The Article :
"It is time to consider cultural differences in debriefing."

Case Author :

- Dr Ben Symon

Expert Commenter :

- Dr Peter Dieckmann

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- Dr Victoria Brazil
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Simulcast Journal Club is a monthly/ series heavily inspired by the ALiEM MEdIC Series.

It aims to encourage simulation educators to explore and learn from publications on Healthcare Simulation Education.

Each month we publish a case and link a paper with associated questions for discussion.

We moderate and summarise the discussion at the end of the month, including exploring the opinions of experts from the field.

The Case :

It was hot and humid and Dave could tell he was being petulant but the frustration had been building for weeks. A month away from his clinical duties had seemed like a dream come true, but the realities of spending time with the in-laws in South-East Asia had rapidly hit home. It was not bringing out the best in him.

"God I wish your parents would listen to me sometimes. I tell them I'm not hungry, so they order a banquet, and I keep telling them I'm full but they keep pushing food onto my plate! Then they look frustrated when I don't finish the ridiculous amount of food I told them they shouldn't have ordered in the first place! And this was just lunch! They're already planning dinner and that's like… 2 hours away! They're driving me nuts!".

"Gweilos eat to live. Asians live to eat." joked Jess.

Dave fumed. "I get it. I get it. But for 2 weeks I keep saying I don't want any more food and they keep ignoring me! It's like your parents care more about looking generous than actually hearing what I'm saying."

"Aren't you always going on about Frames with your sim stuff?" soothed Jess. "You've got to see it from their perspective.".

"They're pretty old school, and in their culture it's important to be 'hak-hei'. It kind of means that as a guest you're supposed to be polite and decline offers a few times before accepting them. When you keep saying no, they just think you're being hak-hei and load up your plate."

"That's not what frames are about at all." lied Dave crankily.

Frames were only fun when he was the one uncovering them.

Discussion :

As healthcare simulation and debriefing expertise has flourished around the world, it has been acknowledged that a lot of debriefing framework shares a heavily westernised perspective. In Chung et al's article, the authors explore cultural differences in debriefing strategies and discuss traps for new players who are debriefing in a cultural environment different from their own.

What has been your experience with debriefing in different cultures? Is the traditional 'debriefing with good judgment' framework based on a particularly western perspective? If so, how can it be adapted to aid learning objectives in other cultures?

Article Summary :

"It is time to consider cultural differences in debriefing" is an article that addresses an important blindspot for many western simulation educators :

We're not the only ones doing it.

Chung et al open the paper by establishing the extensive growth of simulation based education in South East Asia. They then quote a number of articles that highlight the importance of debriefing for learning, strategies for creating psychological safety and the need to communicate in a 'frank, open and honest manner'. But they then acknowledge that all of the papers they quote are from western cultures, and that what works in the West might not generalise to other cultures as easily as might be assumed. In particular, they state that being debriefed "may be more difficult for trainees who come from cultures where the motivation to defer to authority outweighs the choice to disclose views that may seem to contradict those of the instructor."

To highlight cultural differences in communication, the authors utilise the classic case of the Korean Airline disaster featured in Malcolm Gladwell's 'Outliers'[2]. The authors explain that the investigation of the crash found that communication dysfunction between Western traffic controllers and the Korean pilots flying the plane contributed heavily to the crash. In particular, it was noted that the Korean style of 'polite' communication (described as 'mitigated speech') was not assertive and clear enough regarding the plane's plight.

In describing this event, the authors provide a clear example of "East vs West" communication problems, but perhaps more importantly for our learning, they highlight this :

> *"It is important for people with experience of the local culture to develop solutions that will be most effective for that culture."*

In essence, they argue that until you understand someone's frames, you can't help them find a solution. But they to truly understand someone's frame, they argue, one must also understand their culture.

To perhaps highlight the complexity of this issue, they describe further attributes of Korean culture that conflict with Western cultural norms : Its emphasis on memorisation over critical thinking, stronger hierarchical gradients between medical and nursing staff and junior and senior colleagues, and a general fear of 'saying the wrong answer'.

To finish up the article provides a series of questions for future research, such as :
- What motivates Asian students to be active in SBL?
- What are the elements of a *safe learning environment* in different cultures?
- What aspects of culture are 'safety neutral,' and what aspects may actually have effects on patient safety and patient care?

Expert Opinion: Peter Dieckmann, PhD, Dipl.-Psych

Peter Dieckmann is senior researcher and faculty developer with the Copenhagen Academy for Medical Education and Simulation (CAMES) of the Capital Region of Denmark. His research focuses on optimizing simulation to create, recognize, and use learning opportunities around patient safety – on the individual and organizational level. Dr Dieckmann is also Associate Editor of the journal *Simulation in Healthcare*.

Peter's response to this month's article:

Thanks, Ben, and all for the invitation to take part in this discussion. Disclosure: I am one of the authors in the study.

Hah – already so much "culture" in this sentence. The disclosure thing…(a more and more sensless ritual). The thank you thing… (a ritual to open conversations).

I think the value of thinking about culture lies in stepping back, looking from a new angle onto our own position, our own standpoint. By comparing, what we take for granted with what the other takes for granted can generate new insights. Question is: do we then also adapt your actions (a question you raise, Ben, in one of your comments: would you do something different?). It requires openness about ones own ways of thinking, feeling (yes, we do have feelings), about our norms, values, and beliefs. It also requires to be able to distinguish understanding from judging – part of what Jessica Mesman from Maastricht calls "passivity competence". Listen, observing, thinking, before responding. Seeing the situation from the standpoint of the others – us much as possible. Some of them, we might simply not be able to reach. It might be too different from my own standpoint to be possible for me to go there. I can think of many people I see daily in the news, whose standpoints are too far for me to reach (and I do not want to reach them – uuuups: Peter distinguish analysis from judgment!). Culture gets engrained – it is not only a way of seeing the world. It is a way of being in the world. Even bodily aspects (think of beauty ideals).

Culture unfolds in so many different context. It is one of those concepts, that seem to be reasonably clear, until you read the first definition. Down it goes, the intuitive understanding. The more your read, the more you think about measurements, the more tricky it gets.

Especially with globalization, the national culture becomes more tricky. I learned that, in running workshops on culture, where we asked people to represent their countrypeople (not -men: I live in Scandinavia, we are far with the gender issues! – Is this along the lines of Australian humor – get my "u" back it in that word, you damn yankee computer software autocorrection! Or do I get it wrong as principally humor (u!) less German)? Anyway: I asked this nice guy from the UK: Can you role play the stereotypical Brit? He looked at me like: "What? There is not such thing (a person) like this…They / we are from all over the place!" Point taken. So, likely the culture variety within a country is much larger than the variety between countries (imagine a German with humor (u!) – an American, who spells the Fxxx word with all letters – A Dane, who does not drink beer, go on, go on, go on). Departmental culture(s), professional cultures, morning shift cultures, night shift cultures, Christmans (ups – sorry seasonal greetings) shift cultures. Feedback culture…

Might be interesting to explore that one.

Imagine sports teams would have the same feedback cultures as healthcare. Just a moment. Get the picture? Not many goals in sight, my wild guess. That brings me to "assessing" cultures. Well, we do, right? All the time….Those xxx, ts, ts – always like that. They never [clean the table; say good morning] and always…So there is judgment in our cultural understanding and no matter how much we try, it will leak. So, somehow, we will assess cultural norms and will base our actions on this assessment (a good argument for bringing more ethics into simulation and healthcare as such). Question is from which standpoint? If we ask the high-heiriarchy-position people, they might be quite happy. The others might not. The more I think about it, the more I think: the relevant standpoint for the assessment is: is this good for Esther (just learned that from some Swedes: Don't say "good for the patient" but give his patient a name : "Esther". Does make a difference, doesn't it?). …Anyway, for me to find the guidance in how we should balance different cultures, the question of what is good for Esther makes a lot of sense. BUT: The Esthers in different cultures will think differently about what "good" means: absences of disease? Happiness? Go on, go on, go on.

We are currently working with a multicultural team on looking at the hypotheses that we postulated in the paper that is up for discussion. Guess what: we could find empirical differences between cultures with different power distance and the way that debriefers describe their debriefings. The details I do not want to give away here – cross your fingers that the reviewers share your enthusiasm for the topic and accept that there are some methodological challenges. So, there seems to be something there.

In summary – especially in those days of heated debates going on in the UN: there are differences. We kind of begin to get an understanding of them – although that easily goes away as well again. We can then begin to think about what we want to do with the those differences – level them out? Nurture them? Combine them? In some cultures Esther will benefit from advocacies and inquiry that her care givers sit through. In other countries Esther might benefit from another demonstration, of how it should be done right. No words needed. My own standpoint, when running faculty development courses around the world: I have a way that works reasonably well, where I come from. I would like you to take the time to understand it. Then I would like to think with you: how can we adapt this, so that it might fit your context. Or better: I want to help you to develop a way that will work for you. If that way, has a few elements of my way in it. Great. If not, I hopefully have helped you anyway see your way – and even, if you only you found out that my way is not your way.

Peter

Summary of this Month's Journal Club Discussion :

Blog Contributors :
- Vic Brazil, Nemat Alsaba, Ben Symon, Mary Fey, Adam Cheng, Ian Summers, Peter Dieckmann, Shaghi Shaghaghi

Perhaps fitting for a paper that is in many ways a conversation starter, comments this month seemed primarily focused on journal clubbers sharing their own cultural perspectives.

Vic opened the discussion by contrasting Australian humour with American humour, and how the 'teasing' that is used by Australians to signal affection or to soften the blow of a critique is at risk of misinterpretation in other cultural formats. Nemat Alsaba discussed her experiences as a medical trainee as someone with a multifaceted identity : "*born in Saudi Arabia, grew up in America, work in Australia*" and how moving between one culture to another can provide its own challenges in 'relearning the system'. In particular, both her and Shaghi reflect on the importance of hierarchy in some middle eastern cultures, particularly with regard to respecting ones teacher.

Nemat recaps these reflections perfectly with a phrase from her culture :

"I am a salve of him who has taught me one single letter."

Debriefers from a primarily western background, such as Mary Fey, Ian Summers and Adam Cheng, reflected both on their assumptions about communication being challenged by the article. They shared stories of unsuccessful cross cultural debriefs, and shared vulnerability in asking for others to share their stories of 'what could work better'.

Ben acknowledged confusion : how far do we accept cultural norms as they are? How much do we use sim to challenge them?

Overall, it would seem that the article mostly promoted reflection. As Mary Fey stated : *"So, this turns the lens inward – to the debriefer becoming aware of personal biases that can influence us: that quiet learners are "not participating" (or maybe she's a "receiver oriented" communicator)…..that everyone needs to learn to speak up (or perhaps I need to figure out the best communication pathway for learners from cultures who espouse "mitigation talk")."*

A significant frame shift indeed.

Shaghi provided some beautiful examples of turning that lens inward when she shared her experiences as a French Canadian of Middle Eastern Background. *"I had assumed I had more of a "western" upbringing and hadn't given much thought about how my Middle Eastern background could affect my discussions in debriefing. I assumed this until recently when I was told by my simulation mentor… that there was an imbalance in our debriefing the debriefer sessions. Unfortunately, I am more of a taker than a giver. Basically, I didn't have much constructive comments about her debriefing skills. After reading this article, I have been pondering on the reasons why I haven't been able to "give back." Could it just be that her approach is flawless, or maybe I just don't have enough of a critical mind? Or is it that I haven't been aware of the impact of my cultural background and that deferring to a mentor, a senior and a potential figure of "authority" are still things I unknowingly do? Maybe it's a bit of everything."*

It would seem we all have much to learn.

Journal Club Summary September 2017 "Trouble in Paradise"

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