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## The Good Stranger Frame for Police and Military Activities

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We sought to understand how some police officers and military personnel are more effective than others at increasing civilian good will following encounters. Such officers can be termed “Good Strangers” (GSs). We conducted Cognitive Task Analysis (CTA) interviews with 17 U.S. police officers and 24 warfighters (Marines and Army soldiers). The CTA interviews yielded a total of 92 incidents, which were used to identify critical skills for training warfighters to become GSs. These skills supported a professional identity as a GS – seeking opportunities to increase civilian trust in police/military. Increasing trust from civilians requires skills in gaining voluntary compliance, building rapport, de-escalating conflicts, trading-off risk versus trust building, and taking the perspective of civilians.

### INTRODUCTION

The goal of this project was to understand how police officers and military personnel interact with civilians in a way that increases good will and reduces antagonism. Police officers and military personnel have a variety of responsibilities in maintaining law and order, arresting criminals, and providing security in their jurisdictions. They need to gain compliance from civilians, but compliance can be gained in different ways. Some rely on coercive compliance including various forms of force; others can gain voluntary compliance, which is less likely to make civilians resentful. Warfighters will be more effective in conducting humanitarian missions, counter-insurgency, and other activities if they can refrain from antagonizing civilians.

In 2011, DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Programs Agency) initiated the program, “Strategic Social Interaction Modules” (SSIM), to use experiential simulation and other techniques to teach social skills so that military personnel can consistently gain voluntary compliance and maintain cooperative working arrangements with civilians. The nickname for the SSIM program is the “Good Strangers” (GS) project because the intent is to transform military and police into agents who elicit trust and cooperation rather than hostility.

There is a large literature on ways for police and military personnel to accomplish their missions without being provocative. We reviewed 41 military

and police reports and identified 24 different Knowledge/Skills/Abilities mentioned in these documents. We also surveyed a range of publications examining “soft” methods of persuasion and influence (e.g., Cialdini, 1993; Thompson, 1993; Glennon, 2010). There is no lack of speculation about the skills needed by Good Strangers. However, we did not find any in-depth studies of how these skills were formed and used. Therefore, we conducted Critical Decision method (CDM) interviews with police and military personnel who were identified as Good Strangers, to try to determine how they made sense of actual situations.

### METHOD

#### Participants

The participants were 17 experienced police officers from four jurisdictions within the U.S. and 24 warfighters. They had an average of 18.1 years of experience (police = 17.6, military = 18.5). Their mean age was 39.7 years. Three of the participants — all police officers — were female.

We requested interview time with police and military personnel who were acknowledged by their supervisors to be GS exemplars – professionals who had demonstrated superior abilities (compared to their peers) to engage with civilians and to de-escalate rather than escalate situations involving

conflict. The participants were selected by supervisors.

**Data Collection Method**

*CDM interviews.* We used the Critical Decision method (CDM) as our CTA approach (Klein et al., 1989; Crandall et al., 2006). The CDM is an interview-based knowledge elicitation technique that elicits critical incidents to expose different types of expertise. The rationale is that expertise becomes important in handling tough cases. The CDM is a qualitative method, intended to balance more quantitative data collection efforts used by other research teams within the DARPA SSIM program. CDM interviews have been used to study decision making and sensemaking in a variety of domains such as firefighting, healthcare, aviation, and military command and control.

The first two authors conducted 41 CDM interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours, and consisted of four sweeps through every incident: a brief initial description, a timeline for the entire incident, identification of decisions and of changes in situational awareness during the incident, and final probes (e.g., hypothetical variations).

The 41 interviews yielded 92 incidents (44 police, 48 military). The interview data were collected in office spaces at the participants' work settings. All of the interviews were voice-recorded. The first two authors worked as a team in conducting 37 of the interviews, and for scheduling reasons they worked in parallel for the remaining four interviews. The interview data were collected in accordance with Institutional Review Board procedures, implemented separately for the police and military sites.

Participants provided a wide variety of incidents. Police incidents included domestic violence calls, patrolling a gang funeral, and traffic stops. Military incidents included dispersal of protesters, handling checkpoints, and de-escalating community anger at an accidental shooting.

**Data Coding**

*Rating participants.* The first two authors independently reviewed each interview transcript and rated the interviewee on a 7-point scale, where 7 = Good Stranger and 1 = Bad Stranger. These ratings were based on a global impression from the interviews and the way the incidents were handled. The raters showed significant agreement, ICC(3,2) = .944 in their ratings. Subsequently, to justify their global impressions, the raters articulated some of their criteria: showing genuine concern for the needs of civilians, wanting to make a difference in people's lives, anger at other police officers acting inappropriately (e.g. abusing their authority), refusal to take provocations and insults personally (e.g., perspective-taking and emotion regulation), taking pleasure in getting thanked after giving citations, wanting to stay calm in tense situations. Police interviews helped us identify and better understand critical GS skills. Because the SSIM program attempts to improve military performance, we continued our analysis investigating which of these GS factors differentiated military personnel.

*Coding incidents.* Two independent raters analyzed each military incident based on the first two authors' GS criteria and other important GS social skills identified by other DARPA SSIM sub-teams (See Table 1).

Table 1  
High vs. Low GS Differences & IRR (Kappa) for SSIM GS Social Skills

SSIM Social Skills	High GS ( $\geq 5$ )		Low GS ( $< 5$ )		Kappa
	Yes/Total	%	Yes/Total	%	
Prefers voluntary compliance	20/21	95%	8/12	65%	.81
Corrects team members actions (self-policing)	7/8	88%	4/5	80%	.79
Refuses to take provocations personally	13/13	100%	4/7	57%	.65
Prefers trust building actions	17/18	94%	7/11	64%	.64
Successfully defuses conflict (de-escalate)	22/23	96%	8/12	67%	.59
Curious about odd behaviors	7/8	88%	1/3	33%	.50
Considers long-term consequences	17/17	100%	6/11	55%	.45

Both raters were trained to understand the working definitions of the dimensions. For each military incident, the raters coded the dimensions as 1 = yes, 2 = no, or 0 = unavailable, as some incidents did not contain relevant context for all dimensions. For example, incident x did not call for the participant to correct a team member's actions. Cohen's Kappa was used to evaluate rater consistency (see Table 1).

## RESULTS

We analyzed incidents from military participants that provided complete CDM incidents ( $n = 22$ ). In total, we captured 48 military incidents. Two military participants were unable to generate incidents.

For these 22 military participants, we averaged their global GS scores from the first two raters and then categorized each participant as either low GSs ( $< 5$ ) ( $n = 9$ ,  $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) or high GSs ( $\geq 5$ ) ( $n = 13$ ,  $M = 6.03$ ,  $SD = .78$ ) using a median split. Among the 48 incidents, low-rated strangers contributed 19 incidents (40%), and high-rated strangers shared 29 incidents (60%). We considered analyzing the data using a regression method rather than splitting the sample into two groups (high vs. low), but the nature of the incidents meant that not every GS feature was tapped in every incident, creating too many empty cells. For instance, few incidents involved correcting the actions of colleagues.

We investigated whether incidents generated by high-rated warfighters were more likely to contain references to the social skills listed in Table 1, than incidents shared by those with low ratings. Data were analyzed based on individual incidents reported by participants and not the number of participants in the study. Many participants reported more than one incident. Each incident was treated as a new case. We appreciate that this procedure violates the assumption of independence of data elements. Nevertheless, we judged that this was the cleanest way to gather descriptive, as opposed to inferential statistics.

We found that five of the seven GS sub skills differentiated military personnel in the high vs. low GS groups (see Table 1). The remaining two skills (corrects team members' actions and being curious about odd behaviors) didn't differentiate the GSs

and occurred too infrequently to be considered further.

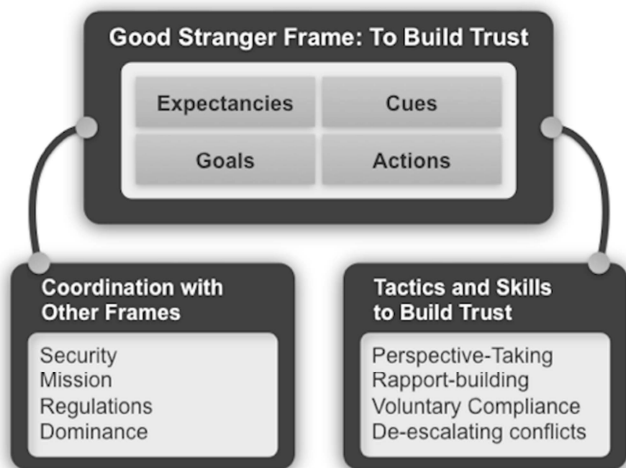
*Preferring voluntary compliance* was more prevalent in the high GS group (20/21, 95%), compared to 67% (8/12) in the group with low GS rating. There was also an increase in *refusing to take provocations personally* in the high GS group with a prevalence of 100% (13/13), compared to 57% (4/7) in the group with low ratings. High rated GSs were more likely to *successfully defuse conflicts* (22/23, 96%) than the low rated GS group (8/12, 67%). Additionally, high rated GSs were better able to *consider long-term consequences* (17/17, 100%) than the low rated GS group (6/11, 55%). Lastly, there was an increase in *performing trust building actions* in the high GS group with a prevalence of 94% (17/18), compared to 64% (7/11) in the group with low ratings. Again, we acknowledge that the incidents were not always independent. Further, the nature of the incidents may have affected the types of GS skills to be exercised.

## DISCUSSION

Our results identified five factors that differentiated the highest scoring participants from the others: building trust, preferring voluntary compliance, refusing to take provocations personally, successfully defusing conflicts (de-escalating), and considering long-term consequences of actions.

We used these findings to construct a model that portrays the way Good Strangers approach encounters with civilians (Figure 1). The model centers on the factor of building trust as a frame for making sense of situations. (See Klein et al., 2006a, 2006b, for a description of the Data/Frame model of sensemaking). We postulate that frames such as the GS frame have four aspects, in keeping with Klein's Recognition-Primed Decision model (Klein, 1998). Professionals using the GS frame to build trust: (i) appear to notice cues that others don't, (ii) have different expectations for how the encounter will develop, (iii) have different goals for encounters, and (iv) consider different courses of action.

Figure 1: The Good Stranger Frame of Building Trust.



Our interviews revealed that the highest scoring GSs worked hard to gain the trust of civilians to ensure long-term benefits even in transitory encounters. They tried to be seen as trustworthy. One police officer explained that he tried to “move the needle” in each encounter, getting the person to trust him and police officers more in general at the end of the encounter than at the beginning. In contrast, the interviewees with low GS scores showed little evidence that they viewed encounters with civilians as opportunities to build trust.

Police officers and warfighters have several ways for making sense of situations, particularly maintaining control during encounters (Alpert & Dunham, 2004), ensuring security, maintaining their own safety, and accomplishing missions. The concept of a GS frame does not mean police or military can, or should, abandon their other frames. There will be times when police and military need to escalate to the use of force to maintain control of others (Pinizotto et al., 2006). Knowing how and when to transition is itself a critical competency. Figure 1 reflects the fact that the concept of a GS frame operates in addition to the other frames, i.e., control, security and mission accomplishment. We include the skill of considering long-term consequences of actions as a part of trading off the need to build trust and the need to ensure safety. Police and military who were not very good strangers seemed to emphasize short-term security and ignore the long-term issues – that treating civilians harshly could lead to

reprisals later on, such as planting explosives on roadways.

Our interviews suggest that some professionals may never acquire this GS frame. It is not part of their conceptual repertoire. They don’t see the same interactional cues that a GS sees. Others may have acquired the frame but give it a very low priority and don’t activate it very often.

A GS frame can be an important aspect of professional identity. For example, a number of police officers described how they started out expecting that the job of the police force was about catching and arresting criminals and using skilled exercise of control and presentations of authority to gain compliance. But somewhere along the way, often with an experienced mentor, they observed a different approach. They encountered role models who spoke softly rather than yelling, who treated civilians with genuine respect, and as a result were extremely effective. One officer explained that after working with such a mentor he cut the number of fights and violent encounters by 90%, by using methods he had learned for gaining voluntary compliance.

We believe that components of the GS frame can be learned, perhaps in a short period of time. For example, the professional identity of being a GS was acquired quickly by many police officers when they observed a respected and effective role model/mentor. In contrast, the military personnel did not report these types of opportunities.

The leverage points for learning to adopt a GS frame include the use of models/mentors, the use of peer pressure (e.g. your colleagues don’t want to ride or go out on patrol with you); the use of norms (e.g. here is what most police officers or warfighters would see in this situation); the use of consequences, both short-term and long-term; and the use of feedback (e.g. here is how you are being perceived).

Our research identified several skills that intersected with the GS frame and enabled police and military to be perceived as trustworthy. One skill is learning how to gain voluntary compliance, as opposed to coercive compliance. A second skill is being able to de-escalate tense situations (see Figure 1). The ability to resist provocations and refuse to take them personally seems linked to de-escalating rather than escalating situations. Figure 1 also includes two skills that we did not include in the data coding, rapport-building and perspective-taking.

These skills arose in discussions with highly experienced police and military personnel, and we add them here provisionally because we have not had a chance to examine them systematically, but they seem too potentially important to omit. Thus, Figure 1 shows a third skill of perspective-taking: being able to quickly determine what is motivating a civilian. A fourth skill shown in Figure 1 is being able to gain rapport. We suggest that each of these four skills helps to build trust. The GS frame and the GS trust building frame helps to carry out these skills.

*Future Directions.* Additional research is surveying military personnel to assess the kinds of frames they use to make sense of civilian encounters. Research is also seeking to develop and evaluate training methods to help military and police adopt and strengthen a Good Stranger frame for viewing civilian encounters as an opportunity to promote trust.

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