Cultural Priming
Adopting the other’s mindset to improve analysis

Objective
To examine the impact of priming analysts with a non-Western, collectivist cultural mindset to better understand and predict the behavior of others.

Definitions
Mindset: A fixed mental attitude or disposition that predetermines a person’s responses to and interpretations of situations. A mindset of one’s own culture can blind one to what is important to people from another culture.

Priming is the process of making an idea or a mindset more easily accessible in one’s mind by presenting something like a word or picture.

Individualist cultures focus attention on the characteristics and motivations of other individuals and encourage the self to develop unique characteristics and pursuing personal goals.

Collectivist cultures focus attention on the social context and encourage mutual dependence upon others and group-reliance.

Findings
The individualism-collectivism distinction used in cultural priming studies is insufficient to account for the variety of non-Western cultures. CASL researchers have applied cross-cultural findings to develop a broader framework for cultural priming. Using this framework, a cultural analysis has been performed on Afghan, African, American, Chinese, Japanese, and Iranian cultures.

CASL researchers plan to:
- Develop client-relevant, scenario-based surveys, and to assess cultural self-concept orientation and cultural knowledge.
- Validate the surveys through neuroimaging and psychometric methods.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of cultural priming when applied to a structured analytic task involving competing social influences.

Relevance
Analysts attempt to predict the future behavior of others to increase mission success. Thus, adopting the perspective of another is a vital skill for effective intelligence analysis. However, not every analyst is familiar with other cultures, and even knowledgeable analysts may have difficulty adopting a foreign mindset. With cultural priming, analysts may better predict the effect of social influences on decision-making and, therefore, better predict other’s behavior.

Report
- Cultural Priming: Adopting the adversary’s mindset to improve analysis (March 2011)

For More Information
U.S. Government Point of Contact
John Walker
Government Technical Director for Analysis at CASL
University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language
(301) 226-8912 | jwalker@casl.umd.edu | www.casl.umd.edu

CASL Principal Investigator
Joseph Dien, PhD
Senior Research Scientist
University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language
(301) 226-8848 | jdien@casl.umd.edu | www.casl.umd.edu

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