



# The Impacts of Cross-Cultural Awareness on Peacekeepers' Cooperation

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine how intercultural awareness affects peacekeepers' coordination. Given cultural divergences of the participants in these missions, it is natural for cultural conflicts to arise throughout their interactions. Therefore, multicultural awareness is necessary to help them interact properly and prevent intercultural clashes that could disturb their mission. In this respect, the article is meant to review multicultural awareness while considering peacekeeping ethics, show how this awareness facilitates peacekeepers' interactions, elucidate the relationship between their cultural homogeneity and unity of action, expose the extent to which their interoperability depends on their cross-cultural understanding, provide an overview of conflict resolution in their communication system, and analyze cultural challenges for their intercommunications. As a result, it becomes clear that cross-cultural understanding is essential to the blue helmets' ability to carry out their common tasks.

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**Keywords:** peacekeeping, multicultural awareness, enhancing peacekeepers' cooperation

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## 1. Introduction

Due to the complex environment in which peacekeepers work, cross-cultural competences are solicited for their diverse interactions. In fact, peacekeeping operations are performed by people gathered from different countries worldwide. Such a coalition is called to perform collective tasks that require high level of coordination and complementarity. Likewise, maintaining positive communication with the local people is necessary for the accomplishment of the

humanitarian missions, as it facilitates their integration. In order to understand how peacekeepers effectively navigate local cultures and achieve success in multifaceted contexts, it is essential to assess their cross-cultural adaptability as key measure of their interventions. Although there is increased interest from researchers in studying the significance of peacekeeping cross-cultural dimension, there has been limited research conducted on the actual effects of cross-cultural on the blue helmets' operational implementation. In addition, successful communication is essential for peace missions that need close coordination between the participants, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. This observation led to the formulation of the following research question: How does cross-cultural awareness influence adaptive performance in peacekeeping missions? Thus, in accordance with the research problem, the objectives of this study are to examine the cultural dimensions of peacekeepers' intercommunications and the role of their consciousness in regulating their range of behaviors within the peacekeeping coalition.

## **2. Peacekeeping Principles and Multicultural Awareness**

Intercultural communication in peacekeeping is normally linked to the principles of the UN charter that includes consent of the belligerents and respect of cultural identities. According to Bellou (2014), "cultural awareness is understood as the ability to comprehend the cultural characteristics of a certain population and also be in the position to distinguish the way in which these are differentiated from others" (p. 584). It could be gleaned from the quote that the focus is on how peacekeepers perceive the interactive implementation of their tasks. This perception constitutes the foundation of the peacekeeping mission that brings together multinational groups from diverse sociocultural backgrounds throughout the world. These groups are assigned to collaborate and provide assistance to local populations with dissimilar cultures. Such an organization carries out an extensive range of responsibilities, including human rights enforcement, humanitarian support and conflict resolution. These duties require high cultural understanding and multicultural consciousness that help managing divergences successfully. In the same vein, military troops have to work hand in hand with the other partakers to develop a teamwork spirit. In his analysis of military and civilian cooperation in peacekeeping missions in Somalia, Rubinstein (2014) contends that

Military and humanitarian organizations sought to work together to reinforce the value of their efforts. To do this they formed civil-military

coordinating centers, which met regularly to create a working environment in which their collaboration could lead to successful action (p. 60).

This collaboration is expected to improve the process according to which peacekeeping organizations interact and strengthen their cooperation and team spirit. Consequently, it is vital for peacekeepers to prioritize understanding and full respect of cultural differences. However, this mindset requires a constant awareness of the cultural implications associated with steady efforts to assist local populations and resolve their struggles.

Factually, the recognition of cultural interaction in peacekeeping has undergone significant changes, leading to social transformations among the troops and organizations involved. In their different undertakings, peacekeepers have been called to seek cross-cultural agreement, particularly when it comes to dealing with the locals' cultures. Being aware of these factors, the peacekeeping attendants can identify the cultural norms to be taken into account for the development of action plans of their mission. As stated by Ferreira (2017), "peacekeepers are required to have sound understanding of and appreciation for cultural diversities and different norms and traditions of host societies, and to demonstrate extraordinary carefulness, self-control and insight into other cultures" (p. 2). Clearly then, peacekeepers' intercultural aspects, such as religion and ethnicity are crucial to preventing negative cultural perceptions, as they are the main causes of conflict. Yet, the realization of an inclusive spirit within the peacekeeping landscape depends on the adherence of the different participants, which calls for a formalized cultural system corresponding to the peacekeeping principles.

This system calls for the synchronization of knowledgeable skills meant to generate intercultural confidence between the different partakers, including the local populations. In this respect, Norvanto and Dumur-Laanila (2017) argue that "the conduct of peace operations cannot be a matter of routine or a mindless application of received rules and regulations. It is rather a balance between organizational values and individuals' own judgment" (p. 16). That is, the cultural complexity of the peacekeeping structures requires adequate cross-cultural awareness that allows the attendants to perform subtle management of cultural divergencies. It is also crucial to differentiate between the thoughts of peacekeepers and their goals. This reflection is well revealed by Funk and Said (2010) who argue that "when people become self-aware with respect to their cultural inheritance, it can be understood and engaged as a resource rather than construed as an obstacle or as an unchanging whole to be defended at any cost" (pp. 124, 125). It follows that deep understanding of cultural values could be developed through a

regular exchange of social and professional data between the peacekeepers and with the local populations. Such an understanding would facilitate their intercommunications for successful completion of the different peacekeeping actions.

In sum, by conceding universal cultural values, peacekeepers from dissimilar backgrounds can identify the intercultural paradigms likely to help them rise above eccentric morals and coordinate their action plan for the common mission. Development of collaborative work and cross-national sense would contribute to the attendants' understanding in accordance with the collective objectives of the peacekeeping assignment.

### **3. Peacekeepers' Cultural Homogeneousness and Unity of Action**

Gathering transcultural communities, peacekeeping includes various that seek to stop hostilities and provide humanitarian assistance. Such programs call for constant synchronization of the participants' contributions in order to ensure the unity of action required for peacekeeping accomplishment. However, peacekeepers face many challenges due to their multinational coalition. The main challenge is to establish coherence between participants from dissimilar cultures. In this regard, Rietjens and Ruffa (2019) state that "both policy and academic debates on peace and stability operations have at length advocated the importance of coherence in peacekeeping operations, as situations in which all actors involved would work functionally and logically to achieve a common goal" (p. 384). Clearly then, the peacekeepers' operational interactions would be coherent with their cultural understanding. In the same vein, Rubinstein (2015) argues that

Since 1993 there has been a growing interest in culture and its relation to peacekeeping and an increasing number of anthropologists have come to the field. Missions in Kosovo and East Timor, the United Nations' first attempts during the 1990s at extensive state-building, were troubled by a lack of understanding of local structures and of the cultural contextualization of those structures (pp. 10, 11).

It transpires from the quote that factors that challenge peacekeeping dealings require taking into account the cultural multiplicity of the peacekeeping landscape so as to prevent disagreements susceptible to impede peacekeepers' functional homogeneousness. They would also act as intermediary groups, bridging the gap between them and the host populations. That is, the peacekeeping partakers are requested to maintain constant preparedness to intercommunicate

according to the universal standards. Acquaintanceship and cultural esteem should constitute the key elements of their different interactions.

Indeed, cross-cultural homogeneity of the peacekeeping partakers smooths their intercommunications, as it enables the development of mutual understanding and confidence between them both in humanitarian and operational activities. That is, given the wide-ranging nature of the mission, it is essential to create a unity of peacekeeping action in the implementation of the peacekeeping tasks. Otherwise, cultural disparities would generate substantial impediments against the attendants' rapprochement. It follows that conflicting cultural perceptions are very likely to reduce or even hinder the participants' collaboration and affect negatively their contribution to the mission. Compatibly, experiences that include the engagement of armed forces to ensure interposition between the belligerents illustrate the risk of antipathy between the host population and peacekeepers. Therefore, it is vital for the latter to be aware of the implications of the cultural images they represent through their behaviors. In his analysis of the complex characteristics of peacekeeping operations, Dalla Costa (2015) contends that "interorganizational coordination is a serious pitfall especially in complex peace operations that involve several actors with different organizational cultures" (p. 180).

Thus, the need for deploying peacekeepers, who are willing to engage in interactions within an inclusive environment, has gained significant importance. The necessity for the deployment of peacekeepers who possess a strong desire to engage in transnational environments has emerged as a significant requirement. Intercultural coordination between the gathered forces is likely to harmonize their operational contributions, which would be beneficial for the mission.

#### **4. Cross-cultural Connections and Peacekeepers' Interoperability**

Through the analysis of the role of cultural values in cross-national military missions, the goal is to contribute to the enhancement of the cultural interoperability of such missions. Obviously, cross-cultural issues also come to the forefront when peacekeepers are confronted with local people from a divergent culture. Indeed, deployment of individuals from divergent cultural backgrounds in an unfamiliar environment is likely to create repulsive attitudes when interacting. This patched-together coalition is naturally far from meeting communication's requirements because of diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, common engagement of these peacekeepers and their cooperation with the police units and the locals' representatives call for intercultural comprehension of these components to succeed in the humanitarian and peacebuilding activities. Correspondently, the traditional model of peacekeeping has been

developed as a means of resolving conflicts between the belligerent parties and accompany the peacebuilding process for the reestablishment of national agreement.

Furthermore, the emergence of intra-state conflicts resulted in a shift towards multidimensional peacekeeping operations that are often mandated to support the implementation of a comprehensive peace agreement between parties of a civil war. This shift has, in turn, led to the growth of the non-military components of peacekeeping, such as civil affairs staff, police units, and NGO. However, their success hinges on their collaboration with the armed forces. This complex coalition is called to perform synchronized collective tasks. According to Van Driel (2019), “a prerequisite for success in peacekeeping endeavors is coming to terms with the cultural diversity contained within a particular peacekeeping force as well as that of the individuals within the host country” (p.p. 4, 5). This condition is meant to create comprehensive behavior among the attendants and prevent operational confusion in the peacekeeping field.

Definitely, individuals and groups from divergent cultural backgrounds, such as military troops, nongovernmental organizations, diplomats and citizens of the host country need to operate as a united team. This massive team is called to undertake several tasks such as, monitoring human rights enforcement, administrating, providing humanitarian aid and training, many of which necessitate a high level of multicultural intelligence. Such an intelligence is also solicited for peacekeepers to succeed in the process of resolving conflicts between the belligerents. As a result, cultural conflicts between the involved military and civilian personnel, who have to cooperate with each other and with the local population, would be significantly reduced, which paves the way for comprehensive communication process.

Thus, to improve cultural interoperability within peacekeeping missions, the partakers cross-cultural agreement needs to be enhanced. It is obvious that gathering people from different cultural backgrounds in a setting would lead to strange attitudes. Therefore, peacekeepers should be endowed with adequate cross-cultural awareness that helps them manage cultural disagreements that arise in the operational field or between the locals' factions.

## **5. Peacekeeping Communication System and Conflict Resolution**

Normally, conflict is related to miscommunication and cultural divergences. Conflict resolution consists of finding points of agreement between the conflict belligerents. This delicate action seeks to restore realistic and effective communication based on mutual cultural understanding. Such an understanding stems from the contention that effective communication would



contribute positively to the solution of political, economic and social problems among nations. According to Tindal (2011), “many failures in international cooperation and conflict resolution are related to cultural differences manifested through miscommunication, which can be overcome by understanding” (p. 5). That is, peacekeepers’ misunderstanding can be avoided through intercultural reconciliation. In this regard, many approaches such as negotiation and arbitration could be implemented to flatten conflicting attitudes that stand at the origin of the conflict. Furthermore, advanced cross-cultural awareness is solicited for the orientation of the negotiation approaches necessary for the reconciliation of the belligerents. To reinforce these approaches, particular focus should be made on the human aspects of the conflict. In this regard, Wani (2014) contends that

Conflict resolution is the best instrument to be used to minimize and mitigate conflictual situations into peace-building process. It can be said that conflict resolution is the best mechanism towards social justice, peace, harmony, cooperation and world brotherhood. It is best slogan of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace-building among conflicted (p. 104).

Clearly then, to decrease conflicts’ effect on peace establishment, conflict resolution constitutes a consistent means for achieving social rapprochement, harmony, cooperation, and global unity between the belligerents. It serves as the ideal approach for peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace-building in areas of conflict and war.

Therefore, peacekeeping mediators need to be endowed with cross-cultural intelligence based on common human morals so as to monitor direct and indirect negotiations between the antagonist ethnicities. However, the efficiency of these negotiations depends largely on the mediators’ ability to interpret the multiethnic stakes of the conflict. Such an interpretation is likely to consolidate the relationship between the mediators and the involved parties and subsequently the mediation outcome. As said by Abbas (2018), “there are differences in the approach to conflict resolution depending on the culture and civilization of the people and their society” (p. 14). Explicitly, resolution of struggles between culturally divergent societies necessitates primarily understanding their cultural values.

In sum, cross-cultural intelligence remains a key element in any attempt to resolving conflict between the belligerents, especially when the source of struggle is cultural. The mediators engaged in this process should gather sufficient data regarding the antagonists' cultural origins

to prevent any potential cultural disagreement. They would be better able to resolve the conflicting parties' cultural differences if they had such expertise.

## 6. Cross-cultural Challenges for Peacekeepers' Interactions

Operations organized to support peace worldwide involve many cultural dimensions that interfere with the functional interconnections of the peacekeeping performers. Due to the multidimensional structure of these operations, cooperation between these performers may decrease in case of lack of their operational adaptability. The participating peacekeepers can be impacted by challenges that arise in the peacekeeping field. Cross-cultural miscommunications between military personnel from different nations and between the military and civilian employees are likely to generate substantial clashes. Yet, having cultural awareness does not always result in integrating relevant cultural aspects into the planning process. Therefore, cultural awareness and understanding alone are not enough to develop the comprehensive cultural capability required by the blue helmets to address present and future challenges. In this respect, Rachmawati et al. (2022) contend that "there must be additional training organized by the United Nations to strengthen the ability of Cross-Cultural Competence for peacekeepers, both civilian and military, in every UN peace mission throughout the world, and carried out on a permanent basis (p. 19). This process draws attention to the necessity of mutual understanding of the managerial principles of the engaged forces so as to obtain the needed interoperability for the implementation of the military and humanitarian arrangements.

In addition, peacekeeping operations need to establish credibility and potential confidence vis-à-vis the local populations. It is crucial for these operations to have insights into the traditional local structures of legitimacy and the way these structures work. As cited by Bellou Fotini (2013), Sprain and Boromisza-Habashi argue that "although different tactics and especially innovation might be proved an effective tool, it nevertheless demonstrates the inherent difficulties in merging military mentalities and cultural non-kinetic perspectives" (p. 584). We can glean from the quote that the unity of action in peacekeeping should be based both on the commitment of all peacekeepers to the rules of engagement and the integration of the locals to the peacekeeping process. However, this unity may not be achieved unless all these actors feel that their cultural morals are well respected. In this respect, the peacekeeping communication system should enhance the lucidity of intercommunications between the different participants. That is, low level of compatibility among peacekeepers drives perceptibly to wide-ranging frictions between them, which could undermine the mission's performances. In this respect,



Douma et al., as cited by Rietjens and Ruffa (2019), hold that “it is crucial to balance the interests and backgrounds of the partners involved, so that a win-win situation is created” (p. 7). It could be gleaned from the quote that lack of interactive understanding among peacekeepers could result in miscommunication, which could underscore the need to create opportunities for reconciliation between the cultures of peacekeepers.

By the same token, recent reports on peacekeeping emphasize the necessity of creating a cultural standpoint in the examination of different involvements. The discrimination acts and cultural stereotyping among peacekeepers cannot be understood without positioning them within a framework of universal values such as human rights. Achieving peace requires a continuous focus on understanding and promoting universal human rights, standards, and cultural diversity. It also involves developing the necessary skills to achieve understanding in the daily work of peacekeepers. As stated by Henigson (2020), “poor communication and coordination can cause gaps in missions’ contextual information and situational awareness” (p. 17). Clearly then, peacekeeping combined performances require synchronization between the different partakers. Successful management of the peacekeepers’ communication process calls for normative models susceptible to regulate their reciprocal interactions.

However, this regulation depends on their readiness to adopt the universal standards in their different interactions. Furthermore, harmony between the peacekeeping actors is indispensable to ensure that their cultures do not dichotomize and that there is no confusion in messages exchange between them. To do so, communication barriers like those caused by language or a sense of belonging should be eliminated. Specifically, coordination between peacekeepers is to be enhanced to allow fluent exchange of information. In this respect, all kinds of obstacles relevant to people’s interface with the institutional factors are to be examined to encourage active interaction and mitigate misunderstanding between them. This examination is meant to focus on the arrangements that aim to eliminate all forms of disharmony, as the interoperability of the different military and civilian components requires ineluctably an utmost level of fluid communication and do not tolerate any confusion. In this regard, Dalla Costa (2015) argues in his illustrations about peacekeeping in Haiti

The organizations involved in peacekeeping and peace-building Missions have sometimes distinctive understanding of concepts and norms [...]. Therefore, if the organizations involved in the Mission lack common

understanding or conflict heavily on these normative standards, they will fail to guarantee the necessary support (p. 190).

That is, establishing comprehensive relationships between all other actors, based on universal norms, is highly recommended to guarantee the required synchronization. Such a synchronization is meant to facilitate interactions and smooth out the mission's enactment. Recent interventions have yielded rich lessons about the importance of developing peacekeeping interconnections.

In sum, the intrinsic interdependences of culture and communication seem to be structural for the successful implementation with peacekeeping operations. The implementation of this process requires consistent knowledge of cultural subtleties. Such knowledge would mitigate the cultural challenges that disturb the implementation of the mission. Still, real companionship needs effective commitment of the military and civilian components to reach the multicultural agreement necessary for their interoperability at different levels.

## 7. Conclusion

This article contends that cultural awareness constitutes a crucial parameter for peacekeeping missions. Precisely because of their compound character, these missions require intercultural competencies of communication that help to boost the participants' cooperation. Recent peace operations revealed the need for a far more interactive performance by internationals, including counter-insurgency practices. Against this background, strategic communication started to gain prominence in strategic thinking and practice while the notion of cultural awareness evolves into one of its integral elements. The benefits of knowledge of the locals' cultural beliefs and customs is proved essential for establishing reliable communication channels. In the same vein, the article examined the importance of peacekeepers ability to persuade the locals of the significance of their interventions that require their adherence to the peacekeeping objectives. This dynamic constitutes a key element for the guarantee of peaceful accomplishment of the peace operation by facilitating fluent interactions between the different partakers. Moreover, effective cross-cultural communication policies would trigger a positive mutation of transnational communication and rapprochement. This situation seems to be changing with the 'multifunctional' missions recently adopted by the United Nations, which is expected to boost communication between peacekeepers through the establishment of structures specialized in communication between the civilian and military elements assigned to ensure coordination with the population in need.

That is, a universal culture could serve as a substitute means of communication for peacekeeping. In this regard, intercultural communication was examined in an attempt to assess its effects on peacekeepers' interactions both in their operational and humanitarian tasks. Such investigations focused on communication between cultures and their different inferences related the contribution to successful interconnections in multicultural environments. This process sought to highlight intercultural awareness through a multinational approach. It is destined to explore peacekeepers' team spirit and its impact on their operational performances. Similarly, it sought to examine the interdependences between peacekeepers' cross-cultural relationships and their interoperability as well as their contribution to conflict resolution. Explicitly, cross-cultural awareness has a direct effect on peacekeepers' intercommunications and subsequently on the mission outcome. It enhances their interoperability and allows them to solve conflicts. Thus, such an awareness is indispensable for the blue helmets either in their protecting the locals or in providing humanitarian assistance.

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