USING THE GLOBAL ONLINE EXCHANGE TO ENHANCE CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE IN FUTURE IC WORKFORCES

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ABSTRACT

Ethnocentrism in intelligence analysis produces challenges in cognition, analysis, and collection that many analysts may not recognize. The most significant challenges are manifestations of mirror-imaging biases and institutional biases that leave gaping cognitive holes. One tool to increase the cultural intelligence of a future U.S. Intelligence Community workforce is incorporating the Global Online Learning Exchange (GOLE) and similar virtual exchange programs within undergraduate intelligence courses. This paper explores the use of GOLE in an undergraduate intelligence course where students in the United States and Australia participated in a joint tabletop exercise using video conferencing.

Keywords: *cultural intelligence, ethnocentrism,* Global Online Learning Exchange (GOLE), *mirror-imaging bias, institutional bias*

INTRODUCTION

Ethnocentrism in intelligence analysis produces many challenges in cognition, analysis, and collection that many analysts may not recognize (Johnson & Berrett, 2011). Most significant are manifestations of mirror-imaging biases and institutional biases that leave gaping cognitive holes in analysis. While structured analytic methods are techniques employed in or to address inherent biases, they do not necessarily reduce the effects of ethnocentrism. The US Intelligence Community (IC) has attempted to deal with the issue of ethnocentrism by using subject matter experts and increasing diversity among its workforce. However, neither approach guarantees improved cultural insight. A better solution is expanding the cultural intelligence of the potential future IC workforce within colleges and universities.

One possible tool to increase the cultural intelligence of a future IC workforce is incorporating the Global Online Learning Exchange (GOLE) and similar virtual exchange programs with undergraduate intelligence courses. By employing various technologies and educational pedagogy, virtual exchanges make it possible for students to access high-quality international and cross-cultural education without the expense of traveling abroad. The paper examines one example of GOLE's utilization within intelligence and security programs at St. John's University, Queens, NY, USA, and Edith Cowan University, Perth, WA, Australia.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ethnocentrism is an inherited bias within individual analysts that can negatively impact finished intelligence products. In anthropology, ethnocentrism is the tendency to project one's cognition and norms onto others (Johnston, 2005). Ethnocentrism is a condition that has many adverse effects on intelligence analysis, including analytic bias and institutional/group biases. By extension, these analyses can result in erroneous judgments and analytical failure. Like the practice of medicine, understanding the condition and the symptoms is central to any diagnosis and treatment plan. Before identifying ways to combat ethnocentrism, it is critical to determine its effects on analysis.

Like many inherent analysis challenges, ethnocentrism produces mirror-imaging, confirmation, and implicit biases. The most significant and most easily employed is mirror-imaging bias. By processing intelligence through a lens of one's personal experience, countries with different characteristics than one's own are more frequently erroneously analyzed (Parsons, 2017). When analysts confront new situations or challenging data, they may be tempted to resort to what is familiar—in this case, everyday conceptions of their culture. (Johnson & Berrett, 2011). There are many opportunities for mirror-imaging bias to manifest. With the spread of Western values and culture beyond the "Anglosphere" over centuries, it is easy to estimate the risk-benefit calculations of a foreign government or non-state group based on what would make sense in a US or Western European context despite underlying differences in cognition between cultures (Witlin, 2008). Alternatively, with the inherent challenge of information or data gaps in intelligence, one is more likely to "fill in the blanks" with one's personal experiences from their culture (Johnston, 2005). Confirmation bias can also occur when sifting through data and information. Ethnocentrism can create opportunities for analysts to seek information that confirms their personal experience while avoiding cultural data and cultural factors they are unfamiliar with (Brislin, 1990). This is best described through the theory of cognitive dissonance highlighted by Anderson (2015) in that we often process information that runs counter to what we believe. When cognitive dissonance is present, a person will likely actively avoid situations that increase their dissonance. These biases can contribute to assessments that inaccurately portray threats and adversaries.

On a larger scale, institutional biases can arise if groups of people are uncomfortable or unsure of their ability to analyze cultural data and trends. Cognitive dissonance can cause cultural dynamics to be ignored in intelligence (Brislin, 1990). This is often the case in the IC. Johnson and Bennett (2011) describe how interviews with analysts have often revealed them being overwhelmed by the scope of cultural data relevant to their account and frustration at the length and depth of the historical knowledge necessary to capture a grand strategic profile of any region or group. Few in the IC have gotten through security measures and have cultural experience/ backgrounds to process cultural data effectively. This leaves people with the skills to analyze cultural factors effectively in the minority, making their assessment more prone to being overridden, ignored, or misconstrued through "in-group" bias. Aldrich and Kasaku (2012) highlight how "group centrality and superiority" within homogenous organizations can

contribute to a lack of intellectual challenge and "imprison" analysis as organizational and customer narratives drive intelligence production.

FAILURE: CURRENT TOOLS AND PRACTICES

Tools in the current analytic environment are too sparse, simple, and outdated to combat ethnocentric bias. Analytical practices such as structured analytic techniques or simple reliance on expertise and intuition can be ineffective against the biases produced by ethnocentrism. First, using widely taught structured analytic methods and relying on subject matter experts does not reduce the effects of ethnocentrism. Structured analytical techniques cover a range of cognitive pitfalls, but only a few can be applied to analyzing foreign or culturally different adversaries. In particular, red teaming poses significant issues acknowledged in the Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) *Tradecraft Primer*. The Primer posits that there is a "clear risk" of falling into a mirror-imaging problem but still encourages analysts to "put themselves in others' shoes" regardless of cultural knowledge (Aldrich & Kasuku, 2012). Red team analysis is characterized by modeling an adversary's behavior and reacting to stimuli the way the adversary would. Without extensive cultural context or knowledge of foreign values, the red teaming exercise generates hypotheses that accurately account for cultural variables. The technique's foundations are rooted in the analyst's cultural understanding and assumptions, which may vary significantly, creating fewer objective hypotheses and less valuable products.

Institutions will rely on subject matter experts' intuition to perform these exercises or generate hypotheses to avoid mirror-imaging biases. Instinct, a compass regularly employed by career analysts, is culturally encoded and ethnocentric. While it may seem counterintuitive to view expertise as a source of bias, Johnston (2005) highlights that the same concentration gives the experts the power to recognize patterns, perform tasks, and solve problems, focusing their attention on one domain to the exclusion of others. Not only is this counterintuitive but as previously mentioned, subject matter experts are sources of bias. Regarding hiring American citizens with ethnic backgrounds, their ethnic background does not guarantee cultural insight and can share the same cognitive filters as non-ethnic Americans (Aldrich & Kasuku, 2012). A diverse workforce has other benefits and may provide a different perspective in analysis. Still, they, too, are vulnerable to cognitive biases.

Intelligence education does not identify culture and ethnocentrism as a force for which analysts need epistemological training. For example, Johnson and Bennett (2011) express their concerns over the stress of intelligence training and education on "power and wealth as the primary human motivators, leaving underexplored other motivators such as identity, preservation of social institutions, alternative value structures, powerful narratives, or perceptions of the security environment distinctive to a person's or group's region and history." Another example is the focus of skill development on foreign languages excluding exploration of foreign cultures (Brislin, 1990). One possible way of improving the IC's defenses against ethnocentrism is increasing the *cultural intelligence* quotient of its current and future workforce.

Earley and Mosakowski (2004) describe cultural intelligence as "an outsider's seemingly natural ability to interpret someone's unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures the way that person's

compatriots would." Livermore (2009) argued that it is the ability to relate and work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds and goes beyond existing notions of cultural sensitivity and awareness. More recently, Marr (2022) found that cultural intelligence refers to the ability to work effectively in culturally diverse situations. Culturally intelligent people are aware of diversity and can relate to (and, where appropriate, adapt to) people of different races, genders, cultures, ages, and religions. What these definitions have in common is that they show the importance of interacting with individuals from other cultures in a business environment. Still, it can be argued that it is also an essential skill for intelligence analysts to understand better the actions and thoughts of the target of their analysis and help combat ethnocentric bias from tainting their research. But this concept of cultural intelligence should not only be limited to the IC's current workforce but also its future workforce. This can be achieved by incorporating content to heighten cultural intelligence into undergraduate and graduate intelligence and security-related programs. Cultural psychology models increase students' self-awareness and understanding of foreign cultures. "To understand international interactions, analysts must understand the situation as it appears to each of the opposing forces and constantly shifts back and forth from one perspective to the other." Heuer (2005)

GLOBAL ONLINE EXCHANGE

How can the cultural intelligence of the IC's future workforce be enhanced? One attempt to achieve this is a virtual student exchange between St. John's University in Queens, NY, and Edith Cowan University in Perth, Australia. Mark Twain famously wrote in his book *Innocents Abroad,* "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." Twain was saying that travel increases cultural intelligence. It tends to suggest that studying abroad and student exchange programs can be an excellent way to enhance students' cultural intelligence. One problem with these programs is that they can be expensive and out of reach for many of the members of underrepresented populations that the IC is attempting to recruit. One potential solution to this problem is global online exchanges known as GOLE.

GOLE is a virtual exchange initiative. O'Dowd (2018) describes a virtual exchange as involving the engagement of groups of learners in extended periods of online intercultural interaction and collaboration with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational programs and under the guidance of educators or expert facilitators. The first examples of online collaborative projects, such as virtual exchanges, began to appear within a few years of the emergence of the Internet; these projects centered on foreign language education (O'Dowd, 2018). Since then, virtual exchange programs such as GOLE have been utilized in various academic disciplines, including intelligence and security programs like those at St. John's and Edith Cowan.

The GOLE program between St. John's and Edith Cowan uses a tabletop exercise that requires the students to apply the course material to a real-life scenario. In the exercise, one group of students must play the role of terrorists plotting to attack a fictional subway system. The second group of students play the role of a security team tasked with putting in a security strategy to prevent an attack from occurring. The decisions made by each team increase or decrease their

probability of success. After the terrorist group tries each attack, the teams switch sides and roles. The tabletop exercise was co-conducted via Webex over five weeks, with a mix of students from both schools on each team. The issue of ethnocentrism was slightly diminished because of some cultural and linguistic similarities; however, Australia and the United States are two different cultures, although they share a common language.

There were several objectives these exercises were trying to achieve. These included comparing the counterterrorism and intelligence strategies of the United States and Australia; developing a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy that accounts for limited resources while balancing the need for security and accessibility through collaboration with individuals from a different country; gaining a greater understanding of the political, social, and cultural differences and similarities between the United States and Australia; and finally, feeling comfortable enough to critique their performance and the performance of their fellow students in the tabletop exercise despite their different cultural backgrounds. Despite the linguistic similarities between the two countries, the students had stereotypes and misconceptions about each other that seemed to diminish as the exercise progressed, and a greater understanding and camaraderie developed between team members.

Based on anecdotal evidence and observations of the exercise by the faculty members, the learning objectives appeared to have been met. The students seemed to increase their cultural intelligence, at least regarding the other country. But is this truly the case? To answer this question, more research needs to be done. The students who participated in these exercises in 2021 and 2022 were given surveys about their experiences with these exercises and cross-cultural interaction. The data gathered by these surveys will be analyzed to help determine if virtual exchange programs such as GOLE can help the future IC workforce overcome ethnocentrism and increase their overall cultural intelligence.

CONCLUSION

Ethnocentrism in intelligence analysis produces many challenges in cognition, analysis, and collection that many analysts may not recognize. The most significant challenges are mirror-imaging and institutional biases that leave gaping cognitive holes. These challenges can be overcome by developing the cultural intelligence of current and future members of the IC. Virtual international collegiate exchanges allow students of diverse cultural and other backgrounds to collaborate and overcome mirror-imaging, institutional, and cultural barriers.

St. John's and Edith Cowan's GOLE program demonstrate that the exchange programs help students understand course content and their international teammate's cultures. College and University Intelligence and Security programs and the IC should build upon the successes of GOLE. Further research and collaboration in this area is an intelligence imperative.

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