

12th ICCRTS

Adapting C2 to the 21st Century

Cohesion in a Multinational Coalition Center

Topic: Cognitive and Social Issues

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ABSTRACT

Military officers from Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Poland, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden and the United Kingdom formed a Command Center during three, two-week Trials of an experiment. Participants completed surveys examining cohesion three times during each two-week Trial, on days 1, 5, and 8. One item consistently fell below “agree” on a 7-point Likert scale. Participants did not agree that: *As a team we feel that we are very similar*. Diversity of opinions and experiences were valued according to respondents and commanders who received products from this team. All of the remaining nine items fell within the agree-to-strongly agree area. On interpersonal cohesion, highest agreement was found on items addressing the importance of liking and socializing with team members. On task cohesion, strongest agreement was found between: *As a team, we enjoyed the task* and *As a team, we felt that the task was meaningful*. These findings provide insights on how a successful multinational team forms and functions. Participants valued getting to know their coalition partners, with a particular emphasis in gaining an understanding of their military role. Diverse opinions were valued which, according to leaders, led to innovative solutions to assigned tasks.

Cohesion in a Multinational Coalition Center

Introduction

Coalition operations are becoming the norm for military actions (Bensahel, 2003). Differences in goals, policies and procedures, and values can present challenges to forming a cohesive team. This research looked at cohesion within a multinational team of military officers participating in an experiment replicating a stability operation. In the “real world” some of these officers were from countries that were part of a coalition with the U.S. military supporting ongoing operations, while others were from countries that did not support or were opposed to the operation.

Method

Participants

Military officers, at the O4-O6 levels, from Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, Japan, Poland, Singapore, South Korea, Sweden and the United Kingdom participated. These officers came from a variety of occupations including: Armor, reconnaissance, submarine, helicopter aviator, stability operation expert, training and transportation. A retired Lieutenant General from France served as a senior concept developer (SCD) and a retired General from the United States served as commander.

The number of participants participating varied across trials. Fourteen non-US officers participated in Trial 1, 16 in Trial 2, and 17 in Trial 3. Military obligations and travel costs limited many officers from being able to participate in all three trials although six were present for all three trials.

Measures

Interpersonal cohesiveness. Interpersonal cohesiveness was measured using Craig and Kelly's (1999) five-item survey. Participants responded to each item using a 7-point Likert scale to indicate their agreement with each statement. An additional field was provided for comments. This scale has acceptable internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .72). A copy of this survey can be found in Appendix A.

Task cohesiveness: Task cohesiveness was measured using Craig and Kelly's (1999) five-item survey. Participants responded to each item using a 7-point Likert scale to indicate their agreement with each statement. An additional field was provided for comments. This scale has acceptable internal reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .87). A copy of this scale can be found in Appendix A.

Procedures

Setting

Military officers from 12 countries participated in an experiment at U.S. Joint Forces Command. These officers served in a Regional Combatant Command's Coalition Center (RCC CC) tasked to provide advice and recommendations on complex problems encountered in a stability operation. In short, they served as a think tank at the operational and strategic levels. This experiment took place over three 2-week trials spaced about a month apart. A one-week training trial took place a month prior to Trial 1. Officers participated for eight hours a day, five days a week during the two week period. The last half hour of each day was set aside for participants to complete surveys or respond to interviews.

Task

Participants were administered the cohesion surveys developed by Craig and Kelly (1999) to examine both interpersonal and task cohesion. Survey administration took place three times during each two-week Trial, on day 1, day 5, and day 8. These surveys were administered via computer, with all items presented in English. Additionally, participants were asked which, if any, of the previous trials they attended and how many of the participants they knew prior to the trial.

Results

Cohesion Survey-Trial 1

No differences on cohesion ratings were found between those who participated in the training trial and those who had not participated in any of the three administrations of the survey during Trial 1. Similarly, no differences were found between those who knew other members of the group and those who did not.

There were no differences on ratings on interpersonal or task cohesion when comparing days 1, 5, and 8. Ratings on one statement on the interpersonal cohesion scale fell below "agree." Statement 4 was, "As a team we feel that we are very similar." Participants commented that their diversity was a strength (see Figure 1).

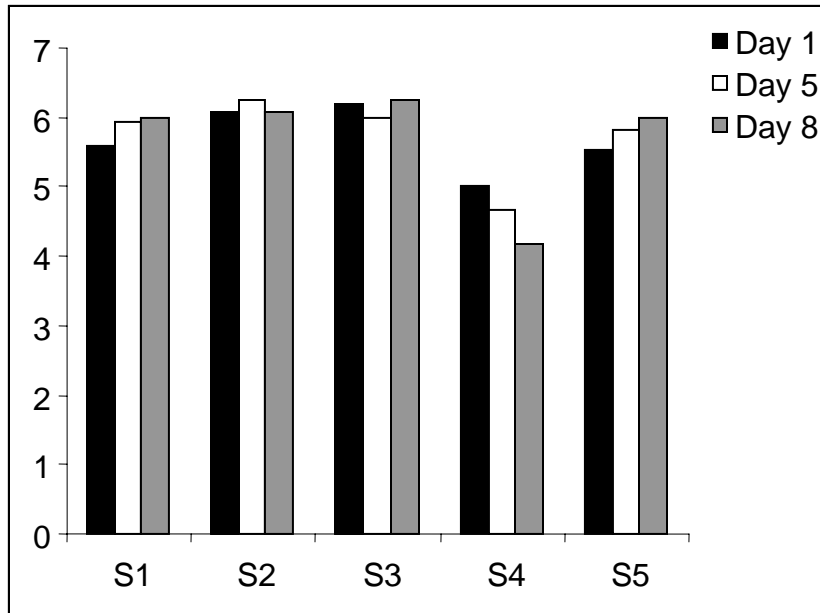


Figure 1. Comparison of ratings on Interpersonal Cohesion on Days 1, 5, and 8. Ratings ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7).

Cohesion Survey-Trial 2

Results from the cohesion surveys were compared between those who had participated in Trials 1 and 2 and those who were new for Trial 2. Significant differences were found on two items. On Day 1, those who were new to Trial 2 were in stronger agreement than those who had participated in Trials 1 and 2 with Interpersonal Cohesion Statement 1 “As a team we currently like each other.” Significant differences were not found Day 5 or Day 8 (see Figure 2).

On Day 5 and Day 8, significant differences were found on Task Cohesion Statement 5, “My team members and I expect that there will be benefits from our team’s performance.” Those who had participated in both Trial 1 and Trial 2 were in stronger agreement with this statement (see Figure 3).

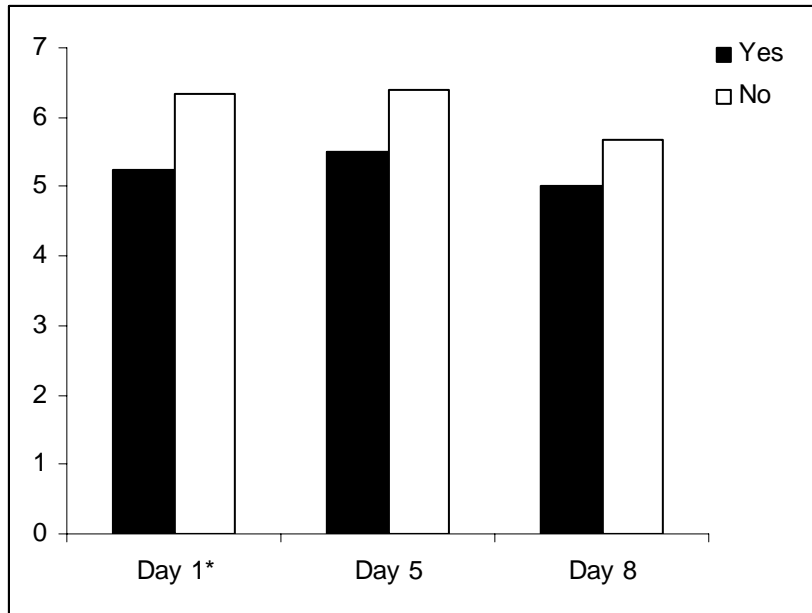


Figure 2. Comparison of ratings on Interpersonal Cohesion Statement 1 between those who had participated in Trial 1 (Yes) and those who had not (No). Ratings ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7).

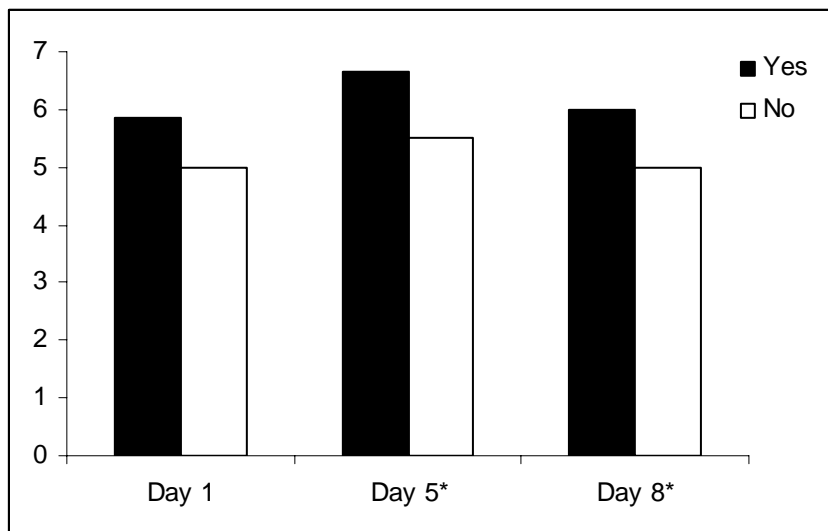


Figure 3. Comparison of ratings on Task Cohesion Statement 5 between those who had participated in Trial 1 (Yes) and those who had not (No). Ratings ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7).

Ratings for days 1, 5, and 8 were compared. A significant difference was found on one item, “As a team, we felt that the task was meaningful.” Participants were in stronger agreement with this statement on day 5 than they were on day 8 (see Figure 4). The task changed from planning a United Nations transition to

providing input on the seven solutions. The seven solutions were the main emphasis of the experiment on the SECRET side. Since the RCC CC was working in an unclassified environment, participants had limited or no access to information needed to respond. This may be an explanation of the findings.

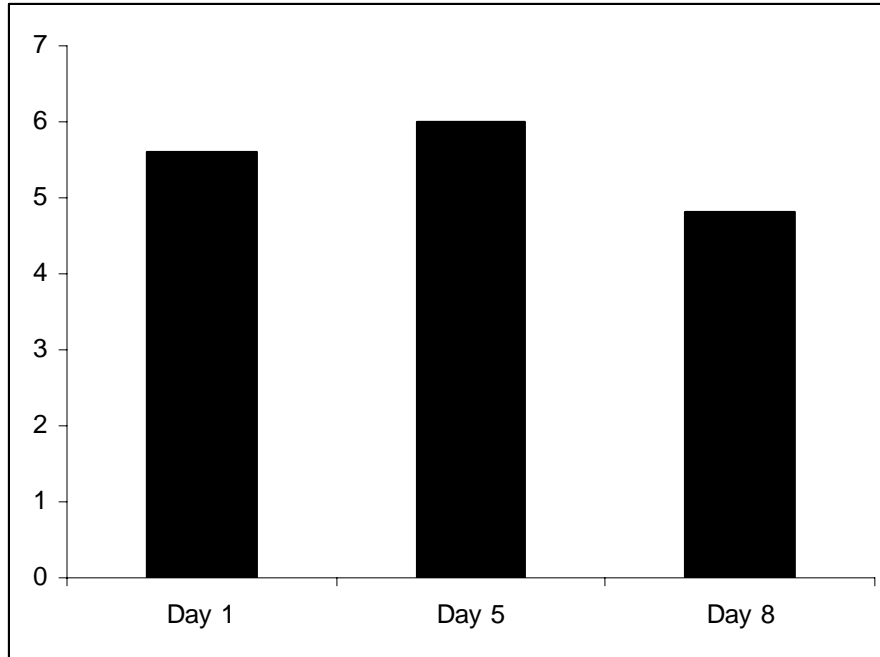


Figure 4. Comparison of ratings on the Cohesion Survey on Days 1, 5, and 8. Ratings ranged from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (7).

Cohesion Survey-Trial 3

There were no significant differences on ratings on interpersonal or task cohesion when comparing days 1, 5, and 8. Similarly, no differences in ratings were found on ratings when comparing the number of previous trials attended.

Cohesion Surveys-All Trials

Results from the Cohesion Surveys for all administrations over the three Trials can be found in Appendix B. With the exception of Statement 4 (“As a team we feel that we are very similar.”), all statements fell within the agree-to-strongly agree area. Highest agreement on the Interpersonal Cohesion Survey consistently was found on Statements 1, 2, 3, and 5. Agreement with these statements suggests that this group of multinational officers see it as important to like each other and socialize with other team members. A strong, positive correlation was found between these 4 statements.

On the Task Cohesion Survey, highest agreement was found on Statements 1 (My team members and I were engaged in the task.) and 3 (My team members

and I agree that it is important to do well on the task.”). Both of these items focus on task performance. The strongest positive correlation was found between Statement 2 (As a team, we enjoyed the task.) and Statement 4 (“As a team, we felt that the task was meaningful.”)

Conclusions

This research looked at interpersonal and task cohesion within a multinational group of military officers. Increases in cohesion were not found across the three trials, possibly because cohesion started high. Some of these officers were acquainted and some were working together for the first time. For example, in Trial 3, 16 officers completed the surveys. Six were not acquainted, four had participated in two of the previous trials, and six had participated in all three trials. Obviously, all of the officers were performing assignments in a country foreign to them (U.S.) and all but two were not speaking their first language.

Subjective observations suggest that participants were sensitive to the challenges of operating in a foreign country and using a second language. For example, their elected leader set aside for participants to share information on their military background and coordinated an after-hours social. Also, leaders ensured that all participants contributed to discussions and proposed solutions. Interestingly, leaders emerged and changed based on their expertise on a particular topic irrespective of rank. Participants saw this as a strength. At the conclusion of each trial, participants were asked to list three areas where they were successful and three where improvement was needed. After one trial, the RCC CC felt that their greatest strength was:

Efficiency and adaptability of RCC CC to address complex issues as RCC “think tank” through flexible internal business rules and organization.

Senior Concept Developers, consisting of flag officers and retired flag officers, also reported strengths of the entire experiment. The contributions from the RCC CC won high praise after all three trials. The RCC CC saw this support as a strength noting:

Attention from senior mentors and various SCDs and their support of innovative thinking of Multinational partners.

Agreement between survey results and comments made during after action reviews suggest that survey responses accurately reflected cohesion during this experiment. Additionally, findings reveal how cohesion is reflected in a successful multinational team. Participants took the time to get to know their coalition partners by gaining an understanding of their military role and by interacting socially. Diverse opinions were valued and encouraged.

References

- Bensahel, N. (2003). Preparing for coalition operations. In L.E. Davis & J. Shapiro (Eds.). *The U.S. Army and the new national security strategy* (Vol. MR+1657-A, pp. 111-128).
- Craig, T. Y., & Kelly, J. R. (1999). Group cohesiveness and creative performance. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice*, 3 (4), 243-256.

Appendix A

Interpersonal Cohesion Survey

Please rate the following statements:

S1. As a team we currently like each other.

- _____ Strongly Agree
- _____ Agree
- _____ Agree Somewhat
- _____ Neither Agree or Disagree
- _____ Disagree Somewhat
- _____ Disagree
- _____ Strongly Disagree

Comments: _____

(Note: the same response selections were provided for each statement.)

S2. My team members and I expect to like each other in the future.

S3. As a team we believe that it is important that the team members get along.

S4. As a team we feel that we are very similar.

S5. My team members and I feel that it is very important to socialize during the session.

Task Cohesion Survey

S1. My team members and I were engaged in the task.

S2. As a team, we enjoyed the task.

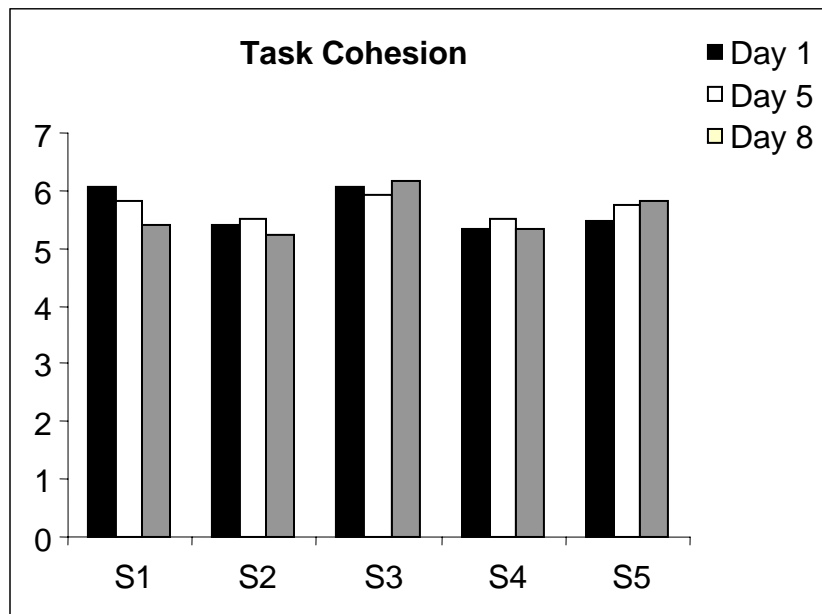
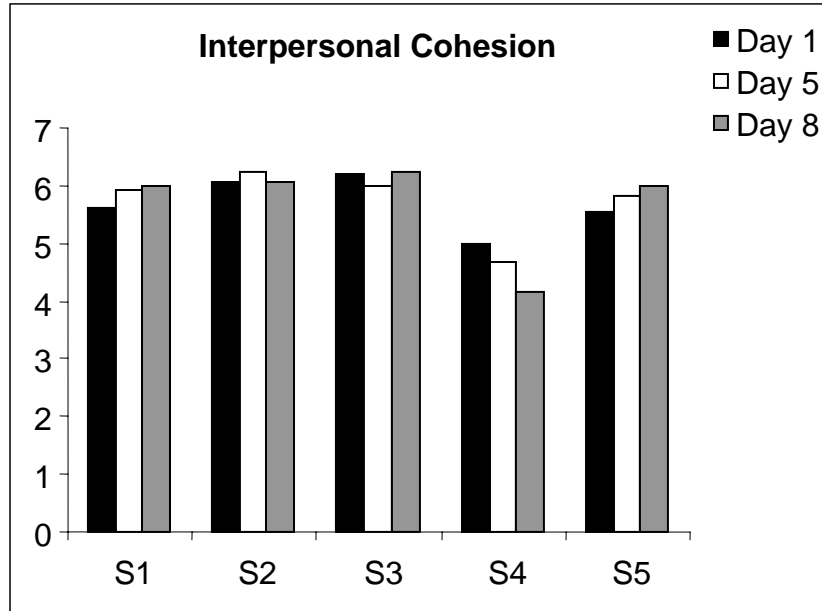
S3. My team members and I agree that it is important to do well on the task.

S4. As a team, we felt that the task was meaningful.

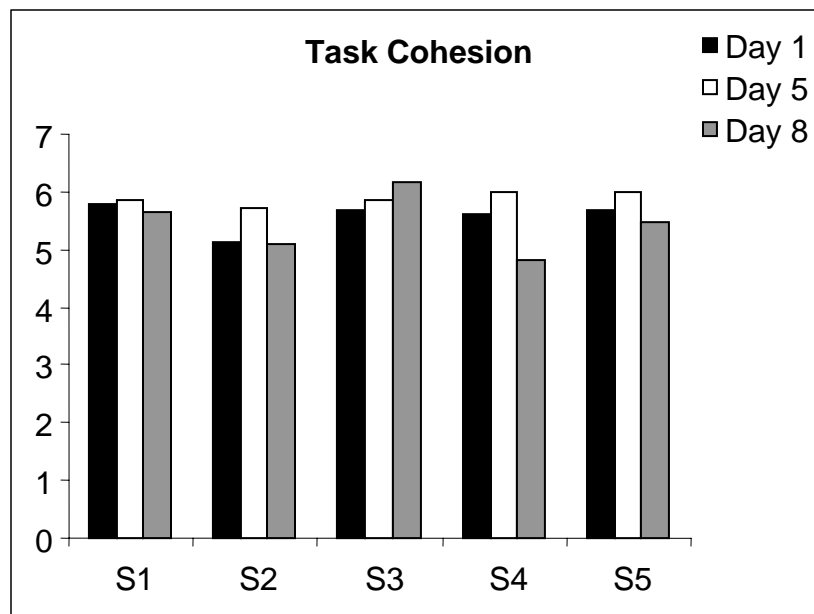
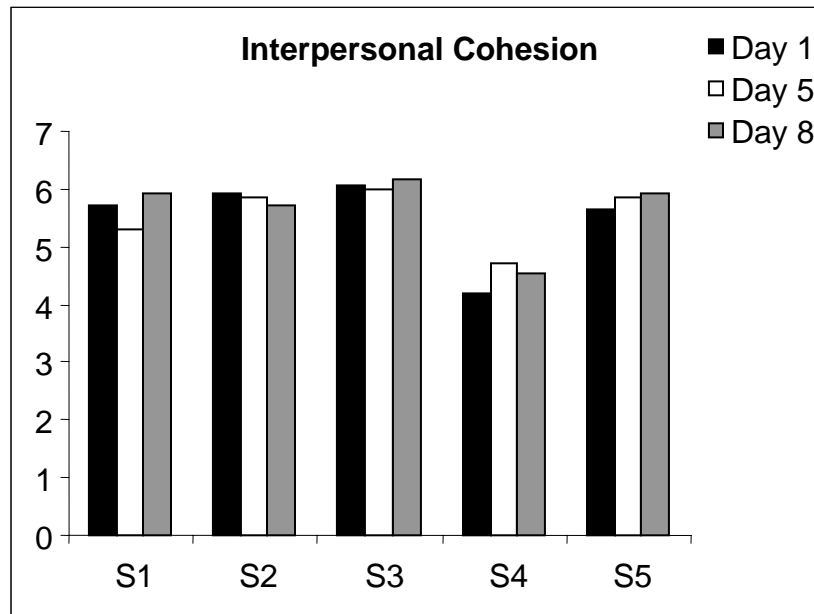
S5. My team members and I expect that there will be benefits from our team's performance.

Appendix B

Trial 1



Trial 2



Additional Information for Trial 2

Interpersonal Cohesion Statement 1. *As a team we currently like each other.*

Significant differences were found on survey results on Day 1 between those new to the experiment and those who had participated in Trial 1.

Day 1 $F(1,12) = 9.99, p < .05$

Task Cohesion Statement 5. *My team members and I expect that there will be benefits from our team's performance.*

Significant differences were found on survey results on Day 5 and Day 8 between those new to the experiment and those who had participated in Trial 1.

Day 5 $F(1,5) = 7.00, p < .05$

Day 8 $F(1,9) = 6.17, p < .05$

Task Cohesion Statement 4. *As a team, we felt that the task was meaningful.*

Significant difference on were found when comparing results from Day 1, Day 5, and Day 8.

$F(2,30) = 3.758, p < .05$

Trial 3

