

Do military need empathy? - ACT

Written by Mr. Serge Da Deppo, ACT Future Solutions Branch
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On 7 February, a team from Allied Command Transformation (ACT) Future Solutions Branch (FUSOL) participated in the Sociology course of Professor Sam Richards at Penn State University, Pennsylvania.

The topic of the course was *empathy*, or the ability to feel what other people feel. Together with retired U.S. NAVY SEAL Captain Ryan McCombie and ACT's Dr. Eric Pouliquen and his branch staff discussed with 750 students what role empathy plays in military operations. They explained how today's missions require much more contact with and understanding of the local populations in theatre than conventional combat.

In missions such as counterinsurgency, security forces assistance, stabilisation and reconstruction, it is critical to build trust with the locals whose support is key to success. The audience got captivated by how much bravery it requires to candidly engage with people, before even knowing whether they are friends or foes. The course ended with a reminder to the students that it is their responsibility, as citizens, to ensure that armed forces are used the right way, sometimes with empathy, other times with force.

In ACT, these aspects are studied within the Human Environment Capabilities Project. The aim of this project is to allow the Commander to make the most efficient use of all assets contributing to understand and engage with the human environment.

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Since the 12 June 'Innovation Hub' event, ACT and Professor Sam Richards have been collaborating on the development of a cross-cultural skills development tool for NATO – based on the World in Conversation Project that he runs at Penn State University.