MILITARY ETHICAL META-KNOWLEDGE AND INDOOR TEAM BUILDING GAMES. FROM PROMISE TO PRAXIS

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Contemporary asymmetric warfare raises challenges that can be best described as volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA). These features translate into a conundrum for both the forces involved in multinational theatres of operations, and for academics, researchers, educators and trainers in charge of finding novel means of approaching the needs of the military human resource both domestically and during deployment periods. One specific requirement of the military when deployed is to act in accordance with their code of values, but to also show consideration for other cultures, attitudes and behaviors. Nonetheless, these requirements may more often than clash. Consequently, this paper is built on the assumption that: asymmetric warfare requires a new set of approaches in terms of military education and training that should involve a change in the learning paradigm of cadets and adult officers so they can measure up to the features of this type of warfare. Therefore, its aim is to propose a possible new framework through which one's own ethical otherness may be discovered and reflected upon in a novel and, we dare say, a challenging manner for the military field and for the didactics of military ethics.

Key words: *ethical meta- knowledge, team building games, asymmetric warfare, military ethics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary asymmetric warfare raises challenges that can be best described as volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA). These features translate into a conundrum for both the forces involved in multinational theatres of operations, and for academics, researchers, educators and trainers in charge of finding novel means of approaching the needs of the military human resource both domestically and during deployment periods.

When in theatres of operation, the military are very likely to discover that the roles they may have expected to fulfill on the missions are not by far what they actually need to undertake.

In this respect, Sookermany [1] notably underlines *"Today's complex operations can never be fully covered by manuals and rules of engagement. Our ability to fulfill our tasks depends rather on individuals whose judgment is well developed and mature"*. In addition, issues like having one's own morality challenged because of the impossibility to take action when witnessing human rights breaches, the need to rely on *"…instinct and training and a bit of luck…"* when the situation calls for impromptu decisions that *"… require switching rapidly between different task with different ethical values"*[2], the differences in approaches and perceptions of various cultures, to mention just few, poignantly highlight

that this new type of warfare that is being waged nowadays triggers a new kind of awareness on behalf of the military.

The observations and lessons learned from the theatres of operations are a good indicator for those in charge with designing, delivering and evaluating military education and training courses/programs that new behavioral standards are imposed by the VUCA environment and, hence, wise innovative and knowledgeable techniques need to be swiftly put in place. In this respect, as with any effort towards adaptation, we believe that one of the untapped ingredients of success is meta knowledge and, given the area of our research and interest, military ethical meta-knowledge. However, for this ingredient to be properly dosed in the education and training processes aiming at building upon/instilling/ encouraging discovery or reflection upon the ethical values of oneself or of others the researchers/educators/ trainers need to become fully aware of the untapped knowledge pool of those who have already participated in one or more missions abroad. Secondly, they need to also give credit for the meta-knowledge acquired by the military while on multinational missions. Should these two constraints be overcome, then the quest for new ways of approaching the educational and training endeavor is much closer to finding the right path and achieving the intended outcomes.

Thus, through the marriage of the knowledge and expertise of academic professionals and the meta-knowledge gained by the military the issue of how to better approach ethical education and training from a didactical viewpoint may be partially addressed. However, one more ingredient is required for the recipe to come out right. In this respect, our source of inspiration is civil life and, more specifically, indoor team building games as action learning techniques employed by companies to develop the talent and skills of their employees. What we propose is to build upon the best practices in the field and to replicate these into the military educational and training endeavors. The manner to do that is to focus on the advantages these games may present for those willing/eager to find new means of approaching ethical (meta)- knowledge and teaching. One argument in favor of our proposal relies on the very principle underlying this type of learning, which is *"…that the team already has the knowledge it needs in order to do outstanding work. The purpose of the training is to access and utilize that knowledge so that everyone will benefit from it."* [3]

2. FEATURES OF ASYMMETRIC WARFARE AND THEIR LIKELY IMPACT ON EDUCATIONAL PARADIGMS IN DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENTS

Nowadays almost all defense establishments are confronted with what the literature in the field calls asymmetric threats, namely *"situations in which a weak side, opposing a strong side, uses non-conventional forms of conflict aimed at overcoming the gap between the two sides"* [2]. However, the dimensions used to define the aforementioned concept (by terms like "terrorism", "guerilla warfare", "criminality", "criminal financing", "exploitation of the media", etc.) [2] are as elusive as the concept itself. Hence, when we speak about defense and security, the difficulty in representing the enemy, or in Baudrillard and Guillaume's terms [4]: "the other" as a flesh and blood entity makes it all the more difficult to envisage the means to counter its actions. General concepts may lead to the anonymity of perpetrators and this anonymity becomes a new identity for anyone who does not agree with mainstream customs and practices.

Under such circumstances, what is there left to tackle the spectral threats that can hardly be embodied? As Baudrillard and Guillaume [4] point out, there are two means by which social symptoms (and in our case the symptoms of asymmetric warfare) can be dealt with. One of these is to treat the symptoms, since treating means the ability to forecast consequences. However, that requires of any forecast to be solidly argued given the utilitarian position adopted through such an approach. But it also means the following: symptoms do not always point out the real cause. Hence, even the forecast of treatment effects can be flawed. The other means refers to interpreting the current situation and if the interpretation is believed, it then becomes a myth (and, as we all know from anthropology, myths are embodiments of values). If we are to refer back to the definition of asymmetric means of conflict it becomes obvious that the weaker part is more prone to such an approach and, as a result, feels entitled to conduct such a type of warfare. The rhetorical question concerns though the extent to which a myth leads to the emergence of a "counterpart" myth that justifies actions and counter-actions of the stronger.

Our role here is not to assume which option the representatives of defense establishments choose to act upon when defining current threats under the already mentioned names. Regardless of the option, it is obvious that a fuzzy representation of the opponent/enemy in either case raises a number of challenges and opportunities in identifying the means to counter it adequately. This is best captured by the U.S. Army War College in the now well known VUCA coinage that stands for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity [5]: *" a world order where the threats are both diffuse and uncertain, where conflict is inherent yet unpredictable, and where our capability to defend and promote our national interests may be restricted by materiel and personnel resource constraints.…".*

The very words used to define the environment are self explanatory in terms of the types of actions required. An environment defined under this acronym cannot but be: under the influence of rapid change (the volatility component), averse to pursuing stable long term solutions, of a complexity that makes it difficult to pinpoint every nook and cranny of a given situation and/ or to develop a comprehensive outlook. What is more, as Harry Yarger [5] emphasizes: *"The environment can be interpreted from multiple perspectives with various conclusions that may suggest a variety of equally attractive solutions, some of which will prove to be good and others bad. Certain knowledge is often lacking and intentions may be surmised, but never entirely known."*

Then, what solutions are there? Most likely, they cannot be as elusive as the environment, but they should be enablers for dealing with such a feature. One solution that several authors suggest, even though from different viewpoints, is that of changing and/or enlarging the perspective used when tackling new situations. In this respect, Charles-Edouard Bouée [6], claims that the direction is to enlarge the current definitions we use and, inherently, the mindset developed through education and experience. Thus, concepts like "value" and "competence", of interest for this article, should be more comprehensive but as long as the guiding principles for the behavior of the organization and of the individuals that make it work are flexibility, adaptability, simplicity, tolerance to fuzziness while viewing challenges as opportunities to "juggle

with", ability to keep pace with the changes in the environment, capacity and willingness to do more with less, consensus focused decisions requiring that centralized and decentralized approaches meet half way.

Marina Nucciari [7] in her turn draws attention to the existence of three types of soldiers: the warrior, the peacekeeper and the in-between or flexible one. Thus, if the warrior is defined by features like *"...discipline, fit for action, decisiveness, leadership, obedience, ability to undergo physical stress, patriotism, readiness to make sacrifices, loyalty to the civil power"*, the peacekeeper is characterized by *"...determination, empathy, expertise, ability to easily make friendships, cooperativeness, mental strength, general education, open-mindedness, taking responsibility"*. As for the flexible type of soldier, this one has to cope with a job that *"it is not a soldier's job, but only a soldier can do it"*.

Even though categories are made for us to better tackle the complexity of surrounding world, it becomes obvious for whoever has worked for/with the military that, all of the above considered, *"too few professional military officers are prepared for this actuality"* , since *"Nothing is ever quite what it seems and all is subject to greater or lesser changes. It is a world of unlimited possibilities and seemingly great promise, tempered by competing interests and often unclear or less than desirable alternatives. ... Policy is often stated in lofty and ideal terms with too little regard for political reality and available resources..."* [5].

Hence, what is the way ahead? How can one deal with the ever changing evolving environment both domestically and in multinational contexts? Even though as we are writing reality seems to be steering a different course that may shape/reshape all the existing assumptions or may simply lead us back to the warrior soldier type, the question is still there. As for the answer … that is hard to glimpse. However, what we do know based on our experience of educators in the military is that the more contact with other cultures, the more likely the need to "reset" some common held assumptions concerning the needs of our target audience, as well as their expectations. As a result, a change in our own approach as trainers and educators to all this is required first and foremost before we actually aim at meeting the increased demands of our target groups, namely cadets, officers moving up the career ladder and, as a result, in need of pursuing education and training programs and/or officers to be deployed on various multinational missions. And such a change can only occur if one basic principle is remembered: learning is to change behavior. Consequently, even though for basic concept understanding merely passing on information, drilling the use of it or encouraging rote learning may be acceptable, if a change is to take place, then a different way of approaching it is needed. Under such circumstances, what we propose is to focus our efforts on building meta-cognition or metaknowledge in the field of ethics (and not only) if we are to achieve our educational goals as they are reshaped by the current security and defense environment.

3. META-KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT & THE CONUNDRUM OF ETHICAL META-KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INDOOR TEAM BUILDING GAMES (ITBG)

As already mentioned, flexibility and adaptability are core features of today's world. To develop them at individual level involves a lot of

struggle with one's self and with what is assumed to be true as a result of validation through learning and experience. However, the very term of struggle requires a certain degree of awareness. For this to happen, a meta cognitive process consisting in *"monitoring one's own certainty…"* and also *"monitoring external circumstances causing uncertainty…"* [8] is required. In this respect, it is worth noting that if on behalf of the target audience of the educational and training process all is needed is *"procedural"/"non-conceptual"/"activity based" "self-evaluative heuristics"*[8], on behalf of the educators/trainers a two-fold effort is required: other-directed attention and efforts to build meta cognition, as well as self-oriented understanding.

3.1. Meta-knowledge defined

Hence, the definition that we adopt for meta-knowledge is the one provided for the already traditional concept of meta-cognition: "knowing that one knows" and from here on we are to use the two terms interchangeably.

Concerning the development of meta-knowledge, the literature in the field [8] lists a number of reminders for anyone attempting to build meta-cognitive skills. As far as we are concerned, we will try to link this with the necessity to focus on the abilities required by a flexible cadet/officer that needs to act in asymmetric environments in full awareness and respect for ethical principles.

Meta-cognition consists of integrating a number skills like being able to identify one's own cognitive strengths and weaknesses, learning goals, approach to achieving these goals, monitoring the progress made, controlling one's own performance via evaluation and making the necessary changes so that the aforementioned abilities are improved in future similar situations. In this respect, we believe that team building games are one of the most important means to frame/reframe likely boundary situations that real life may raise unexpectedly and for which the aforementioned skills and competences should already be in place. Thus, team building games are defined as *"…the cooperative process that a group of individuals uses to solve both physical and mental challenges. While using this process and solving the challenges, the group learns how to share ideas, how to praise and encourage one another, how to support one another physically and emotionally, and how to start becoming a team"* [8]. Hence, such means to practice theoretical concepts represent both a way to assess someone from the outside in order to identify the strengths and the weaknesses of an individual as part of a social group, but also a self-assessment and self-awareness development method. This is supported by some of the guiding principles [9] that learning as a process of facilitating future behaviors is based on:

- Learning is not simply passing on information and drilling the use of it or encouraging rote learning of concepts;
- Learning is conditioned by the learner's history (hence understanding/perception/representation of the same concept cuts across the variety of learners' experiences and acquires new meanings when there is a group of learners focusing on similar contexts and sharing their separate experiences and understanding);
- Learning cannot be isolated from a social/emotional context and in this respect it is worth reminding that reasoning and decision making cannot be separated from emotions and feelings

(hence, the need to understand the choices made at a specific point in time in these terms and not only in the terms of the rules/ regulations enforcing a given course of action is mandatory). In relation with this, at the risk of applying circular logic, we remind that one of the key goals of team building game sis to provide *"...individuals and teams physical, social and emotional challenges"*[10].

3.2. Meta cognition & team building games

In relation with all of the above, practice and feeedback play a major role in developing meta-cognition and, hence, in facilitating thorough and comprehensive means of acquiring and applying knowledge in a critical manner. Thus, we dare say that some of the most important signs of meta-cognition are informed educated assumptions and constructive criticism. Concerning this, the literature in the field provides a number of features to describe individuals who are both good *"problem solvers and deep thinkers"* [11] because (and we only selectively mention some of the thirty seven characteristics of this type of person) they understand, create, are flexible, are fair minded, make relevant links, empathize, infer, persevere, communicate clearly, clarify information, manage impulsivity, take responsible risks, show a questioning mind, wonder, are lifelong learners, understand cause and effect, are autonomous, show respect, think interdependently, etc. The very frame provided by team building contributes extensively to the development of such abilities since one of facilitator's roles in such games is to provide *"positive, constructive, and challenging feedback"* in order to *"establish a learning culture and build trust among teams and groups"*

[12]. However, for the real goal of team building games to be met (that is to put into practice a number of theoretical approaches to a topic) any facilitator needs to be aware of the stages a team has to go through before individuals start acting as a cohesive group and begin learning

Thus, according to Paul Tizzard [13], the stages of a group's evolution into a team per se determine the types and goals of team building games and they are as follows: **the polite stage** – characterized by awkwardness, extremely polite behavior, reluctance on behalf of some team members to fully participate in the activity (this is a stage in which ice-breakers work best since the goal that needs to prevail is that people get to know one another); **the emotional stage** (or angry stage as the aforementioned author calls it) when people start to assert themselves and their emotions in a passive-aggressive manner and juggle with a number of roles they assume or the group assigns them to play more or less aware; **the understanding stage** when activity intensity and people's involvement reach a plateau and people may just drift or be very comfortable about their newly acquired positions; and finally, **the learning stage** when team members become self-directed, highly motivated, perform at high levels.

Besides the feedback and practice opportunities that are tasks of the facilitator, it is worth reminding the games themselves provide the participants a number of benefits such as [14]: enabling relationships; involving participants at multiple levels: verbal, intellectual, physical, creative; offering a place to exhibit/discuss behaviors that in real life scenarios are difficult to approach; enabling new behaviors and their inherent consequences before transferring them into real life situations.

3.3. Ethical meta-knowledge development through ITBG

Trainers must avoid the trap of assuming that trainees will become proficient in applying/transferring one specific meta-cognitive skill developed in a specific context into a completely different one. Therefore, every time a facilitator resorts to games, the latter must be fully aware of such assumptions underlying the choice of the game, the group size, composition, role assignment, etc., as well as the theories underpinning the choice/development of the game. From our experience, to choose a game for the sake of using it indiscriminately causes confusion all the way through the presentation of the game, its unfolding and wrapping. In such cases learning is not possible and, regardless of how well variables like group size, composition, clarity of instructions on how to play the game, role assignment are in place, the players cannot move beyond the emotional stage.

Related that to the topic of this paper: ethical meta-knowledge, we must emphasize that the games on the market do not meet the expectations we have set through the arguments already provided in the first part. Therefore, what we stronlgy advise are "custom-made" team building games that need to be anchored in a theoretical framework and whose goals should be framed in terms of ethical imperatives and inherent prescriptions [15]:

- **Beneficence/concern for welfare expressed as**
  - *"do no harm (the duty of non-maleficence)"*;
  - *"prevent harm wherever possible (the duty of prudence/ stewardship)"*;
  - *"remedy harm wherever possible (the duty of compassion or charity)"*;
  - *"do good, provide benefit, wherever possible"*.

- **Justice**
  - *"obey the laws and the codes of your profession"*;
  - *"treat all groups alike"* (non-discrimination/equal opportunity);
  - *"act affirmatively to remedy the result of past injustices"*;
  - *"recognize merit"*

- **Respect for persons**
  - *"tell the truth"* (the duties of veracity, informed consent, full disclosure);
  - *"celebrate differences, whether individual or cultural"*.

4. FROM PROMISE TO PRAXIS

With a view to all of the above, the inherent question that we need to address is how the promise can be actually transferred into practice. For this, we strongly recommend a two-fold approach.

First, the place and role of indoor team building games need to be anchored into the ethical concepts covered and integrated/chosen over other means of providing two-way feedback and practice of these. To achieve that, a number of steps should be pursued:

1. Setting the context, namely the theoretical background underlying the reasons for choosing indoor team building games, as well as the level of group cohesion, its size, its members' previous and future relationships.

2. Discussions on topics relevant to the theory to be exemplified through the games.

3. Presenting the challenge (which requires extensive preparation on behalf of the facilitator and adaptation of the game in accordance with group needs and dynamics, as well as assignment of clear-cut roles to team members).

4. Allowing the group to tackle the challenge within a given time frame and based on an observation sheet to be filled out by the facilitator or by observers from within the group who are instructed on how to act and record group members' behavior.

5. Debriefing on the dynamics observed within the group.

6.   Drawing conclusions relevant for the application of theory to real life situations, as well as for individual predispositions to act when a specific set of circumstances manifests.

Second, the indoor team building games need to be developed in accordance with a well defined framework. This has to be built around the following dimensions:

1. ASSUMPTION;
2.   THEORY UNDERLYING THE ASSUMPTION;
3. THEORY RELEVANCE FOR ETHICAL IMPERATIVES AND INHERENT DUTIES;
4. GAME DESCRIPTION.

In this respect, we provide below an **example** of how this framework can be used in the development of a team building game.

1. ASSUMPTION

If two or more groups develop functional relations (i.e. compatibility/ incompatibility of interests), then intra- group cohesion increases

2.   THEORY UNDERLYING THE ASSUMPTION

Muzafer Sherif's theory on real conflicts presented in Group Conflict and Cooperation: Their Social Psychology (1966).

Theory short description:
•   The relationships developed among groups are of a functional nature and thus they may lead to conflict/cooperation;
•   When groups compete over limited resources, inter-group perceptions and categories give rrise to stereotypes and prejudices, while intra-group performance is over estimated. It is only with joint projects that negative framing of the other group can be changed. Thus, inter-group perceptions are highly dependent on intra-group interests and relationships.

Sheriff's hypothesis is the following: when the relationships between two groups are antagonistic, the stereotypes are negative; friendly intra-group relationships lead to positive perceptions and cooperation.

The inherent assumptions on human behavior and that underlie the above hypothesis are:

1. human beings are selfish and try to maximize their own advantages.
2. conflict is generated by the differences in interests.
3. marriage/divorce at interest level between distinct groups (e.g. control over resources) leads to behavioral and psycho-social effects that become overt through stereotypes, prejudices, hostile attitudes and in-group favoritism.

According to Sherriff's theory, inter-group contact is sufficient to solve conflicts.

3. THEORY RELEVANCE FOR ETHICAL IMPERATIVES AND INHERENT DUTIES

Ethical imperative: justice
Duty: "treat all groups alike" (non-discrimination/equal opportunity)

4.   GAME DESCRIPTION

Game name: WE & THE OTHERS
Game type: perception, team-building, communication

S u m m a r y : Inter-group competition over resources increases a system's internal cohesion and contributes to the development of negative stereotypes and perceptions of system non-members, while joint goals (super ordinate goals) lead to inter-group cooperation

Game goals:
1. Increase intra-group cohesion by facilitating inter-group competition;
2. Facilitate intra-group cooperation by identifying super ordinaate goals;
3. Identify inter-group stereotypes and prejudices;
4. Support a point of view with arguments and counter arguments

Group size: minimum 12-maximum 20

Time (55 minutes):
1. Game introduction - 5 minutes;
2. Game preparation/subgroups: 15 minutes;
3. Stage 1: 10 minutes;
4. Stage 2: 10 minutes;
5. Presentation of observers' charts: 5 minutes;
6. Conclusions and discussions: 10 minutes

Materials:

Photocopies of Appendix 1 for all participants;

3 Photocopies of Appendix 2

Procedure:

1. Form 2 groups made up of minimum 3 members-maximum 6 members each using random criteria;

2. Present the game (see Appendix 1);

3. Assign observers from among participants and distribute Appendix 2. They must be instructed not to show any approval/disapproval for group dynamics during the game. Moreover, they should also play the role of evaluation board for the projects to be submitted by the groups.;

4. Time allocation/subgroup (15 minutes);

5. First stage (10 minutes).;

6. Second stage (10 minutes).;

7. Observers present their findings;

8. Conclusions and discussions

Discussions (guiding questions)

1. How did you perceive the members/representatives of the other teams during the two stages of the game? Why?;

2. What led to inter-group competition?;

3. What factors led to your decision to support your team's/other team's project?;

4. What are your feelings right now towards the other groups?

Appendix 1: Game presentation

You are part of different departments of the same organization. You are at the end of the fiscal year and you discuss budget allocation/departments for the next fiscal year. You already know that each department is entitled to a fixed amount of money. However, the budget allocated to each department is to decrease by 5% and the overall savings will rise to 100.000 euro. This amount of money is to be allocated to only one department to undertake a priority project that is to impact the future performance of that department. Each department needs to develop a business case that is to be presented to the other departments and to the evaluation board. Once the business case is ready, identify 3 representatives that should negotiate and convince the board about your project's feasibility.

Stage 2: Once the arguments and counter arguments are presented, the teams need to choose only one winning project.

Appendix 2: Observer's Chart

1. What relationships were developed at inter-group level when preparing the business case?

2. What were the remarks made concerning the competitors?

3. What factors contributed to establishing group strategy?

4. What was the verbal and non-verbal behavior within the group and among the groups during the two stages?

5. CONCLUSIONS

Team building games are a means to frame/reframe likely boundary situations, to assess someone from the outside, but also to support self-assessment and further self-awareness. Consequently, the following principles need to be heeded, if meta knowledge is to be built or reinforced through team building games:

- Learning is not simply passing on information and drilling the use of it or encouraging rot learning of concepts;

- Learning is conditioned by the learner's history (hence understanding/perception/representation of some concept cuts across the variety of learners' experiences and acquires new meanings). In this respect, it is important noting that complex mental processing involves memorization as the basic stage to start from (which means that theoretical anchoring is more than necessary before practicing it and discovering its plethora of meanings associated with meta ethical knowledge).

- Learning cannot be isolated from social/emotional context.

- Reasoning and decision making cannot be separated from emotions and feelings. Therefore, understanding the ethical choices made at a specific

point in time need to be made terms of learning and not only in the terms of the rules/regulations enforcing a given course of action.

- Metacognition is about thorough learning and team building is about facilitating this process.

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