

2017

Rapport Development and Native Language Use Between U.S. Advisors and Afghan Counterparts

Sean Ryan Ryan

Walden University, sean.ryan@waldenu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/current>

 Part of the [International Relations Commons](#), [Military and Veterans Studies Commons](#), and the [Near and Middle Eastern Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ryan, Sean Ryan, "Rapport Development and Native Language Use Between U.S. Advisors and Afghan Counterparts" (2017).
Current/Present Programs & Posters. 7.
<http://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/current/7>

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by the Research Symposium at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Current/Present Programs & Posters by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Rapport Development and Native Language Use Between U.S. Advisors and Afghan Counterparts

Sean Ryan, PhD

Abstract

This phenomenological symbolic interactionism study of rapport and native language use between 15 Afghan counterparts and their U.S. advisors involved semi-structured interviews informed by social exchange theory, servant leadership theory, role theory, and the Army conceptual rapport framework. Native language appeared to contribute to perceptions of respect, understanding, commitment, and trust supporting rapport.

Problem

Advisor effectiveness is a complex phenomenon affected by the relationships between advisors and their foreign counterparts (Brunner, 2010; Chemers, 1968; Hickey & Davidson, 1965; Zbylut et al., 2010).

Problems with rapport were viewed as contributing to incidents of murder-fratricide of U.S. soldiers by Afghans (Bordin, 2011).

Rapport is a dyadic social phenomenon representing a developing professional relationship between an advisor and counterpart. Whereas most contemporary studies considered predominantly U.S. perspectives, I examined how foreign counterparts perceived U.S. advisors' attempts to use the native language in military settings through the perspectives of the counterparts' lived experiences.

The paucity of research on building effective relationships indicates a gap related to knowledge critical to advisor preparation in rapport building and language skills (Phelps, 2009; Zbylut et al., 2010).

Research Questions

RQ1: What do foreign counterparts believe to be the antecedents to building effective rapport with their advisors?

RQ2: What symbolic meaning do foreign counterparts ascribe to their advisors' use of their native language and what effect did they perceive it had on rapport development?

Relevant Literature

U.S. national security strategy relies on effective advisors (Obama, 2010; 2015). Rapport was consistently identified as critical to advisor effectiveness, but was rarely defined or explained (Bordin, 2011; Brunner, 2010; Chemers, 1968; Hickey & Davidson, 1965; Zbylut et al., 2010). Advisors played significant roles in every major conflict involving the U.S. in the 20th century (Axelberg, 2011; Cushman, 1972; Lawrence, 1926; Snyder, 2011).

Unlike Chemers (1968), and Hickey & Davidson (1965), contemporary advisors did not correlate language skills with advisors' abilities to understand their counterparts' perspectives (Brunner, 2010; Phelps, 2009; Zbylut et al., 2010).

Theoretical Foundation

Social exchange theory (Thibault & Kelly, 1959; Ribarsky, 2013), servant leadership theory (Greenleaf & Spears, 1996; Van Dierendonck, 2011), role theory (Harnish, 2011), and the Army rapport conceptual framework (Army, 1990; 2009) were used as filters for interviewing Afghan counterparts. This complex foundation accounted for:

- the cost-benefit analysis inherent in professional relationships;
- the role of influence in the advisor-counterpart relationships;
- differing roles and expectations involved in these complex relationships.

Methodology

Husserlian phenomenology (Vagle, 2014) provided an appropriate methodology for this study of the essence of intercultural rapport between advisors and counterparts.

Symbolic interactionism served as an effective methodological construct for studying the meaning placed on native language usage and the subtle actions by advisors (Mulyana & Zubair, 2015; Oliver, 2012). Kramsch (2013) viewed language in symbolic terms from a cultural perspective.

Purpose

The purposes of this qualitative phenomenological symbolic interaction research study were:

- to identify and report on what Afghan counterparts believed to be the antecedents of rapport and
- to identify, interpret, and report on what symbolic meaning foreign counterparts assigned to the rudimentary use of a native language by an advisor during rapport development.

Procedures

Pilot study: 4 former Afghan interpreters validated the data collection instrument.

Snowball sampling was used to recruit 15 current or former Afghan officials experienced in working with U.S. advisors, and who were fluent in English,

Data Collection

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person or via Skype, FaceBook audio/audiovisual chat, or telephone.
- Interviews were recorded, when participants allowed, and then transcribed.
- Transcripts and field notes comprised data.

Data Analysis

Manual data analysis followed the 6 steps outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). Applying an indigenous lens to coding was important (Saldana, 2012).

Findings

Respect, understanding, working collaboratively, frequent interactions, expressions of genuine interest by advisors, and **trust** represented the major themes (RQ1).

Respect was unanimously expressed as a precursor to building rapport.

Language was viewed as a symbolic demonstration of respect, familiarity, affinity, or commitment that contributed significantly to building positive rapport (RQ2).

4 of 8 tenets of servant leadership were identified by participants as valuable or meaningful.

Limitations

Different cultures may interpret relationships or native language usage differently. Interpreting meaning across disparate cultures may represent a limitation (Patton, 2014).

Potential bias from my personal international experience was mitigated by focusing the study of Afghan perspectives.

Context and the environment in Afghanistan may also represent limitations on transferability.

Conclusions

Perceptions expressed by Afghan participants were consistent with the Army rapport framework. **Respect** and **understanding** were identified as precursors to professional rapport; **Trust** was referred to less often.

Native **language use contributed to rapport** and provided symbolic value beyond a means of communication.

Additional research into the potential relationships of trust, commitment, and interest is warranted.

Social Change Implications

Findings from this study may inform advisor preparation and policies to improve advisor relationship building skills and advisor efficacy.

Insights from this study may contribute to improved relationship building skills in the context of global or international leadership.

Dr. Richard Schuttler, Committee Chair, Dr. Karla Phlypo, Committee Member, and Dr. David Banner, University Research Reviewer