

Information Paper: The Application of Psychology and the Behavioral Sciences in Advising

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“Because war is a clash between opposing human wills, the human dimension is central in war. It is the human dimension which infuses war with its intangible moral factors. War is shaped by human nature and is subject to the complexities, in-consistencies, and peculiarities which characterize human behavior.

Since war is an act of violence based on irreconcilable disagreement, it will invariably inflame and be shaped by human emotions.” - MCDP 1

The Marine Corps is expeditionary, meant to be forward deployed and engaged with foreign populations. While interacting with those populations a Marine is expected to be both the peacemaker and when necessary, a life taker. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication 1 (MCDP 1) sets the stage for understanding the human dimension of war. In accordance with understanding the human dimension, the Service must create Marines that understand themselves first before they can comprehend the human dimension of war. In short, this means creating critically thinking, emotionally intelligent Marines, with a bias for action. The USMC currently has two programs, Language Regional Expertise and Culture (LREC) and Combat Hunter, that are intended to help Marines understand their operational environment better. However, they are not sufficiently aligned and produce conflicting world views. In short, they teach Marines two categories of skills, “No Better Friend”, and “No Worse Enemy.” There is a way to bridge this gap, and to help create a more critically thinking Marine that is moral and ethical, with a bias for action.

Operational Culture, which includes concepts on establishing cross cultural relations and cultural stress or culture shock, is designed to provide the education necessary to connect with foreign populations better. We will call these skills “No Better Friend Skills.” Combat Hunter is designed to provide a Marine the skills required to profile a target and kill, capture, contact, or let it go. We will call these skills “No Worse Enemy Skills.” The purposes of the programs are opposing and the lexicons both use social science and behavioral science terms to provide context and relevance to their intended purposes. These two programs are providing a Marine two opposing sets of skills, using two similar lexicons, to make decisions. The net effect is mental confusion which causes disruption in the Marines decision cycle by confusing whether to treat a foreigner as a friend or foe. When in fact, the self-awareness and skills required to exercise both “No Better Friend Skills” and “No Worse Enemy Skills” can and should be complimentary, and built into a Marine’s Emotional Intelligence (EI) and ability to critically think about EI. By doing so the Service may see benefits in a Marine’s personal growth, ability to handle multiple types of stress, and an improved ability to interact in both interpersonally and in times of violence, and an improved ability to make decisions.

This paper will discuss the linkages between the USMC’s cultural learning and CH programs as they intersect in the world of advising Foreign Security Forces (FSF) and overseas deployments by the Fleet Marine Forces (FMF) when engaging and interacting with FSF and foreign government officials and populations. It will do so by attempting to walk the reader through categories of required advisor understanding and linking established mental models to demonstrate a better way of training to interact in complex environments. This will be done by anchoring Marines with a firm understanding of emotional intelligence and how it impacts thinking and their ability to improve it.

Emotional Intelligence: Emotional Intelligence (EI) is defined as, “The capacity to be aware of, control, and express one’s emotions, and to handle interpersonal relationships judiciously and empathetically.”¹ One’s level of EI is hard to determine and measure, in most cases it will be recognized by another in terms like, “that person just has it together.” However, what makes up EI can be defined to some degree. Figure 1.1 depicts the categories of EI that are commonly accepted in the field of psychology. To the Marine or Sailor on the ground, understanding each of these categories, what they are, what they mean, how they relate to oneself, and how one exhibits these traits is critical. This requires a lot of external study on what EI is, as well as a lot of self-reflection to understand how they relate or manifest within one’s own head. If we view EI as the key to one’s ability to relate to, and react in, the world around them, we can then teach a Marine to enhance their EI. By using a series of mental models, it is possible to improve a Marine’s EI by explaining: how one receives information from the outside world; how it is processed in the brain through pre-existing “file folders” (i.e. Heuristics) of past experience²; how to update those file folders; and how improve the ways a Marine reaches a decision. The study of EI, with the intent of personal growth, requires self-examination and a lot of self-critical analysis and thinking.



Figure 1.1 Emotional Intelligence

Decision Making: If EI is the proficiency level of one’s understanding and ability to wield the categories of information in figure 1.1, then it is obvious that we are beginning to think about how and why we think. For a Marine, a bias for action is key. Marines are taught very early about Boyd’s Observe, Orient, Decide and Act (OODA) cycle depicted in figure 2.1 (e.g. OODA Loop)³. However, rarely is it

¹ *Psychology Today*, online, 2020.

² USMC. (2011). *Combat Hunter* (MCRP 3-02).

³ USMC. (2011). *Combat Hunter* (MCRP 3-02).

taught to the degree it should be. Boyd's intent was that each step of the cycle contained a feedback loop that could restart the cycle at any point based on circumstances. Boyd also developed the model as a way of depicting how to create implicit guidance and control versus explicit. This is a key requirement in the execution of maneuver warfare. Figure 2.1 contains a blue box which demonstrates categories of information which effect decision making. Cultural Traditions, the ability to analyze and synthesize information, etc. These can be compared to the categories depicted in figure 1.1, Emotional Intelligence. It is apparent that Boyd had a grasp of the concept of emotional intelligence and how it influences our decision making. At a minimum, it can be deduced that he understood that the culture and experience had an effect on biases that we carry, which in turn have an effect on how one makes decisions. His model was considered by the developers of CH, as the net effect of that program was to help Marines process incoming information in a more efficient and effective manner to reach a decision to act. The methodology utilized to teach CH was through the use of John Boyd's OODA Loop (Figure-1). The rationale was that no matter what task a Marine conducted, he/she could not escape the OODA cycle, and it was something simple for junior Marines to understand, and thus became the perfect teaching mechanism to simplify complex concepts. In 2009 the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Behavioral Science Unit (FBI BSU) unit helped the Marine Corps create a Boyd-like model to codify the thought processes that a Marine would incur during the creation of a profile by attempting to blow out the file folders, or compartments, of information a Marine used to profile. Figure-3.1 below, from CH (USMC, 2011), depicts what Dr. Gregory Vecchi, head of the FBI BSU in 2009 provided the Marine Corps.

Effectively Dr. Vecchi's team validated the six domains of USMC behavioral profiling and placed them into three categories, Individual Body Language, Environmental Indicators, and Heuristics (see Figure 3.1). Heuristics is one of the original domains, but also came to be a category of its own due to the fact that the intent of behavioral profiling was to collect behavioral and environmental cues that allowed the Marine to create a "tactical shortcut" or heuristic that allowed him to cycle through the OODA loop faster. This work effectively validated the USMC Combat Hunter Program and allowed the Marine Corps to export its content to the other services and governmental organizations. It was the first time any agency, police or military, had codified a methodology for explaining adages such as, "the sixth sense" or "the hair on the back of your neck," why they occur, how to recognize them, and how to use them to your advantage.

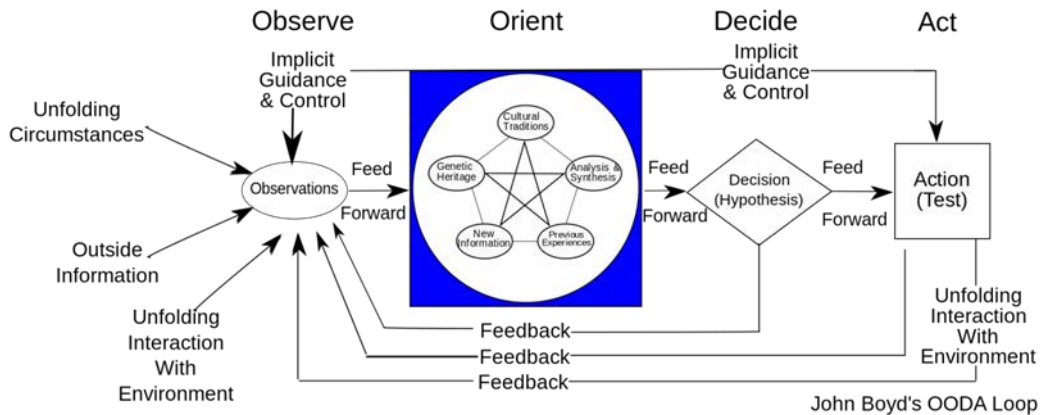


Figure 2.1 Boyd's OODA Cycle

Behavioral Profiling: The basis of any human interaction requires the use of both verbal and nonverbal communication. When communicating humans have an innate ability to determine meaning, provide context or relevance to an interaction with another human via verbal and nonverbal cues. The ability to understand these cues, with more ability than you have innately accrued through years of interactions in and with your environment, is a skill that requires specific training and education as well as experience. Commonly we refer to this skill as the ability to behaviorally profile a person. The ability to profile another human being involves mental processes and conversations that occur in the brain. Those conversations occur as we recall file folders of past experiences (i.e. Heuristics), receive and interpret new information, and rapidly choose how to react. The reasoning we conduct in our head, is influenced by the incoming cues as described below (fig. 3.1). The recognition of an anomalous cue, or group of anomalous cues, when quickly processed through the lens of one's experiences (i.e. life, culture, biases, training, etc.) affect the decision made. Boyd's model (fig. 2.1) highlights this same dynamic.

The use of these models (figs. 2.1 and 3.1) have larger impacts beyond "No Worse Enemy" skills. This model can be applied to how one makes decisions and chooses actions, or responses, during their everyday interactions. More specifically for the advisor, these skills should be utilized during interpersonal interactions with foreign counterparts. Thus, using this model for teaching "No Better Friend" skills, linked to how culture, both the student's and the counterpart's (e.g. LREC skills), impacts the reading of cues is a very valuable tool in enhancing a Marine's ability to make decisions. Critical thinking about how the decisions are reached by explaining observed cues and any interpersonal biases that surface, directly links back to training emotional intelligence. It is the analysis of a decision, how and why the Marine reached the decision, coupled with bringing to light any biases that influenced the decision that allow the Marine to gain better understanding of their EI level.

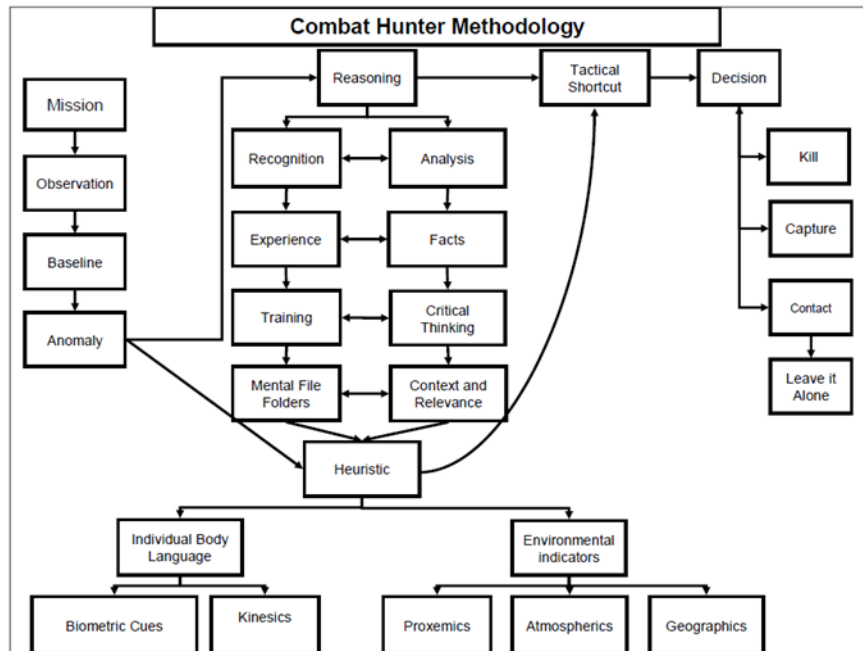


Figure 3.1. Combat Hunter Methodology (MCRP 3-02)

This type of mental exercise has impacts beyond the ability to behaviorally profile others. Using this method of breaking down the mental process can help prepare Marines to handle stress much more effectively. A comparative model used in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), shown in figure 3.2, demonstrates how psychiatrists and psychologists link how our thoughts create feelings, which in turn we act out when executing behaviors. Comparing this model to Boyd (fig 2.1) and to the CH Methodology (fig 3.1) we can deduce that if bad thoughts are pulled from file folders (i.e. experiences) they can corrupt our decision making. This equates to producing cognitive dissonance which is defined as the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioral decisions and attitude change⁴. CBT therapy is used to treat many types of mental issues, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The therapy focuses on challenging and changing unhelpful cognitive distortions (i.e. corrupt file folders) and behaviors, improving emotional regulation, and the development of personal coping strategies that target solving current problems.

By building the understanding of EI, Boyd’s OODA Cycle, and the CH methodology linked to CBT methods of interrupting cognitive dissonance, or fixing corrupt file folders - that affect decision making - it should be possible to speed up and improve the decisions a Marine makes. Additionally, the same methodology of bringing to light a corrupt file folder to interrupt cognitive dissonance, is a simple way for Marines to interrupt other stressors, such as cultural stress or shock.

⁴ Oxford Dictionary online (2020), https://www.bing.com/search?q=cognitive+dissonance&form=EDNTHT&mkt=en-us&httpsmsn=1&msnews=1&rec_search=1&plvar=0&refig=d2648ca97dc24468d0ae329466dd7b15&sp=-1&ghc=1&pq=cognitive+dissonance&sc=8-20&qs=n&sk=&cvid=d2648ca97dc24468d0ae329466dd7b15



Figure 3.2 Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Operational Stress: Operational stress comes in many forms. It can come from the stress of being away from home, family issues, the stress of combat action, or the tempo of operations. Culture experts specifically like to call out “Cultural Stress, or Culture Shock” as something significant that occurs when a Marine is immersed into a new culture and must absorb environmental changes more rapidly than the Marine can handle required acceptance of changes. It is one’s opinion that inculcating Marines with the knowledge and inner workings of the models explained in this paper, coupled with CBT methods (i.e. instructional methods) of bringing to light corrupt file folders for discussion and revision into positive file folders will help overcome cultural stress, as well as other stressors. A practical example of this would be a Marine who meets a counterpart for the first time and is offended by the counterpart’s body odor, and put off by a handshake coupled with a kiss to each cheek. The Marine is filled with perceptions of what a greeting should be, as influenced by his/her culture, experiences, or file folders of their defined normalcy, as they interpret them. In this simple example, the stress of dealing unfamiliar smells and behaviors experienced by the Marine can cause him/her to interact with the counterpart inappropriately, or perhaps build resentments that may present themselves in a multitude of ways, including affecting other relationships. If a Marine were to pull the suffering Marine aside and talk him/her through the bad experience, and help them shape a new understanding, they can then uncorrupt an existing file folder and help the Marine process the inputs to their environment better. (Mason, 2020).⁵

Conclusion:

Critical thinking is an endeavor that must be honed and exercised if one is to become a good critical thinker. The Marine Corps needs, now more than ever, Marines that can think and make rapid decisions, while exercising increased authorities at junior levels. Current Fleet Marine Force

⁵ Hampton Veterans Administration, *Interviews with Dr. John Mason (PYSD)*.

Security Cooperation activities such as advisor missions, mil-to-mil engagements, Unit Deployment Program (UDP), Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) patrols and Special Purpose MAGTF Crisis Response (SPMAGTF – CR) deployments coupled with emerging concepts such as Expeditionary Advanced Based Operations (EABO), or Littoral Operations in Contested Environments (LOCE), will be executed amongst foreign populations. Future Marine Corps operations will require not only advisors to be inculcated with critical thinking skills, but all of those Marines and Sailors who interact with foreigners on an ad hoc, or persistent, basis.

The study of emotional intelligence, its relationship to Boyd’s OODA Cycle, Combat Hunter, as well as methods mentoring Marines through stressful situations using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy methods to fix corrupt file folders is one way of helping to create better critical thinkers. Analyzing how one thinks, the influences on how they think, and the communication of that information to another Marine, helps to increase emotional intelligence and thus speed the Marines ability to wade through the OODA Cycle faster. It is recommended that the Marine Corps, Marine Corps Security Cooperation Group (MCSCG) in particular, explore linking these things together in a coherent teachable package of instruction to be absorbed by all ranks.

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