

# Navigating the Cultural Terrain: Portable Cultural Radar System (PCRS)

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Middle East Orientation Course

U.S. Air Force Special Operations School

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- Why know the cultural terrain?
  - - urban warfare / insurgency
  - - trigger cultural landmines
  - - protective gear
  
- How be effective/secure without alienate – CULTURALLY ALERT
  - - culturally alert / cultural radar on / people will give you cues
    - listen observe
    - culture – social – personal ← → combat back-up mode (high stress vulnerable)
  - - know where & how to look (can't know everything)
    - -know areas / social / power / family / communication v nv
    - - know own culture – something's weird here
  
- How to sabotage or blind yourself in a cultural terrain – CULTURAL BLINDERS
  - - alert →different vs judging →right/wrong [blinded by the differences]
  - American-centrocism [using American culture as a standard to measure or evaluate other culture.
  - - mirror phenomenon [what you see is what you get / how you feel, he feels]
  - - good intentions → we're all human [blinded by similarities]
  - - cultural projection [what you believe is what you see/ if I like it, he'll like it]
  
- Culturally Alert – Assess the cultural terrain – potential differences
  - social / power / family / values / respect, honor, dignity / gender / age
  - Communication - verbal / nonverbal



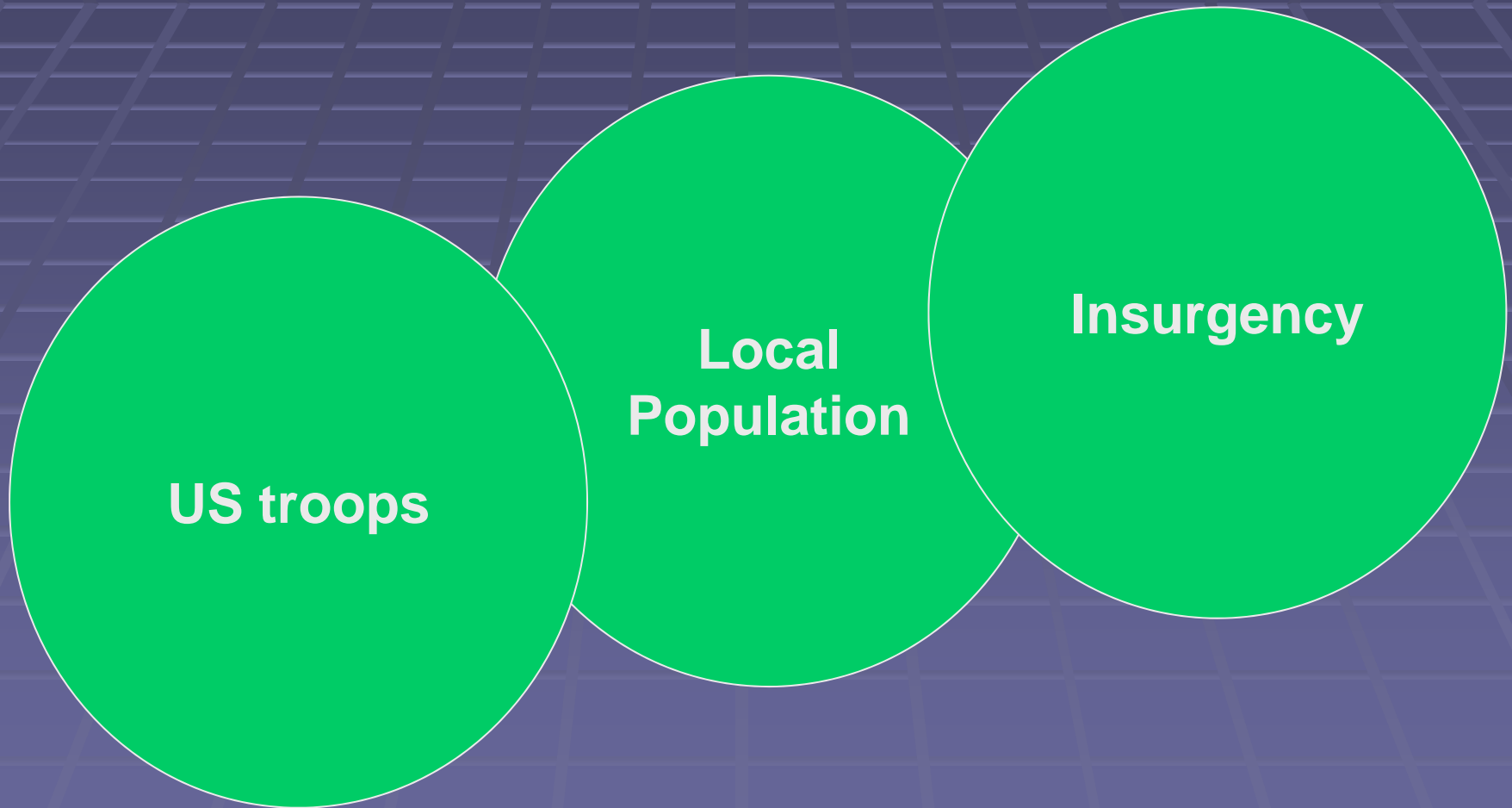
# Overview

- Urban warfare → Know the cultural terrain
- Effective/secure = Culturally Alert
- Vulnerable = Culture Jamming
- Portable Cultural Radar System (PCRS)

# Urban Warfare – Insurgency

- Knowledge of physical terrain
- Weapons system & equipment
- Tactical knowledge
  
- Civilian population → cultural terrain

# Urban Warfare – Cultural Dynamic





## Footnotes – Iraqi Insurgency

- Insurgency not swarming and dispersing out of thin air – but from within the local population.
- Insurgency – tactical advantage of knowing how to navigate the cultural terrain

# Why important to know how to navigate cultural terrain?

- Urban warfare → need neutral/positive support of local population.
- Local population
  - Physical terrain – visible
  - Cultural terrain – invisible

# Cultural terrain filled with CCBMs

- Cross-Cultural Ballistic Missile (CCBM) = cultural differences that carry emotional significance

## Launch or hit by CCBM:

- tension, confusion, misunderstanding
- turn public against US personnel and mission
- push to protect or support the other side



# Navigate the Cultural Terrain

- If know how to navigate the cultural terrain
  - Avoid triggering CCBM
  - Increase mission effectiveness
  - Provide security buffer (protective gear, early warning)
  - Undercut insurgency tactical advantage



# Strategic Choice?

- 1) KNOW the cultural terrain? (knowledge)
- 2) NAVIGATE the cultural terrain? (skill)



# KNOW the cultural terrain?

- 1 – Not possible to know everything
- 2 – Too many side factors (social, tribal, age, gender, personal, bad day)
- 3 – Combat setting (high-stress, “back-up mode”)

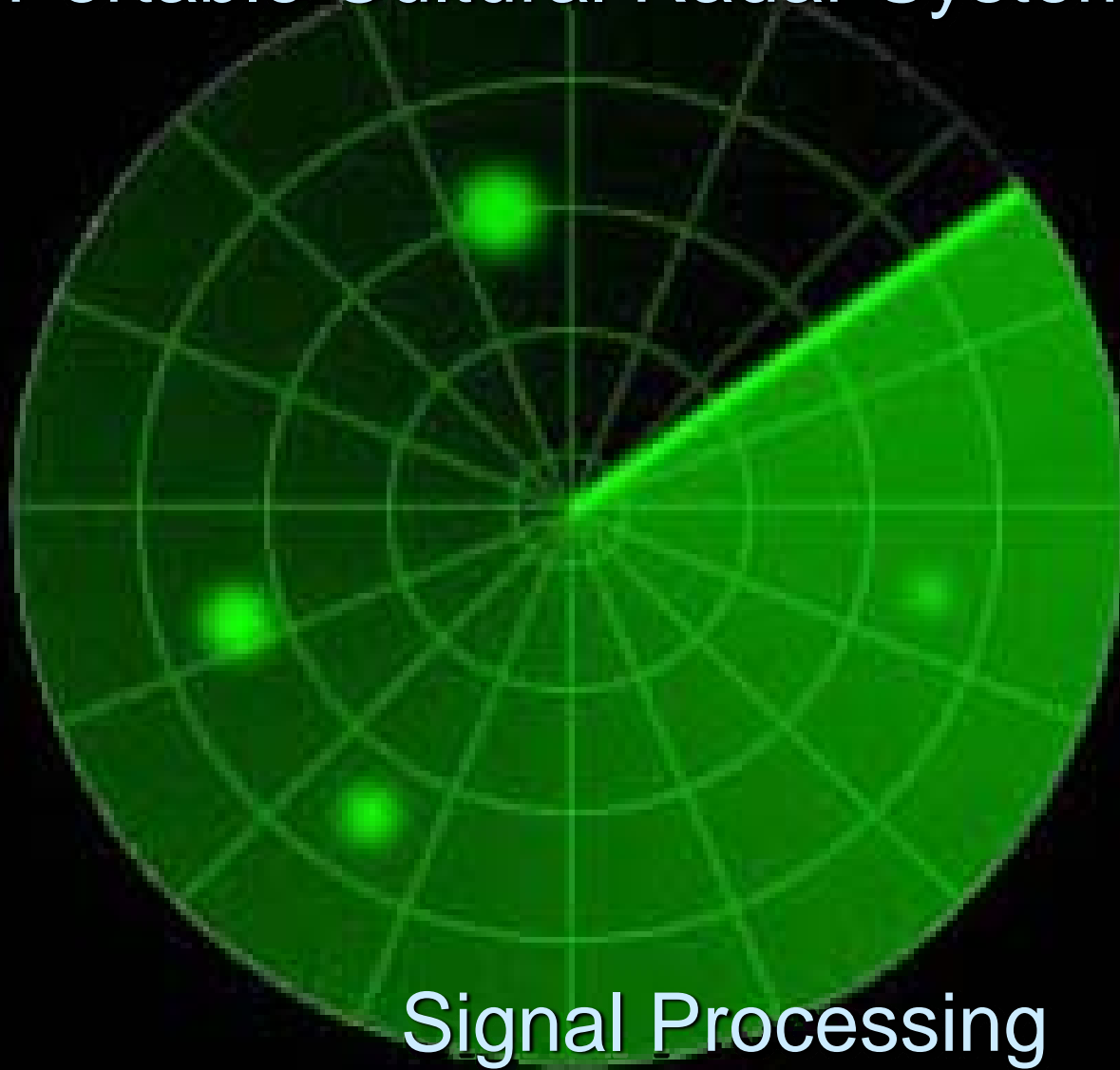


# *Navigate the Cultural Terrain*

- 1 – Culturally alert (keep your edge)
- 2 – Look & Listen (people will give you cues, signals)
- 3 – Know where & how to look & listen (cultural differences – important signals)

PCRS → Portable Cultural Radar System

# Portable Cultural Radar System



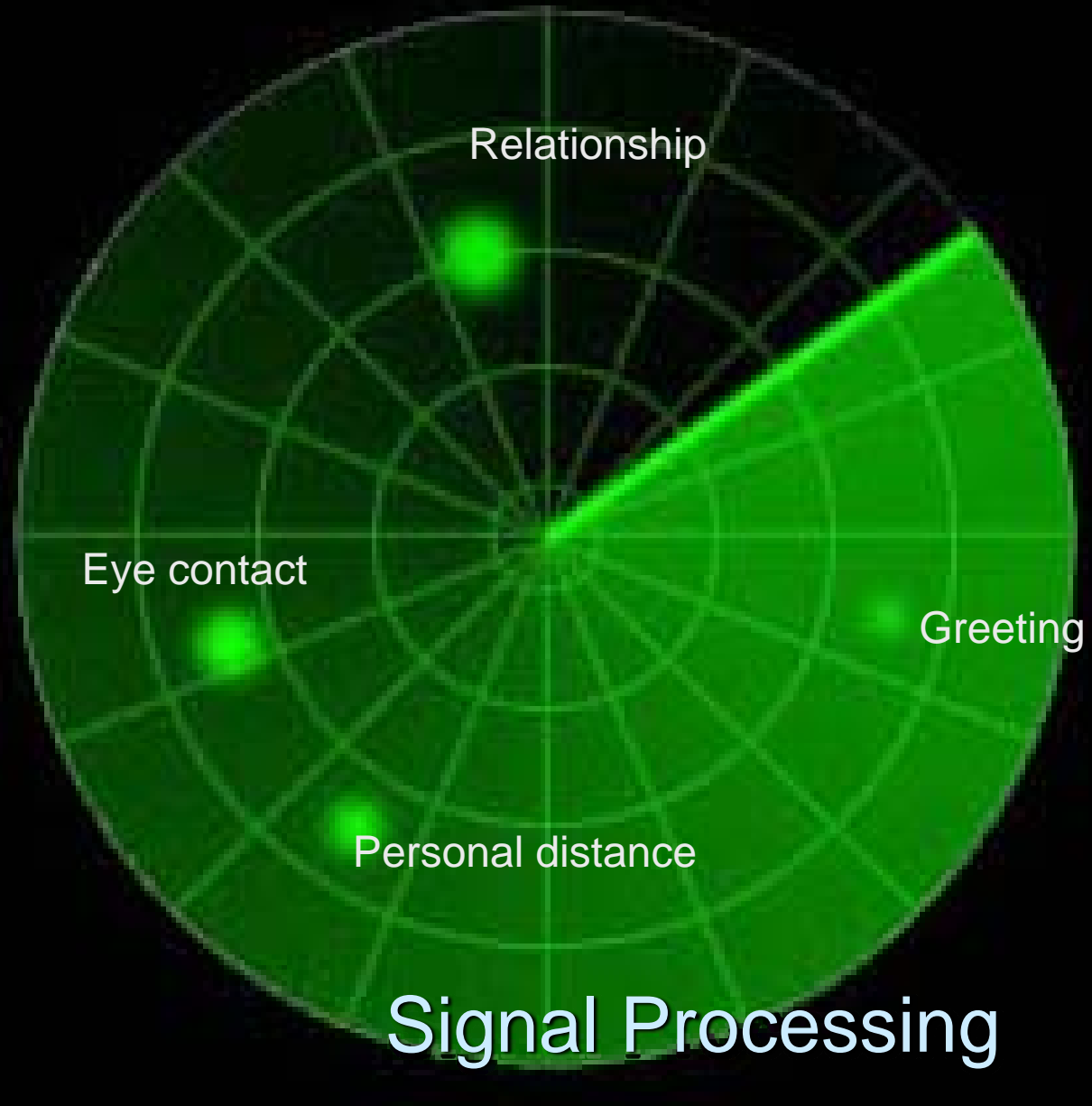
Signal Processing

# Being Alert to Cultural Signals

- Whenever operating in cultural terrain – **NEED** to activate your Cultural Radar Screen
- Be alert to cultural signals that people are sending that carry important information on how to navigate the cultural terrain.
- Knowing where & how to Look & Listen



# PCRS





# Cultural Radar Jamming

- Flat Surface: Judge → right or wrong
- Spot Jamming: American-centrism
- Decoy: Stereotyping (false targets)
- Interference: We're all human (clutter)



# Tuning into Different Cultural Frequencies

- US Military
- Doing oriented
- “Get the job done”
- Task focused
- Expediency
- Security
- Iraqi Civilians
- Social oriented
- Public face:  
Dignity, honor,  
respect
- Relations: family,  
tribe, home

# Cultural Signals

## 1. Social Target Areas

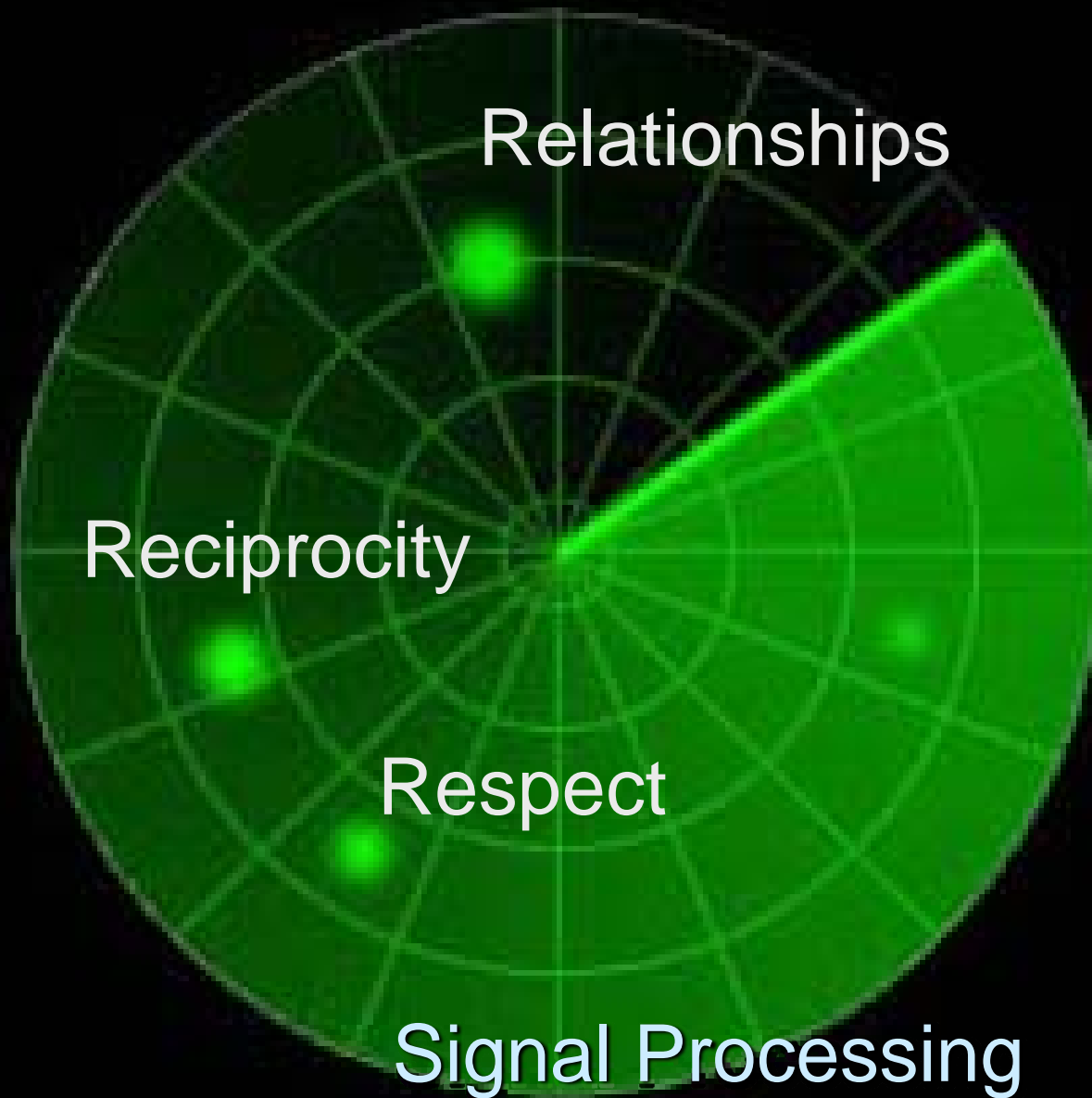
- Relationships
- Reciprocity
- Respect

## 2. Nonverbal Target Areas (eye contact, distance, time)

## 3. Verbal Target Areas: greetings, expressions, voice tone



# Social Target Areas





# Signal Processing: Relationships

Relationships (social status, power, family connection, familiarity)

- Who is connected to whom?
- What is their connection? How strong?
- Positive or negative?
- Power over or subordinate?
- Public or private power?



# Signal Processing: Reciprocity

Reciprocity – helps establish and maintain relationship – need keep scales balanced

What exchanged?

- Greetings
- Gifts
- Platitudes / compliments
- Opening door and entering / exiting



# Signal Processing: Respect

Respect – honor, dignity, public face

How greet acquaintance? Stranger?

How talk to village leader – voice tone?

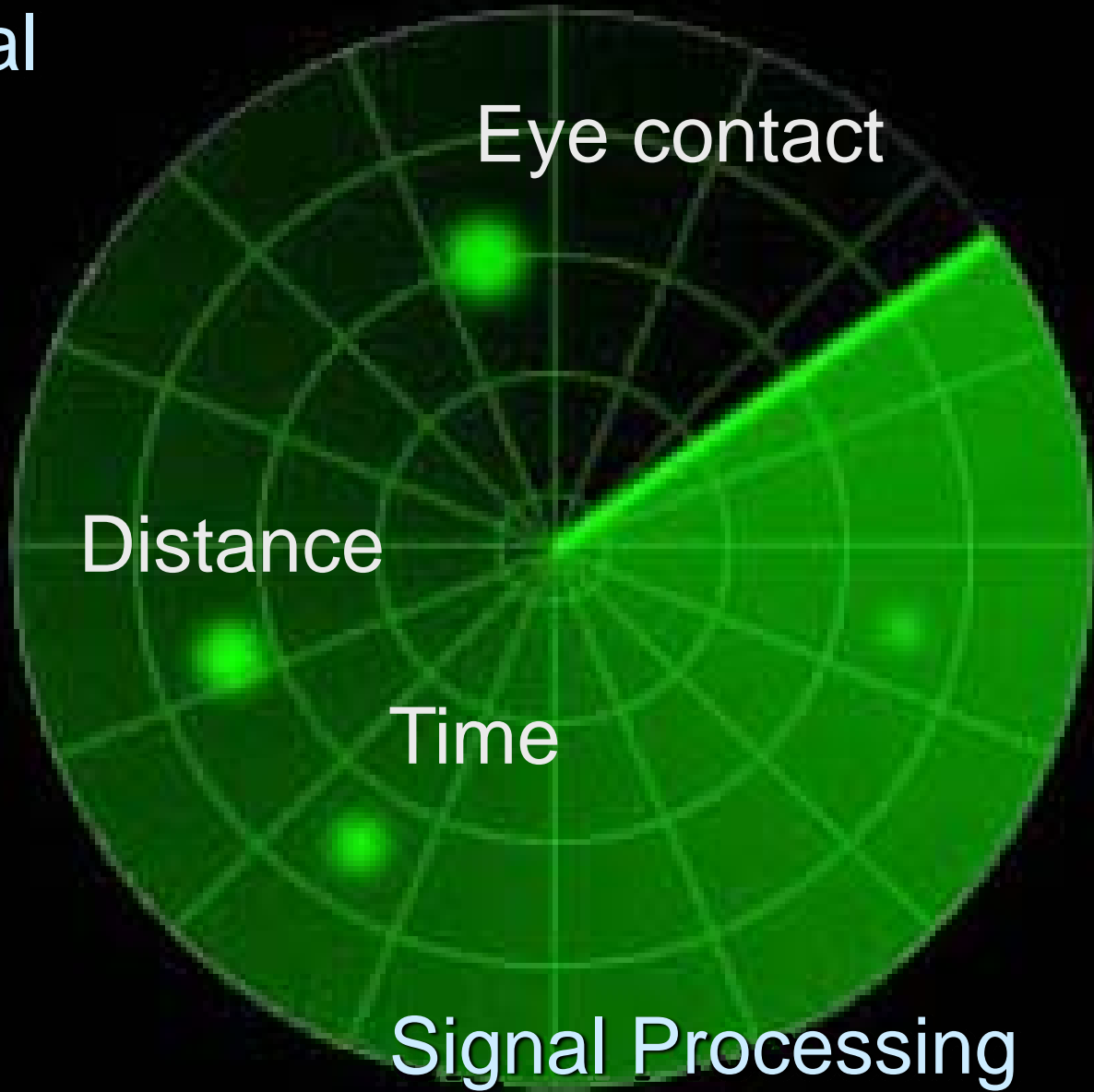
How ask supervisor – eye contact?

How question man with wife and children –  
public face?

How search female – personal space?



# Nonverbal Target Areas



# Nonverbal Target Areas

*LOOK* for relationship, power, respect, familiarity, vulnerability

1. Eye contact
2. Personal distance
3. Time use



# Signal Processing: Eye Contact

## Eye Contact – different cultural rules

- How long appropriate? American? Iraqi?
- Stare American culture =
- Male respect for elderly male?
- Male respect for female?
- Bargaining / Enter store – look at Owner?  
Items?
- Bargaining/Negotiating – Owner? Item?

# Signal Processing: Personal Distance

Personal distance / space – amount of personal space or distance from other

How close is too close?

What personal distance for same sex?

Youth? Elderly? Elderly village head?

Supervisor? Marketplace stranger?

Searching? Questioning?

# Signal Processing: Time

How use time – different cultural perspectives – *listen* to the social clock

How do you know WHEN ... to start work?  
End work? Eat lunch? Ask question?

What activities conducted around ...

Dawn prayer? Noon prayer? Afternoon prayer?  
Sunset prayer? Evening prayer?



# Signal Processing: Time

**Signal interference:**

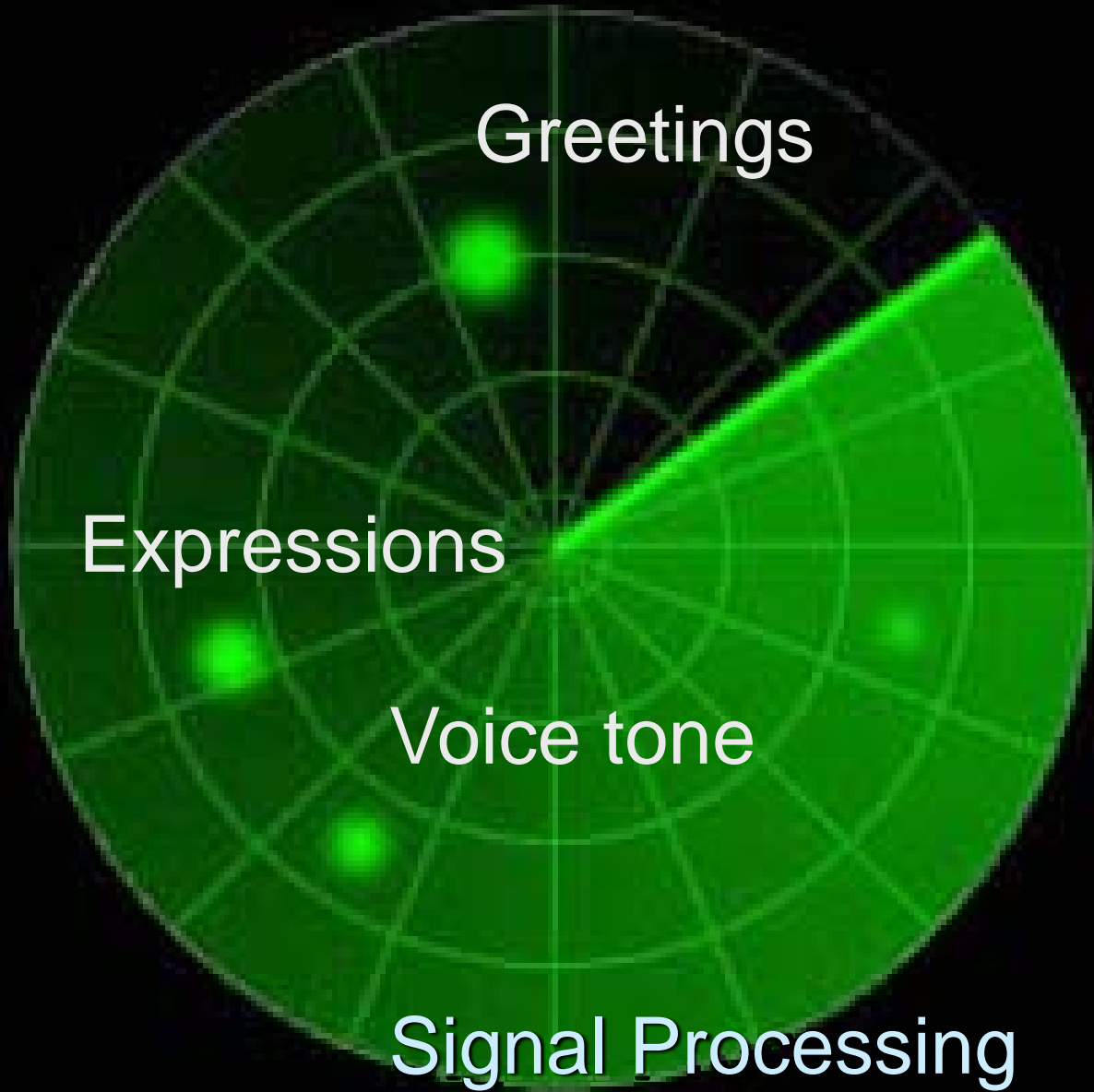
**“It’s frustrating...**

**We say be ready at 0900, and they say  
*inshallah* [God willing].**

**We show up ready to work, and they say,  
'Have some tea.'**



# Verbal Target Areas



# Verbal Target Areas

*LISTEN* for relationship, power, respect, familiarity, vulnerability

1. Greetings
2. Expressions
3. Tone of voice



# Verbal Signal Processing - Greetings

Greetings – offer, acknowledge, reciprocate

Who greets whom?

- If you enter a room?
- If you are in a room and someone enters?
- If you pass a person on the street?
- If you suspect the person, not sure?
- If person is male? female?



# Signal Processing - Expressions

Expressions – cues tell what is important

When, why say ...

God willing [in shah Allah]

Thanks be to God [il-hamdu l-Allah]

Peace be upon you [As-salamu alia-kum]

God be with you [Allah ma'akk]

If you please [it-ta-fad-dal]





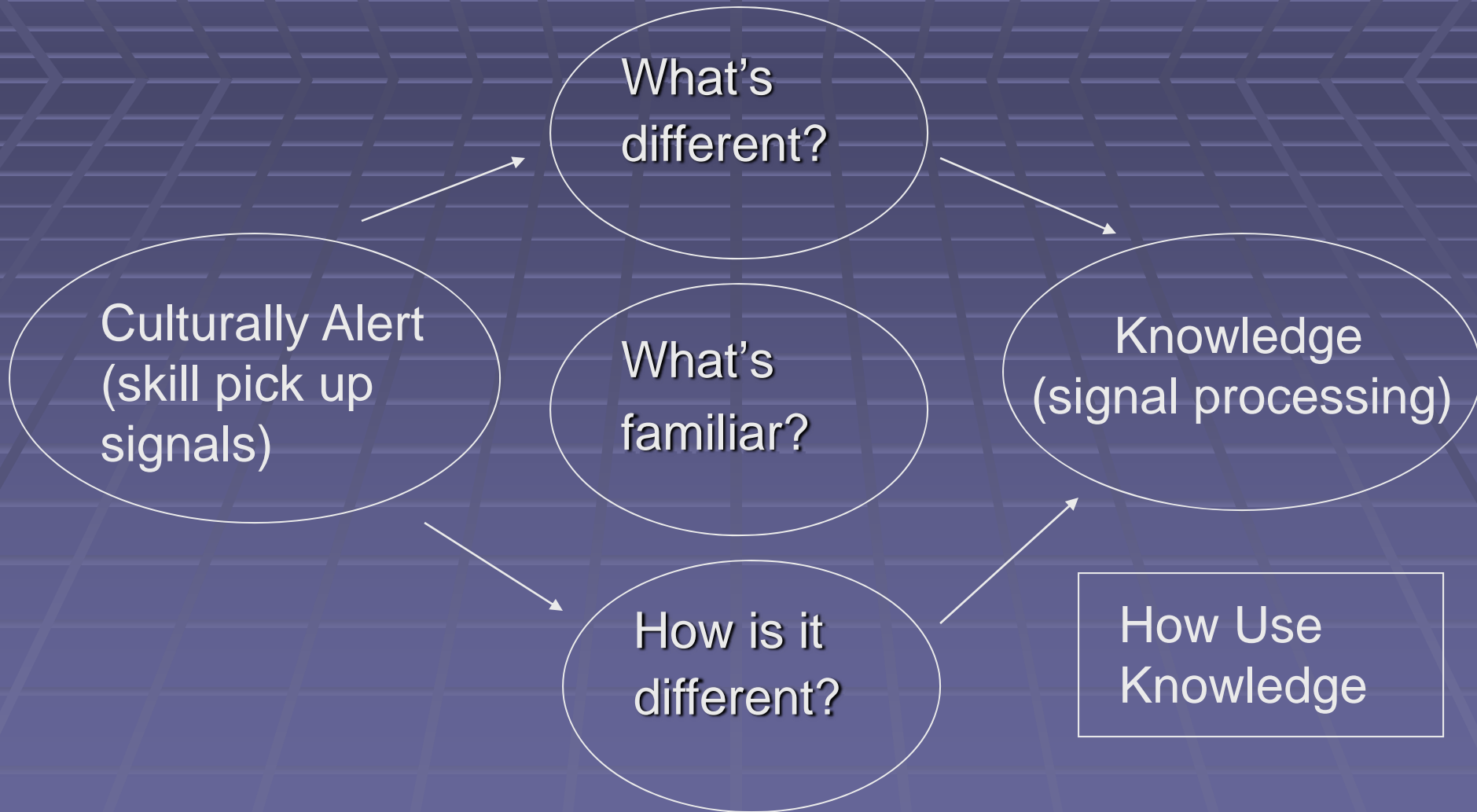
# Signal Processing - Voice Tone

Voice tone – listen for relationship, power, respect, vulnerability, familiarity, hostility

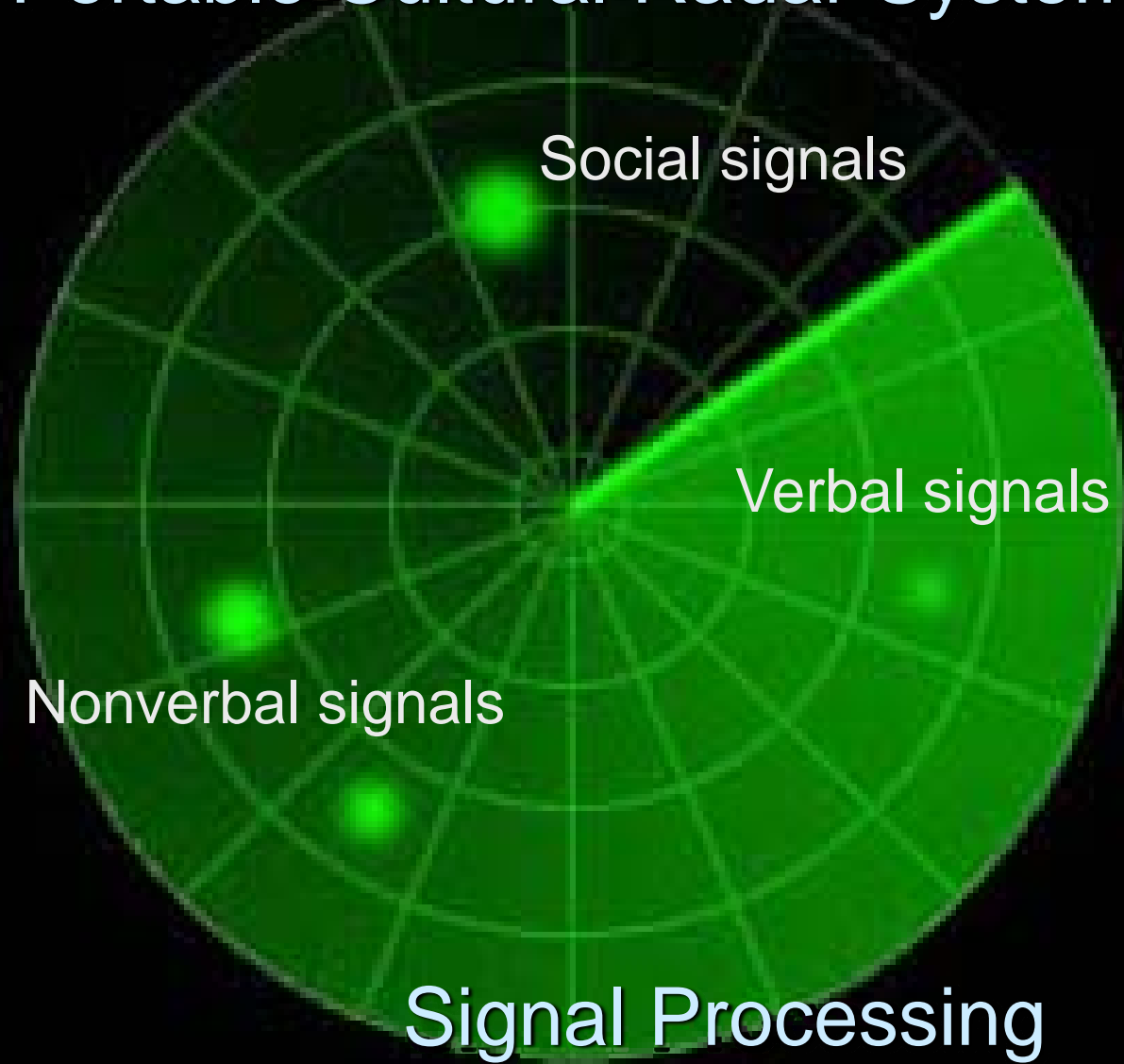
What is voice tone for ...

- Greeting elderly family head?
- Greeting young male family head?
- Asking supervisor for something?
- Answering supervisor?
- Greetings between females? Males?

# PCRS – Alert to Cultural Signals



# Portable Cultural Radar System



# Thank you.

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PART I

BEGIN

PART II  
EXERCISES

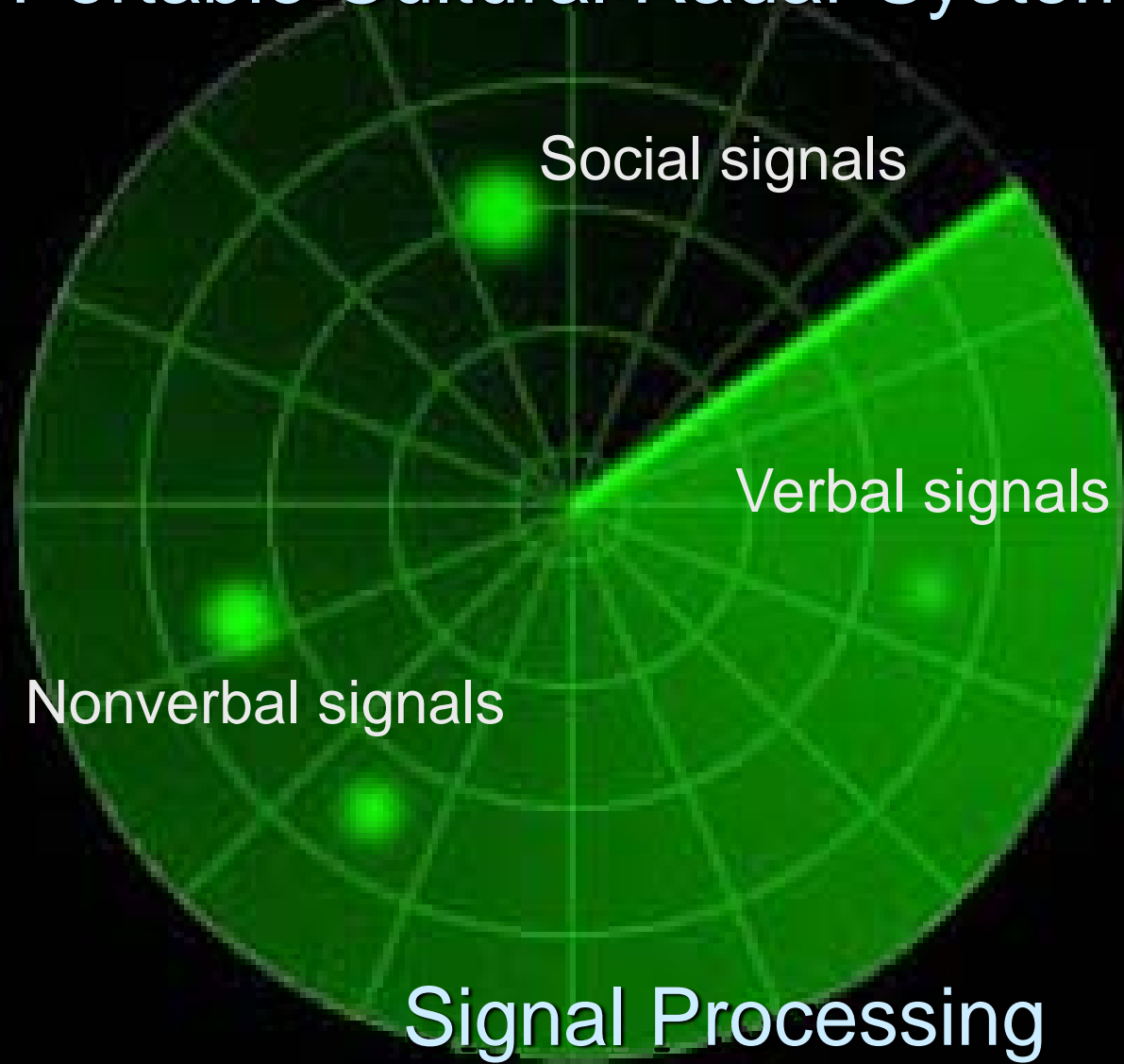
# Person Cultural Radar System (PCRS)

## Exercises for Target Areas

Zaharna – Part II

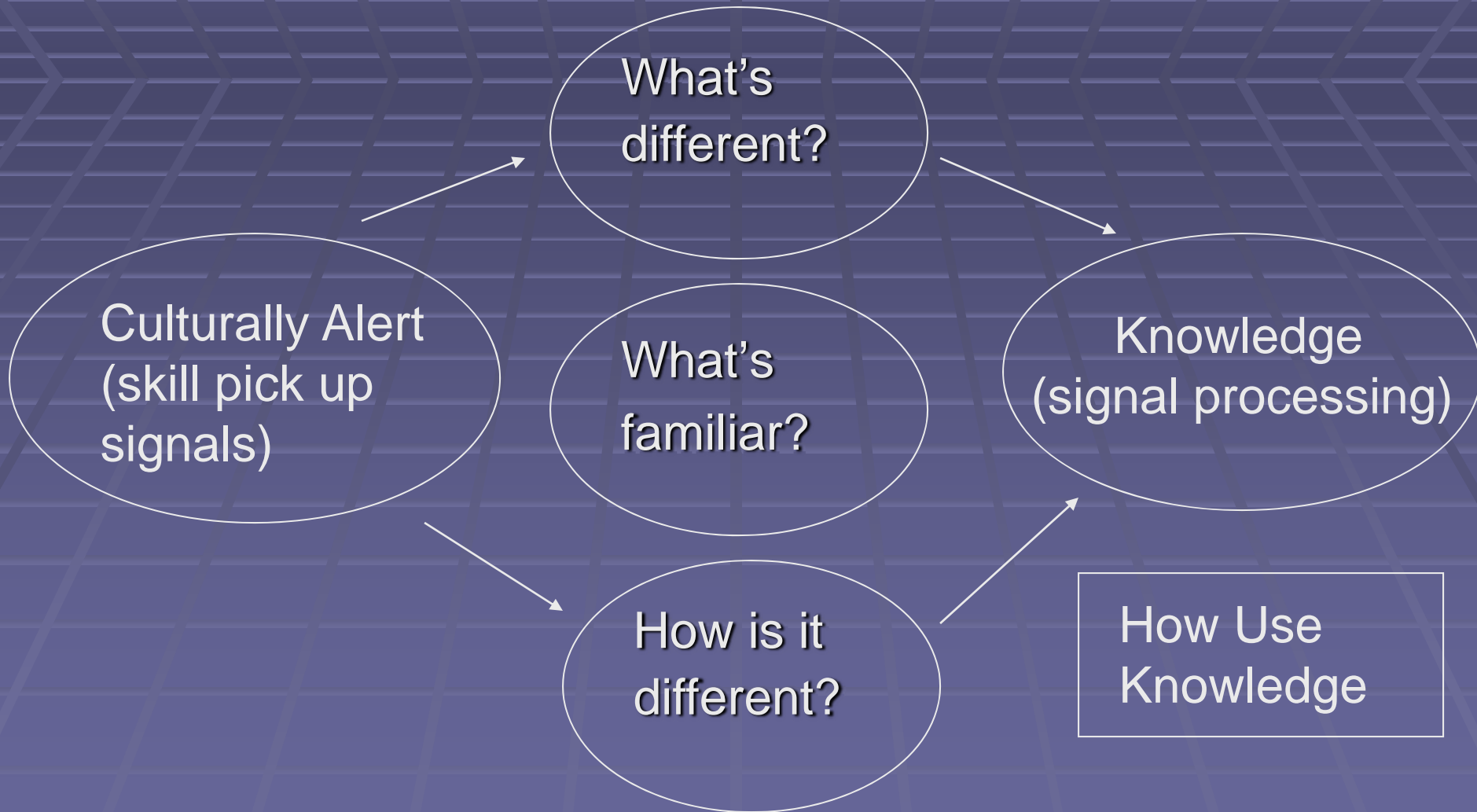
MEOC – July 2006

# Portable Cultural Radar System



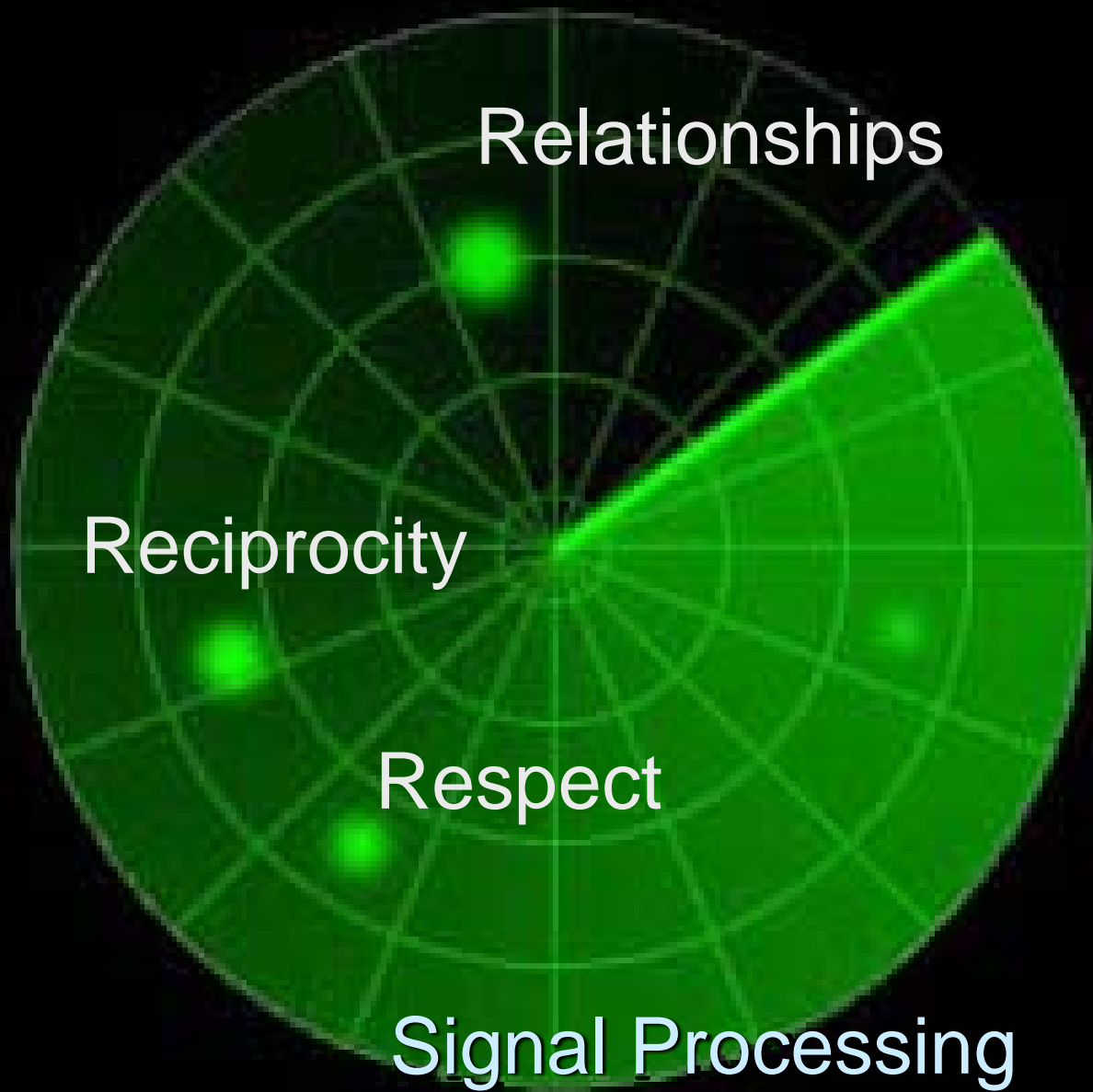


# PCRS – Alert to Cultural Signals





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Relationships (social status, power, family connection, familiarity)

- Who is connected to whom?
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# Skill - Signal Processing: Reciprocity

Reciprocity – helps establish and maintain relationship – need keep scales balanced

Gifts:

1. What given, what returned?
2. By whom, to whom?
3. Symbolism? Value?
4. Special Occasion?
5. Given at start or end of visit?



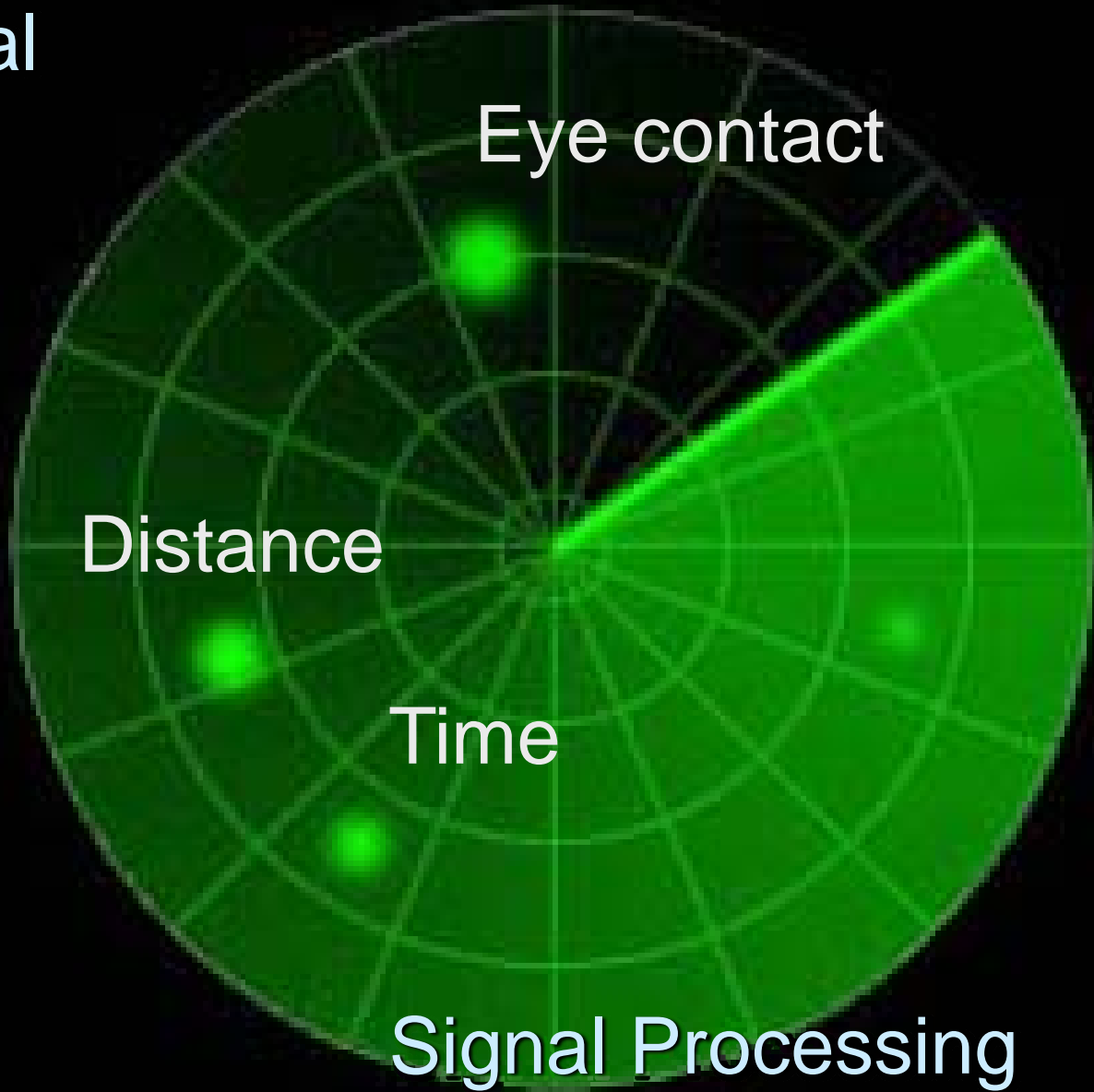
# Signal Processing: Respect

Respect – honor, dignity, public face

1. Offering Greetings
2. Talking to village leader
3. Questioning man with wife and children
4. Search female
5. Unclean: shoes, dogs



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# Personal space/ Posture





# Time Perspectives

- Future – oriented
- Value new, change, progress, potential
- Frustrated with historical details
- Ease in strategizing and forecasting
- “Been there, done that!”
- Past – oriented
- Value history, tradition, lineage
- Frustrated with detailed planning
- Ease in making historical links
- “We’ve always done it this way!”



# Signal Processing: Time

**“It’s frustrating...**

**We say be ready at 0900, and they say  
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'Have some tea.'**



# What's Familiar? Time

**“Meetings in the American military are straightforward, down to business, the clear communication of ideas in the shortest time. It's not that way in the Iraqi Army.”**

# Signal Processing: Time

Learning to listen to the social clock

What activities conducted around ...

Dawn prayer? [0400]

Noon prayer? [1300]

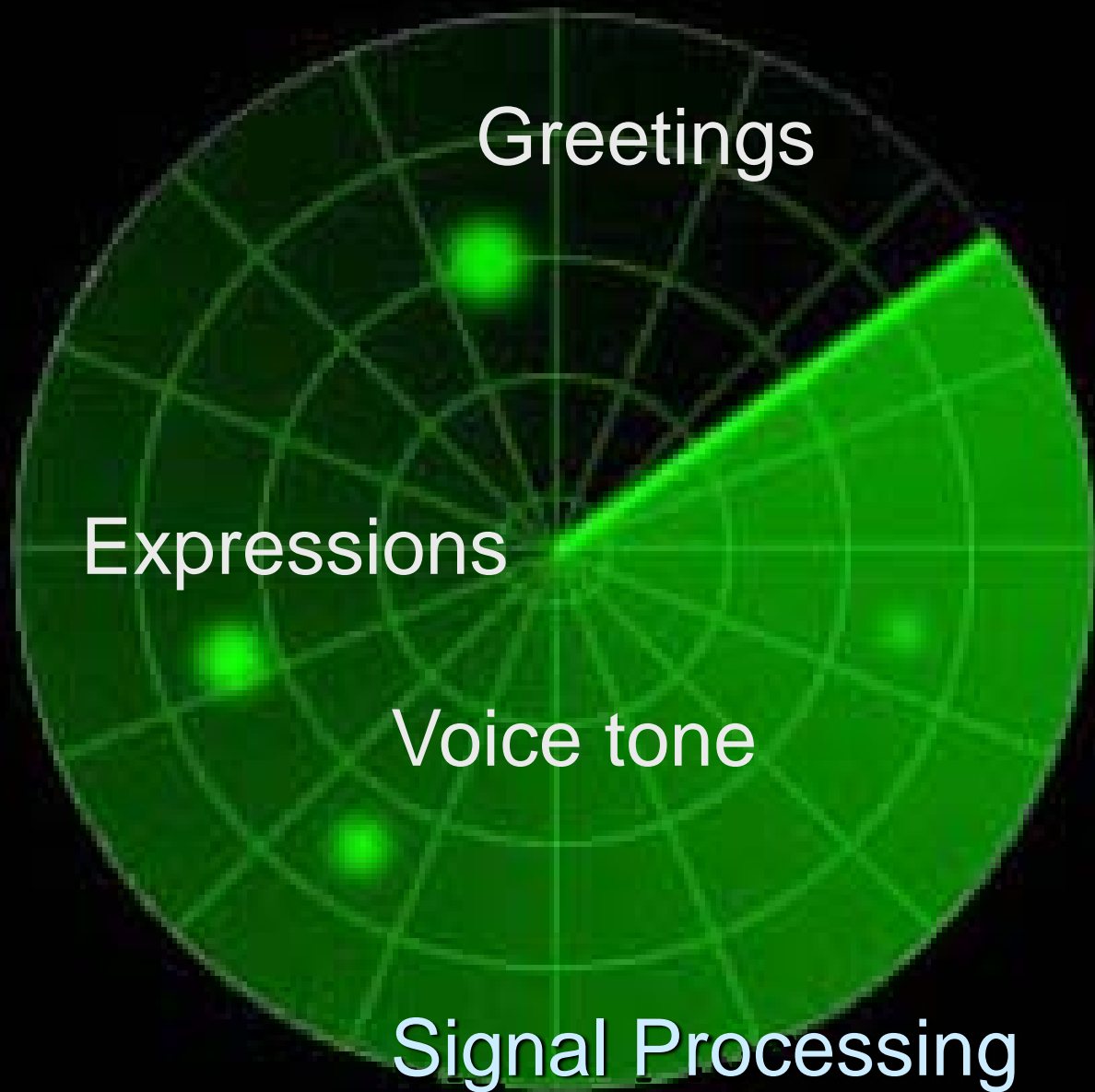
Afternoon prayer? [1600]

Sunset prayer? [2000]

Evening prayer? [2200]



# Verbal Target Areas



# Verbal Target Areas

*LISTEN* for relationship, power, respect, familiarity, vulnerability

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END

PART II

BEGIN

PART III  
DIFFERENCES

# PCRS: Being Alert to Potential Cultural Differences

Part III

MEOC – July 2006

# Disparity: Cultural Values

- US Military
- Doing oriented
- “Get the job done”
- Task focused
- Expediency
- Security
- Iraqi Civilians
- Social oriented
- Public face:  
Dignity, honor,  
respect
- Relations: family,  
tribe, home



# American Cultural Assumptions about Communication

- Communication = Information transfer
- Focus → message
- Problem → absent or incorrect information
- Solution → more or better information
- “If I explain to the person (give information), he’ll do it.”





# Arab Cultural Assumptions about Communication

- Communication = Social process
- Focus → relationships
- Problem → strained or broken relations
- Solution → fix relations
- “If relationship bad, why listen to the person or trust what he says?”

# Communicating Preferences

- Written word valued
- Singular experience
- Accuracy
- Tools - facts, evidence argument
- Analytical reasoning
- Speaker detached from audience
- Oral / aural valued
- Group experience
- Emotional resonance
- Tools – analogies, metaphors, images
- Intuitive reasoning
- Speaker interacts with audience



# Getting Acquainted: American & Arab

## What's important?

- What do you do?
- Professional status, achievement
- Impt - action, results of action
- What you know
- Competence  
Professionalism
- Where are you from?
- Social status, family
- Impt - relationships, social connections
- Who you know
- Social network  
Loyalty



# Just Talking

- Meaning in the message
- Listen to what I say
- Messages explicit
- Speaker responsible for clear message
- Meaning in the social setting
- Listen to who said it when, where, to whom, why
- Message implicit
- Listeners co-create message

# Providing Information

- To the point
- Linear, direct
- Seems “clear”
- Value objectivity
- Deliberately control emotions
- What point?
- Circular, indirect
- Seems “vague”
- Value subjectivity
- Deliberately use emotion



# Persuading the Other

- Direct
  - Facts, evidence, argument
  - Future-oriented – “we will”
  - Individual appeal, choice
  - Self-Promotion
- Indirect
  - Metaphors, analogies, rhetorical questions
  - Past-oriented
  - Collective/Communal appeals
  - Credit to the Creator



# Time Perspectives

- Future – oriented
- Value new, change, progress, potential
- Frustrated with historical details
- Ease in strategizing and forecasting
- “Been there, done that!”
- Past – oriented
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# Scheduling Differences

- One at a time
- Time – linear, segmented, beginning and end
- Value planned schedule
- Many at a time
- Time – nonlinear, fluid, begin or end difficult
- Value spontaneity





# Individual or Group Focus

- Individual goals, freedom, choice
- Impt - Personal achievement
- Networking with strangers (out-group)
- Group goals, norms, sensibilities
- Impt - Group solidarity
- Strong distinction between IN-group and OUT-group



# Views of Relationships

- Relationship: useful short-term
- Relationship problem-cut it
- Relationship goal: produce results
- Relationship: trust, long-term
- Relationship problem-fix it, find mediator
- Relationship goal: build social capital

# Power Differences

- Equality -  
We're all equals
- Individual  
responsibility
- Power = individual  
control over another
- Hierarchy -  
well-defined structure  
social status
- Social  
responsibility
- Power = duty and  
responsibility to group

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END

PART III  
DIFFERENCES