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VOJSKA IN ETIKA: KAKO NASTAJAJO ETIČNI VODITELJI?

MILITARY AND ETHICS: HOW ARE ETHICAL LEADERS PRODUCED?

Povzetek Etika je pomemben element vojaškega profesionalizma in pomemben dejavnik vojaškega dela in obnašanja, zlasti v operacijah. Študije in raziskave kažejo, da so etični vojaški vodje ključnega pomena za splošno etično ravnanje v oboroženih silah. Članek predstavlja delo raziskovalne skupine, ki se je v okviru Organizacije za znanost in tehnologijo ukvarjala z dejavniki etičnega vodenja. Osredotočili so se na študij vojaške etike, izobraževanja in usposabljanja iz etike ter nacionalnih praks pri poučevanju etike, dokumentirali so uporabne etične primere in raziskali stališča vojaških vodij o etičnem vojaškem vodenju.

Ključne besede *Vojaško vodenje, etični vodje, vojaška etika, etična dilema, Organizacija za znanost in tehnologijo.*

Abstract Ethics is an important element of military professionalism, and a factor in military work and behaviour, especially during operations. Studies and surveys show that ethical military leaders are crucial in promoting ethical conduct within the armed forces. This article presents the work of the Science and Technology Organization's research team on Factors Affecting Ethical Leadership, which focuses on the study of military ethics, ethical education and training, national practices of teaching ethics in the armed forces, the documentation of relevant ethical cases, and surveying the opinions of military personnel with regard to ethical military leadership.

Key words *Military leadership, ethical leaders, military ethics, ethical dilemma, Science and Technology Organization.*

Introduction Ethics, ethical behaviour, ethical decision-making, and ethical leadership are important terms and concepts in today's world. All possible relations, behaviours and responsibilities – what can and should or even must be done, and what not – cannot be included in formal regulations. In the grey zone of non-existent regulations people behave according to their values, knowledge and skills, personal characteristics, or in general: their ethics. Ethics is a set of moral principles – a theory or system of moral values. It is the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group. It is a consciousness of moral importance, and a guiding philosophy. Ethics can also be defined as a set of moral issues or aspects (such as rightness), and the discipline dealing with what is good and bad, and with moral duty and obligation (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

It is interesting to note that the relationship between the military and ethics is not one-dimensional. While many authors and practitioners claim that ethics must be an important part of military work and military leadership, and of military organization in general, some see ethics and the military as incompatible, and the term military ethics as an oxymoron (Cook, 2015, p 36). However, Cook (2015, p 33–34) claims the opposite and gives some explanations: that there is no question that the military is oriented towards the public good; that military professionals consider the principle of discrimination (they discriminate between those who are enemy combatants and those who are noncombatants); that the duty of military officers is to take upon themselves any danger that the conflict introduces to noncombatants; and that military professionals must act proportionally – judgements must be made by a competent military authority on a case-by-case basis, and so on. The dangers of killing and being killed are additional strong factors in ethical military behaviour. As Toner (1995, p 9) stated, “The preeminent military task, and what separates it from other occupations, is that soldiers are routinely prepared to kill.” As such, one who is a military professional must exhibit standards of ethical conduct that foster the trust a nation's citizens afford to those who are both prepared to and will wage war on their behalf.

Since ethics is such an important element of military professionalism and a factor in military work and behaviour, the armed forces need, above all, ethical leaders. An international research group worked on a Science and Technology project entitled *Factors Affecting Ethical Leadership* from 2018–2022; some preparations began even the year before. The group consisted of researchers from Canada, Australia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Greece, the Netherlands, Slovenia, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the US. This article presents their work and some key research and study findings (STO-TR-HFM-304), but the majority of the article's content is dedicated to a literature review on teaching ethics in military organizations, and some important conclusions arising from it and from the whole study and research project.

1 THE PURPOSES, GOALS AND METHODOLOGY OF THE PROJECT

The work was conducted simultaneously in two streams: six of the ten participating nations conducted an empirical survey in their armed forces, and all of the nations participated in the educational stream.

1.1 Empirical survey stream

The main purpose of the research group was to develop a model of the factors affecting ethical leadership. A model had been proposed (O'Keefe et al., 2016), which aimed to explain the predictability of ethical behaviour in military leaders. The project team worked on this model and added some further elements to it. An empirical survey was conducted with military leaders and command personnel in six states to verify the new model. Due to the different organization of research in the participating countries (noncomparable groups), the final sample was divided into three subsamples. A statistical analysis was conducted for each sample separately. Altogether, there were 461 respondents in the three subsamples. The goals of the research group in the empirical survey stream included identifying the individual, situational, and organizational variables predictive of ethical leadership, as well as developing a model of ethical leadership.

1.2 Educational stream

The second purpose of the project was to review the teaching of ethics in the military and to identify obstacles and potential solutions. The work in the educational stream comprised a review of the literature on ethical leadership, and a review of ethics training in the armed forces of the participating countries (including Slovenia). Additionally, the researchers wrote various case studies of ethical dilemmas in military settings, which can be utilized for educational purposes. All the descriptions of ethics training and all the ethical case studies are part of the final project report.

There is clearly a dilemma with regard to the acquisition of ethical leaders in the military: the question arises of whether it is better to select individuals with inherent ethical qualities as future military leaders, or to teach them about ethical behaviour and decision-making during their military education, training, and career. While the empirical part of the project focuses on identifying characteristics that could be utilized in the selection process, the educational aspect emphasizes the development of ethical leaders.

2 TEACHING ETHICS IN THE MILITARY

Teaching ethics in the armed forces, and instilling ethical values in soldiers of different ranks, is undoubtedly a challenging task. There are numerous unresolved issues discussed by authors writing about teaching military ethics, which primarily address the following questions: Why should ethics be taught in the military? How should ethics be taught in the military? Who should teach ethics in the military?

2.1 Why should ethics be taught in the military?

The study and development of a system of military ethics revolves around the idea of examining honourable and shameful conduct within the military profession (Toner, 1995). As a profession dedicated to defending the nation, its interests and the civic community it comprises, the military forces of a nation must understand that their primary role is the use of violence. With this understanding comes the recognition that the use of violence carries moral obligations that govern its use and restraints (Baker, 2012). It is through military ethics that military professionals gain awareness of their moral duties, obligations, and responsibilities as agents of violence.

Robinson (2007) pointed out that the attitude that a good soldier could be a bad man (as General Taylor had said in the past) is no longer valid, since there is the need for public support of operations and militaries. Owens (2011) argued that the relationship between military and civil leaders has eroded since 9/11 and the long years of persistent conflict in the Middle East. Dobbin (2010) wrote about so-called 'moral communities', and questioned whether the military is or can be a moral community. He said that the military and its sub-divisions can be easily recognized as a community or communities, which, because of the very nature of the work, require values and standards as well as ethical guidelines on how to live and operate (p 74).

Clifford (2007) drew on the history of the US efforts in Vietnam to posit that there are boundaries for moral actions. He described a continuum ranging from moral decision and action which produces minimal moral discomfort and does not harm one's moral identity or agency, to the other extreme, where performing a requested action would cause significant damage to one's moral identity and agency and thus should not be carried out. Wortel and Bosch (2011) wrote about moral dilemmas. They recognized that moral dilemmas appeared in both situations – in garrisons (home stations) and during deployments. They argued that the profession of arms needs moral competency to effectively analyse and respond to these dilemmas. Thomson and Jetly (2014) recognized the unique and fundamental moral nature of the profession of arms. They reviewed the complex and stress-inducing nature of warfighting operations, and the moral lapses these can create. Carrick et al. (2008) stressed the importance of individual character education and shaping "good soldiers into good people", and Cicyota and Ferrante (2011) stressed the importance of ethical leader development in successful organization. Callina and Ryan (2017) saw the importance of theories and research in the promotion and development of the positive character of cadets. Matthews and Snider (2005 and 2008) also saw ethics as an element of being a professional, and stressed the development and sustainment of the moral character of cadets. Hartle (2004) articulated a vision in which war is a harsh event that creates moral ambiguity, confusion, and stress upon the conscience of the warfighter. He also stressed the importance of values and ethics for the military profession as it acts in the most moral of professions, warfighting. Howard and Korver (2008) demonstrated that ethical reasoning and action not only prevent moral lapses and failures, but also serve as a tool for human moral flourishing and well-being. Connelly and Tripodi

(2012) discussed the impact of moral incompetence, ambiguity, and moral failure on operations, and post-deployment reintegration, while Toner (1995) focused on describing the honourable and shameful in military conduct and action, prescribing a method that links moral and ethical ‘goodness’ to the military profession.

The opinions listed above present two main arguments as to why soldiers should be ethical and receive ethical education: the first is that the relationship between society and the military, encompassing support, the military’s responsibility to the parent society, and soldiers as citizens, necessitates ethical soldiers and leaders of character, while the second argument is rooted in the organizational culture of the military; specifically, the nature of military work often places soldiers in moral dilemmas. Ethically educated and trained soldiers should be better equipped to navigate such dilemmas.

2.2 How should ethics be taught in the military?

A holistic programme which seeks to develop and form the ethical reasoning and moral conduct of the military professional must seek to address and develop core military values, military virtues, and the concepts of trust, character, conscience, and moral obedience and moral disobedience, amongst other essential aspects (Toner, 2005; Mitchell, 1999). Miller (2004) argued that ethical education and formation must move beyond the questions of how, why, and what, as if ethical education and formation was centred on propositions and techno-philosophical inquiry. Instead, he argued that effective military ethics education and formation must include formative questions on how one becomes ethical from a qualitative perspective. In other words, military education aims to shape and mould the ethical character of individuals, which, in a mutually supportive and interdependent manner, influences the ethical character of the organization they belong to and the military institution they are part of.

When we look at the suggestions of authors who are writing about teaching ethics in the military, different ideas, experiences and suggestions are pointed out. One of the revealed questions is whether ethical behaviour can even be taught. Paskoff’s (2014) answer was: “Yes, ethics can be taught”. However, he decisively added: “The real question is whether you’re making sure it is learned” (p 1).

Robinson (2007) wrote about two approaches to achieving ethical soldiers: the first is by osmosis, which involves a slow, unseen, and gradual influence throughout one’s career, and the second is the explicit teaching and training of ethics. Robinson also highlighted two types of ethics: virtue ethics, which focuses on character, and value-based ethics, which encompasses the values upheld by society and the military. The virtue approach faces a danger in that there is always a personal guilt (despite the fact that sometimes the reasons for moral failures rest in other factors – the institution, for example). Robinson suggested several specific methods for teaching and training ethics, including providing training in moral philosophy (especially for leaders who are not too young), employing case studies, inviting motivational speakers,

and offering role models. However, he also cautioned against using only negative examples (instances of unethical behaviour), as this may lead to risk avoidance.

Baker (2012) argued that it is not enough for military ethics courses to only investigate ethical issues; he said that “a true military ethics course must in addition meet two key criteria Cook and Syse propose: it must be real world and focused on decision-making” (p 210). The author suggested a method of ‘ethical triangulation’, putting the cases through three lenses: deontology (duty and rule), utilitarianism (consequences) and virtue-based assessment (‘the character check’), which narrows the choices. However, it does not produce moral certainty (p 214). Baker cautioned against relying solely on historical cases, as they often focus on negative instances of ethical wrongdoing. Instead, he suggested utilizing cases with unknown outcomes, allowing students to engage in discussion and negotiate the proper ethical decisions. Furthermore, Baker proposed employing Computer Aided Argument Mapping to facilitate after-action reviews, which involve diagramming the structure of arguments. This approach enhances the analysis of ethical reasoning and decision-making processes.

Cook (2006) presented his own experience of how to teach leadership (and also ethics). He used what he called ‘great books’. In his article he proposed a book by Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. His evaluation was that the content of the book offers all the possible situations that military leaders meet, and he pointed out that “almost without exception, students evaluating this elective commented that ‘everything in the War College curriculum can be found in this book’” (p 354). Cook argues that this way of teaching fosters higher ordered ethical reasoning and reflection.

Ficarrotta (2006) examined the work of Manuel Davenport, a thinker and teacher of military ethics. Davenport emphasized the importance of putting military ethics courses near the commissioning sources. He argued against the use of posters, pamphlets, or brief motivational speeches as effective means of teaching military ethics; instead, he emphasized the significance of individual engagement, advocating personalized instruction, focusing on one student at a time.

Miller (2004) differentiated between the technical (‘how’), scientific (‘what’) and philosophical (‘why’) approaches. He argued that instead of asking philosophical questions such as “Why be moral?” or “Why it is wrong to kill non-combatants?”, the technical approach to ethics should be asking “How do I become a good officer?” and “How I decide who I aim at?”. But the consequences of looking for a simple and straightforward answer to these technical questions could be devastating. Miller also emphasized that “those responsible for teaching ethics to the military must be willing to back away from a training model and embrace – or at least make room for – Socratic dialogue” (p 213).

In his essay of 1998, Toner expressed some personal thoughts about teaching ethics in the military (he has experience teaching ethics at the Air War College in Alabama) and also other institutions. His thoughts are (summarized):

1. People entering the forces already have the power of ethical judgment. There is no need to teach (and build) them from the bottom up.
2. However, they do not know everything, either. The teacher's task should be to impart some sense of order, some overarching scheme of discipline to the ethical sense and awareness that already exists.
3. There is difference between teaching ethics only (chaplains, for example – they are moral and ethical) and setting an example or “walking the talk” (e.g. commanders – they have a more difficult task).
4. Ethics is not a simple matter (especially not in the military, where commanders must act, and not be afraid of ethical mistakes).
5. Even though they may be good ethical examples, not all commanders are good teachers of ethics.
6. Teaching must be passionate, with dedication to the content of the teaching. Some traditional teaching methods are not necessarily functional in teaching ethics. In his book about the core values, virtues and traits that define the moral professional member of the military, Toner (2005) also uses case studies and anecdotes from civilian experiences to discuss moral virtue and how to communicate it within the military context.

Wrage (2012) also shared personal experience in teaching courses on Ethics and International Relations. He adopted a case-based approach, constructing six real-life cases intentionally designed to be equivocal, lacking a single right answer or a completely correct solution. Wrage employed three lenses or conceptual models: realist, idealist, and constructivist. He argued that utilizing multiple overlapping lenses is the most effective approach to comprehending ethical issues in foreign policy.

The book by Carrick et al., *Ethics Education in the Military* (2008), is a detailed synopsis of ethics training for military members in multinational settings, focused on unique military traditions within the national setting. It demonstrates commonalities in programmes which:

- address global military ethics problems in the context of the national military tradition;
- target the development of individual character education and shaping “good soldiers into good people”;
- address the concept of role responsibility for the military profession, and of specific branches – doctors, chaplains, etc. – and their duty to carry out certain actions or not;
- incorporate case studies within the text.

Englen and Thomas (2018) demonstrates two key goals of moral education: 1. to equip individuals with capabilities to engage ethically, 2. develop critical skills needed for developing and sustaining moral agency without coercion or undermining options, reflection, and assessment.

Hartle (2004) points out the significance of looking at warfighting through the prism of Just War Principles.

In addition to these suggestions and experiences in teaching ethics, we should also consider that teaching ethics and providing education on ethics in the military are regular components of the training and education of military leaders. This is particularly true during their character development and the acquisition of leadership competencies (see the publications of Wilson (1985), Williams (2005), Ciulla et al., eds (2006), Snowden and Boone (2007), Matthews and Snider (2008), Cycyota and Ferrante et al (2011), Owens (2011), Crissman (2013), Callina, Ryan et al. (2017), Vie, Nihill et al. (2017) etc.).

2.3 Who should teach ethics in the military?

The question of who can or should teach ethics in the military is not simple at all. Authors mostly mention philosophers, lawyers, priests (military chaplains) and military officers/commanders as teachers. Their opinions about which of these is the most appropriate are not congruent. Should the teachers of ethics in the military be academics or practitioners? Is it enough to be an ethical person oneself in order to teach ethics? As Toner (1998) noted, while some (chaplains, for example) can only teach ethics, others (commanders) can also set an example. But, even though they may be good ethical examples, not all commanders are good teachers of ethics.

This literature overview reveals significant challenges in the issue of acquiring ethical military leaders and teaching ethics in the military in general. Nevertheless, the authors are largely unanimous in recognizing the importance of ethics education, particularly in the light of the consequences that unethical conduct by soldiers can have both domestically and during operations.

3 KEY OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS OF THE PROJECT

The project began by defining basic concepts and terms, which resulted in a Glossary of Terms at the end of the report. The literature review on ethical leadership and teaching ethics followed, which was carried out by several researchers. Here I will mention some interesting and important thoughts of the authors with regard to the literature review.

Under the title *Moral Philosophical Perspectives of Ethical Leadership*, Olsthoorn and Kucera (in STO-TR-HFM-304, p 5) write: “The argument for leading ethically that underlies transformational leadership (the leading theory today), for instance, is

mainly functional: leaders who appeal to the values of their followers are thought to be more effective and to have followers who are more satisfied with their leader, than leaders who fail to do so (while unethical leadership is explained away as a pseudo-transformational leadership). Clearly, such a functional line of reasoning does not amount to a moral argument. The obvious flip side of a functional argument for leading ethically is that it loses its impact as soon as a leader finds a way to be more effective, and perhaps even to have more satisfied followers, without being ethical – military history is replete with leaders who were absolutely effective but were not ethical at all.”

Foley and other authors, in a subchapter entitled *Social Psychological Perspectives of Ethical Leadership* (in STO-TR-HFM-304, p 16), point out that some researchers “suggest that the leader is the single most important determinant in shaping an organization’s ethical climate, which has a significant impact on the ethical behaviour of organizational members and the operational effectiveness of the military unit in garrison and in a theatre of operations.”

When reviewing the subject of how ethics is taught, MacIntyre and O’Keefe, in *An Overview of Ethics Education* (in STO-TR-HFM-304, p 29), indicate that “some authors insist that the behaviour of students does not improve measurably after following ethical education programs of study”. But they add that “it would be premature to conclude that the teaching of ethics is a failed venture simply because overt signs of understanding are less than visible.” Specifically, “moral behaviour consists of more than observable actions. It also includes less visible behaviours such as perceptions, decision making and motivation” (Bradley and MacIntyre in MacIntyre and O’Keefe in STO-TR-HFM-304, p 30). They also list Mulhearn et al.’s possible educational approaches, which are lectures, web-based instruction, simulations, case studies, electronic discussion boards, team-based learning, decision-making exercises, experiential learning, role playing, sharing personal experiences, individualized exercises, self-reflection, and essays (STO-TR-HFM-304, p 30).

Aalto (in STO-TR-HFM-304, pp 34, 37) states that when thinking about teaching ethics in the armed forces and teaching military leaders, we are again faced with whether ethics can be taught and, if so, how it is being taught in a military population. For example, is it teaching, training or education? He recognizes that teaching military ethics should be included in both training and educational aspects of training. He stresses that ethics teaching is also tied to a place, a time, and a culture, so an approach which works in one military organization may not work in others.

Kucera, in his text *Ethics and International Humanitarian Law*, deals with the dissemination of international humanitarian law (IHL) to the armed forces. Among other things, he stresses: “It is a legal obligation of military leaders to ensure that their subordinates comply with the rules of IHL. However, this obligation cannot be reduced to occasional IHL lectures.” (STO-TR-HFM-304, p 45).

The third part of the researchers' work and of the final report presents the review of educational and training practice of armed forces in the field of ethics. Analysing the reviews, MacIntyre establishes that it is evident that the leaders of the military forces within NATO and Partners for Peace place tremendous value on the importance of ethical conduct within their uniformed forces. He also recognizes that the methods used in the different countries do not follow a single blueprint and that this is to be expected, because the programmes have been developed individually without any overarching guiding principles. Nevertheless, he sees common threads that permeate throughout these descriptions: "First, it is evident within the descriptions that the value of ethics education is given great prominence by each nation. Second, there is a motivation and desire to impress upon military members that the values and principles espoused by the organizations should be adhered to and, hopefully, internalized. Third, the people who deliver this type of education should be both knowledgeable and passionate. Finally, ethics education should continue throughout a member's career." (MacIntyre in STO-TR-HFM-304, p 48).

The fourth part of the final report is a heavy annex of ethical leadership case studies. It contains 50 ethical case studies, which are classified by case intensity (dilemma difficulty). As MacIntyre and O'Keefe say (in STO-TR-HFM-304, p 30): "If we expect to encourage ethical behaviour, we need to first ensure that people can correctly identify dilemmas when they occur."

The final, and one of the most important parts of the project, is a model of ethical leadership and empirical survey, carried out to validate the model. As stated in the report (STO-TR-HFM-304, pp ii-iii), the findings of the empirical survey in the armed forces "show that the ethical behaviour of a leader is the most important factor in shaping an organization's ethical climate, and that ethical leadership is strongly associated with values, in particular with value achievement (e.g. setting high standards and striving for excellence) and person-environment fit. Leaders who have the ability to address an ethical dilemma tend also to be those with high standards, a firm foundation in values (such as helping others and generosity) and belief that their institution shares these values. The results of this study further found that moral efficacy, a leader's confidence in their own ability to confront ethical challenges, is the strongest predictor of ethical leadership. This latter finding suggests that ethical leadership reflects a broader, systemic dynamic where foundational social and/or institutional principles have become internalized by the leader."

As the final assessment of the project we can use the words of Kalantzis in a Foreword to the STO-TR-HFM-304 report: "The group identified educational and training tools to better equip leaders, and therefore all military personnel, with the capability to respond to ethical challenges in a principled and virtuous manner" (pp vi).

Conclusion The work of the research team of STO-TR-HFM-304 *Factors Affecting Ethical Leadership* focuses on the question of how to achieve ethical military leadership. Studies and research, including an empirical study within the project, indicate that

an ethical military leader is the most reliable factor in promoting ethical conduct within the military. While some may reject the connection between the military and ethics, it has become increasingly clear in recent years that unethical behaviour in military actions leads to public opposition, political investigations, and also unit disintegration.

Teaching ethics to military leaders represents a challenging task, as the path of learning and gaining experience is not straightforward. Various approaches have been developed, and ethics education is pursued by different experts. The result of the project team's work is a response to questions about what most influences the culture of ethics in the military and what constitutes an ethical leader; what dilemmas exist in teaching and training ethics in the military and in general; and also guidance on how to overcome them. Finally, the researchers have prepared a practical "Handbook" with 50 ethical case studies, which can serve as a training resource for the armed forces of NATO and Partnership for Peace countries in recognizing ethical dilemmas, which is one of the primary conditions for ethical conduct.

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