

AN ETHICS RELATED APPROACH TO HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE MILITARY

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In all countries there is a new interest in all matters concerning ethics, with a sum of questions that are increasingly hard to answer – like who's to blame for terrorist attacks, why different people are reacting so strange, so “away” from our way of thinking. As a result, there is an increase in the number of people, teaching or attending courses in ethics than before. Doctors, politicians, prosecutors, professors are developing new rules acceptable for the whole spectrum of their profession, with a declared intent to follow up on living up to the new codes. As part of most societies, the military have made a tradition of studying ethics, mostly through case studies, through examples, and least through a philosophical approach. The process of making decisions is something that comes like breathing to an officer, so are we taking all steps in making sure that those decisions are ethical ones too?

Key words: *military ethics; ethical principles; senior management; ethical decision-making; integrity.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The word ‘Ethics’ derives from the Greek word ‘Ethicos’, meaning in a very broad understanding “habit” or “custom”. Ethics or moral philosophy is the branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct.

Military Ethics applies to a very specialized profession and has evolved in time in order to respond to certain situations, furthering mission accomplishment. The armed forces must be led to preserve the nation, secure its national interests in an ethical way. Ethical leadership embracing the ideals of the military profession is going to happen only if the proper methods and the right tools are in place: an educational

system that has a very good connection with the present realities, a support from the members of that particular armed forces and of a tradition of doing the right thing at the right time.

In the ultimate quest for success and fame in the contemporaneous competitive world, we all seem to have become obsessed with “doing the thing right” rather than “doing the right thing”. Intense struggle to mount the social ladder to success and the craving for quick results in the face of complex pressures are a more than possible cause of a certain departure from the values and principles defining the society. One only have to read a media report to find out about new human rights violations, or different scams perpetrated by one of the people considered representative

for a large group of people, successful in their careers and lives. We all can notice the decline of values and principles, and its effect on our present and future leaders.

2. GENERAL ETHICS RELATED CONSIDERATIONS

As a profession, the military is a very stressful one. A large majority of that stress comes from trying to accomplish a mission, in a certain context or situation, following a predetermined set of rules. The moment of decision making for the military professional is determined by the obligations set by the missions, the rules, and the context of the situation. Ultimately, each individual is responsible for establishing the weight to all these criteria and for determining which is the road to take, and to deal with the consequences of his decision.

One of the best arbiters of ethics is our conscience, our moral judgement which, if properly trained, produces actions and in absence of actions or in the presence of the wrong ones, produces guilt. A prepared ethical conscience consistent with our own value system strengthens a leader to make the right choices when dealing with certain problems, no matter if the path to accomplish the goal is easy or hard. Ethics is ultimately about individual character as manifested in the decisions and actions of all who are considered leaders within the profession. Leadership is best understood as a matter of character that demands individual moral decisions, and its exercise can never be an application of popular and simplistic formulas.

2.1. Rule obligations

The primary criteria for ethical judgments are provided by rules. The questions “What do I have to do?” and “What is right for me to do?” reflect not only a sense of responsibility but also an understanding that a standard exists for establishing what is mandatory and what is correct. Military personnel, more than most people, live under a sense of duty, aligned with a strong base of order, deference, and discipline. We have taken oaths admitting us into the ranks of the military and also, as citizens we are required to honour legal justice, civil law, and the social and ethnic customs of our communities. The primary ethical pressures upon us, however, are such formal mandates as telling the truth, keeping promises, respecting property, and preserving life. These norms are the linkage without which social institutions would collapse. While such norms need not be regarded as unconditional moral boundaries, the burden of proof is always upon those who would take exception to them.

The rule-oriented approach to ethical theory establishes in given standards the criteria for determining right and wrong. Dilemmas exist when two or more obligations conflict. Making choices lies at the heart of ethics. The ethical conduct is finding the best reasons for making particular choices or crafting particular sets of rules. One must sometimes choose between what a superior officer orders and what regulations prescribe, or between what law exacts and what personal conscience dictates. The philosopher

Immanuel Kant is the premier exponent of a method for determining fundamental obligations. For Kant the supreme principle of morality is good will, and “the first proposition of morality is that to have moral worth an action must be done from duty” irrespective of consequences, so the duty is considered the imperative determining the right course of action. A second valuable expression of the categorical imperative is: “Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only” – so pay respect to people and their inputs, because the final judge of your actions will always be your peers. [1]

Ethics has a special meaning to the military profession because it calls upon its members to make the unreserved supreme sacrifice of life at the bidding of a superior in the hierarchy. Therefore, unless a man has absolute faith in the ethical correctness of the superior’s motives and conduct, he will lack conviction in his act and will avoid risks to his life.

This institutional ethic is derived from the imperatives of military effectiveness and the values of society whom the armed forces serve. Leaders at all levels are supposed to guard the integrity of their profession including its ethics. They set standards to met for conduct and performance, teach those standards to others, establish systems that develop members to meet standards and take rapid action against those who fail to achieve the standards, all this in the best ethical traditions of the military profession.

Being a senior officer implies that he/she is at the top of the hierarchy and, by virtue of merits, can effect

influence over his/her subordinates and the professional context. Unlike command at junior levels, the senior officer is under the watch of a much greater audience, within and without the military, so his/her conduct and character are on display for a more in depth observation. It is important for leaders, especially the more senior ones, to make sure that everyone’s behaviour in the organization is based on clear rules, and set up the proper personal example, because if there is duplicity towards standards at the top levels, then it is more than likely that the subordinates will not consider a rules guided conduct to be important enough. Usually, the senior leaders are certain that by virtue of their status, rank and position they have the power to obscure all deviations from the rules. Added to this is that they are insulated from critical feedback, because no one around them is ready to risk his status trying to confront them with their ethical problems.

2.2. Mission oriented aspirations

In addition to following rules, we determine which decisions and actions are ethical by referring to missions. The questions addressed are “What is good?” or “What is my purpose?” The criteria for shaping right and wrong are no longer historical standards but future consequences. The good decision or action is measured by its ability or promise to attain a desired scope. Aristotle defined happiness as the good all men seek.[2]

In terms of the society, we can say that the mission is to reach the greatest good for the greatest number of people. For the military professional, goal-oriented aspirations are a

combination of the public good and personal happiness. On the public side is a conglomerate of national desires and military objectives. The more immediate objective is accomplishing the mission. This may range from training personnel and maintaining weapon systems to delivering personnel and supplies, striking targets, or defeating enemy forces. On the personal side, we want job satisfaction, recognition, promotion, financial security and an overall sense of fulfillment in life.

Conflict between missions and rules is common, because there are situations when the rules that must be observed are in a direct opposition to the mission to accomplish, and you have to make conscious and educated decisions to ignore some rules that are not applicable to the current situation in order to fulfil the mission.

2.3. Situation-oriented decision

In situation ethics the particular circumstances of a situation provide the criteria for determining right and wrong. Here, each situation is unique, without precedent and judgments must be relative to the circumstances; the circumstances determine what actions should be taken. The significant questions are “What is appropriate to the situation?” or “What is fitting?”. One of the proponents of this approach to ethics, Joseph Fletcher, was saying about the rule-oriented judgments that “Situation ethics keeps principles sternly in their place, in their role of advisers without veto power.” [3]

A major limitation of situation ethics is its focus on the unusual, once-in-a-lifetime circumstance. It

is not fitted to everyday life, because the situations, in which we must make ethical decisions, can be extrapolated to different rules or goals applicable. Any realistic person knows that under certain conditions we must act accordingly. Situation ethics resists systematization; it can never be normative. Without appropriate checks and balances, situation ethics could lead to ethical anarchy. Military professionals do occasionally find themselves in circumstances where regulations and mission objectives fail to provide sufficient guidelines. In those rare instances the aptitude for innovative leadership can be a virtue. When followed inflexibly, any of the three approaches to understanding the bases for our ethical judgments can result in moral aberration: exclusive attention to rules can result in legalism; rigid adherence to the utilitarian goal of the greatest good for the greatest number can promote a tyranny of the majority; and preeminent attention to situations can result in loss of directives and moral chaos.

3. MAIN ETHICAL ISSUES WITHIN THE MILITARY

Studying ethics theories without relating them to the predominant ethical problems of military professionals would be merely an intellectual exercise. These theories are tools to help us think more clearly about our decisions and actions. Three overlapping areas in which our theories may be applied to problems are people, integrity, and career.

3.1. People

Human needs are a military commander’s prevailing problem.

Probably the most difficult part of being a commander is making people decisions, because people have needs, they have frailties, and they have great potential. People need consideration, recognition, and encouragement in order to reach that potential.

It is an enduring principle of the Army leadership that we mentor, coach and counsel subordinates. Senior leaders have a moral and ethical responsibility to develop subordinates while balancing both short and long-term needs of the service. Grooming and mentoring is one of the primary tasks of every senior which is avoided, for some reason or the other.

Mentoring plays a big part in developing competent and ethically sound future leaders. It is not limited to people with high potential or favourites. Counselling is an interpersonal skill essential to effective mentoring. Effective counselling helps subordinates develop personally and professionally. Ethical leaders talk with and not to the soldiers. Regular, effective counselling is essential for ethical development, and responsibility for this problem must be equally shared by the institution, its leaders and subordinates. The second-in-command or somebody else with a similar senior position and influence in a unit could be considered for being designated as the "unit ethics counsellor".

Leadership is more than giving orders; anyone can give orders. The skilled leader knows how to motivate the people on whom he depends to accomplish the mission. People are the focus of every command and the heart of every mission, the gears that make all things going in the right direction, towards the desired end-state.

3.2. Integrity

The second major ethical concern for military professionals is integrity. The quality of being honest and having strong moral principles is defining for us, as instructors and role models to our subordinates, by showing them how to do what is required and to encourage them to do so. Leaders must model appropriate behaviour and expectations. They must hold themselves to high ethical standards and strive for honesty, humility and integrity in their professional lives, while accepting responsibility for their own ethical failings.

Ethics and integrity, therefore, have to come from within and cannot be overlapped. To help a person to behave ethically we have rules, laws, codes of conduct, and a standard of what is acceptable to society, but these by themselves cannot create morality, honesty or ethical behaviour. That has to come from within the individual. [4]

For example, for a certain degree it is understandable why somebody while making a report, is trying to show the best aspects from his command, because he's worried about his subsequent rating, but we have to convince people that the institutional interest is in having a realistic view on all institutional facets.

Military leaders cannot take corrective action if they do not know what needs to be fixed, so an important aspect of a unit's ethical culture is the effectiveness of the unit's system for reporting ethical failures to the chain of command. Usually, there are few problems in this area if the misconduct is witnessed by a leader, but it is less certain that a member

who is not in a leadership position will report any misconduct he or she observes.

Integrity is a human concern; people operate, perpetuate, and validate any system, no matter the amount of pressure existent or the errors within the system. Each individual is responsible for his moral integrity. The military system is trying to make honesty as easy as it can, but the system only reveals what an individual's values really are. Ethically alert military personnel will always be disturbed by the variances between the ideal standards proclaimed by the services and the actual practices that deviate from those standards.

3.3. Career

Integrally related to the problem of integrity is the problem of placing career before honour. The military professional should be concerned about his or her career. For almost all officers, achievement ranks really high in their code of values. A fine line, however, separates valid concern of one's success in the military from excessive, unhealthy careerism. The nature of the military system in itself is able to breed some of the ethical dilution visible presently.

The primary reason is the military structure, which is pyramid-shaped and bureaucratic. High ambition leads to a drive for success in which ethical sensitivity is bought off or sold because of the personal need to achieve success. Also, faced with the lack of self-esteem and an ethical crisis within, the military creates a superior image for itself, which is to be protected at all costs.

Personal ambition can cloud ethical judgment whatever

the profession. In the military, preoccupation with career can lead us to be yes-men for the commander instead of constructive critics. It can lead us to cover up for the commander, to think that any hint of criticism, howsoever justified, is a form of disloyalty to his policies and commands. Going further, this will determine, after a while, a deviation to sycophancy, which will be embraced as the path of least resistance.

We cannot and should not tolerate, by virtue of misplaced loyalty, unethical behaviour. It can lead us to keep unwelcome reports from him. It can lead us to cover for ourselves in our effort to look good at all costs. It can lead us to do what we know is morally wrong.

Establishing priorities between goal-oriented career aspirations and rule-oriented obligations can be on top of the most difficult moral choices officers face.

Careerism is an ethical threat. It thrives in the military because most individuals wish to be promoted, but it is a two-edged sword. On the positive side, the prospect of promotion can encourage people to work hard and to seek greater responsibility, thereby contributing to the organization. But careerism can also entice individuals to avoid their professional responsibilities by playing it safe, creating no waves, and being "politically correct". [5]

At its worst, careerism can also lead subordinates to curry favour with their superiors by engaging in unethical behaviour, such as complying with ethically ambiguous orders, keeping problems quiet, failing to voice dissent when a situation calls for it, and basically "going along" to get ahead. [6]

Competition among individuals, units, or organizations that is not kept in check can result in an unhealthy lack of cooperation, which, in turn, can lead to neglect of some stakeholders' interests and ultimately cause ethical failures. On reading about the disagreement around the proper management of detainees in Afghanistan, [7] one wonders if competition between military officers and officials participating in this operation may have contributed in some way to the development of unsatisfactory detainee handling procedures, which resulted in scandal.

4. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Military professionals can never deviate from the time-honoured principles of "Duty, Honour, Country" and remain true soldiers. The three ethic concepts defined-rule oriented obligations, mission oriented aspirations, and situation oriented decisions-are useful in the service of "Duty, Honor, Country." These theories together with the three principles mentioned can be applied to the previous issues said under the topics of people, integrity, and career.

4.1. Duty: conduct and person-oriented leadership

The military service is, at the end of the line, only a service, oriented towards the nation, the people that support that service. They exist to defend and support human values.

The key personnel in the military for promoting these services are the military professionals. The duty of the military professional is to conduct person-oriented leadership, leadership consistent with the fundamental commitments of the nation.

Most military professionals are aware that those they seek to lead are people first and soldiers, sailors, or airmen second. They have entered the military with unique personalities and individual sets of motivations, interests, attitudes, and values. They share basic needs for survival, belonging, esteem, and self-realization. Each of these needs must be met in turn for the next to become operative and efficient. Although servicemen wear uniforms, they also are a part of an intricate network of civilian relationships. They have wives, children, husbands, parents, hopes, fears, dreams, religious ideals, and names. The successful leader remembers that he or she is dealing with whole beings, people who are infinitely more than soldiers, squad leaders, platoon commanders, mechanics, artillerymen, or pilots.

In our desire to achieve our military missions successfully, we are sometimes tempted to depersonalize those with whom we work along with those against whom we fight. The latter attitude is especially prevalent. We try to keep our own sense of self by pretending that the enemy we are fighting is less than a human being with a name and with a family.

Similarly, but more slyly, we depersonalize our associates in the military when we treat them as hands or troops who are there to do our bidding or to advance our careers.

Person-oriented leaders respect the individuality of each person in the command; they establish direct relations with each member of the team. Kant's dictum applies: people are ends in themselves, never means. One major problem can be derived from treating people as objects, as things rather than as persons. As a leader, you should maintain your

vigilance; develop relationship with each member of the team as well as a relationship with the team as a whole. That will involve you in talking and listening to each individual, and will facilitate your role of a counselor. If you work for in the military, you probably will have to appraise each team member, an activity that you will have to take steps not to become a formal and bureaucratic procedure.

Also, sometimes overconfidence can bring failure, because teams with an excellent record can start to act in an arrogant way and make unexpected mistakes that can endanger the whole organization.

Some trainers and unit leaders address the issue of operational ethics wherever they can; for instance, encouraging trainees to think about the moral aspects of particular situations. This approach is welcomed, but probably a better choice would be an integration of moral decision-making training within military pre-deployment training scenarios. In this way, operational ethics training objectives will be attended more explicit, the short term memory of the trainees will have a basis of the particular challenges pertinent to the theatre of operations and the organization's commitment to accomplish this objective will be evident.

One cannot emphasize enough the importance and impact of the previous experience, lessons learned, that must be made to focus and include moral and ethical decision-making challenges in operations, making sure that, when confronted with a particular situation, the soldiers will react accordingly – in the right way.

Considering the fact that the military training systems and

schedules are already burdened in providing the proper training, one possibility available to integrate ethics training is to include moral decision making into selected training, in addition to the other objectives already in the curriculum.

Some researchers have suggested that ethics instruction is more effective when it is included within professional training rather than taught as separate courses. Providing ethics training in the form of stand-alone courses delivered by civilian experts or others from outside the professional community will simply reinforce the notion that ethics is not a core military competency. So, having it taught by leaders from within the organisation will demonstrate that ethics is an integral element of military operations.

Romanian military have recently integrated moral decision-making challenges into training in a manner consistent with this approach. For instance, during the training for pre-deployment in Afghanistan, in the final complex, live-action field training exercise designed to replicate the conditions as much as possible, there are injected a series of ethical problems, with the purpose of observing the way soldier react and solve them. For example, during a patrol, they could encounter a woman being beaten, or hear of sexual abuse, hazing, and/or theft by some of the Afghani security forces. Experienced exercise controllers determine how effectively the inject was handled by all soldiers: Does the incident get responded to properly at every level? If there are shortfalls in the reaction, the exercise controllers can either repeat the event, insert another ethical inject, or stop the action to talk to the leadership concerning the

training objective and which are the appropriate reactions.

The benefits of this kind of training will be to mitigate many of the risks in the theater of operations, practiced with the leaders and peers with whom one will deploy, in realistic, but nonetheless safe conditions.

4.2. Honour

Any code of ethics devised for military professionals undoubtedly will contain articles that emphasize the importance of professional and personal integrity and that recognize the professional officer's responsibility to be an example of integrity for subordinates.

If you want integrity to prevail in the military, act ethically yourself and expect ethical actions from your subordinates. Integrity, like person-oriented leadership, is a whole-person concept. Integrity is not just truth telling, or kindness, or justice, or reliability. Integrity is the state of my whole life, the total quality of my character, and it is witnessed by the moral soundness of my response in every life situation. [8]

Integrity is not something that can be turned on and off. It reflects the value systems in which our lives are grounded. Our code of behaviour must not tolerate expediency or deception. This rigidity and uncompromising adherence to standards does not in the least mean that we must be lacking compassion. On the contrary, individuals who recognize that people make mistakes, even when they are doing their best, not only display integrity themselves, but reinforce that of their subordinates. In the last analysis, integrity is an entirely personal thing.

Important to anyone, it is absolutely vital to the military professional who has responsibility for human life and public property.

4.3. Country: initiate moral concern

The moral quakes the last twenty-six years have fractured the confidence of many in our country's commitment to honour and integrity. Those events that perpetrated ones of the most preeminent figures in the business, media and political life as having a different code of conduct, based on cheating, stealing, abuse of office, promoting only self-interest, waste, have changed the way we think about themselves: they have produced a wave of moral uncertainty, self-doubt, and rebellion.

Recapturing of a spirit of moral integrity in our nation can be our mission. Military professionals are occupying a favourable position, as always, in the hearths and minds of our people. They can show and lead the way. They can become the catalysts who initiate throughout society a reawakening of integrity and moral awareness. Through philosophy and ethics, is it possible for the military-and through the military for the nation-to regain its moral concern and its concomitant moral self-confidence.

Military professionals can start a return to essential integrity, though not by bold front attacks. They must start with themselves as individuals who pledge themselves to first moralities and to altruistic goals. They must be daring people who place "Duty, Honor, Country" ahead of careers, people who say the illegal

and immoral plots stop here. The abuse and objectifying of people can stop if leaders in sensitive positions consistently treat people as ends, never as means to ends; consistently perceive enemies, peers, subordinates, and superiors as persons of great value. Dishonesty, misrepresentation, and false reporting can only be reversed if key professionals insist on honor and exemplify integrity. Selfish careerism that lifts personal advantage above the well-being of others and of the whole can only be reduced if commanders stop rewarding self-glorification and become models themselves of accountable service. Reforming the moral climate within the military and the nation needs only a few dedicated professionals to make a beginning. Then, beyond the level of individual example, must come unit example—a platoon, a company, a battalion, a division, a service, to generalize and be the model to follow.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In the literature associated with ethical development and education of military professionals, there are social scientists agreeing that morality is a process that continues as one grows and is educated. Also, others think that this process may be accelerated through an educational system, with an implied need on the requirement for reflection.

This character education will remain between the most important dimensions of military academy education, with the provision of including this education in other higher education programs, no matter the format used: lessons, conferences, hands-on training, etc. The amount

of information available regarding all aspects of ethics, morality, and in particular professional military ethics, is vast.

As professional military officers, while some may be born with leadership abilities, most have to continuously develop the many traits leaders must live up for. Furthermore, moral behavior is not just something people show up with, but IT is learned through practice and habit. As representatives of warfare, this basic yet violent facet of the human condition, professional military officers have a moral obligation to not just practice ethical conduct, but to teach it as well.

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