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What Senior Leaders in Defence Should Know about Ethics and the Role That They Play in Creating the Right Command Climate

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Introduction

Ethical leadership encompasses both the personal conduct of the leader and the leader's expectations that followers behave ethically.[2] This paper explores some of the principal reasons that ethical failures occur and, just as importantly, what practical steps military leaders can take to prevent them from happening. It draws on published doctrine, operational experience, academic research, scientific reports, and inquiries such as Chilcot (the Iraq Inquiry) and the Op Telemeter Internal Review (focusing on "Marine A") to examine everything ranging from the psychological causes for certain behaviours, to the way that our environment shapes the way we see the world around us. It will also explore how nurturing the right leadership environment can foster and promote good behaviour at both an individual and organisational level. While this is intended to provide guidance for leaders across defence, it finds inspiration in the Army Leadership Code, which draws on both historical and contemporary experience to list seven leadership behaviours.[3] These behaviours provide a useful framework for discussing what leaders can do to create and support an appropriate ethical climate within defence.

- Lead by example
- Encourage thinking
- Apply reward and discipline
- Demand high performance
- Encourage confidence in the team
- Recognise individual strengths and weaknesses
- Strive for team goals

The challenge, of course, is not coming up with a list of helpful principles but understanding what they mean in practice and working out how to

actually apply them. It is useful to look at both good examples and best practices, but also to examine and understand how and why failures have occurred.[4] This paper will therefore refer to both the good and the bad to illustrate the points being made.

Lead by example

Taking command is normally considered the high point of a military career for those who are privileged to be entrusted with it, but leadership is something that is expected across a wide range of roles in defence. Clearly there is a relationship between leadership and power, and it is therefore useful to start with the observation that power can (or may) change behaviour.

The military invests a huge amount of effort in ensuring that those they promote into positions of authority have the character to be able to rise to the challenge of their new position. Such focus on character begins at officer selection and is then a recurring theme as the different values and standards are internalised through conscious training and unconscious institutional diffusion.[5] The British military is not unique in relying heavily on a virtue ethics model that would have been very familiar to Aristotle.[6] Virtue ethics concentrates on the importance of character and on how we can nurture the right types of behaviour by practicing what we should do. The more we do the right thing, the more it becomes habit and therefore part of the stable disposition that informs one's character. While stated as values rather than virtues, the different services provide institutional articulation of expected behaviour. They hope that, by fostering such behaviours and promoting those who consistently demonstrate them, people will be able to do the right thing when the situation demands it.[7]

Ethical leaders understand that their own character is an important resource to draw upon, but also that it may not be sufficient to protect themselves from being affected in a negative way by their situation. Only by understanding the effects of the environment on our perceptions and behaviours can we be confident of acting correctly despite the temptations and opportunities around us. Command brings many kinds of power, and while the link between power and ethical behaviour is multifaceted, we know that power can corrupt. It increases disinhibition, which itself fosters selfish behaviour. This can include acting in ways that gratify individual desires or giving into temptation. For example, people in positions of power are more likely than others to lie, cheat, and engage in infidelity.[8] In an influential piece from 1993, Ludwig and Longenecker argued that

embedded in success may be the very seeds that can "lead to the downfall of both the leader and the organisation."[9] Amongst other things, success and promotion can lead to a change in perception of one's own abilities and can contribute to an inflated belief in one's personal ability to control outcomes. After all, you got where you are because you're good, right? One of the ways to avoid this type of hubris is to build a team of people that you can trust and empower them to be able to provide challenge or comfort when you need it. These will be people that can robustly (but quietly) criticise or correct as required, and might be your executive officer, a mentor, peer, or trusted friend. The chaplain or padre often provides a spiritual resource for military units and may also be able to provide assistance in this role as someone who can provide a detached perspective. The important thing is not who the person or small group of people are, but that they are empowered by the leader to challenge him or her whenever it is needed to provide a sense of perspective.

One thing that seems to be consistent across leadership, be it civilian or military, is that many people unfortunately wear their sleep deprivation as a badge of honour. Sleep allows us to consolidate and store memories, process emotional experiences, replenish glucose (the molecule that fuels the brain), and clear out beta-amyloid (the waste product that builds up in Alzheimer's patients and disrupts cognitive activity). By contrast, insufficient sleep and fatigue leads to poor judgment, lack of self-control, and impaired creativity.[10] On top of this, sleep deprivation also increases the likelihood that people will engage in unethical behaviour.[11] For example, in one study carried out at the Norwegian Military Academy, extremely sleep-deprived students on a training exercise were expecting to fire on non-human dummies. When the targets unexpectedly turned out to be real people, fifty-nine percent of students still fired their weapons in response to an order when it was clear that they should categorically not have engaged (thankfully their rifles were disabled for the exercise).[12] Although extreme sleep deprivation clearly impacts ethical behaviour, researchers have found that lower levels of fatigue can also have a negative influence.[13] For example, some researchers have found that people act more ethically in the morning than in the afternoon, a finding dubbed the "morning moral effect."[14]

What can you do about it? While sticking to a fixed schedule to ensure sufficient rest may not always be an option, if your staff understand how important it is, it should be possible to manage time more efficiently to create rest opportunities. Mindfulness exercises and restricting caffeine intake

in the hours before sleep can both help, while even a twenty-minute nap can speed up cognitive processing, decrease errors, and increase stamina.[15] It is clear that you appear to have more time to do more work if you sleep less, but any extra productivity is often an illusion and is likely to affect the whole command, not just your own decisions and awareness. Your leadership, whether good or bad, affects the moral identity of those around, above and below through the example that you set. Leaders who discount the value of sleep can negatively impact wider behaviours on their teams as those under them pay close attention to cues and adjust their own behaviour accordingly. Conversely, if your people see that you take being appropriately rested seriously, they are more likely to take it seriously themselves. This is probably the single most effective thing that any leader can do to foster ethical resilience in any organisation.[16]

Encourage thinking

Absolute certainty is not always the strength people think it is—sometimes it is good to question and be questioned. Admiral Woodward demonstrated this in 1982 when he chose not to shoot down an aircraft approaching the British fleet with an apparently hostile profile and on an intercept course, despite having both the Rules of Engagement (ROE) and legal permissions to act. Thankfully, rather than simply authorising weapon release for when the aircraft crossed the defensive perimeter, the admiral carried out one last check, asking for the origin and destination point of the incoming aircraft to be quickly plotted. According to his diary, with only twenty seconds to spare, this last check resulted in the answer that the aircraft was on a direct line running between Durban and Rio de Janeiro—obviously a flight path that was very likely to be used by a commercial airliner. The decision to wait was confirmed when the fleet's Harrier finally came close enough to confirm that the aircraft was a Brazilian airliner going about its normal business.[17] Our brains repeat patterns in order to make decisions more quickly, and they selectively seek out information that confirms what we already believe. While this can be often be very helpful, these mental shortcuts don't always lead to accurate conclusions. This situation was saved by the leader continuing to question himself, but JDP 04 (the Joint Doctrine Publication on "understanding and decision making") also warns us today that an over-reliance on a "specific technology, applications or bearers to deliver mission critical information, can lead to single points of failure."[18] For example, it is easy to see how machine bias means that

answers generated by an artificial intelligence algorithm can be taken as definitive, even when they are very clearly wrong from any objective position (demonstrated every time we see someone driving into a river while following their satnav).[19] Some environments will be more challenging than others. For example, "perceptions and bias can be even more prevalent and entrenched when working with allies or occasional partners."[20]

As far as confidence in your own decisions goes, as well as being willing to question yourself, don't be afraid to be challenged. The disciplined obedience that must be maintained so that orders in the face of overwhelming danger on the battlefield will be obeyed without hesitation is too often used as an excuse not to listen to, or offer, alternative views when there is the time and opportunity. Inviting "reasonable challenge" is one of the best safeguards that any leader can have against their own hubris and can force you to think about your own motivations, but it is also an important corrective to certainty in wider contexts when it might be misplaced due to insufficient or inaccurate information, bias, or limited perspective.[21]

Following the UK's intervention in Iraq in 2003, the Chilcot Inquiry published its long-awaited report in 2016.[22] This made uncomfortable reading for the Ministry of Defence, highlighting significant failures in leadership, processes, and organisational culture. The inquiry identified a number of factors that led to these failures, including a disturbing tendency to "groupthink" across government, where people conformed in their thinking to such an extent that the decisions they made became dysfunctional or even irrational. Key assumptions were not questioned, even when those assumptions were blatantly false. As a response, the UK MoD has repackaged the idea of constructive dissent as "reasonable challenge." This is now being taught across the professional development courses taken at each promotion stage for all three services as a way of escaping a tendency towards groupthink. The policy document starts astutely by addressing those who receive the challenge, rather than those who might make it, and this is particularly important. Rather than just telling people not to be bystanders and encouraging them to speak up when they see something might be wrong, it recognises that unless leadership responds to appropriate challenges in the right way, no one is going to have the courage to say anything that deviates from what they believe to be the received view.[23]

Going further, creating an institutional expression to counter groupthink by supporting and encouraging "red teaming" is one of the ways to counter

the effects of cognitive bias within a team.[24] Encouraging an attitude of open discussion and reasonable challenge throughout your command is also a healthy thing to do.[25] For example, one of the recommendations from the Op Telemeter report is that "loyalty to an 'oppo' is best expressed by challenging him before he makes a mistake rather than trying to cover up for him afterwards. Moreover, that encouraging someone to own up quickly to their mistakes is better than allowing them to hide them."[26]

Fostering critical thinking as an ongoing process can also help people avoid moral disengagement. Moral disengagement refers to the psychological manoeuvres that we use to engage in unethical behaviour while at the same time maintaining a positive self-concept—i.e., convincing ourselves that we've done nothing wrong.[27] We manage to do this by reinterpreting our actions so they seem less bad (e.g., who thinks of taking something they don't really need from the stationary cupboard as stealing), minimising our role or personal responsibility (e.g., "she told me to do it"), minimising or ignoring the consequences of our actions (e.g., "well it wasn't that bad"), or blaming and/or devaluing our victim (e.g., "well he deserved it").[28] The Op Telemeter report notes that "moral disengagement on the part of Sgt. Blackman and the members of his Multiple was a significant contributory factor in the handling and shooting of the insurgent."[29] Again, fostering an environment in which behaviours and attitudes are not just left unchallenged over time can help prevent this from developing.

Apply reward and discipline

"You get what you inspect" is part of leading by example. Whether formal or informal, inspections are a means by which you can communicate priorities. If things are overlooked, they quickly become invisible. Maintaining those standards, even in the face of adversity, is a function of effective leadership. This will be particularly challenging in "situations where 'the battle lines are not straight.' Training alone cannot mitigate these risks, strong leadership and regular oversight is required."[30]

If other people are doing it, it quickly becomes normal (think about speeding on the motorway and keeping up with traffic flow). Rules are important, and enforcing them is also important. In many contexts, simple rules applied consistently tend to outperform even expert judgment.[31] Therefore, rules matter. Do not let people start to see rules and laws as soft or "malleable," as this is dangerous and is often the start of a slippery slope. However, while rules are important, a heavy-handed approach to

enforcing them can in some instances prove counterproductive. If minor infringements are treated in the same way as a major breaking of the rules, and every rule bending is treated as if it is a life and death matter when it comes to punishment, rather than prompting adherence to the rules, it can simply undermine the difference between things that don't really matter and things that are incredibly serious. If a punishment does not fit the crime, this can lead to people covering up for one another out of a sense of injustice at harsh punishment for trivial offences. Covering up undermines all of the rules, and the authority of those who make them. Therefore, each "crime" must be treated individually and in context, and the punishment must always fit the crime.[32]

Rewarding the behaviour you want to see is as, if not even more, important than applying discipline to prevent the behaviour you want to eliminate and will ultimately promote the behaviour you are seeking. These issues are just as true at the systemic level as they are at the individual one. As you move into positions to make decisions and set goals and standards that start affecting system-wide behaviours, understanding that there are likely to be unintended consequences is also important. A goal-orientated mentality can easily cause the narrowing of one's focus onto a specific point at the expense of noticing what else is happening as a result of one's actions. Organisations can be very effective at structuring individual actions into discrete parcels of activity (mostly unintentionally), so they do not necessarily see the outcomes or impacts of their decisions or actions at a later stage of the process they are involved with.[33] Getting out of your silo and gaining an appreciation of the effects of your orders is essential in determining if the new goals that you are implementing with the sweep of your pen are actually realistic for all the people they will affect. For example, a 2002 US Army War College report showed that army units had 297 days of annual mandatory training to pack into 256 available training days.[34] The message was clear—the system was obliging you to lie or face disciplinary measures. The result of such inappropriately set goals is that everybody lies, and everybody knows everybody else is lying. This will inevitably have a corrosive effect on other rules as well.

An organisation's ethical culture is degraded "when even good people feel they need to systematically falsify, fudge, and exaggerate in order to make the system work properly."[35] Creating the routine assumption that some rules are deliberately optional undermines the way other problems and situations are viewed, and there is the risk that people accustomed to making common

sense exceptions to create good outcomes "start making lazy or corrupt exceptions to facilitate bad outcomes. Further, such a corrosive environment risks creating cynicism about the moral universe. Is all life just a game?"[36]

While you may not have responsibility for the whole system, you can and do have power to influence significant parts of it, so be aware what behaviour you are promoting through the goals that you set, especially the unintended ones.

Demand high performance

As a leader, you are in a position to shape group culture. While a leader can and should demand high standards, deliberately or accidentally creating an environment of fear where nobody is willing to admit to having done something wrong can not only be counterproductive, it can also be dangerous.[37] For example, Prof. Mike Skerker at USNA Annapolis recalls the case of a commodore who read the riot act over the fact that a new communications system was nonfunctional on several aircraft in his fleet. "During the next meeting, every subordinate reported to the commodore that the system on their crafts were 'green.' Great success, except that on some craft 'green' meant that communications could only be maintained for four minutes."[38] No one had lied, but they were too scared to tell the full truth, which in this case was rather important. Demanding perfection and making it clear that you will only accept zero defect reports is likely to prove counterproductive. For example, when it comes to dealing with allegations of sexual harassment, this type of thinking (and the signalling that goes with it) "can result in problems being improperly "contained" within the unit."[39] Given how difficult this kind of complaint is to make anyway, the added disincentive of upsetting an unblemished unit record, combined with the expectation that it won't be taken seriously anyway, means that "trust in already suspect complaint procedures erodes even further."[40] This suggests that sometimes, paradoxically, units that have zero reported sexual harassment incidents may be of more concern than other units that actually have reported cases; at least in the latter, people may feel empowered to report misconduct, meaning it can actually be addressed and dealt with.

Let people know what they do is important and that *you* as the leader value that work. The behavioural economist Dan Ariely notes that the meaningfulness of your work has a large part to play in how well you do it.[41] Your team will take those tasks more seriously as a result of your

acknowledgement and be less tempted to cut corners. Cheating goes down when the stakes are higher, and thus work that is valued will be done to a higher standard than work that is not.

While setting inappropriate requirements can be damaging, being less than clear can also cause ethical issues. Ambiguity surrounding orders or expectations is a major cause of ethical failure. As already noted, fatigue is likely to be a factor on most deployments, and sleep restriction increases reliance on clear rules.[42] An absence of clear guidance is almost a guarantee for unintended outcomes. Being clear about what you value and what is expected in a given situation is essential and can have many profound effects for your team culture, the behaviour and mental health of your people. For example, during operations in Afghanistan in the first decade of the new millennium, personnel from many coalition states were repeatedly put in unenviable positions by their own governments who had instructed them to work with local populations and uphold their own values in doing so, but[43] in some areas, Thursday night was known as "man loving night." Had the activity been limited to consenting adults, then it would not have posed problems (indeed, many of the coalition states have legally recognised marriage between same-sex couples). However, these activities were of a very different nature. Checkpoints, supposedly set up to provide security to the local area, were instead being used as opportunities to target and select young prepubescent boys that "caught the local commander's eye." They would then be raped. At the time, this state of affairs was considered to be accepted practice by the indigenous coalition partner and could even occur in the outer cordon of the ISAF security perimeters occupied by those indigenous forces. Friday prayers were considered to absolve those involved of any sin. This put enormous pressure on personnel, many of whom requested guidance but received nothing and had little idea how to deal with a situation in which they were seemingly expected to go along with something that was wrong for policy reasons in order to keep the coalition together. [44]

In such situations, it is easy to see how ambiguity and uncertainty over the rules can also contribute to both post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and moral injury. The term "moral injury" was proposed by the American psychologist Jonathan Shay a decade ago to describe unseen wounds thought to be distinct from the more closely studied experience of PTSD. Shay's definition, which remains widely quoted, suggests that moral injury is present when "there has been a betrayal of what is morally correct; by someone

who holds legitimate authority; and, in a high-stakes situation."[45] Those who develop moral injuries are likely to experience negative thoughts about themselves or others (for example, "I am a terrible person" or "My bosses don't care about people's lives") as well as intense feelings of shame, guilt, or disgust. These symptoms can contribute to the development of mental health difficulties, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and even suicidal ideation.[46]

Although there is a wealth of evidence that having a supportive "one up" protects your mental health, leaders are human too. As such, more senior leaders should keep an active eye on more junior ones and check how they are doing. If they show signs of presenteeism—insisting on carrying on with work despite being ill, injured, or unable to function at full capacity because of poor mental health—this will directly affect the operational capability and health of all team members, and thus early identification and support are key.[47] It was noted in Sgt. Blackman's Supreme Court Appeal that pastoral care had not been provided to the troops at Command Post Omar presumably due to it being too dangerous to be visited, and that Blackman (who had also not been trained in Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) pre-deployment) had no peer support network.[48] This left Blackman and his immediate team badly at risk.[49]

Given the stigma associated with seeking help, it is often difficult for people to ask for it, meaning it is up to leaders to recognise and address this. Supporting those who may not wish to be supported is also important, especially those who might be "too busy," as avoidance is a key symptom of trauma.[50] To date, the language used to describe moral injury has lacked precision, which has contributed to the difficulties associated with differentiating moral injury from PTSD. As such, moral injury is often considered as a "mental health issue" rather than an unavoidable feature of uniformed service that needs to be managed by commanders at all levels.[51]

Encourage confidence in the team

Recognising team members as people and understanding you are not just a leader but also a part of that team is important in preventing an accidental drift into acquiring the traits of toxic leadership.[52] Just as the role of the leader is vitally important in shaping both expectations and the ethical climate of the group,[53] the group itself is also a significant actor in its own right, and peer-to-peer influence is a powerful factor.[54] Appreciating the role of the group itself is therefore an essential part of ethical leadership,[55] as is appreciating the

fact that the support of ethical norms by immediate peers and direct leaders is even more influential than that of senior military officers.[56]

There is a significant body of research demonstrating that group identity can have a profound impact on behaviour, both good and bad. If the group has a strong positive identity, that is itself an excellent defence against ethical drift, while if you see other members of the group breaking rules or cheating, it spreads further very fast.[57] Group identity prompts people to ask, "What do *we* do in this situation?" If you see fellow group members breaking the rules or cheating, then the chances are you will too, whereas seeing other people passing up "opportunities" or doing the right thing, that too will tend to get mirrored.[58]

It is about more than simply following the legal rules. The International Committee of the Red Cross report Roots of Restraint, published in 2018, recognised that culture is an essential part of understanding why people don't break the rules—simply focusing on the rules alone would be less successful than also appreciating and nurturing an ethical culture in the organisation.[59] Group behaviour is contagious—we like to conform to the social environment around us. That is one of the reasons that situations in which our individual identity can be hidden from the group are more likely to lead to bad behaviour. So, for example, concealing one's identity—even something as simple as covering one's face—can have a powerful impact on people's ethical behaviour. People can lose their self-awareness and feel less accountable for their actions. This "deindividuation" has been found to increase people's willingness to harm others unnecessarily.[60] Anthropological research has found that cultures that cover their faces (e.g., using face paint or masks) during combat were more likely to kill, torture, and mutilate their enemy than cultures that did not cover their faces.[61]

Trust is an enormous part of having confidence in your team. Operational demands can make it hard to maintain the group cohesion of shared understanding and expectation that builds that trust. For example, unit disaggregation is particularly common among Special Operations Forces personnel who are regularly tasked to support short-duration missions that are distinct and separate from their unit's regular tasking.[62] This can contribute to the slow erosion of leadership, discipline, and accountability. These risks should be recognised, and opportunities should be seized to reinforce a healthy group ethos.

Multiagency, multinational, or complex situations can also pose challenges for trust. "Establishing trust within, and between, groups from different organisations or cultural backgrounds is an essential prerequisite to effective partnering."[63] On the other side of the coin, while healthy competition between units is to be expected, if your team starts to see itself as separate, or "better" than those other groups, it can not only undermine wider trust, it can easily slip into dangerous exceptionalism. Subgroups within militaries that have a strong identity—i.e., groups that see themselves as unique and distinct from the rest of the military—have contributed to unethical behaviour in the past. For example, the disgraced Canadian Airborne Regiment that was disbanded following the crimes committed by some of its members in Somalia, had developed an exceptionalism that was so extreme, they wouldn't even salute officers that were outside their regiment.[64] Using language that differentiates between "us" and "them" can also contribute to unhealthy attitudes because "they" are not considered the same as "us." For example, there is clear evidence that in war, incidents of war crimes are far higher when a conflict is deemed to be racialised.[65] This logic extends beyond that particular environment and there should always be zero tolerance for derogatory speech due to its corrosive influence on perceptions and behaviour.

Recognise individual strengths and weaknesses

As has already been mentioned above, character is very important to the military, from recruitment and development all the way through to promotion. It is understood to be a stable set of behavioural dispositions, formed by habit and education, which can supposedly be relied upon to guide individuals' actions and which others can use as a relatively reliable basis for predicting their behaviour.[66] We judge people based on the type of character they appear to possess, and this informs our expectations about whether or not they are trustworthy, honest, will have the courage to speak out when something is wrong, whether they will be diligent and contentious even when not being supervised. But is this really safe? Moral failure, ethical transgression, and law breaking are often seen as character failures as a result, even though we have already seen just how important situational factors can be in affecting people's behaviour and perceptions. Lack of sleep can have a profound effect on the ethical awareness of individuals, and it can also cause individual behaviour to vary dramatically. Character may have an influence on this, but it is not enough to fully protect people from this or many other situational factors. This is just as true of leaders as it is

subordinates. The Op Telemeter Internal Review points to the fact that environment can have a profound effect on maintaining rules and regulations, but that current training appears lacking in terms of appreciating this.[67] Therefore, to build on strengths and minimise weaknesses, leaders at all levels of an organisation should promote ethical and prosocial behaviour through ethics training and mentoring.[68]

"Train as you intend to fight" is not limited to weapons drill and tactics. Situation and context can have powerful effects on perception and action, but this is something that should be taken into account when considering how best to go about it. That means that to foster genuine ethical resilience, you need to go beyond knowing what the right thing to do is and get people to actually do it even when it is hard. Fostering ethical behaviour has to extend beyond dialogue, moral reasoning, the consideration of stated institutional values, and other deliberative processing. Because people's best intentions can be overridden by situational factors, ethics training and education need to include strategies that actually influence behaviour. To do this, you need approaches that tap into automatic thought processes or that help people to switch from deliberative to automatic processing.[69] So, when it comes to applying what you know, the closer you can get in training to the actual environment you are training for, the better. That means that best practice needs to embrace a full range of learning environments. Messervey gives us some illustrations of what this might look like:

> First, ethics training can be conducted in a non-stressful environment so that key lessons can be absorbed (such as the impact that crowds can have on ethical decision making). This information can be repeated to increase retention of key lessons. Next, ethics training can simulate stressful situations (such as surprise and shock) to teach soldiers how to respond when confronted with ethical dilemmas under stressful conditions. This can also allow soldiers to practise coping with strong emotions such as anger. Finally, when conducting scenario-based training, soldiers and leaders can practice intervening during a staged ethical misconduct.[70]

If you can normalise the discussion of ethical issues rather than treat it as something separate from routine activities, this can have a constant affirmation of what you are trying to promote, whether you are in a formal training environment or in an informal moment between other tasks.[71]

Invariably, there is never enough time available to do everything you want to. Sometimes, that time is incredibly restricted due to factors out of anyone's control. That is why it is so important not to leave this essential area until just before a deployment. It should be a normal part of everyday activity. As long as it is not considered simply as an afterthought, and is therefore part of routine activity, it is relatively easy to focus on a particular area that might need to be refreshed, such as judgmental scenarios based on expected situations just before a unit is deployed, rather than having to start from scratch just when there is no time to do it properly.

Given the fact that it is always possible to do more, how much military ethics training or education is sufficient? A definitive answer is not possible, but we do know that even short courses, delivered in the right way, by the right people, using the right material and methods of delivery can have very real results on the behaviour of personnel deployed on operations.[72] Just reminding people about good behaviour makes them behave better.[73] For example, a training package, delivered to a US Infantry Brigade, based on movie vignettes and leader–led discussions, was administered seven to eight months into a fifteen-month high-intensity combat deployment in Iraq, between December 11, 2007, and January 30, 2008. Reports of unethical behaviour and attitudes in this group were compared with a randomly selected sample from the same brigade, pre-training. The ethics intervention, limited though it was, was associated with significantly lower rates of unethical conduct of soldiers and a greater willingness to report and address misconduct than in those before training or for those that did not receive it.[74] Imagine what a more robust approach to ethics education might achieve in building strength and reducing weaknesses in team behaviours.

Strive for team goals

We have seen how important identifying with other people can be and how this influences behaviour, both good and bad. If we are surrounded by people doing the right thing, that tends to rub off. We have also seen how people do a better job and cut fewer corners if they believe their work is important, and therefore, how important it is for leaders to set clear team goals and demonstrate an appreciation of each individual's role in pursuing them.

Group goals are one of the factors influencing the creation of a shared identity. They don't necessarily replace individual goals, but exist along-side them, although certain situations may bring them to the fore. "For example on a combat patrol the group identity would be more salient, and

as such collective goals will take precedent over personal ones…This can have tragic consequences for the individual, when a soldier throws himself on a grenade to save his buddies."[75] This kind of extreme self-sacrifice to save the group is motivated by a "visceral sense of oneness with the group, resulting from intense collective experiences."[76] However, the type of routine, smaller sacrifices that members of a team make for each other in pursuit of a shared goal are also important.[77] This has many implications, one of which being that if people are prepared to "pull their weight" and demonstrate a shared commitment to a common goal or task, they can be accepted by the group even if they are not liked by other members of it. For example, in Sebastian Junger's account of US soldiers in Afghanistan, Sgt. O'Byrne states: "there are guys in the platoon who straight up hate each other […] but they would also die for each other."[78]

There is also evidence of a relationship between unit-cohesion and mental health outcomes in soldiers. Membership of a group can "provide meaning to life, encourage the provision and receipt of social support, facilitate social influence, and engender a sense of belongingness."[79] This sense of connection to those "who share our sense of self and the group itself" can enhance well-being, in terms of mental and physical health.[80]

Team goals are clearly an important motivator and can help forge a common sense of identity that is an essential part of creating a healthy ethical culture within an organisation. However, there is also one more significant factor that must be guarded against. We have already looked at the dangers of groupthink, but a related, and just as dangerous, tendency within groups with a clear goal and a sense of righteousness is moral certainty. Given how much time we spend convincing ourselves that we are on the right side, that our cause is just and that we have sufficient legitimacy to permit us to do what needs to be done, it may seem strange to warn against being too confident in your goals. However, Steve Reicher at the University of St. Andrews makes a powerful argument that the biggest harms can be done by people who *really* believe they are doing the right thing. Reicher reexamined a number of supposedly well-known psychological experiments and, in light of new notes and evidence that had emerged since, found that the "received view" of why people had acted in the way they had may not be safe at all. For example, the longstanding conclusion from Milgram's experiments in 1961 was that normal people will tend to be obedient to authority figures even if that means applying lethal levels of electric shock to subjects who have gotten a maths problem wrong. Similarly, the conclu-

sion that we have taken for many years from Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment in 1971 is that people are predisposed to conform to roles, and guard brutality was a natural consequence of people "asserting the power inherent in that role."[81] Reicher's reexamination suggests something else had been missed—and that this was at least, if not more important than the explanations that we have been used to.

While other factors were undoubtedly also at play, one of the reasons that the subjects in Milgram's experiment were content to electrocute someone, or Zimbardo's guards were motivated to abuse inmates to impose discipline in a fantasy prison, may have been because they believed they were contributing to science that would ultimately help humankind. Both groups had been primed to look at the "big picture" (for example, helping future generations of children to learn more effectively, or reducing prison violence through reform) and this goal meant that individuals rationalised that the immediate harm they were inflicting was not as important as the worthy goal that was being pursued.[82]

Such behaviour can be observed in many areas of life. For example, in British justice, disclosure of unused evidence to the other side is an essential part of a police investigation and ensuing prosecution through the courts. This is to ensure that important leads really are followed up and miscarriages of justice can be avoided (e.g., when it turns out the person had an alibi all along). A failure to disclose awkward or conflicting evidence by the police is therefore a serious matter, but it is far more likely to occur if the investigating officer is certain that they have caught the right person. The trial process in which evidence is tested to see if it stands up to scrutiny can be seen as rather inconvenient "red tape" if the problem has clearly already been solved as far as the officer is concerned.[83] Therefore, it is easy to see how if someone is confident that they've got the right person, they are more likely to bend the rules a little to ensure that nothing gets in the way of successfully holding them to account.[84]

It is easy to see how on a larger-scale, moral certainty leads to crusades where anything appears to be justified in the pursuit of "the good." An otherwise good person doing the wrong thing because they believe in a goal can be just as dangerous as a bad person deliberately causing harm. Therefore, getting the balance right between inspiring the confidence in your team that they are doing the right thing without giving them the misplaced belief that therefore anything goes in pursuing that goal is one of the hardest challenges that leaders need to consider.

Conclusion

While such a short piece cannot hope to be comprehensive, this paper has employed the headings from the Army Leadership Code to draw out key points related to both how things can go wrong, and what you can do to ensure that this doesn't happen on your watch. Ethical leadership is simply part of good leadership. As such, it requires "focus, the appropriate use of resources, trust, effective decision making, and provision of model behaviour that is worth following." It is also therefore true that "once it is lost it is difficult if not impossible to regain"[85] While ensuring your organisation has an ethical climate is unlikely to win you a conflict, poor or absent ethics can hamper or contribute to ethical failings that undermine or lose war efforts.[86]

Notes

1. The author would like to gratefully acknowledge the generous assistance provided by Dr. Deanna Messervey, Department of National Defence, Ottawa, Canada, and insights from Messervey, D. L. (2020). *Ethical Risk Checklist*. Director General Military Personnel Research and Analysis Scientific Report. Ottawa, ON, Canada.

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4. For example, the Op Telemeter Internal Review into the circumstances surrounding the "murder of an unknown insurgent in…Helmand Province, Afghanistan on 15th Sep 11 by Sgt Blackman." The redacted Executive Summary notes that the deployment "provides a number of important lessons on creating an appropriate command culture in a complex environment; both the pitfalls and examples of best practice. These should be used to inform future commanders and those they lead in order to reduce the likelihood of a repetition of the sort of behaviour exhibited by Sgt Blackman and his multiple." Executive Summary, Op Telemeter Internal Report. Annex B-2 to NCHQ/585/5, 2 Jul15. It therefore sincerely hoped that the full, unredacted report will eventually be released so that those lessons can indeed be learnt.

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21. JDP 04 2nd Edition, p.25

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23 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/674545/TheGoodOperation_WEB.PDF. Specifically note p.62—Embracing Challenge.

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