

Civil Military Cooperation: Model and Field Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

Building and maintaining effective interagency cooperation is at the heart of civil-military operations. Systematic evaluation of actual cooperation processes in (semi-)operational conditions is important to get a deeper understanding of the dynamics of interaction. We developed an interagency cooperation model that capitalizes on boundary spanning behaviours. The model formed the basis for our evaluations during an exercise organised by I(German/Netherlands) Corps and the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Germany and Netherlands. We found that external focus, identification with whole, and integrated understanding correlate with cooperation behaviours, and this with cooperation effectiveness. Observations of how cooperation between the parties developed suggest that lack of knowledge about each other and each other's organisation, experiences, and capabilities hinder building of effective interaction.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

International, interagency cooperation between local government, non-governmental organizations, and military (in a comprehensive approach) is vital during humanitarian peace-keeping operations [1][2]. Cooperation prevents conflict between parties that operate in the same operational area. Moreover, cooperation enables actors to synergistically combine their unique set of resources and, subsequently, achieve collective safety and security goals as well as their individual organization-level goals.

Given its importance, building and maintaining effective interagency cooperation, is at the heart of civil-military operations. Cooperation is, however, a difficult activity that is prone to fail without careful management, as demonstrated by findings from alliances studies reporting failure rates at about 60-70% [3]. Indeed, many obstacles threaten cooperation in the civil-military domain, such as diversity in objectives, motives, interests, principles, planning horizons; stereotypes and prejudices; internal focussed mind-sets; lack of awareness of each other's needs, lack of understanding in what information to share, challenged independence principles. [4][5].

Observations and formal evaluations of real-life cases represent primary sources for increasing our (theoretical) understanding of how we can effectively overcome barriers to cooperation. Specifically, evaluations allow us to reflect on our own experiences and explicate such knowledge in lessons-learned reports. Such insights can, subsequently, be applied as (generalised) principles in new contexts. Despite the value of evaluations, it is found that organizations typically only reflect informally and ad hoc on their joint activities, if done at all. For instance, very few evaluations were held of the partnerships in which ISAF co-

operated with humanitarian organizations, and if so, these mostly consisted of internal meetings or chats [6]. Several authors argue that evaluations and lessons learned processes are often done superficial [7], with too little knowledge about what it takes [8], with highly variable quality, poorly formulated, and with limited utility by weak follow-up processes [9], or too light in relation to the assumed impact and investment they evaluate [10]. Even the widely propagated ‘after action review’, developed by US Army in the 70ties for commanders and their teams as a simple model for learning from experience [11], suffers from irregular, unstructured and ill-prepared sessions [12][13].

In an effort to systematically analyse civil-military interaction we developed an interteam interaction model drawing from theories of interteam cooperation. This model was the basis for our evaluations during a sequence of exercises organised by 1(German/Netherlands) Corps in Muenster. These exercises aim to develop and improve the way cooperation is being realised between the diverse parties, civil and military. In the following sections we present the basic elements of the model and the application of the model in the evaluation during an extensive civil-military exercise ‘Common Effort’ performed in September 2011 in Muenster.

2.0 CIVIL-MILITARY COOPERATION MODEL

Cooperation between parties is critically facilitated by high-level commitment from senior leaders to share information, build trust, and promote transparency across their governmental, non-governmental, and military organizations. Implementation of cooperation often focuses on ‘institutional’ models of mechanisms, protocols and incentives, as for instance is expressed by the former NATO’s senior civilian representative in Afghanistan [14]. We propose that, equally important, a human-centric, behavioural approach is needed to establish and maintain cooperation. Cooperation requires new ways of integrated thinking and doing based in individual members’ capacities, motivations for interacting with external members, facilitated by organisational cultures of external orientation. This focus on interaction behaviours and processes between parties can be captured by the concept of ‘boundary spanning’ [15][16].

Boundary spanning is defined as an individual’s task-coordination efforts, aimed at behaviourally synchronizing and aligning actions with those of other teams or organizations. It relates to interteam cooperation behaviours and processes of developing and maintaining communications with other teams, engaging in cross-functional activities, and conducting promotional activities. It can foster exchange of resources, information, and assistance across teams and, as such, promote realization of goals that are beyond the scope and capacity of any single team or organization. It further enables the team to keep current with developments in the environment [17]. Typical interteam cooperation behaviours that can be observed, are: scouting for information, seeking new input from others, inviting outsiders, testing assumptions on meaning of inputs, reflecting on outside inputs, figuring out how to improve cooperation [18]. The effectiveness of interaction behaviours is captured in output measures such as: general quality of interaction, handling disagreements, presence of problems, constructive discussions, handling of overlap [19]. These measures are assessed using a survey.

Several antecedents or ‘conditions’ enable interteam cooperation behaviours. Over the course of several evaluation studies, we identified “external focus” (i.e., leadership behaviour that stresses the importance to engage with external parties, [16]); “identification with whole”, (i.e., a person’s perceived “belongingness” to the overall organization, [20] [21]); and “integrative understanding” (i.e. understanding the broader aspects of one’s work, how it relates to what others are doing, [22]) as the most important enablers of individual members’ boundary spanning (see Figure 17-1). Other conditions relate, amongst others, to the level of perceived “interdependence”, (perceived dependency of others drives seeking support from others); “task uncertainty”, (reflecting uncertainty and unpredictability of future results leading to seeking more support from others [23]), “centralisation”, (decision making done by the leaders or by the employees with minimal intervention of the leaders [24]). Military personnel is used to formal structures that organise

interactions and decision making, with more or less centralisation, more so than their civilian partners who are usually small in size and may interact at several levels in operational context. In addition, we assessed level of perceived centralisation, and preference of formality of interactions with more or less formalised meetings with other parties and what relation that has with achieving the outputs.

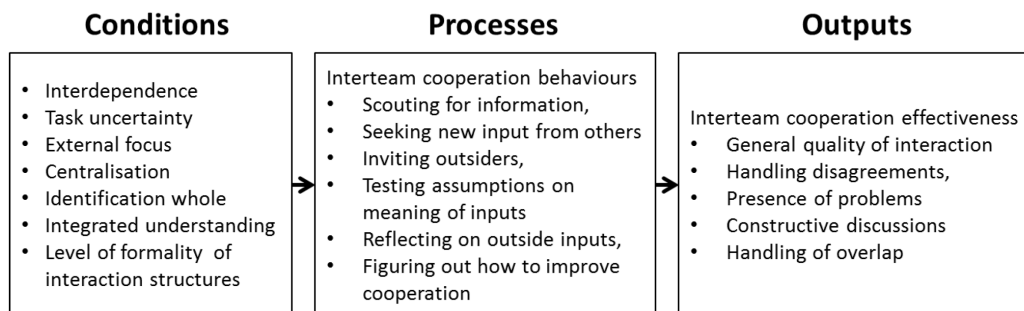


Figure 17-1. Civil-military cooperation behaviours model.

3.0 “COMMON EFFORT”

3.1. Introduction

The 1(German/Netherlands) Corps (1GNC) together with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of Germany and Netherlands initiated in 2010 the project “Common Effort” which led to the exercise “Common Effort” in September 2011. The project’s objective was to develop and exercise a structured, civil-military collaborative process. The assumption was that jointly preparing for a mission would improve cooperation and strengthen the so-called ‘diplomacy, defence and development’ approach towards joint activities. Their motto was: “Cooperation should start before we meet abroad in a crisis” [25]. An underlying longer term objective for 1GNC was to change their military mindset away from solely own-task focus toward a collaborative focus and involve other (civil) parties when addressing operational challenges, if opportune: other experts may have solutions that may reduce or resolve the use of military force, for instance, a pointed effort in development, may clear a security issue, see [26].

3.2. Design

After a ten-month preparation phase with twelve participating parties, the project culminated into the exercise in Muenster (Germany) in September 2011, in which with about 300 military and 140 civilians from 33 organizations participated. Participating organisations developed their own exercise objectives, but common for all parties were the objectives to develop or increase mutual understanding, and to understand the principles and mechanisms for interagency information exchange and collaboration. The logic of the exercise was to start with the development of a comprehensive scenario which covers military, diplomatic, developmental and humanitarian dimensions together with representatives of the diverse parties (diplomatic, development, humanitarian and military). In addition, common preparation of plans for security sector reform was organised to improve insights in each other’s plans and to formulate harmonised plans. A shared information platform and an ‘interagency centre’, populated with reservists with civil expertise, which were setup to facilitate information exchange between the partners. During the exercise participants interacted daily during meetings, hot wash reviews, and briefings.

The evaluation of civil-military cooperation at this exercise was setup to assess the realization of the objectives on mutual understanding, and mechanisms for interagency information exchange and collaboration [27]. As described above the evaluation focus was on the conditions and realisation of

boundary spanning. We applied the civil-military cooperation model and assessed conditions, processes, and effectiveness of cooperation between organizations and teams. An example of a Condition related questions is: "At Common Effort the importance was emphasised for my group/agency to exchange information with other groups/agencies during the exercise?" followed by nine possible arrangements of formality. An example of a Processes question is: "This group/agency frequently sought new information from other groups/agencies that led us to make important changes". Outputs questions were of a conclusive kind, for example: "Discussions with other groups/agencies were conducted constructively".

During preparation meetings of representatives of the participating organisations interactions, exchange of information, and shared goal setting were observed by two observers. During the exercise week data were gathered by observations, semi-structured interviews, and a survey. Observations and interviews were done with a team of eight observers who followed the different groups in their interaction meetings. The survey was handed out two days before of the exercise.

3.3. Results

Observations during the preparation meetings showed that there was high level agreement of overarching goals. At the same time, less agreement emerged when taking the step from high level objectives to concrete actions. Different approaches and ways of working caused initial frictions and stalled ways forward. In particular a mismatch was observed between the task-focus approach of the military, with their experience and routines in exercises, and the civil partners who were still thinking at a conceptual level. It took some time, but given the shared commitments and conscious efforts to understand mutual perspectives these misalignments could be resolved. The mismatch in effort and time spend at preparation by the military and the civil parties was identified as a continuous source obstacles. For the military preparing for and performing exercises covers a large part of their non-mission activities, while the smaller civil parties do this on top of their daily operational work. This difference was also apparent at start of the exercise where most participant groups, apart from their representatives, met each other for the first time on site, some well prepared, some marginally prepared. The collective needed several days for getting from 'confusion' to 'adaptation' mainly by building interaction and personal connections, and developing dialogue to understand meaning of other parties language and wordings, interests and principles, and to clarify operational structures and roles.

The survey data (190 send out, 121 returned: 47 civil, 73 military,) provide in the first place insight into the participants' perceived effectiveness of the coordination between own team or organisation and other teams or organisations, and how the interteam coordination processes functioned. Overall there was no systematic difference between the civil and military clusters (except for some smaller effects which will be discussed elsewhere where we compare multiple exercises). For interteam cooperation effectiveness, 45% percent scored at the high end (5-7) and 29% at the low end of the scale (1-3) on the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). From the description of own team/organisation coordination behaviours, only 40% percent scored at the high end, and 16% at the low end, with most staying in the middle. The interteam coordination behaviours measure is significantly correlated with the output measure: interteam coordination effectiveness ($r = .34, p < .01$).

High and low end scores provide further indication how well the cooperation developed. There was substantial agreement that tasks were interdependent (71% score 5-7), and tasks were considered uncertain (50% score 5-7). Both are drivers for interacting with other experts. Other drivers or motivators for interacting with others are external focus (71%, score 5-7), and identification whole (48%, score 5-7). The integrated understanding measure scored rather low (32% scored 1-3, 31% scored 5-7), indicating that there was a problem in understanding own roles in the context of others. Indeed, it was observed in several instances following team discussions that role clarity was low. Most organizations needed some time to clarify their roles for themselves and in relation to others, civil-civil and civil-military.

When asked to score formal versus informal structures, respondents indicated to prefer the latter, like simply contacting a member of the other team, or through understood policies for coordination (respectively, 63-60% percent scored at the high end, 5-7). This is corroborated by the observations of the so-called interagency centre as a formal mechanism for interaction. Most civilians did not use the interagency centre as intermediary to interacting with military experts, but preferred direct contact face-to-face, which was relatively easy to arrange being at the same location.

The survey data give also insight on how strong the conditions factors were related to the interteam coordination behaviours. Significant relationships were found between interteam coordination behaviours and external focus ($r = .50, p < .01$), identification whole ($r = .29, p < .01$) and integrated understanding ($r = .27, p < .01$), interteam interdependence ($r = .42, p < .01$), task uncertainty ($r = .31, p < .01$). Notably, centralisation was scored only by 20% as high and did not correlate significantly with any of the other measures.

From the interviews a generally positive picture of the exercise emerged. Despite the conclusion that there was still a lot to be done and learned in terms of civil-military interaction, the exercise was felt to provide a highly valued opportunity to interact in semi-realistic settings, gaining experience to work with diplomats, with military, with developmental and humanitarian experts learning from good behaviours and mistakes. From the civil perspective high costs in time and effort to prepare and execute such a project were mentioned, but most thought that benefits were high enough and building networks was seen as having lasting value. Civil participants concluded that future exercises should take these costs into account. For an overview of ‘takeaways’ compiled by the organisers themselves see their First Impression Report [31].

3.4. Conclusion

Did mutual understanding increase and more insight develop into interagency information exchange? The scores of the judged interteam cooperation effectiveness (45%) was not as high as wished for in this exercise that was directed to building cooperation. One reason could be that too many obstacles needed to be overcome in this short time of the exercise. On the other hand, the interviews and informal communications showed that the opportunity for interaction was highly appreciated: ”more benefits than costs”, to cite one of the interviewees. So the answer can be positive. The test is in the follow-up exercise, to see if the lessons learned were implemented.

From the observations during preparation and during the exercise and from the survey data (‘integrated understanding’) it became clear that there was a lack of deeper knowledge about each other and each other’s organisation, experiences, and capabilities. A lot of attention was given during preparation on how to manage the process in a technical sense, but little explicit attention was given to requirements of cooperation building. Improving this before an exercise by taking a systematic approach to raise the level of mutual knowledge can be expected to improve interaction and allow for more effective use of the short time available for the exercise. This approach should have several consequences in how exercises are build and how cooperation is developed between the participating parties. A stronger focus on gradually building cooperation is being developed in the concept of supported intelligent collaboration building (‘iCOBUS’ [32], and iterative training concepts [33].

4.0 DISCUSSION

We set out to systematically analyse civil-military interaction from a behavioural perspective, well grounded in the existing scientific literature with its large experience base. This approach was successful in focussing on the dynamic aspects of interaction with terminology that was also easy to communicate (the concrete behaviours are easily recognised by practitioners). Crucial for successful evaluation was the support of the military and civil leaders of the exercise and the team’s daily participation in the larger, evaluation team of

the exercise. This provided legitimacy to speak to all levels in the command and with the civil parties and receive the needed attention to the assessment. Providing immediate feedback to all parties in a First Impression Report at the end of the exercise week, based on initial observations and interviews, proved to be crucial for making the scientific approach of practical value (a subsequent detailed briefing covering also the survey results was presented three months later). While the scientific base and the behavioural approach both showed to be very practical (with direct advice to the respective leaders) and scientifically relevant (with a publication [29]), a limitation in the evaluation was that the ‘institutional’ aspects of the setting were not assessed directly. While the focus is often *only* on the institutional aspect (“we do not check whether this [civil-military teamwork] does in fact happen, but only whether the exercise concept permits it” [30]), we understand that our behavioural approach should be complemented with how well the structures permit or support the realisation of the interaction processes. Extending our approach is one of the objectives of an international research team (HFM 227 - Building Effective Collaboration in a Comprehensive Approach) under the NATO science and technology organisation umbrella.

In summary, from our experience, systematic evaluation in operational settings is feasible and has value for practice and science, despite its limitations of control. This only works well, however, if it is incorporated in the planning and processes of the operation or exercise itself, and done in a systematic way with criteria set in advance using the vast body of experience in the literature. To build and maintain relationships with all participants requires substantial, time and effort by the larger research team. But still, in the end it depends on finding the leaders who have the vision to look beyond the incidental event.

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