



Finnish Defence Forces  
International Centre

# **Diversity, Teamwork and Communication Skills Behind the Success of UNMEM 2/2018 Course**

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Finnish Defence Forces International Centre  
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**DIVERSITY, TEAMWORK AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS  
BEHIND THE SUCCESS OF UNMEM 2/2018 COURSE**

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## FOREWORD

The UN Peacekeeping Defense Ministerial was held in London in 2016. The meeting outlined objectives for increasing the number of women in operations. (UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial 2016.)

“We further call on all Member States to develop and implement National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security, and to increase the number of women officers serving in missions as Staff Officers and Military Observers, and attending UN Staff Office and Military Observer Training Courses. We aim for 15% of such roles being filled by women by December 2017.” (UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial 2016: Report of the meeting)

As the first training center in the world, FINCENT took a step towards organizing an UNMEM course in August 2017 where the majority of participants would be women. In 2018, FINCENT continued to organize the UNMEM course, with more than half the participants consisting of women. Our activity opens up possibilities for women to be deployed in any ongoing UN operations to cooperate and coordinate with local women in the conflict area. Women as UN Blue Helmets can be better suited for certain aspects, such as taking into account particularly vulnerable groups, for example, women and children in mission areas.

Exceptionally, 70% of the participants in the 2018 course were women. This resulted in a very intense course spirit and atmosphere. However, FINCENT's goal of training observers in mixed patrols was undermined. The best course composition should be 50/50 gender. This would make it possible for women and men to work in mixed patrols during the training phase. Female students in this second course had better basic skills than those who attended the 50/50 course in 2017 (i.e. driving, orienteering, map reading and using radio).

This publication concludes that the observations from this course indicate the positive relation between gender balance and learning, which supports the main idea behind this course. Multiculturalism poses the main challenges to the course. FINCENT's goal, together with the countries sending students, is to achieve the highest possible multicultural framework. Problem solving should be practiced in the course, not in the area of operation.

FINCENT wants to combine research and training in order to achieve better training results. Operations focus on the individual's interaction skills, teamwork skills, and cultural awareness skills. This was the incentive this year to launch the University of Oulu and FINCENT cooperation in UNMEM courses. The University of Oulu began collecting data in 2019, the planning process for which started on the 2/2018 UNMEM course. FINCENT aims to further develop UNMEM courses based on this academic cooperation and research.

FINCENT cannot execute any activities without the support of national and international actors. The course was organized by qualified and competent trainers from Finland, Denmark, Hungary, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. The course will be in our course catalogue in the future and the 2019 course will be a good milestone for FINCENT's 50th anniversary.

I would like to thank Tanja Arffman, who made observations in the UNMEM 2/2018 course and who wrote a draft report on the study; Iira Rautiainen, who described the research phase of the University of Oulu, and Vera Vikström, who compiled and edited the publication into a finished product.

For sponsoring female officers to participate at UNMEM 2/2018 special thanks go to:

Australia sponsoring Jordan, Kazakhstan and Rwanda

Canada sponsoring Philippines

The United Kingdom sponsoring Nepal and Morocco

Lieutenant Colonel (G.S.) Harri Westerlund

FINCENT Head of Academics

## **OBSERVATION ON THE UNMEM 2/2018 COURSE**

### **Preface**

This was the second time when the Finnish Defence Forces International Centre FINCENT organized United Nations Military Experts in a Mission Course (UNMEM) with the majority of participants consisting of female participants. The UNMEM 2/2017 course had a female participation of over 50% (Ruolanto, 2017). Compared to the course held in August 2017, the UNMEM 2/2018 had fewer participants: out of 32 participants, 23 (70% out of the whole course) were female.

The course was organized in cooperation with the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO) and Crisis Management Center Finland (CMC Finland). The purpose of this research is to provide more information about how the students' cultural and personal background resonates in the practical exercises. This research topic was first discovered in the previous UNMEM 2/2017 course report (Ruolanto 2017).

The UNMEM 2/2017 course had some challenges according to basic skills, such as driving, language skills, using a radio and map reading (Ruolanto 2017). Tanja Arffman was invited to the UNMEM course to observe the interaction and skills. She was given three different factors to observe. The main focus was on: language skills, driving skills, and a soldier's basic skills (orienteering, map reading and using a radio). As communication is inevitable in all these tasks this makes the study of communication skills to be the focus during the observation.

In Helsinki, 04.12.2019

FINCENT and Tanja Arffman, MA (Communication)

## Abstract

The United Nations Military Experts on Mission (UNMEM) course is one of the most well-known courses offered by FINCENT. In 2018, there were three courses arranged and the student feedback from the courses indicates improvements in respect to previous courses, as well as on how the updates were received. This report is a follow-up to the one published about the UNMEM 2/2017 course and focuses on the UNMEM 2/2018 course held in August 2018.

The UNMEM 2/2018 course was arranged in cooperation with the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFECO) and Crisis Management Centre Finland (CMC). The UNMEM course aims to prepare students to serve as UN Military Observers, Senior Military Liaison Officers or Military Advisers.

The UN Secretary General published a report called *Improving Security of United Nations Peacekeepers: We need to change the way we are doing business* (2017). The report was based on UN data about fatalities due to violent acts and on more than 160 interviews. The main aim of the report is to change the UN's way of working in high security risk peacekeeping operations. The report gives an insight into the topics to be focused on to develop peacekeeping. (Cruz 2017.)

Crises are more complex than ever and affect many civilians. One of the main tasks is to provide more diversity (UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial 2016). FINCENT sees its responsibility as an educator to adapt to new challenges. One way to broaden the range of skills and capacities is to have more female peacekeepers in peacekeeping groups (FINCENT 2018). In 2016, the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial announced that their future mission was to increase the number of female officers in peace support, both in uniformed roles as well as in senior UN leadership positions. The role of women in UN peacekeeping is the key to a sustainable peace process, the operational effectiveness of a mission and the overall success of missions. The number of women in the military and the police quota of UN peacekeeping operations was stated to be doubled by 2020. (UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial 2016.)

As the first UN Peacekeeping Training Centre in the world, FINCENT wants to lead the way by providing more military observer training possibilities for women. The UNMEM 2/2017 course was the first pilot course with the majority of participants being women, and the UNMEM 2/2018 course had an even bigger female majority.

## United Nation's military experts on mission course 2/2018

Overall, the UNMEM 2/2018 course had 32 participants, of which 23 were female officers (FINCENT 2018). The course had a great amount of diversity, including students from 16 different nations: Austria, Botswana, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Norway, Philippines, Rwanda, Sweden and Zambia. The instructors came from Denmark, Finland, Hungary, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland. This diversity is a unique tool to improve the cross cultural awareness of the participants.

The Cruz report was published in the end of 2017. The report focuses to outline the developments needed in the United Nations peacekeeping. 2017 (56 fatalities) was the deadliest single year for UN peacekeeping missions since 1994. The report states that it wants to change the way the United Nations operates in the high security risk peacekeeping operations. (Cruz, 2017.)

The recent development calls for

action, which FINCENT also recognized. The UNMEM course requirements are based on the UNMO Skill Set Requirements (see. UN Ref. 2016.25, Annex J). These requirements include, for example:

- observation and monitoring
- verification and assessment
- negotiation and mediation
- liaison and coordination
- safety
- driving
- cultural awareness
- knowledge of important UN Policy Documents.

(UN Ref. 2016.25, Annex J.)

The UN response to the changes in the field of peacekeeping led to concrete action.

On 28<sup>th</sup> March 2018, the new Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) initiative was launched. The eight main priority commitment areas were listed as following:

- politics
- women, peace and security
- protection
- safety and security
- performance accountability
- peacebuilding and sustaining peace
- partnerships

- conduct of peacekeepers and peacekeeping operations.

(Action for Peacekeeping, 2018.)

These topics are focused on during training and FINCENT is dedicated to continue to develop the course to answer such needs.

The UNMEM course was mentioned by the UN Military Gender Advisor to the Office of the Military Affairs, Fiona Pearce, at the 2018 IAPTC in New Zealand (Pearce, 2018). Pearce gave a speech about women peacekeepers, and FINCENT was noted to be one of the only centers offering such a course (Pearce, 2018). Courses such as UNMEM 2/2018 are a way to increase the number of women in the field of peacekeeping operations and prepare the participants with knowledge for their upcoming deployment. UNMEM 2/2018 is one step towards fulfilling the aim to double the number of women peacekeepers by 2020. (UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial, 2016.)

The course consists of theory lessons, case studies, basic exercises and a final exercise. The first week consists of driving, first aid, getting to know the important United Nations Policy Documents and studying the scenario. The second week (basic exercise) includes equipment handling, negotiation and mediation, observation and monitoring, information collection and interpretation, verification and investigation. The third week (final exercise) is partly conducted in cooperation with Crisis Management Centre Finland. The final week includes similar factors as the second week, but in a different and more challenging setting. As a result of the international aspect of the course, cultural awareness and communication skills are practiced simultaneously throughout the whole course.

Tanja Arffman was invited to the course to observe and collect feedback for the future development. The observed teams were chosen in advance, based on the variety of teams. Four teams out of ten teams were completely female. One team consisted of male soldiers and five teams were mixed. A total of 24 participants were observed. Any feedback was not given to the students during the exercises and the observer's presence wasn't acknowledged during the exercises. The course consisted of planning, execution and feedback phases which the observer had the opportunity to follow.

After the analysis, the observations were divided into two groups: teamwork and communication skills. In addition, language skills, driving skills and basic skills were reflected on.



## **Collaboration with the University of Oulu**

The collaboration between FINCENT and the University of Oulu began in 2016. The core idea of the partnership was to study crisis management training using video based interactional linguistics. The focus of the research is on talk and interaction in multinational teamwork with English as the working language: how team cohesion and shared awareness can be strengthened through interaction, and how situational awareness is managed verbally in fast-paced and changing situations. The findings will also be returned to the studied community. Two researchers from the University of Oulu visited the UNMEM 2/2018 course to familiarize themselves with the course's structure and activities in order to support the planning of upcoming data collection in the 2019 courses. The researchers visited the course in the second week, following a couple of different teams to their negotiation and mediation tasks, and observed one team on their car patrolling route. One researcher returned to visit the course in the final week and followed two teams on their car patrolling routes and in the MILADs' final round table task. Based on these visits, data collection for courses 1/2019 and 2/2019 was planned and later implemented. Research data were collected from negotiation and mediation tasks, car patrolling, and first aid exercises. The final data collection will take place in the 1/2020 course. The resulting materials in the 2019 courses were more than 150 hours of video data, dozens of pages of field notes, and a variety of course materials that were handed out to the students. The analysis work is ongoing, and the researchers visited the UNMEM core instructors in October 2019 to return some initial findings to the community and discuss how the results could be utilized in future training. Research articles on the findings will also be published at a later date.

## Results

The participants rated the UNMEM 2/2018 course with an average of 4.6 (on a scale of 1-5, in which 1 was poor and 5 excellent). Open feedback included many positive comments about the atmosphere, spirit, social cooperation, expertise of the trainers and attitude. Cultural differences were perceived as an asset but also as a challenge. Participants developed their preparedness to work in a culturally diverse operation. The challenging aspects were language and skills. There was difference in the language proficiency as well as in the basic skills among the participants.

Communication skills were observed through investigation, patrolling, negotiation and mediation exercises. Cultural diversity was high, which exposed the participants to different situations such as working with someone from a different background or the use of English as a work language. As noted in the UNMO guidelines (2017), these factors are to help personnel to work with other nationalities (UN Ref. 2016.25, 3). Many participants stated that the international environment was the best aspect of the course. Also, many participants stated that they experienced learning through working with different people. The evaluation results indicated that the skills and the level of knowledge of colleagues are more important than gender, for example.

Driving skills were evaluated based on observation and monitoring exercises which included reading a map, orienteering and the use of a radio (equipment handling). This indicated the basic skills (orienteering, mapping and using a radio) lower than average on other previous UNMEM courses. Driving and language skills were both on an average level. These results are based on comparing the overall skills between the UNMEM 2/2018 course and the previous UNMEM courses.

The main observations from the course show:

- Cultural differences were the biggest challenge in the cooperation. Knowledge and basic skills depend on educational background and experience.
- Negotiation and mediation skills were above average, which might correlate to gender.
- The atmosphere was experienced more positive than before.

The UNMEM course prepares participants to work in highly demanding roles. The course is a great opportunity to experience working as a part of a multinational group, which is expected on a mission. FINCENT offers a positive and equal learning environment.

According to these observations it is recommended that:

- There will be more focus on the pre-course requisites. FINCENT has stated clear pre-requisites for the participation, and the sending organizations are expected to follow these guidelines, as it is a big factor in the success of the course.
- The course has a great, supportive and open atmosphere and the course should be held 2-3 times per year to continue to support UN peacekeeping.
- The reason and need for the cross-cultural course should be explained to participants in the beginning, in order to give them a better understanding as to why the course is arranged in this manner. This could support the students' learning.
- The importance of teamwork and interaction should be highlighted.

With many years of experience from previous UNMEM courses, this experience has provided a holistic understanding of the different skills needed to develop the education.

The language and driving skills were on an average level. Basic skills (orienteeing, mapping, using a radio) were below average but higher than in the UNMEM 2/2017 course.

One observation from the UNMEM 2/2018 course was the good spirit and cooperation among the participants and instructors. The level of teamwork and interaction in teams during the exercises were good, regardless of the team's composition. In the well-functioning teams, the leader was able to get everyone committed and divide the tasks. The humour and good team spirit was easy to recognise in these teams. The challenges regarded language, skill levels and leadership skills. Cultural challenges were mentioned many times during the interviews and in the feedback. Different cultural backgrounds were seen as positive but also as a challenge. Trust was the main component bringing the teams together, despite the cultural differences.

Communication skills included both strengths and challenges. Communication functioned well in teams in which the participants supported one another verbally and physically. Verbal support can be using the term "we" instead of "I" or "you", for example. Good communication skills helped teams to gather more information. In some teams, the level of frustration was high which was due to leadership skills.

## **Closing remarks**

The recruitment for the UNMEM 2/2018 course resulted in having more women than the year before, which supports the goal of adding women's ability to work in different positions on missions. However, as it was stated in the 2017 report, the goal is to provide a 50-50 course, where participants would be divided more equally (Ruolanto, 2017). This way, the best support for the course could be achieved, as male and female participants would have to work together more. The atmosphere experienced among the participants was positive and encouraging. The language skills were good, which reflected positively on team spirit and cooperation. Observations from this course had some correlations to the previous years. The negotiation and mediation skills were good which can correlate to the number of women. This supports the previous findings from the UNMEM 2/2017 course that female officers are able to receive more open source information (Ruolanto 2017).

This year's course shed light into the cultural diversity, level of knowledge and the skill level among the participants. These were seen both negative as well as positive, a lot of people said that their ability to work with different people increased. At the same time there were few comments made about the difficulties faced when someone in the group was lacking language skills or knowledge. These topics will be further noted in FINCENT, but overall the course was successful. The participants were overall very content with the course based on the evaluations.

The recommendation is that FINCENT introduces cultural skills and teambuilding as learning points at the beginning of future UNMEM courses. It is important that the participants realize the importance of teamwork.

In the future, there should be more research done regarding the cultural differences and educational backgrounds. The observations made during the UNMEM 2/2018 course shows that the cultural background and level of knowledge (level of education) were the most challenging aspects of the course. Observation and the course feedback indicate that the UNMEM 2/2018 course had a good atmosphere and spirit among the participants, and the instructors were experienced professionals.

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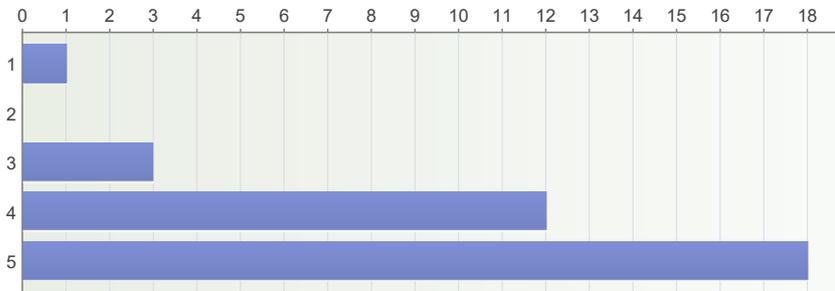
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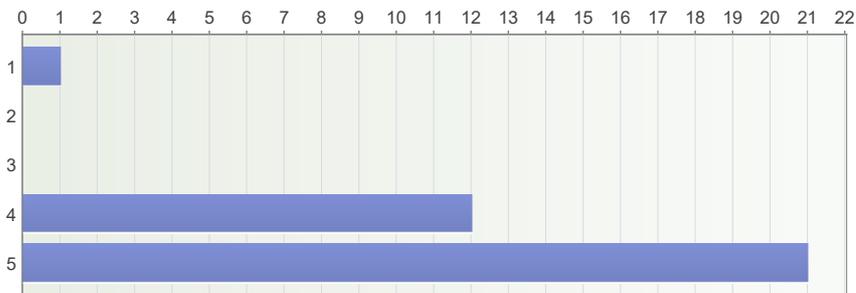
## COURSE EVALUATIONS

The course-evaluation was concluded with a survey that the participants took part in. All the questions were answered with options from 1 (poor/completely disagree) to 5 (excellent/fully agree).

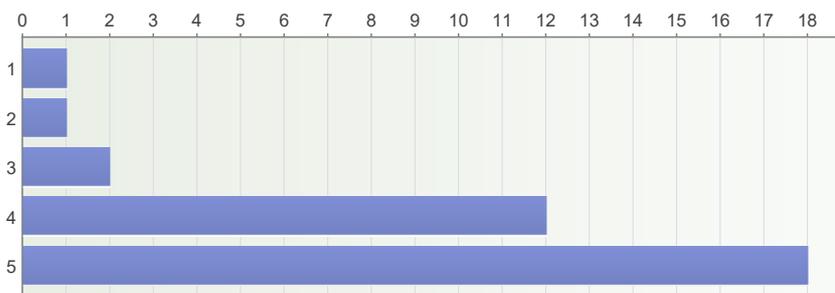
“I achieved my personal goals on the course.” (4.4)



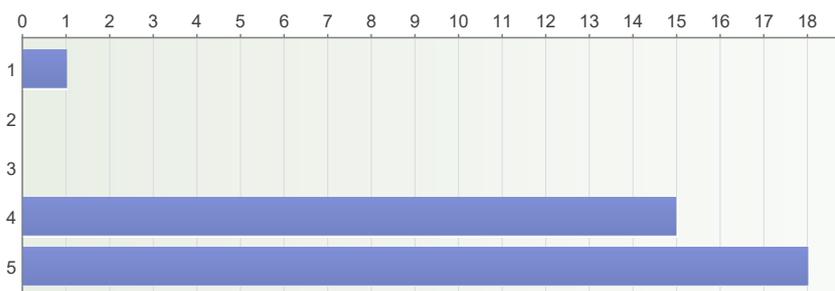
“The general goals of the course were achieved.” (4.5)



“The students had good mutual relations and cooperation.” (4.3)



“The instruction on the course was carried out professionally.” (4.4)





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