not explicitly asked to think about the other’s perspective, they did so of their own accord as part of their routine decision-making process. In other words, as they were figuring out what do to, they spontaneously thought about what the other person might think, want, or feel.

In the example below, the participant responded to a situation where Kyrgyz school officials have requested that the U.S. only helps them fix the windows in a building where
everything is in dire disrepair. The first question the participant is asked after reading the scenario is “what would you do?”

It depends. In certain parts of the world, having more means someone’s going to take it from you. Maybe something they know they need – “Hey, we need the windows to keep the bugs out. If we get electricity, someone’s going to come take it from us, or we’ll be skylined and people will die because of it.” So, it all depends on what happens in the area at the time. Skylined [means] highlighted. So, if you’re the only one with electricity and let’s just say the local warlord wants the electricity, he’s going to come and take it from you. So, them having it – a generator is going to make noise, the guy is going to come and take their generator. And while he’s doing that, someone might get hurt, so it may be their way of saying, “We don’t want to bring extra attention to ourselves. How about you just give us windows?”

At the Master level, responses also show that individuals understand that people with different backgrounds view events differently. Master level responses demonstrate efforts to consider the possible unique social, situational, or cultural factors that could influence the other person’s line of thinking or point of view.

In the example below, the participant is faced with a Korean Captain who accuses a subordinate of silent contempt and challenges him to either a knife fight or to wash vehicles in zero-degree temperatures wearing only shorts and flip-flops.

One would make a hopefully reasonable assumption that while this may not be a technique that we would particularly use, maybe there’s something [the Captain is] trying to prove, and he knows the outcome and the private knows the outcome even though I may not know it. […] It’d certainly be abnormal in the U.S. context for something like that, but you know, I mean there’s a whole host of possibilities it could be. […] It could be a scripted thing he has to go through and [they] all understand that [they] know what’s going to happen. [P45]

In this example, the participant considers that the Captain and private belong to a culture in which this type of exchange is thought of differently. As a result, they know something about how the situation will unfold and end which the participant does not. In general, responses at the Master level acknowledge that people in other cultures view events differently. And they try to imagine thoughts and motives that cultural others might have, that they themselves do not.

**Proficient.**

As shown in Figure 20, for level 2 Perspective Taking, the low group had significantly smaller scores than the others, \( t(88) = 3.14, p = .002 \). The high group did not differ significantly from the Proficient group, \( t(88) = 0.29, ns \).
Figure 20. Mean Level 2 Perspective Taking (standardized) by Competence Group.

At the proficient level, responses demonstrate that individuals recognize that taking the perspective of others can help them to anticipate and influence their decisions. For example, at this level, participants reveal that they can infer that understanding what a West African man’s sons mean to him can help you anticipate what he would do if insurgents threatened them.

However, at this level, participants appear to predominantly only consider the perspective of culturally different others, when they are prompted to do so. That is, responses at this level make reference to cultural others’ expected knowledge, desires, attitudes, emotions, or intentions after the individual has been explicitly asked to focus on that aspect of the situation.

In the example below, the participant is first asked what they would do in the situation where Kyrgyz school officials say they only want windows. In the response to the first question, the participant immediately generates a solution to the problem, without spontaneously considering possible unstated motives. But, when they are prompted to think about what might be going on with the school officials, they then consider a possible motive from their point of view.

What would you do?

It’s their schools at the end of the day. If they want shitty power and shitty plumbing, they can keep it. We need to give them only what they want and not try and force our American standards down their throat.

What do you think is going on with these school officials?

I think the school officials are potentially embarrassed and they don’t want to lose face both to their higher-ups as well as to the people by, “oh yeah well, you could have provided this before, then the Americans come in then all over sudden it’s here.” [P36]

At the Proficient level, responses show that individuals rely on their own knowledge, desires, attitudes, emotions, or intentions to infer cultural others' perspectives. That is, they project their own experience onto the other person, and often use phrases like “if I were them,” or “if I were in their shoes.” In the example below, a participant responds to a situation in which a Jordanian Commander has asked for a preview of a final training exercise.
I feel like maybe he’s a little uncertain of his team’s skills and maybe he feels like, and I can understand that being in his shoes feeling that his men need a head’s up because he’s afraid of how they’ll perform, so he wants them to see it beforehand, so that when they do perform they do really well. So that’s what I think is going on. [P54]

This approach appears to possibly lead to increased feelings of mutual understanding or even sympathy in certain situations. But, failures to consider that people in other cultures may think or feel differently appears to also at times lead to culturally misaligned guesses about what is going on with other people. In the example below, a participant uses their own experience to take the perspective of Nigerian partners who are not taking notes during a planning meeting.

So, when I was a student, I’d hate taking notes and I’d be like, “I can remember this definitely.” And sometimes I did and sometimes I didn’t. So, it’s either A, these partners believe that whatever we’re doing at this meeting, they can find the information elsewhere or they’ve already memorized the information. I think they’re just kind of—as my teacher would tell me—being lazy. [P73]

At the Proficient level, participants do not take into consideration that people from other cultures may think or feel differently than themselves.

**Less Skilled.**

Responses at the Less Skilled level show that individuals struggle to consider the perspective of cultural others, even when they are prompted to do so.

In the following example, rather than think about what Kyrgyz school officials might want and why when they reject an offer to fix plumbing and electricity in their school, the participant focuses on the point they wish to get across and the goal they want to achieve. When they are subsequently prompted to think about what could be going on with the school officials, instead of taking their perspective, the participant speculates that something nefarious may be going on.

*What would you do?*

Just try to show them, ask them what their definition of working electrical and plumbing is and show them what we have in our schools and this is the standard that we usually try to go by.

*What do you think is going on with these school officials?*

It seems like something under the table is going on, but that’s something that definitely needs to be dug into and see where the money that is going to them is spent on the schools or it’s going into their pockets or something like that.

*What do you think they could be thinking?*

That I might be trying to investigate them or something like that. Just let them know we’re here to help them. These schools are going to benefit them more than anything else. [P10]
This example shows that at the Less Skilled level, responses tend to either focus on the individual’s own needs, goals, or perceived mission constraints and requirements.

Responses at this level tend to demonstrate little consideration for or curiosity about the cultural other’s perspective, including their needs and wants. For this reason, responses at this level tend to miss opportunities to either leverage or align local perspectives with the mission. Instead many responses demonstrate that the objective is to determine fault; mainly, who is to blame, and how bad are the offender’s intentions.

In the example below, a participant faces a situation where a local partner appears to have omitted to pass on an instruction. The participant fails to speculate about the partner’s current state of mind and possible motivations. And, when they are asked what they would like this partner to walk away with from a conversation, they describe the state of mind, beliefs, or feelings they want the cultural other to have.

If he’s deviating, I really don’t care why he deviated, because it’s not the right way. It doesn’t matter, it’s not the right thing. The right thing was doing it according to the plans that we would have, and the Captain is not compliant. So, the Captain either directed it or allowed it to happen and he gets to have some accountability and own it. [P2]

Responses at the Less Skilled level do show that individuals are generally able to consider the point of view of culturally similar others. That is, other Americans. A participant who was responding to the situation where an Afghan commander has bought cheaper tents than expected, spontaneously focused on and described the state of mind of the American officer in the scenario, rather than the Afghan commander.

[...] The [U.S.] Captain was actually concerned about their soldiers considering that the [Afghan] commander didn’t really put much effort into buying proper tents for the soldiers. [P63]

Acts under Cultural Uncertainty

Master.

Figure 21 shows that the high overall competence group scores were significantly larger than the other groups on Level 3 Acts, $t(88) = 4.04, p < .001$. The medium and low groups did not differ significantly, $t(88) = -0.31, ns$. 

At the Master level, responses show that individuals intentionally leverage the fact that they have limited cultural knowledge. They express awareness that trying to address cultural norms, customs, and using the local language, is generally seen as positive, regardless of their current performance level. And, they have strategies for using knowledge limits as tools to build social relationships and for overcoming mistakes.

That participants at the Master level are aware that attempts are seen as positive is illustrated in the example below. Here, the participant responds to a scenario where they are at a formal dinner with Thai counterparts. They see that one of their American colleagues is clumsily eating a fish head with chopsticks. The scenario offers the ambiguous cue that the Thai partners are paying close attention.

Clumsy use of chopsticks, they understand that we’re a bunch of Americans who don’t use chopsticks. They’ll understand that fish heads that’s not something Americans generally eat, and he wants to eat them so good on this guy for [being] willing to eat fish heads. That’s going to be a positive as opposed to the American who turns up his nose and says thanks, but no thanks. [P48]

This may seem like a simple insight. But, only a portion of participants interpreted the situation this way. Several responses at the other levels instead concluded that the clumsy attempt was likely offensive, and the attention garnered would surely be negative.

At this level, responses show that individuals deliberately use even limited cultural information or language skills that they have acquired in strategic ways to achieve social effects. A number of participants revealed a strategy in which they would ask locals or partners about a topic or custom presumed to be familiar to them. It could be a famous local author or local music they had heard a little about. Their intent was to make the other person feel empowered, and thus generating trust and goodwill, by giving the other person an opportunity to share information about a topic they likely knew about.

For example, in one scenario, participants responded to a situation where they were asked to imagine that they have read a bit about Semba, a form of traditional Angolan music. They were asked whether they would consider bringing semba into the conversation as a way to break the ice with a foreign partner.
First off, I would remember that I know nothing about Semba. However, it is a good way to break the ice. I would just tell them I’ve heard about this and essentially ask him his opinion, see what he knows about it, pick his brain, treat him as the expert because he is. It’s more just, “I heard about this and I want to know more. What do you know? Can you show me this? Can you teach me about this thing?” It always makes people feel good when you treat them as the subject matter expert or the knowledgeable one and it makes them a little friendlier. It makes them more willing to want to educate you and want to help you. [P8]

In general, participants at the Master level tended to recognize that people often enjoy sharing their knowledge and that one can use this as a leverage for building relationships. At the Master level, individuals appear to have confidence to experiment with new cultural information and skills. This is perhaps because at this level people tend to have developed strategies for recovering from gaffes and mistakes, which may be what gives them the confidence to use uncertain knowledge.

The next two examples illustrate that a common strategy for dealing with a cultural faux pas at the Master level was to turn the situation into a learning opportunity after the mistake has been made. The following response to the Thai fish head scenario illustrates this strategy.

I think that the Thai counterpart are being—are going to be a lot more attentive to what’s going on because of his lack of knowledge. I will try to diffuse the situation by using my own clumsy skills. And I’ll be like, “Oh, you know, I’m not really good with this. My friend here is not good at all.” And then try to diffuse the situation by asking “how do I do it? Can you come and show me?” [P69]

Another strategy was to diffuse the situation with humor. In this example, the participant is asked to imagine that they have used a phrase in a foreign language and that they receive an unexpected reaction.

This is “was it something I said?” kind of a situation. If there are any of those you have a better rapport with others, one, I would go, “Hey, was there something I said that didn’t come out particularly well back there?” And then when you find out you were claiming to be a great admirer of Panamanian men, you get a good laugh at yourself and correctly explain what you meant and thank them for teaching you how to express that a little better. [P46]

At the Master level, individuals appear to feel confident that they can “throw information out there,” read the reaction, and recover if it is not well-received. One example comes from the scenario where participants were asked to imagine that they have read a bit about Semba and were asked, would they consider bringing into a conversation as a way to break the ice with a foreign partner?

I’m probably not going to learn a whole lot about semba without getting an Angolan to talk about it. So, I may bring up the topic of semba and I’ll just see how it goes. If it’s something that he wants to talk about, we may spend the next hour talking about samba. If he says, “Yeah, semba sucks. I like Lynyrd Skynyrd,” we don’t spend any more time talking about semba. As long as I’m not picking a sensitive
subject and I assume traditional Angolan music is not a sensitive topic, then I can make a quick audible one way or the other on whether that’s a good way to break the ice once I bring it up. I’m going to have to look for either spoken or nonverbal cues. If I bring it up and the guy gets all tense and immediately wants to change subjects, then I quit talking about semba. If his eyes light up and he leans over towards me and it turns out he’s in a local semba band and he’s a national folk icon, then I’ve probably just struck up a good conversation. [P50]

**Proficient.**

For level 2 Acts Under Cultural Uncertainty, as indicated in Figure 22, the high and medium groups had significantly larger scores than the low competence group, \( t(88) = 2.15, p = .035 \). The high and medium groups did not differ significantly, \( t(88) = 0.09, ns \).

![Figure 22. Mean Level 2 Acts (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

At the Proficient level, responses show that individuals recognize that their cultural knowledge will always be limited relative to that of someone who has grown up in the culture. At this level, participants do not appear to be encumbered by having less than complete cultural understanding or mastery of cultural behavior. While Proficient responses at times reveal some unease using limited knowledge, they do not tend to focus on and be paralyzed by the possible negative consequences of doing so, as is the case in responses at the Less Skilled level.

Instead, responses at this level demonstrate that individuals are generally willing to use the cultural knowledge they have acquired when they make decisions and take action. When presented with a scenario where they have used a phrase in a foreign language and receive an unexpected reaction, Proficient responses tend to demonstrate a willingness to not be discouraged and to keep trying.

Oh, you have screwed up and said something about someone’s mother. That wasn’t very good. It happens, and we hope that people understand you’re using a foreign language and you’re going to make mistakes, but not everybody thinks that way. So yeah, you made a faux pas – try to find out what you said, try to improve your Spanish, and if you did frighten them or backhandedly insult them, you might not be able to rebuild the relationship, but keep trying. It’s all you can do. [P3]
Generally, at the Proficient level, responses reveal that individuals tend to avoid inaction or paralysis due to having less than complete cultural understanding or mastery of cultural behavior. At this level, mistakes tend to be seen as “not a big deal.”

First of all, I would say congratulations for being able to eat fish heads because I haven’t been able to pull that off myself. The gaining attention from your Thai counterparts, I guess I’d want to get a sense of what kind of attention it was actually eliciting and then ask my interpreter if I was concerned that there was an issue, but I don’t think there would be an issue here. Again, as I said previously I think most of counterparts wherever we are, tend to be a little more flexible in what they expect of us. [P40]

Even though participants at the Proficient level appear to not fear mistakes, they do not seem to have developed strategies for intentionally leveraging their knowledge gaps in strategic ways, as is the case at the Master level.

**Less Skilled.**

At the Less Skilled level, responses show that individuals prefer to have a high degree of certainty in their cultural knowledge and skill before using it as a basis for interacting. Responses show that at this level individuals are very hesitant to use information they do not know very much about.

In the examples below, participants are asked to imagine that they have read a bit about Semba, a form of traditional Angolan music and are asked if they would use this information as an ice breaker.

I probably wouldn’t bring it into the conversation until I read up on it or at least listened to it. […] It’s like using a word that you’ve just heard once and it’s a big word. There’s no point in bringing it in. […] If you use it wrong, you just look even dumber. [P87]

So, you don’t want to start a conversation where your comfort zone is about an inch wide. That could burn you. So, the potential of showing your lack of knowledge, offending them by saying something wrong after you run out of knowledge is pretty high, probably outweighs the benefit of saying, “Hey, let’s listen to some semba.” [P53]

At this level individuals are also cautious about using new phrases in a foreign language. In the scenario where participants are asked to imagine they have used a phrase in a foreign language and get an unexpected response, Less Skilled responses generally take the stance, “don’t do it again.”

Don’t make that mistake again. I need to be a little more confident in my abilities to hable Español before I try to open my mouth. [P76]

Either learn Spanish better or don’t say it because they are probably just making fun of you. [P37]
At this level, individuals appear to think of mistakes as “a big deal.” And, they, do not reveal the attitude that you should keep trying, as is seen in Proficient responses. The main reasons people describe that one should hesitate to act when you are not ‘completely certain’ are fear of looking foolish, being laughed at, or causing offense.

In general, responses at the Less Skilled level reveal a pervasive belief that acting with less than certainty will likely have negative consequences. This was the case across a number of scenarios. In the example below, participants are responding to the scenario where a colleague is clumsily eating fish heads in Thailand. The scenario imparts that this gains attention from the Thai counterparts, but it is vague about the nature of the attention. At the Less Skilled level, participants generally interpret it as negative attention.

I think my American colleague is trying to be cultural by attempting to eat the plate full of fish heads, but because he’s inexperienced, he doesn’t know how to do it. And so, impressing our Thai counterparts, he’s really just making a fool of himself, similar to the other situation. And that if I didn’t want him to continue making himself look like an idiot in front of our Thai counterparts, I’d have to let him know how—what I’m seeing, and that they’re looking at him probably being wasteful of this delicacy by improperly eating it. [P21]

In fact, the fear of looking foolish or causing offense appears to be paralyzing. Responses at the Less Skilled level show that individuals go out of their way to not be noticed in any way.

I don’t want to go out there alone and stick out like a sore thumb. You don’t want to be that guy. I already look different enough because it’s not my local environment, it’s not my home town. So, I’m already going to stick out, I don’t want to make it that much worse, but I don’t want to try to blend it too much either because then I’ll still stick out. [P61]

**Plans Intercultural Communication**

**Master.**

Level 3 Planning, shown in Figure 23, differed significantly between the groups, such that high group scores were significantly larger than the others, $t(88) = 5.64, p < .001$. The medium and low groups did not differ significantly, $t(88) = 0.71, ns.$
At the Master level, responses show that individuals plan for critical intercultural interactions in advance tailor their communication to specific people, cultures, and contexts. As part of their planning process they often seek or consider information they already have about the specific person they will engage with, or about the culture in general. They also think about and adjust their plan based on what they know about the context for the engagement—why and where it will take place, as well as past engagements they themselves and other U.S. personnel have had with the individuals in question.

In the following example, a participant lays out their plan for addressing a Cambodian Captain who has given his own team a different instruction than what he had agreed upon with his U.S. partner.

I think in general I would work to try to optimize the environmental elements. Who is this guy? How important is he to us? How can I influence him without putting him a corner where he has to try to save face or anything? […] I would try to create a dynamic with him where he understands that if there is a different way to do the task that I’m saying, that he and I talk about that ahead of time. Then I will make that part of my routine. I’ll build time into the schedule to spend time with him telling him what I’m going to tell them and see if I get some feedback from him, try to encourage him to give me some feedback because often they do much better than we do. We say pour the concrete here and you’re pouring concrete on a burial ground or you’re doing it on Friday when they are supposed to be in the mosque or come up with 50 cultural reasons that we don’t even think about in America, you know there could be an issue. I’m all over the map on this one, but I think with just the information you’ve given me I would try to work with him offline to get him back onboard as to my instructions or give him a safety valve where he can say, hey before you tell him to do that you might want to think about this or that or the other thing. [P44]

At the Master level, responses also show that individuals consider the effects of their messages and means of communicating in advance of interactions. And, they go a step further to attempt to anticipate possible responses so that they can plan for those as well. In the example
below the participant is responding to the situation where the Korean Captain has challenged a Private to either wash cars in freezing temperatures or participate in a knife fight.

What I would do is kind of bozo in, so to speak, in a way like, “Hey you guys, what’s going on? Are you using knives, or can I do knives?” or something that is not targeting one or the other as a – benignly interact – not targeting one or the other but distracting both and may defuse a little bit of the immediate risk. And then in the course of that [if they say], “Why are you interfering with this Korean affair? You’re an American guy, get lost,” “Oh, I’m just here for the knives. Hey, I love knives. By the way, this is really great. I have a knife too. Do you want me to pull my knife?” because certainly you’re not trying to hurt each other over stuff like this.

You try to diffuse it in a way that’s not confrontational or getting yourself involved in a way that you’re on his side or that side or meeting some kind of objective standard that ruffles some people. I mean that’s not really valuable in this case. [P31]

The last part of this example demonstrates that responses at the Master level tend to explicitly describe a goal to manage or influence how the U.S. is seen by locals. At times responses at this level take this a step further to consider how their communication affects the way the other person is seen within their social surroundings. They craft messages and plan communication that takes the other's social status and image into consideration.

In the example below a participant discusses how they would handle the situation where a foreign partner has given his team a different instruction than what was agreed upon.

I would pull him aside and discuss with him why he doesn’t want to do it the way that we had planned to and just discuss which way he thinks would work better and maybe come up with a new plan so that he feels more comfortable briefing this task to his troops. He’s a leader in his culture and with his troops so there’s no reason in getting angry about it but he obviously has opinions that are different from yours. So, I wouldn’t make a scene or anything in front of troops, there’s no reason to embarrass another leader in front of other people. [P66]

Proficient.

As indicated in Figure 24, The high and medium groups had significantly larger scores than the low group on Level 2 Plans Intercultural Communication, $t(88) = 2.72, p = .008$. The high and medium groups did not differ significantly from each other, $t(88) = 0.58, ns.$
At the Proficient level, responses show that individuals think more generally about what they are going to communicate and how they are going to communicate it in advance of critical interactions. They plan communication both for themselves, and other team members who will take part in the interaction, including subordinates or interpreters.

But, at this level, planning does not reach the depth of Master level planning in terms of tailoring the communication to the specific person or culture one will be interacting with. In the example below, the participant is responding to the scenario where a Cambodian Captain has given his team a different instruction than what was agreed upon.

I think I would just, again, engage in conversation with the guy, maybe ask some probing questions to see really what his issues are with it without letting him know that the driver is doing that, because I want to use him for finding me good information. I want to use that, so without giving that away, get his take on the situation and find out what his reservations are on then try to persuade him that I’m right. [T3-sub33]

This response demonstrates that the participant is thinking ahead about his approach in a general way (i.e., taking a conversational approach and asking probing questions). They are also identifying general communication goals, in this case, persuading the Captain and gathering more information. However, they are not incorporating specific cultural or personal information into the communication plan.

The previous example also demonstrates another characteristic of Proficient level responses—that is, they indicate that the individual is thinking ahead about the social objectives they want to achieve within specific interactions. In this case he does not want to let the Cambodian Captain know that his driver informed him of the mistranslation.

Finally, at the Proficient level, responses tend to reveal that individuals consider multiple dimensions of communication as they plan for future engagements such as words, body language, posture, dress, social context, and actions when planning. For example, in one scenario participants read about an engagement with locals in which it seemed the interpreter is increasingly “taking over” the relationship. Participants were asked to describe how they would approach a future engagement with the same locals. One participant described a strategy in which he would plan to
sit in front of his interpreter in the engagement to ensure that he was perceived as the lead for an engagement.

**Less Skilled.**
At the Less Skilled level, responses show that individuals tend to enter engagements without forethought or planning. At this level, individuals focus on the message they want to get across and tend to formulate their message in a very direct way. These responses do no show consideration for crafting the message, nor do they show attempts to anticipate the effects of the message or the means of delivering it.

In the example below, a participant describes what they would do in the situation where a foreign partner has given a different instruction than was agreed upon to his subordinates.

> I would definitely talk to the Captain, because the best way to approach something is to just be direct about it and tell them exactly what I was told by the driver and [tell him] exactly what [I was told] he said to the people in the Cambodian army. Yeah, the best way to go about this is to give clear and concise information and asking him exactly what he said. I have to hope he’s going to tell the truth to me in that situation. [P10]

At the Less Skilled level, responses also demonstrate that when individuals are prompted to think about communication planning, they are rigid and scripted in their understanding about ways to communicate. They reveal a line of thinking in which there are certain specific phrases and topics one can use to achieve communication objectives such as building rapport or conducting business. Responses reveal that these phrases and topics are expected to be used in a script-like manner. For example, first ask about family as a way to build rapport, then bring up mission-related topics. However, responses show that individuals are unable to adapt when thinking about interactions that do not fit a clear or expected pattern.

> If he’s the one who starts talking about business, then I don’t see how to switch it to where I’m building rapport. I don’t want to be the one to change topics and start talking about family.

**Engages in Disciplined Self-Presentation**

**Master.**
As shown in Figure 25, for Level 3 Presentation, the high group had significantly greater scores than the others, $t(88) = 4.67, p < .001$. The medium and low groups also differed significantly, $t(88) = 2.88, p = .005$. The pattern of results suggests an ongoing progression in quality of responses across groups, culminating at group 3.
Figure 25. Mean Level 3 Presentation (standardized) by Competence Group.

At the Master level, responses show that individuals are able to adapt their approach to engaging cultural others as well as adjust their interaction style when needed. They do so, even in situations that are high tension and potentially provocative. That is, situations where the individual may perceive confrontation or cause for offense.

One of the most high-tension scenarios participants were presented with was a situation in which they are meeting an Afghan partner unit for the first time. As the two teams are making introductions, the Afghan unit’s religious officer singles them out; points at them and calls them a jerk in front of everyone. This scenario invites a perception of provocation and it is high stakes because the individual’s and the entire team’s future relationship with this foreign unit appears to depend on how it is handled.

Master level responses to this scenario showed that participants attempted to read the situation and adjust their response to the cues they pick up from the context and other people.

I guess I would try to read everyone else’s reaction, the Afghans, to see if it was a joke or not. Maybe they were trying to break the ice. Maybe they were nervous too. It's a very difficult situation, because especially if he’s their religious officer, one of the things we never wanted to talk to those guys over there about was religion, because we’re just kind of so far apart on the issues, it doesn’t end well.

So, if it was a joke, I’d just laugh at it and move on. If it wasn’t a joke, I would just try to shrug it off and maybe throw something in there about, “You may think that now, but once we get to work together, you’ll find out I’m a pretty good guy,” or something like that, try to use something to get past the awkwardness of the situation like that. Yeah, that’s unfortunate. [P9]

Similarly, in high-tension situations, Master level responses demonstrated that individuals sought to avoid unnecessary conflicts. This often meant communicating in a discreet, indirect, or otherwise non-confrontational manner. But, most importantly it meant in the moment considering and weighing the merits of one presentation strategy over another and, when appropriate, deliberately choosing one that was thought to de-escalate or avoid further inflaming tensions in potential conflict situations.
In the following example a participant responds to a situation where a Japanese pilot appears to be covering up a fratricide during a joint training exercise debrief. Judging that the mistake needs to be discussed to ensure that everyone learns from it, this participant aims to get it out in the open. They take what they deem a non-confrontational approach. Rather than calling out the pilot’s omission, the participant asks who else was in an area where a fratricide occurred. Doing so indirectly steers the debrief conversation towards the topic of the fratricide, making it more likely that someone will bring it up so that it can be discussed.

[I will] bring it up, not to put him on the spot, but it is an exercise. That’s where we’re supposed to make mistakes, so we can learn from it. And then I will bring it up as a question rather than a statement, even though I know already the answer to see what they say. “I thought that we had ground units in this location. Didn’t we have ground units?” And then look like, “I thought team three was over there. Team three, were you guys there in that area in that timeframe?” And then just kind of trying to walk the dog without sounding like, “I already know the answer. I’m just trying to—that’s not true.” I will try to bring it up without trying to expose him. [P69]

Of course, it is not necessarily the case that everyone would agree that this is ‘the correct’ way to handle this situation. Nor is it the case that an indirect approach to dealing with an emerging or potential conflict is always “the best” tactic. However, responses like the one above, demonstrate that the individual has more than one communication strategy at their disposal that they can deliberate and choose between in an effort to avoid unnecessary conflicts.

At the Master level, responses also show that individuals can at the same time gauge which situations require demonstrations of respect and be on the lookout for opportunities to accrue respect. For that reason, they are not uniformly appeasing or accommodating when it comes to observing cultural expectations.

In the example below a participant describes their analysis of why a Cambodian Captain is not translating the message that was agreed upon. The assessment is that there is friction between the Captain’s rank with respect to U.S. rank. As a result, the participant describes showing the Captain respect as a key consideration when engaging him, as a way to legitimize the Captain’s role within the situation.

[…] I wouldn’t say it’s in their culture, but he feels that he doesn’t need, like he has the whole picture, because he’s already a Cambodian captain, he’s already an officer in the army, so he might feel that he is obligated to act because he has rank in his own way, but he also doesn’t want to challenge the U.S. because the higher rank or senior ranking, so that’s where the disconnect is, I feel like.

So, the approach would be very different because I would show him the respect that he is a very respectable officer in their army, but at the same time, I don’t want to be bearing down and say “junior officer” because that would probably make him feel lowly and make him feel even worse. So that’s a consideration. [P28]

Lastly, Master level responses also show that individuals deliberately presented themselves in ways to achieve intended effects on other people’s perception. This means that responses at the Master level reflected that participants thought about their mission goals and objectives when they
considered how to present themselves to others, and they thought about the type of persona they wanted to impress on others. In the below example, a participant describes how they would use cultural information that they study up on in advance of assignments to make a certain impression on people—ultimately in order to gain an opportunity to gather intelligence.

When you walk in and you talk to somebody, and I’ve learned this pretty much from experience that the more you seem to know about what’s going on in there during their lifetime. Most people you talk to are at least 20 years old, [and] almost everybody I’ve dealt with has not been a white person, so they go, “This guy cares. He has some sort of knowledge about what’s going on here and he cares about, or he’s interested in my culture or in this case, what’s going on basically for the last 20 years.” So, you can talk smart. You can ask him, “What did you think about this person? What did you think about that person? Why did this war start?” things like that, and they’re conversation pieces that can lead into, for me, intelligence gathering stuff. [P79]

**Proficient.**

For Level 2 Presentation, as indicated in Figure 26, the high and medium groups had significantly larger scores than the low group, $t(88) = 4.28, p < .001$. However, the high competence group did not differ significantly from the medium group, $t(88) = 0.39, ns$.

![Figure 26. Mean Level 2 Presentation (standardized) by Competence Group.](image)

At the Proficient level, responses show that individuals recognize that the way they present themselves, including their appearance, can influence the outcome of intercultural interactions. For example, many participants at this level described the difference between interacting with locals when they wear their uniform versus when they wear civilian clothing. They anticipate that locals will see them as more approachable in civilian clothes compared to when they are walking around looking like a “storm trooper.”

[Wearing civilian clothing] one it makes you less of a target opportunity. […] A lot of Marines, especially overseas, all the locals see is this guy with body armor head to toe and a helmet and a face mask and this giant [armor pack] coming down the street. It looks like a [strong language used for emphasis] imperial storm trooper,
that really has negative connotation with it. So, if I’m in civilian clothes and more relaxed, they’re more relaxed, they don’t view me as some imperial power to overtake their country. [P91]

At this level, participants were also alert to the responses and reactions of others in intercultural situations. They would describe adjusting their engagement approach and their interaction style accordingly.

In the example below, participants are asked what they would do in a situation where their buddy is accidentally showing the bottoms of his feet to foreign partners. They are under the impression that their foreign partners find this offensive. In this case the participant purposely points out the faux pas, so it can be corrected in order to send the message they are being culturally sensitive.

I would still very politely tap my buddy on the leg, kind of point to the feet out there. Just because they don’t appear to be offended doesn’t mean they’re not. If I can correct him, then they can see that I understand and appreciate that we’re not intending to be offensive. [P46]

In general, at the Proficient level, responses show that individuals take steps to avoid unnecessary conflicts. Unnecessary in this case means that resolving the conflict is not needed to meet U.S. mission objectives.

In the example, a participant is responding to the situation where two Italians have gone ahead of them in line at the post office. In contrast to a high conflict situation presented in the Afghan meeting scenario, in this case responding appears less of an imperative. No one else has seen this happen, and the engagement is not mission related.

If someone wants to be jerk and cut you in line when you are in a different region or country, let it pass. You’re going to get your delivery, you are going to send out your mail, whatever you’re trying to do, you are going to be able to do it. Just don’t make a situation bigger than what it needs to be. In this case I would have just let it go, not say anything and just take my turn after. [P12]

**Less Skilled.**

At the Less Skilled level, responses show that individuals appear unable to discriminate the circumstances of the interactions they are in. They tend to reveal the belief that situations can only be handled in one of two ways: by being appeasing or confrontational.

In some cases, responses at the Less Skilled level seem overly concerned with showing respect. They appear unable to discriminate the circumstances of the interactions and default to using an appeasing approach, even when it weakens their own or the position of the U.S. in general.

And I’m different because I see the ugly American way too many times on deployment, so I always try to be non-confrontational and polite. [79]

At the Less Skilled level, responses also show that individuals tend to be reactionary. That is, they engage others in the moment with “no filter.” Unlike responses at the Proficient and Master levels, responses at the Less Skilled level demonstrate no consideration of alternative ways to frame messages or to communicate them.
I don’t know why this guy is calling me a jerk if I’ve never met him before, but I’m going to – as opposed to where the Japanese guy was going to let him save face publicly, I’m going after this guy verbally, maybe getting in his face. I’d need to know a little bit more about who’s in the room and the security situation, but I’m not going to let this guy demean me on the first day of the job. So, he’s picking a fight and I’m going to take it and hopefully it’s just a verbal fight because it would be bad for my boss to fire me for punching an Afghan the first day. But I’m not going to take his crap. [P50]
Discussion

The current study has provided empirical evidence to support distinctions between ways ARC competencies can be enacted at different levels of mastery. These results are supported by analysis of behavioral data in the form of think-aloud protocols from 91 DoD personnel with varying extents of cross-cultural experience and training. Mastery level differences were demonstrated through quantitative measures of the frequencies of use of specific behaviors and strategies associated with the 12 competencies. And, through qualitative analysis of the ways competencies were enacted by personnel in the different groups.

Overall, behaviors associated with ARC were found in all three competency groups. In the case of the Less Skilled group, parallel inverse thought processes and habitual ways of responding were identified. These results provide evidence to suggest that ARC competencies can be enacted by personnel with different levels of training and cross-cultural experience.

There were of course systematic differences in the ways participants in the three competency groups applied the ARC competencies. There appeared to be some underlying patterns in these differences. Broadly, we saw important variation in the ways responses in the different groups described:

- culture and its role in military missions
- incorporating awareness of cultural difference and cultural knowledge into routine thinking
- strategies associated with the competencies
- tackling ambiguity and complexity

In the following we summarize the main differences between the three groups in these areas.

Master.

At the Master level, responses showed that participants viewed cultural learning and intercultural relationships as force multipliers that can be purposefully leveraged for mission completion. They demonstrated that participants developed relationships and applied cultural knowledge in anticipatory and deliberate ways. For example, responses showed that participants not only recognized that they themselves had a culture; they anticipated ways their unique cultural ways and mere presence could affect interactions. Similarly, at this level, responses revealed that participants anticipated that their attitudes in specific situations and towards working in a foreign environment in general could impact engagements and relationships.

In Master level responses, understanding of culture and cultural difference was applied spontaneously and routinely as participants engaged in thinking to make sense of situations and to decide on courses of action. This meant for example, that at this level, participant responses showed that they spontaneously considered what foreign others thought, wanted, or felt as part of engaging interculturally. And, when doing so, they took cultural difference into account. That is, they attempted to imagine thoughts and motives that cultural others might have, that they themselves did not. At the Master level, participants also spontaneously generated multiple, alternative explanations that incorporated understanding of difference. Meaning, they took cultural, social, and situational influences into consideration. Finally, when planning for critical intercultural interactions, responses showed that participants intentionally tailored their
communication to specific people, cultures, and contexts, discriminating situations that called for accrual rather than displays of respect.

At the Master level, responses demonstrated that participants applied competencies in ways that went beyond mere awareness and scripted performance. They indicated they had developed and used sophisticated strategies for enacting competencies. For example, at this level participants revealed that they used sophisticated cognitive strategies for managing attitudes. And, they demonstrated clever approaches for learning about culture and for assessing and mitigating bias in cultural information sources.

Finally, at this level responses showed that participants approached ambiguity and complexity in an anticipatory way. They demonstrated that they expected surprises and revealed that they had strategies for dealing with these. Mastery level responses revealed appreciation of the underlying notion that there aren’t any ‘right’ answers in the socio-cultural realm. This appeared to translate into a reduced fear of ‘making mistakes.’ At this level, participants readily used even limited cultural knowledge as tools to build social relationships. However, at the same time, Master level responses also showed that participants avoided overconfidence when confronted with unexpected or ambiguous behavior. In fact, they demonstrated that participants sought information to understand underlying causes in an open-ended way, even in situations where participants in other groups perceived an obvious ‘right answer’.

**Proficient.**

At the Proficient level, responses showed that participants tended to think about culture as imposing a set of limits not to overstep. They described cultural knowledge and relationships as useful, because they can help you keep the peace, create goodwill, and keep you out of trouble. Accordingly, at this level, participant responses showed that they took some responsibility for being prepared for working in new cultures. But they appeared to be chiefly motivated to avoid causing offense or conflict. This underlying goal affected the ways they applied several competencies. For example, when they sought feedback following engagements with unexpected outcomes, they were inclined to do so to discover the correct way to act in that specific situation.

Proficient responses showed that participants recognized cultural differences, and that they themselves have a culture. But this awareness seemed to remain at a vague and general level and did not appear to be in incorporated into their routine thinking. For example, at this level, responses revealed that participants thought in advance about their social objectives in interactions. But they tended to tailor communication in a general way; rather than adapt to the audience. Also, Proficient responses showed that while participants recognized that taking the perspective of others can help anticipate and influence decisions, they needed to be reminded to do so. And, when prompted they often neglected to consider that cultural others may think or feel differently. Also, while participant responses at this level recognized simplified or overgeneralized explanations of cultural behavior, they only reliably volunteered alternative explanations when prompted.

At this level, responses revealed that participants used simple and passive rather than sophisticated strategies for applying competencies. For example, participant responses revealed motivation to learn about culture, and participants were able to identify cultural topics they wanted to learn about. However, responses also showed that participants did not have deliberate strategies for doing so. ‘Culture that is useful to learn about’ was described merely as lists or categories of topics that were good to know. These topics were not connected to specific objectives or use cases. Similarly, responses at this level demonstrated that participants were aware that negative emotional states can ‘dampen effectiveness.’ But, at this level only simple, relatively passive techniques were used to control expressions of negative affect.
At this level, responses also showed that participants recognized that culture is ‘complicated.’ And, even though they appeared motivated to avoid causing offense, they were not fixated on and paralyzed by possible negative outcomes in interactions. Instead, they approached mistakes with a willingness to not be discouraged and to keep trying. They did however, describe a less calibrated confidence in existing knowledge than Master level responses. They only described using an open-ended approach to making sense of ambiguous situations when there was no perceived obvious interpretation.

Less Skilled.

At the Less Skilled level, responses showed participants were very focused on task completion; but they did not appear to recognize culture and intercultural relationships as levers for accomplishing mission relevant tasks. Accordingly, learning about culture was often seen as a distraction, someone else’s responsibility, or something that would be provided if it was necessary. Responses at this level revealed a belief that what is provided through formal channels is enough to be fully prepared to work in foreign cultures. And at this level, responses tended to fault others when the individual was confronted with a cultural knowledge gap.

At the Less Skilled level, responses showed that participants were aware that there are different cultures. But, they appeared to find it difficult to incorporate cultural awareness into routine thinking. For example, when confronted with cultural difference, responses at this level focused on evaluating and changing cultural behavior, rather than leverage it to inform their decision making. Similarly, Less Skilled responses demonstrated that participants struggled to consider the perspective of cultural others. Even when they were prompted to do so, they tended emphasize the needs or goals of Americans in the scenarios, or, perceived flaws in cultural other’s point of view.

In general, responses at the Less Skilled level were reactive rather than deliberate and strategy-based. These responses showed that participants had trouble recognizing their own attitudes and reactions and the effects they can have. And, that they were inclined to enter engagements without forethought or planning. Responses showed that participants were rigid and scripted in their understanding about ways to communicate and tended to neglect considering the ways messages were delivered. Perhaps because of a perceived need for templates for thinking and acting, responses at this level showed that participants preferred to have a high degree of certainty in cultural knowledge and skill before using it as a basis for interacting. Mistakes were described as something that should be avoided, and responses lacked attempts to examine errors or seek feedback. Instead, they focused on negative outcomes and ways to avoid blunders.

At the Less Skilled level, responses showed that participants engaged in either/or thinking. Behavior was either good or bad, malicious, or benevolent. And, the outcomes of engagements were either good or bad. Accordingly, responses at this level demonstrated that participants struggled to discriminate and adapt their self-presentation to the circumstances of specific interactions. They tended to reveal the belief that situations can be handled in one of two ways: by being appeasing or confrontational. This meant that at times they were overly concerned with showing respect and defaulted to using an appeasing approach, without considering possible effects of doing so. In general, responses at this level showed that participants had unqualified confidence. Confidence that the information they would be provided through formal channels and from experienced colleagues is all they would need. And, confidence in their own ability to interpret ambiguous situations. Responses at this level described surprises as preparation failures.
Directions for Future Research

Studies on ARC to date have shown that the competencies are used by personnel from across the DoD with extensive experience, having served in high contact roles in multiple culturally distinct locations. The current study has successfully charted mastery levels for cultural competence based on behavioral data from a broad sample of DoD personnel with a wide range of overseas experience.

One useful direction for future research would be to determine the association of ARC level assignments with outcome variables, such as measures of how well personnel actually adapt to encountered cultures on the job. This would serve to further refine and validate the model. Research along these lines could examine relationships between ARC levels and broad domains that have been identified as important in previous research on international and intercultural job effectiveness (Kealy & Ruben, 1983; Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002). These comprise professional performance outcomes, such as accomplishing collaborative tasks involving cultural others. Relevant outcomes could also include the quality of relationships developed with people from other cultures, as well as general adjustment to the cultural milieu.

A related beneficial next step would be to obtain larger participant samples in future studies, such as in those that aim to extend the current results by examining cultural adaptability outcomes. The sample sizes in the current study meet typical standards found in experimental and quasi-experimental psychological scientific research. Yet, replicating and extending the results using a larger sample with an even more diverse range of DoD backgrounds would reinforce confidence that the levels of mastery, defined here, capture and adequately describe the full range of variability in the DoD. Data from a larger sample could also enable reliable detection of more fine-grained differences in levels of mastery. This direction of research takes an important step towards establishing norms for ARC mastery levels. A normative study identifies the skill level of the DoD population. Normed data with ARC mastery levels would better enable instructors and program managers to identify development needs within the populations they serve and devise strategies for building cultural competence.

Conducting larger-scale studies along these lines presents significant research challenges. The issues include identifying and recruiting sufficient participants who meet stringent criteria for inclusion, collecting and managing high-grade behavioral response data, and analyzing open-ended verbal responses to determine levels of mastery. Such research should use procedures that allow for efficient collection and processing, yet still yield performance-based data. Research along these lines is feasible, but requires well-developed systems and processes to execute successfully. Further refining, standardizing, and codifying the methods in such a study will also enable effective transfer to other research groups to adopt the techniques and replicate results.

Another useful direction for future research would be to determine how difficult each of the ARC competencies is to develop. Within each competency, it seems clear that some skills are harder to develop than others. This can be seen in the data showing no significant differences between Low and Medium competence groups for skills associated with the Master level. It is also likely that some competencies are tougher for people to build than others. Providing information regarding developmental difficulty based on research, along with an account of the factors that hinder or accelerate competence acquisition and development would be useful for programs seeking to optimize their efforts. Determining which competencies take more and less time to acquire will enable programs to devise strategies that generate results quickly, and at the same time set the stage for long-term improvement.
Implications for Education and Training

The primary purpose for ARC is to support training and education. Hence, the mastery levels in the current study were crafted with that aim in mind. Defined levels of mastery make the model an actionable foundation for cultural competence instruction development and assessment for several reasons.

First, ARC levels of mastery give instructors and instructional designers a well-formed basis for determining the most important knowledge and skills to cover for specific learner audiences in the time available. Second, by linking specific knowledge and skills to levels of mastery, the model provides a foundation for developing rubrics to assess learning in their courses (Brookhart, 2013). These, in turn, can be used to gauge the extent to which course materials and exercises help learners advance their cultural competence.

In addition, each ARC mastery level includes a description of behavior reflecting a degree of competence, which can be used to provide explanatory feedback in complex situations without any firm right or wrong answers. Hence, the levels describe behaviors in terms that allow for many different paths to successful patterns of interaction.

Mastery levels or associated rubrics can be shared with learners at the beginning of a course or unit to help them plan and monitor their own progress. They provide general guidance regarding learning targets for personnel over the long-term, as well to show learners what immediate actions can help them improve on a competency. For example, Hafner and Hafner (2003) found initial evidence that the process of applying rubrics with mastery levels for peer assessment helped learners adopt skills by watching their peers and identifying what key performance behaviors look like in practice.

As the ARC mastery levels are described in general terms, they can be used in different service training contexts and with many kinds of instructional activities. Encountering the mastery levels periodically over time helps personnel build up clear concepts of what it means to be culturally competent. Finally, the mastery levels support natural social learning, giving personnel a means to identify potential issues and provide peer feedback in work situations on the job.

ARC competencies directly apply to engagement and working relationships with members of other cultures. And the kinds of social interaction skills included make positive contributions to performance abroad (cf. Abbe & Halpin, 2010). In addition to their direct application for working effectively with people from other cultures, ARC competencies provide a solid foundation upon which to build both regional expertise and language proficiency.

DoD LREC training programs have multiple culture-related training components including general culture training, specialized regional training, and language training. The most direct way to incorporate ARC is to develop general cultural competence instruction using the model to guide instructional design. Stand-alone instruction of this kind provides a useful foundation for all personnel. This does not mean personnel should all receive the same content. The instructional materials should be tailored to the specific work roles that trainees are preparing for. Doing so helps the learners to directly apply the skills and knowledge they need to deal with challenging cross-cultural encounters on their jobs. It can also help learners to appreciate the applied value and reasons for why they are receiving cultural instruction in the first place, and so boost their motivation to learn in those courses.
General cultural competence training should also go beyond conceptual and theoretical instruction and incorporate deliberate and repeated opportunities to practice ARC competencies. This is the difference between knowing and doing. Practice in different contexts and circumstances supports the transition of conceptual knowledge to performance in realistic settings.

In addition to stand-alone cultural competence courses, ARC competencies can be infused in courses on regional expertise, language instruction, and live-action field exercises. In practice, personnel enact region-specific knowledge, culture-general competence, and language skills together. ARC offers a common frame for threading these topics together in order to follow the “train like you fight model” which promotes skill acquisition and transfer.

In regional expertise and some culture-general courses we have reviewed, instruction often includes, among other elements, study of theoretical frameworks that describe categories or domains of regional information. And different services have their own frameworks for analyzing aspects of social and cultural factors in a region (Mackenzie & Miller, 2017). For example, the Marine Corps draws on their Operational Culture framework, and the Air Force teaches from their 12 Domains of Culture (Salmoni & Holmes-Eber, 2008; Selmeski, 2007). Such frameworks provide personnel with useful “mental bins” that help them organize and think about different types of information one might include when conducting a regional analysis as part of planning. They can also give personnel an organizing framework for researching and analyzing an area before going abroad.

ARC provides a different level of cultural knowledge and skills that complements these kinds of frameworks. The cognitive skills that comprise ARC provide a means to synchronize with other frameworks and enhance learning outcomes. As we described in a recent instructional analysis, careful course sequencing and thoughtful infusion of ARC facilitates learning region-specific training content (Duran, Rasmussen, & Sieck, 2018). For example, the ARC competency develops cultural explanations of behavior describes cognitive skills needed to analyze and understand human actions in foreign locations. It supports students in developing complex explanations of cultural behavior that include local and broader area information, such as learned in region-specific courses.

Teaching students to develop deep, integrated explanations that incorporate cultural knowledge about what is going on in a cultural situation has benefits both for cultural engagement and analysis capabilities. First, it increases the likelihood that personnel can understand, anticipate, and identify levers for influencing behavior as part of their engagements. Second, it gives learners a framework for determining what information they want out of an analysis process and why. This serves to increase their motivation to learn region-specific information.

As with regional understanding, foreign language learning outcomes are also likely enhanced by ARC instruction. In the language courses we have examined, instruction naturally places a heavy emphasis on acquisition of vocabulary and grammar. And, as you would expect, a great deal of time is spent on practice. In these courses, ‘culture instruction’ is most often limited to notes containing facts about a region and its local customs. Other culture components may include cultural events or excursions, analysis of authentic language materials, or first-hand accounts provided by a foreign language instructor. Therefore, while language instruction does provide students with cultural exposure, it is increasingly recognized that language instruction materials “fall short of the mark when it comes to equipping sojourners with the cognitive skills needed in a second-culture environment” (Straub, 1999, p.1).

ARC competencies can be infused into language instruction in ways that not only cultivate such cognitive skills, but that possibly enhance language learning. As a proof-of-concept, we have
developed a set of task-based injects that allow students to learn about and practice the thinking skills that are associated with ARC, at the same time as they are acquiring Spanish language vocabulary and practicing production (Rasmussen & Duran, 2018). Using ARC as a framework for teaching culture provides a systematic format and vocabulary for culture discussions in the language classroom. Further, it gives students strategies for moving beyond limited cultural information provided by individual language instructors and textbook content. Lastly, it is possible that increasing the complexity of tasks in the language classroom in this way may push students towards greater accuracy and complexity of production (Robinson & Gilabert, 2007).

A final application of ARC is as a basis for developing assessment rubrics for immersive exercises or simulations that have a cultural engagement component. We recently conducted a study of cultural competence requirements in the Army Civil Affairs culminating exercise, Sluss-Tiller (Rasmussen, 2018). Sluss-Tiller is a 3-week, human engagement intensive, simulated military operation in which students are tasked to engage and build relationships with foreign cultural role-players from all over the world. We noted that Sluss-Tiller included realistic, culturally and cognitively authentic challenges. Students could not just follow a few simple do’s and don’ts and ‘get it right.’ We found that ARC competencies were aligned with the demands of Sluss-Tiller and appeared critical to performing well in the exercise. Students used many of the competencies to support analysis and engagement. Some were encouraged or reinforced by coaches during planning and feedback sessions. These sessions were especially useful for gaining further insight into students’ thought processes and considerations that drove their interpersonal decisions and performance in the moment, as well as for providing cognitive feedback. Integrating rubrics associated with ARC competencies into assessment systems for human engagement exercises would be a useful step towards closing the feedback loop between the schoolhouses and the operational force.

Observations of the exercise further reinforced the idea that exposure to concepts related to general cultural competence is not, by itself, sufficient to achieve skilled performance. For example, trainees who had exposure to ARC-aligned instruction were clearly able to grasp the conceptual aspects of the competencies. However, they were not always able to enact the competency in a role-playing setting. Other trainees were overwhelmed with mission demands and failed to enact competencies despite being repeatedly reminded just minutes before by their training coaches.

Repeated practice will help make competency use more automatic and therefore less likely to be “left out” when competing mission demands come into play. Consider, for example, the difference between needing to be prompted to take the perspective of others (i.e. Proficient level indicator), and automatically taking the perspective of others into account during intercultural interactions (i.e., Master level indicator). Threading ARC competencies through multiple kinds of LREC instruction, and stressing practice of the cultural skills within each, is the surest way to help personnel move further up the master levels, and achieve reliable performance in cross-cultural encounters.

Alongside the studies and analysis to develop DLNSEO’s general cultural competence model, considerable work has been done to create cultural training and education materials and programs. In addition, technological advances have enabled strides to be made in the design and delivery of computer-based instruction, virtual simulations, and apps. The DoD Components responsible for the delivery of cultural training and education have leveraged these advances in different ways to support the unique missions and requirements of the populations they serve. An inclusive review of the different programs and products that exist within the current DoD culture
instruction landscape is out of scope for the current effort. Nevertheless, based on the instructional reviews and analyses in which we have participated, it is reasonable to conclude that different groups are in different places with respect to current development, implementation, and evaluation of their programs.

As mentioned previously, ARC can be used as the basis for design of programs that do not currently include general cultural competence instruction that their leadership deems satisfactory. In cases where reasonable instruction already exists, program managers might consider review processes to determine the extent and depth of coverage of ARC competencies. Based on analyses we have conducted of several training courses, we suggest that reviews at least check the alignment between course content and competencies, the language difficulty of concepts presented, and extent of exercises for practicing skills relative to presentation of declarative information.

In addition, care should be taken to examine both surface and deep features of the instruction. It is possible for a course to use language from the model to describe content that does not facilitate learning about or practice of the relevant knowledge or skills. On the other hand, a course does not need to match the exact terminology from the model to build skills that align with ARC competencies. In those cases, course designers may consider using the model to revise course content in ways that reduce jargon so that concepts and skills are more easily acquired by students (see Appendix 1). Revising the way instructional content and learning objectives are communicated could also serve to make the connection to national security clearer, and otherwise better communicate the relevance and usefulness of the instruction to job success.

The results of this kind of instructional review should provide an overview of the competencies that are covered and to what depth. Bloom’s taxonomy can be used as a reference to determine the extent of cognitive engagement required by individual course elements and associated depth of learning. Such a review can provide a basis for identifying and effectively incorporating competencies to fill any potential gaps. As a last step, the model levels can be used to create rubrics and exercises for formative assessment of learning.

The DoD is committed to providing training and education programs that build, sustain, and enhance the skills and knowledge personnel need to deal with cultural challenges they face abroad. One theme that we hear repeatedly when speaking with trainees and DoD leadership responsible for LREC training is that personnel are pressed for time when it comes to training. Trainees and leaders need to immediately see the direct relevance of training content to their mission. ARC was empirically derived from the best practices of DoD personnel and captured in the appropriate vernacular for trainees and instructors. ARC provides a basis for developing instruction to meet the needs of diverse groups, and for personnel at different stages of cultural competence development. It outlines the thinking, learning, and interaction skills personnel need to understand, collaborate with, or influence people with culturally different beliefs, values, and perceptions. It is useful for any DoD organization that prepares personnel for work that involves foreign partners or populations.
References


Appendix

Culture-General Competence Model: Definitions and behavioral examples.

The model includes four broad competency domains. Each general competency domain has three associated competencies:

**Diplomatic Mindset**

Knows ways that cultural understanding and relationships help support mission objectives. Recognizes that own view of the world is shaped by personal background and culture. Manages attitudes and reactions to work productively with members of other cultures.

**Cultural Learning**

Takes a proactive approach to learning about cultures. Draws on a variety of sources to gain cultural information and considers their potential biases. Reflects on experiences and seeks feedback to improve cultural relationships, skills, and knowledge.

**Cultural Reasoning**

Attempts to make sense of puzzling situations or people. Explores a variety of reasons why people from other cultures may behave differently than expected. Considers the point of view of culturally different others.

**Intercultural Interaction**

Engages with others and builds relationships, even when uncertain about the culture. Prepares and plans communications before challenging interactions. Considers objectives and present oneself in ways to achieve intended effects.
### 1. Maintains a Mission Orientation

**Definition:** Builds rapport and intercultural relationships to achieve mission objectives, using cultural knowledge and skills to develop, monitor, and maintain them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level Definitions</th>
<th>Behavioral Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td>Working to build a relationship with the unspoken leader of a local village to increase the chances of getting local buy-in for U.S. mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes that the purpose of building intercultural relationships is to achieve mission objectives, rather than to just make friends or do good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops relationships in a strategic, purposeful way to further the mission</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluates intercultural behaviors and situations in terms of influence on mission</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes when mission objectives conflict with cultural norms and manages that conflict</td>
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| **Proficient** | Working to make Iraqi forces good enough to deal with their own challenges, but not trying to convert them to the exact U.S. military ways. |
| Recognizes limits of the mission, including that it is not about making other cultures exactly like U.S. culture or enforcing U.S. laws/customs on locals |
| Develops rapport and relationships with members of the culture in a non-targeted way |
| Assesses progress of developing rapport and professional relationships; repairs as needed |
| Knows specific ways cultural information aids in meeting mission objectives |

| **Less Skilled** | Harassing locals who are transporting khat in a region where it’s not illegal, when the mission is anti-terrorism. |
| Does not recognize mission parameters, oversteps with intervention |
| Misses opportunities to build relationships |
| Struggles to recognize ways actions affect relationships and mission accomplishment |

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>Immediately seeking to replace a foreign partner who does not perform according to expectations, rather than building a relationship and mentoring.</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Spending off time with counterparts in order to develop a basis of trust needed to conduct joint missions. |

Determining that intervening in the internal affairs of a foreign partner would jeopardize the relationship and negatively influence military-military relations. |

Recognizing that a foreign Commander’s desire to impress his superior conflicts with the objective of a performance evaluation and finding a compromise. |

Working to make Iraqi forces good enough to deal with their own challenges, but not trying to convert them to the exact U.S. military ways. |

Befriending a local who works in the mess hall where one is assigned overseas. |

Suspecting that foreign partners are offended and tracking them down to smooth things over. |

Expressing that knowing a little about some key political players in a region and talking to partners about them can give you a feel for their loyalties. |
## 2. Understands Self in Cultural Context

**Definition:** Recognizes roots and limits of own point of view; seeks to understand how own self and the U.S. in general are viewed by members of other cultures; establishes baselines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
<th>Behavioral Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td>Uses knowledge of own cultural background as a baseline for comparison with new cultures. Recognizes situations where underlying cultural differences affect behavior and engagement. Considers ways own and U.S. presence influence others.</td>
<td>Explaining that locals ‘cutting in line’ might compare to an unspoken rule on U.S. military bases where soldiers that must go back to work get priority of service. Recognizing that foreign partners may not follow U.S. custom of taking copious notes during briefings and using this insight to adapt process for joint meetings. Considering that a foreign intelligence officer may defer decisions to the Americans because he feels he can’t stand toe to toe with U.S. intelligence capabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td>Recognizes that own way of viewing the world is biased as a result of individual background, personal history, and culture. Knows distinctive U.S. cultural values, views, and ways. Applies understanding or seeks to understand how own self and the U.S. in general are viewed by members of other cultures.</td>
<td>Recognizing that one’s view that a partner military’s method of discipline is abusive is based on acceptable practices in the U.S. military. Acknowledging that U.S. military tends to value efficiency and getting things done quickly. Being a little more blunt with locals after finding they tend to view Americans as polite but superficial.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td>Assumes U.S. laws, customs generalize to local area. Considers U.S. way as only correct way. Expects others to regularly adapt to own or U.S. way of thinking or behaving. Does not recognize that other cultures differ from own.</td>
<td>Determining that a local elder using khat is a criminal because it’s a schedule 1 substance in the U.S. Concluding that foreign partners have lower standards compared to Americans after comparing their equipment with that of the U.S. military. After noticing that foreign partners are not taking notes at a mission briefing, providing notes to the partners and instructing them to study. Explaining that some locals who are perceived as pushy are just rude and that ‘rudeness’ is universal.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# 3. Manages Attitude Towards Culture

**Definition:** Manages negative attitudes and reactions in order to accomplish collaborative tasks and establish and maintain mission critical relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level Definitions</th>
<th>Behavioral Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses sophisticated strategies to manage attitudes and work with others</td>
<td>Reinterpreting a foreign partner’s apparent failure to properly follow a plan and considering that he may have a better way to approach the work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manages expectations about what and how much can be accomplished within intercultural interactions and on assignments in general</td>
<td>Adjusting expectations about how quickly a structure can be built because building materials are hard to come by in the host nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusts to culture as a routine, ongoing process</td>
<td>When abroad, occasionally meeting up with other Americans to relax and recharge in familiar ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes and sets aside negative attitudes and reactions to accomplish tasks</td>
<td>Notices that one is frustrated with a foreign partner’s collaboration style, then taking a breath and pushing through to finish the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts to maintain positive or neutral attitude towards culture</td>
<td>Finding a couple of things to like about the people one is living among in another culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes that it is natural for cultural differences to wear on attitudes</td>
<td>Expresses that one has to mentally prepare oneself for differences in punctuality to avoid frustration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands that personal attitudes, values, preferences can get in the way of establishing critical intercultural relationships</td>
<td>Suggesting that one should think twice before operating under the assumption that locals hate Americans, because it changes the way that you act towards them which changes how they receive you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reacts to differences with negative evaluation, emotional response, or judgment.</td>
<td>Mentioning how rude and disorganized the locals are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacks strategies to manage reactions, emotions</td>
<td>Expressing that frustration felt when dealing with locals is due to specific local customs one finds annoying, rather than a response to working in a foreign context.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Attributes own negative reactions to specific people or situations only, without consideration of a broader context | }
4. Self Directs own Cultural Learning

**Definition:** Seeks to advance understanding of own and other cultures; takes ownership of learning by framing questions, setting objectives, and gathering pertinent information.

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies key topics for study that enhance ability to operate in host country</td>
<td>Studying local history and current political events because these can provide the context for anticipating how people think and will react to U.S. interventions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generates own principles for organizing cultural facts and theories</td>
<td>Describing that one can unpack topics; like, learning about who is currently in power in a region implicitly helps you learn about history and ethnic tensions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses sophisticated strategies for learning new cultures effectively</td>
<td>Learning two songs, two poems, and reading two books from the host culture and asking locals about them as the basis for assessing one’s understanding of how the culture works.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continually assesses own cultural skills and accuracy of current understanding of a culture</td>
<td>Comparing training content to what is seen on the ground in host culture with the goal of identifying knowledge gaps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes that cultural learning is an ongoing process that takes place prior to, during and post deployment</td>
<td>Anticipating that a course can’t prepare you for everything; you have to keep figuring things out when you arrive in the host nation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks out opportunities to improve cultural understanding, beyond provided training</td>
<td>Sharing a meal with local partner forces in their dining hall to try local cuisine and learn local dining etiquette.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learns independently by observing people on the ground</td>
<td>Paying close attention to how locals are sitting during a meeting to determine how to sit cross-legged.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views own cultural learning as other’s responsibility</td>
<td>Determining that one’s language teacher is to blame when met with a stiff reaction from locals after attempting to use a phrase taught in training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers cultural learning as something to be completed in training to be fully prepared</td>
<td>Expressing that a culture course should prepare you for all the local eating habits and speaking habits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn't recognize how cultural understanding can improve relationships and decisions</td>
<td>Expressing that one does not need to worry about the ‘culture stuff’; it’s not part of the job description.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Develops Reliable Information Sources

**Definition:** Identifies multiple sources for obtaining information about new cultures; establishes credibility of individuals who can provide insight into a culture and other sources.

<table>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td>Verifying embassy reports on the local area by driving around, observing patterns of life, and talking to locals with various perspectives, from village leaders to kids. Concluding that although one was taught that locals are offended by seeing the soles of another’s feet, a lack of offense might indicate the rule does not apply to younger, less traditional members of the culture. Recognizing that a colleague’s conclusion that a foreign partner is dishonest is merely his opinion; deciding to drill deeper into the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assesses credibility and bias in cultural information and sources (e.g., by checking multiple sources)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands that general information about a culture will not necessarily be true in all contexts and circumstances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discriminates opinions from facts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td>Gathering information from the CIA Fact Book, State Department website, and reading a book of local fables before deploying to Ethiopia. Cautioning that members of a partner force are from different tribes and are known to give bad information about one another because they don’t like each other. Reading local newspapers, watching local TV shows, and talking to the locals when arriving in country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifies and uses a variety of sources (e.g., books, web sites, local informants, etc.) for obtaining information about cultures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledges potential bias exists in cultural information sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes beyond U.S. military-based sources of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td>Avoiding a seemingly disgruntled foreign partner after hearing that he hates Americans. Having heard a rule against showing the bottoms of your feet to locals, and expecting it to apply without exception. Accepting without question a frequently deployed teammate’s conclusion that a foreign partner who bought tents that appear to be of poor quality must be skimming money, as these locals are known to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not attend to reliability, potential bias in sources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treats cultural information as absolute, widely general</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts as a given cultural information handed by authority</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### 6. Reflects and Seeks Feedback on Intercultural Encounters

**Definition:** Reflects on prior intercultural interactions and experiences; seeks feedback about own actions to continually improve cultural skills and knowledge.

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<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treats mistakes as opportunities to learn more about a culture</td>
<td>A male soldier mistakenly proclaiming to foreign partner forces in the local language that he is pregnant. Using a break in the laughter to ask how to properly say his intended message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks feedback after intercultural interactions to discover underlying cultural rules and principles</td>
<td>Noting two incidents where foreign partners from different cultures each behave in ways that suggest a desire to preserve face</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derives principles and lessons learned across cultural experiences that can be applied in future cultural situations</td>
<td>Working with a foreign partner who may have skimmed money in a transaction, remembering that in a different region, a certain level of allowance had to be made to keep things running.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapts and extends existing knowledge and skills to fit new cultural situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks feedback about own actions after intercultural interactions to adjust performance</td>
<td>Asking how to correctly eat a local delicacy correctly after making a clumsy attempt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compares different cultural experiences to identify group level commonalities and differences</td>
<td>Noticing that foreign partners from one culture make decisions more cautiously than in another culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts to generalize knowledge and skills that may be useful across different cultural contexts</td>
<td>Explaining that in many cultures it is customary to initially use a formal interaction style until a level of rapport is established, then it is OK to be more informal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruminates on adverse interaction outcomes rather than reflect to draw lessons</td>
<td>Concluding that one looked foolish and neglecting to ask how to improve after a failed attempt to use a foreign language greeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responds defensively to criticism and feedback</td>
<td>Rebuffing an interpreter who volunteers tips on how to eat a local delicacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignores feedback on performance in cultural encounters</td>
<td>Focusing on similarities in head dress between two groups, while missing differences in beliefs and values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggles to compare between cultural situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 7. Copes with Cultural Surprises

**Definition:** Notices behaviors or events within other cultures that violate own expectations and manages surprises by analyzing their causes.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td>Noting that even though it seems clear locals are acting out of fear, there could be something else going on and it’s worth talking to members of the local community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moves beyond obvious interpretations of puzzling behavior and attempts to</td>
<td>Considering that the lack of a “normal” line might be a culture thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discover underlying factors</td>
<td>Watching how local pedestrians deal with shocking driving patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers culture as a possible general source of unexpected behavior</td>
<td>Explaining that even though one was told about differences in personal space, it was still surprising when it happened for the first time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts to determine whether observed behavior is typical within a culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes that cultural surprises happen regardless of how much one knows about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the culture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td>Noticing that the way foreign partners act in a meeting is not what one is used to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notices and attends to cross-cultural behavior or events that are obviously</td>
<td>Asking local officials why they didn’t want repairs for the local school at no cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>surprising or violate expectations</td>
<td>States that uncertainty and surprise is to be expected when working in a foreign culture and that you have to be ready to figure some things out on your own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asks open-ended questions or otherwise seeks information to understand cause of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puzzling interactions or anomalous foreign behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts to find out what foreigners think or what they want</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts some personal responsibility for managing ambiguous cultural situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td>Concluding that a foreign partner broke an agreement due to dishonesty, and immediately seeking punitive action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicitly doesn’t care why behavior occurred, or assumes knows why with high</td>
<td>Trying to confirm one’s conclusion that locals are afraid of going to their jobs by asking “are you scared of being attacked?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certainty</td>
<td>When confronted with ambiguity, expresses resentment that one did not receive training on how to handle this exact kind of situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misses or explains away cross-cultural behavior or events that are surprising or</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>violate expectations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks for information to confirm initial interpretations of behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expects to receive any instructions up front for dealing with unusual situations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Develops Cultural Explanations of Behavior

**Definition:** Develops functional explanations for the behaviors of members of other cultures that incorporate local concepts, beliefs, and values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporates social, cultural, and situational factors into explanations of foreign behavior</td>
<td>Explaining that a foreign military uses extreme punishments due to a difference in attitude toward physical pain and because soldiers must have iron clad discipline to deal with a constant threat of war with a neighboring nation that can be inadvertently escalated by soldiers who act rashly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneously generates multiple, alternative explanations of behavior</td>
<td>Speculating that a medical facility may be turning down the offer for free improvements because they see it as a short-term solution, as they lack the resources to maintain them. Or, they do not have the skill to use the newer technologies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develops integrated (deep causal) explanations of cultural behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledges the possibility of more than one explanation for a behavior</td>
<td>Telling a U.S. Captain that there may be other reasons why a foreign commander bought ‘cheap’ open-bottomed tents other than to skim money.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generates multiple, alternative explanations of behavior when prompted</td>
<td>Suggesting that the concluding that foreign partners are not smiling during a meeting is because they hate Americans is likely a simplification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes stereotyped, overgeneralized explanations of foreign behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses stereotyped, overgeneralized explanations of foreign behavior</td>
<td>Stating that local leaders who decline U.S. aid are clearly too proud to accept help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generates singular, simple explanations for foreign behavior</td>
<td>Explaining that a foreign commander is trying to get an inside edge on an exercise to look good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggles to consider alternative explanations of foreign behavior</td>
<td>When asked if there’s another possible reason, being unable to think of one.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 9. Takes Perspective of Others in Intercultural Situations

**Definition:** Considers the point of view of culturally different others during intercultural interactions to help meet objectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routinely attempts to consider the point of view of others during intercultural interactions, making reference to their expected knowledge, desires and attitudes</td>
<td>Indicating that a foreign Captain and Private engaged in a potentially dangerous confrontation might each know how it is going to play out, unlike an outsider who’d be taken aback by the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers that people with different backgrounds view events differently</td>
<td>Explaining that foreign partners have a shame-based culture and a local Commander’s request to preview a training exercise set-up is motivated by his fear of failing in the eyes of his leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses social, cultural, and situational factors to adjust expected way people from that culture view events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognizes that taking perspective of others helps to anticipate and influence their decisions</td>
<td>Stating that understanding what a local man’s sons mean to him can help you anticipate what he would do if insurgents threatened them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When prompted, considers the point of view of others during intercultural interactions, making reference to their expected knowledge, desires, attitudes, emotions, or intentions</td>
<td>Taking the perspective of pestering locals after a team member points out their life circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses own knowledge, desires, attitudes, emotions, or intentions to infer cultural others' perspectives</td>
<td>Stating that if you were in a foreign commander’s shoes and had men about to be evaluated you might feel uncertain their skills and therefore could want them to see the test environment beforehand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers point of view of similar others</td>
<td>Understanding why an American buddy acted as he did in a local establishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not take the perspective of cultural others into account</td>
<td>Insisting local officials let the U.S. repair their roads even when they have turned down the offer several times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluates rather than analyzes others' points of view</td>
<td>Telling locals what they should want, rather than listening to what they are saying.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 10. Acts Under Cultural Uncertainty

**Definition:** Uses cultural knowledge, albeit limited and uncertain, to take action and develop relationships.

<table>
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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master</strong></td>
<td>Asking about a famous author in the region one has heard a little about as a way to help locals feel empowered by sharing information about a topic they likely know about. Being laughed at after trying to speak the local language, laughing along and turning the incident into an ‘inside joke.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td>Using a few things one knows about the MIG-19 to build rapport with an Albanian General who flew a MIG-19. Stating that one isn’t going to be in any position to debate the intricacies of the Koran with locals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td>Refusing to bring a local topic into conversation without understanding specific details to avoid ‘looking dumb’ in front of foreign counterparts. Answering a foreign partner in English after being greeted in the local language to avoid looking foolish because of poor pronunciation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Uses existing cultural knowledge in a strategic way when taking action
- Knows that trying to address cultural norms, language, etc., is generally seen as positive, regardless of current performance level
- Has developed strategies for recovering from mishaps, giving the confidence to be able to use uncertain knowledge
- Uses the cultural knowledge that does have when taking action
- Avoids paralysis due to having less than complete cultural understanding or mastery of cultural behavior
- Recognizes that outsider knowledge of a culture is limited
- Needs complete knowledge, certainty before interacting
- Resistant to trying language, behavior, mentioning aspects of culture
- Attempts to not be noticed in any way
11. Plans Intercultural Communication

**Definition:** Plans communication content and means of expression in advance of mission critical interactions.

<table>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employs personal or cultural information about people, surroundings and situation to plan and adjust upcoming critical communications.</td>
<td>Deciding that someone of higher rank should approach a foreign partner who has been mistranslating instructions to a work crew, anticipating that the partner would be more receptive to someone of equal authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers effects on others in advance of interactions.</td>
<td>Anticipating that directly intervening in a confrontation will undermine a foreign officer’s authority. Thinking through a discreet and indirect approach instead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sets goals to influence how the US is seen by locals.</td>
<td>Planning to gradually encourage responsibility from a foreign officer that routinely defers to the U.S. to build his confidence and send the message that the U.S. is there to assist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers possible situational changes and responses to own communication and plans for those.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans own and other (e.g., subordinates or interpreters) communication content and means of expression in advance of critical interactions.</td>
<td>Making a plan to ask a foreign Captain several questions to get a sense of his views and any concerns with an upcoming mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defines relevant social objectives.</td>
<td>Setting goals for an engagement with a foreign Captain that he should be able to air his concerns, feel that they were listened to, and know that the door is open if he has problems in the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considers multiple dimensions of communication such as words, body language, posture, dress, social context, and actions when planning.</td>
<td>Planning to sit in front of one’s interpreter to ensure that one is perceived as the lead for an engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has difficulty tailoring communication plans to audiences with different cultural background and experience.</td>
<td>Is unable to envision alternative ways to build rapport when a situation does not lend itself to asking about the other person’s family, discussing the weather, or other standard topics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overly rigid, scripted with planning.</td>
<td>Deciding to ‘go with the flow’ during an upcoming meeting with a village elder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engages without forethought, no planning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. Engages in Disciplined Self Presentation

**Definition:** Presents self to achieve intended effects with the audience; adapts style of presentation to fit the target culture and situation as needed.

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presents oneself in a way to achieve an intended effect on the other person’s perception (includes sometimes maintaining own style and other times adapting self-presentation) Adapts approach, adjusts interaction style when needed, even in provocative situations Acts to de-escalate tensions in situations of potential conflict Displays or accrues respect according to circumstances</td>
<td>Mentions local historical events to show caring and connect so locals will open up and provide information. During a joint training exercise debrief, indirectly asking who else was in an area where a fratricide occurred to reframe a mistake as a team outcome after it appears a foreign partner tries to hide it. Reacting to an insult with humor to demonstrate that one can be in control and trusted in combat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proficient</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitors effects of one’s presentation on others in intercultural interactions, and adjusts accordingly Avoids unnecessary conflicts (i.e. ones that don't meet or run counter to own or US goals) Recognizes that own appearance and how one presents oneself can influence the outcome of intercultural interactions</td>
<td>Beginning a conversation with local partners in a formal and professional manner, then throwing out a subtle joke and gauging reaction to determine their reception to a more informal approach. Recognizing that self is a foot taller than the locals in an area and bowing deeply and remaining seated during an engagement to not appear imposing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Less Skilled</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overly concerned with showing respect, without discriminating circumstances of the interaction Employs an appeasing approach to interactions, even when it weakens own or US position Reacts and engages others with “no filter”</td>
<td>Making it a point to always be non-confrontational and polite no matter what the circumstance when working abroad, out of fear of looking like ‘an ugly American’. Interprets conflict or provocation as ‘picking a fight’ and reacts with perceived in-kind aggression.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>