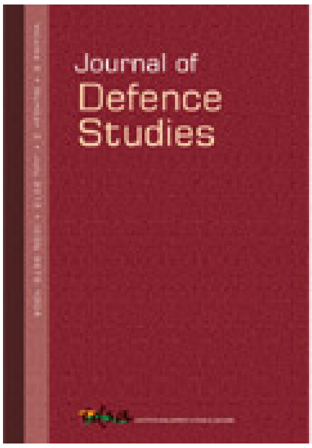

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Understanding Ethical Behaviour towards Better Institutional Functioning in the Armed Forces

Ankush Banerjee[*]

At the heart of ethical choices lies the complex interplay between individual intentions and environmental vectors. Factors such as stress, misguided motivations and the failure to handle positional power make the issue so very intriguing. Further, ethical dilemmas are often laden with inherent individual subjectivities, making it difficult to arrive at a singularly agreeable distinction between 'right' and 'wrong'. Why do individuals transgress? Why do individuals give and take bribes? Why is it so difficult to report a course mate? This article seeks to focus on the behavioural side of ethics. It investigates the behavioural realm of ethics through the application of various principles from the newly emerging field of behavioural ethics, in order to expand the individual and organisational understanding of ethics and morality in the broader context of the military paradigm.

Introduction

Imagine two course mates, say, A and B, are stationed in the same unit. They have undergone the rigorous arc of military training together, and thereafter served in the same or nearby units, having spent nearly eight years together. They have faced and shared similar highs and lows of life and have a healthy interpersonal bond among them. However, one day, A realises that B has been indulging in minor misuse of office resources. As if this weren't enough, he has also involved his subordinates in his

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transgressions. While A is certain that he must report B's misdemeanour to his superiors, he feels severely conflicted. On the one hand, he has to take into consideration a carefully nurtured, eight-year-old friendship, and on the other, the best interests of the institution. Taking either decision has a considerable psychological and personal cost—and it is not quite clear to A as to what he should do. If he doesn't report his course mate's transgression, he runs the risk of becoming party to it himself, while if he does, he risks losing a meaningful relationship.

The above-mentioned incidence foregrounds the 'grey area' that lies at the heart of ethically challenging situations. First, it highlights the fine but very compelling line between 'morals' and 'ethics': while morals are understood as a set of *abstract principles adopted by society, individuals or culture to guide good behaviour and conduct*, ethics may be seen as a set of *rules and conventions which govern good conduct within a context, usually a profession*. For example, 'killing is an immoral activity' is a universally acceptable 'moral'. However, when soldiers are ordered to 'kill' on the battlefield, they are applauded and awarded.[1] Does this make them or the state which they obey 'immoral'? Obviously not! Because soldiers 'kill' within the moral and legal sanction of the state towards defending it from external aggression and towards maintaining law and order, or as maybe enshrined in a document such as the Constitution.[2] Likewise, 'lying is an immoral activity' is accepted widely. However, does espionage and deception make military practitioners immoral? Common sense tells us that it doesn't. Rather, if military professionals refrain from resorting to it despite it being a mission requirement, their conduct will be considered as falling short of the professional demands and expectations, and therefore be deemed unethical and unprofessional. Thus, in the earlier example about course mates, while the moral in question is 'to snitch or not to snitch on one's peers' (abstract, socially accepted principle), ethical conduct, being concerned with the professional realm, would entail rightfully reporting the transgression.

Hence, the realm of ethics is often characterised by situations where individuals find themselves in the 'grey area'. Usually, this occurs when two strongly held values come in conflict. In the instance mentioned here, loyalty to one's unit/institution comes into conflict with loyalty to one's friend/course mate. Further, this also highlights the psychological complexity that arises in ethically challenging situations. While it may be true that, by proportion, the extent of ethical transgressions within the armed forces is small, yet in an inexplicable but certain manner, their occurrence accrues magnified costs on the organisational image and morale. Thus, though these lapses and shortcomings may be exceptions rather than the norm, it is important to study and learn from them to boost our individual and organisational learning curve, and thereafter apply these findings towards creating institutional mechanisms that cultivate an ecosystem of ethical behaviour among the armed forces personnel.

The article draws from the newly emerging discipline of behavioural ethics to discuss various factors that precipitate unethical behaviour among well-trained, well-meaning individuals. In simple words, it attempts to answer the question: why do good people do wrong things? The underlying thesis is that *organisational ethos/environment and individual disposition* are both partially responsible for ethical lapses. The article examines both these factors to arrive at a holistic understanding of ethical behaviour. It then turns its gaze towards the armed forces specifically, and discusses certain organisational and individual factors which perpetuate a faulty work ethic that further precipitates unethical behaviour. Concluding with what is desirable, it goes onto suggest institutional measures and ethics training methodologies towards not only making individuals more ethical but also instilling a higher standard of organisational ethics.

Anatomy of Ethical Behaviour: How People Take Ethical Decisions and Why Good People Transgress

Behavioural ethics is an interdisciplinary field of study that brings together disciplines such as psychology, economics and sociology to understand and explain ethical behaviour.[3] This synthesis of behavioural psychology and economic decision making research lends fresh perspective to our understanding of human behaviour in general, and ethical decision making in particular.

'Want/Should' Dichotomy

As such, it is assumed that individuals are rational decision makers. If this was completely true, then having institutional mechanisms such as rules and regulations would be enough to deter bad behaviour, and there would be no incidences of corruption, nepotism, fudging reports, drunken driving, financial misappropriation and the like. However, this assumption is deeply wanting.[4] To explain the behavioural dynamic of unethical behaviour, behavioural economist and Noble laureate Daniel

Kahneman posited that there are two systems of thinking that determine decision making: System 1 and System 2.[5] System 1 thinking refers to the instinctive, spontaneous, 'in the moment' part of our thought process, whereas System 2 faculty refers to deliberate, thought-out responses to a situation.[6] For instance, when we are asked whether we will cheat in an exam or not, we answer from System 2 faculty, saying, 'No, we wouldn't!' However, while actually taking a test, most of us indulge in 'minor cheating', like copying/asking from neighbours, as at this juncture System 1 faculty becomes predominant. This example and numerous studies (one of which is discussed next) show that there exists a dichotomy vis-à-vis psychological gap between the 'should' (what we should be doing vis-à-vis 'talk') versus 'want' (what we end up doing vis-à-vis 'walk') part of our thinking, primarily because how we *think* we would respond to situations and how we *actually* respond to situations is at times at variance, especially in ethically challenging situations.

An experiment by behavioural economist Dan Ariely further clarifies this behavioural dynamic.[7] Ariely conducted a study where four groups of students were asked to sit for a general quiz. The first group (reference group) was made to write the test under ideal conditions, that is, no cheating. The second group, at the end of the test, was given a bubble sheet (like an optical mark recognition [OMR] sheet) wherein they were asked to transfer their answers from the initial answer sheet. The catch lay in the fact that the bubble sheet already had the correct answers pre-marked on it. The students could either *cheat* by marking the correct pre-marked responses or honestly transfer their original answers. In the third group, similar conditions were applied, with one change: the students were instructed to shred their initial answers sheets, that is, erase evidence of cheating. The fourth group was instructed to shred both sheets, walk up to the examiner and self-report number of correct answers. Each correct answer earned them 1$. Assuming the standard of knowledge/scholastic ability of the class was homogenous, the reference/first group's average score became the reference point. Any deviation from the reference group's score signalled that that group had indulged in cheating. The reference group scored an average of 3.5, while the fourth group scored an average of 10—consistent with expected behavioural pattern. Thus, the fourth group, with no checks, cheated maximum to maximise their payoffs. What intrigued those conducting the experiment was the behaviour of the second and third group: both groups, contrary to a predicted score of 9–10, scored an average of 5.5. Based on such trends, Ariely and his colleagues posited the following:

1. In ethically challenging situations, that is, given a choice to cheat, *almost everyone* transgresses. This happens as the 'want'/ System 1 faculty overpowers 'should'/System 2 faculty.[8]
2. However, people do not suddenly cheat a lot, as evidenced by the patterns of the second and third groups. They only cheat/ transgress a little, that is, the precarious 'one small step'.

While such an inference was drawn in an experimental setting, the ensuing discussion, with its emphasis on our preoccupation with our 'social self' determining behaviour, explains the findings in the context of armed forces personnel who are trained from the formative stage to be conscious of their 'reputation', that is, self-image. The theory of self-concept maintenance, discussed next, explains this interesting inference.[9]

Theory of Self-Concept Maintenance

Mazar et al. posit that because dishonesty pays (irrespective of whichever form it takes, that is, bribery, cheating in exam, stealing, etc.), when given a chance, most individuals will cheat.[10] However, it is unlikely that they will 'go all the way'. Rather, they indulge in dishonest acts but '*only to the extent that their dishonesty allows them to maintain a positive moral self-concept* (emphasis mine)'.[11] Moral self-concept is defined as our own view of ourselves as 'morally upright, ethical individuals'.[12] In simple words, while taking home a printer from office seems unacceptable to us, taking a pen does not: the former interferes with our moral self-concept of being 'good people', whereas the second does not. Two inferences become germane here. First, all ethically challenging situations give rise to this conflict between preserving a healthy moral self-concept, that is, a good view of ourselves, versus maximising one's gains.[13] Second, when it comes to ethical behaviour, we tend to quantify the transgression in terms of the dividends it pays us. Reading these two points together, one wonders why people actually never get caught while taking a bribe of Rs 500, or merely taking home office stationery. Rather, they get caught when they are already way down the slippery slope. How does one explain this? The anatomy of ethical transgressions answering this question is discussed next.

Anatomy of Ethical Transgressions

Figure 1 illustrates the mechanism that finally leads individuals to glaring ethical failures.

As mentioned earlier, an ethically challenging situation involves a conflict between maximising one's gains and preserving a healthy moral self-concept. The result of this push-and-pull manifests in individuals making small ethical transgressions, that is, having a *chalta hai* (everything goes!) attitude, cheating *only* in multiple choice questions from neighbours in an exam, taking small bribes initially, and so on. However, the first small step, and the subsequent steps thereafter, changes an individuals' perception of the act. The *perceived value* of the benefit derived from the transgression decreases. For example, the perceived value of a bribe of Rs 500 seems less when the same bribe is offered again, and hence to compensate for this, there is an escalation of commitment, that is, the individual asks for Rs 1,000 this time, Rs 2,000 the next, and so on.[14] Thus, not only does the first small step lead to the subsequent steps in a wrong direction, it also changes the perception of the individual towards the act itself, making it slightly more permissible

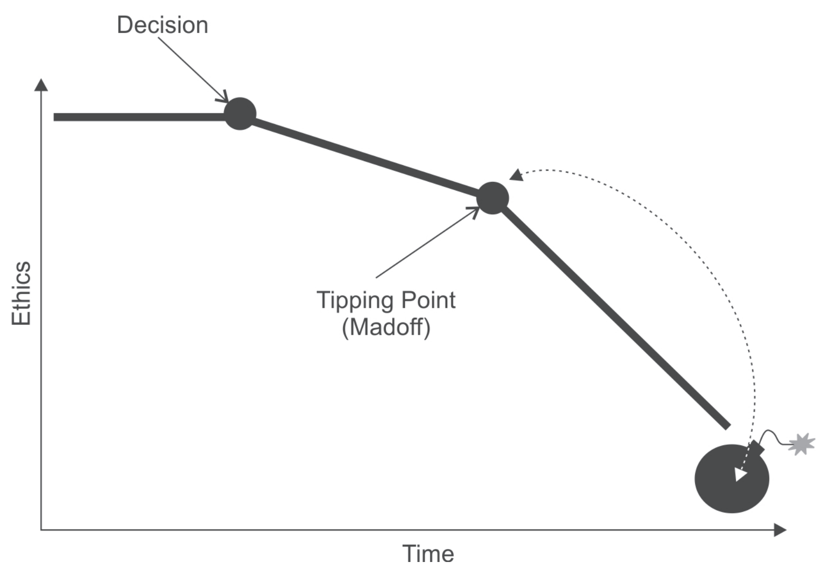

Figure 1 The Slippery Slope

Source: Banaji et al., 'How (Un)ethical are You?', n. 12, p. 58.

each time the transgression happens. This phenomenon is also termed as 'psychic numbing' or 'moral myopia'.[15]

With respect to military institutions, the concept of the 'Honour Code' instituted in academies has been a step in the right direction. This is especially so when seen in context of such biases which distort decision making. As cadets are made to administer the 'Honour Code' via cadet's committees, they are trained from their formative years to evaluate and introspect their ethical positions and perceptions. This is a dynamic, and practical way of taking ethics training out of the classroom and contextualising it in a real-world setting.

Bathsheba Syndrome

In their article 'The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders', Dean Ludwig and Clinton Longnecker posit that, more often than not, ethical failures are not a result of an individual's low morals, but are a by-product of success/positional power.[16] Their article makes certain disconcerting inferences, such as how success/positional power often allows leaders to become complacent and to lose focus, diverting attention to things other than their primary roles. Moreover, since positional power leads to privileged access to information and organisational resources, it makes such individuals more prone to ethical transgressions.[17] This suggests that positional power/authority has a tendency to promote System 1/'want-oriented' thinking, which precipitates 'one small unethical step' and paves the way for major transgressions in the future. The infamous Fat Leonard bribery scandal which rocked the United States (US) Navy is one such succinct example illustrative of 'power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely'. Leonard Glen Francis plead guilty to bribing scores of navy officials with cash, prostitutes and other gifts, such as hotel stays, electronics and travels to exotic locations, with the objective of gaining classified information. Investigations were held against 33 people, including seven Admirals and two Captains.[18] So much so, the scandal wreaked havoc on the navy's ability to fill senior leadership roles, unintentionally stalled hundreds of officers' careers, and thinned out the navy's flag ranks.[19]

The above discussion also suggests that ethical decision-making is a delicate amalgamation of individual and situational factors. The ensuing subsection foregrounds the role of the latter in shaping human conduct and decision making in the ethical realm.

Situational Forces Precipitating Unethical Behaviour

Instances from Academic Literature

Scholars have argued that situational forces overwhelm individual motivations in ethically challenging contexts. Some well-known experiments support this view. In social psychologist Stanley Milgram's famous experiment on obedience conducted in the 1960s, study participants were asked to play the role of a teacher and administer 'electric shocks' to another participant, that is, 'the learner' (another experimental assistant), each time the learner made a mistake on a word-learning exercise (see Figure 2).[20] After each mistake, the participant was asked to administer a shock of higher voltage, which began to result in audible distress in the learner. The experiment was epochal in that it illustrated how normal people were liable to involuntarily transgress and harm others when ordered by figures in authority roles.[21]

Albert Bandura, another pioneering psychologist, also posited that situations involving authority figures often cause diffusion of responsibility among subordinates who become 'morally disengaged'

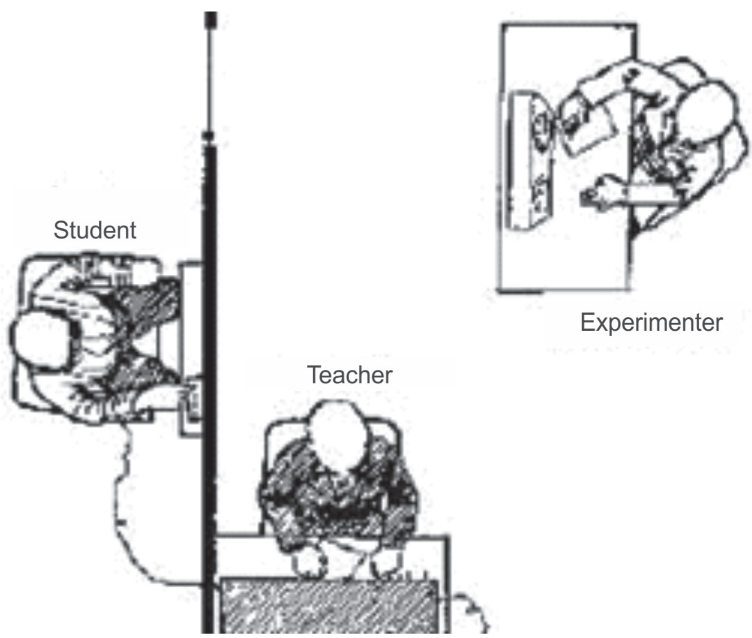

Figure 2 Set-up of Milgram's Experiment

Source: Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, n. 19, p. 23.

from their own values and actions.[22] This is consistent with patterns observed in Milgram's study. Similarly, in the famous Stanford Prison experiment, Stanford undergraduates were randomly assigned to be either guards or prisoners in a mock prison setting for a two-week experiment.[23] The experiment was terminated within five days because the guards were seen to engage in sadism and brutality and the prisoners suffered from depression and extreme stress. Normal university students had been transformed merely by the situational conditions created for the experiment.[24]

Other Instances Meriting Attention

Another instance illustrative of overpowering situational factors is ragging and unauthorised punishments in academies/universities/colleges. While there is enough institutional oversight and punitive measures to repel such acts, anyone who has been through the rigours of a training academy will testify that the environment is very different from that of the 'real' world. Functional isolation, rigid hierarchies, immaturity coupled with disproportionate authority, and a misplaced sense of machismo, often precipitates cadets to transgress. Fictional but highly illustrative works such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm*[25] capture the essence of dysfunctional group dynamics.

These studies foreground the role of situational influences in precipitating unethical behaviour and suggest that *morality is dynamic*: individuals with certain moral traits, even when they strongly value morality, *may not* behave consistently across different situations and may cross ethical boundaries under situational pressures.[26] Thus, human conduct is a profound amalgamation of situational vectors and personal disposition.

Implications for Military Leaders

Having provided a succinct theoretical framework to understand the manifold complexities of ethical behaviour and decision making, it is now imperative to extrapolate such understanding in the military context for gaining a deeper understanding of the institutional importance of ethics. What, then, are the implications for military leaders?

1. Military leaders, at all levels, should be mindful of the power that accrues from positional authority and the capacity of such power to distort one's moral compass. Further, military leaders need

to diligently guard themselves against abusing their positions in view of potential psychological vulnerabilities (and subsequent self-serving rationalisations) arising due to being in those very positions. Some of these are:[27]

(i) 'Everyone's doing it': This is the 'safety in numbers' argument that ignores organisational rules and procedures. This rationalisation argues that since everyone else is breaking the rule, it must be okay. For example, overstating personal financial claims.

(ii) 'It doesn't hurt anyone!': This is used to excuse misconduct and falsely holds that one can violate ethical principles so long as there is no clear or immediate harm to others. For example, operation of illegal slush funds.

(iii) 'If it's legal, it's ethical': This argument conveniently ignores the fact that laws and rules establish the minimal level for acceptable behaviour. This thinking does not embrace moral obligations for doing the right thing.

(iv) 'I deserve at least this much!': This happens when people who feel overworked and underpaid justify or rationalise unethical behaviour. For example, bribery and abuse of public resources.

(v) 'It is not for me, it is for the unit's pride/welfare': This is a plea resorted to when individuals want to couch personal, self-seeking desires/aspirations in the garb of institutional betterment.

2. Leaders should be extremely watchful in ethically challenging situations, especially when such situations demand them to make departures from standard operating procedures (SOPs)/ laid-down regulations. This is because the first small step in the wrong direction could set not only them but also their subordinates (who emulate the leaders' behaviour) on the slippery slope of ethical transgressions.[28]
3. Leaders should aim to create a culture of ethical behaviour in their respective domains. Good behaviour should be praised, while questionable behaviour should be admonished. Any laxity in this regard sends a wrong signal to the subordinates. S.Y. Shrikhande has illustrated a 'three legged stool' model of decision making, wherein the leader must introspect into the three dimensions of a decision, that is, administrative (orders,

procedures), legal (laws and regulations), and moral (driven by 'inner voice'), before taking a decision.[29]

In his book, *Being Ethical*, S. Manikutty succinctly captures the role of leadership in creating an ethical culture.[30] While systems of incentives and negative reinforcements are already in place in the form of regulations/laws, the leader has the sacred duty of setting the foundation for enduring ethical standards. S/he must 'walk the talk', lead from the front and exemplify, in deeds and words, the time-tested service values that have held the services together in a common bond. Furthermore, the leader must define the ethical climate and moral values of an organisation and ensure their institutionalisation (see Figure 3).[31]

Fostering an Ethical Ecosystem through a Better Work Culture

As discussed earlier, human behaviour is determined by a host of individual, situational and organisational factors. Further, as mentioned, it is not that the 'morals in the armed forces' have declined, but that a constellation of perceived faulty work ethic practices often precipitate individual and organisational setbacks/transgressions. For instance, unrealistic expectations and infructuous work may lead to commanders sidestepping SOPs; lack of transparency and adhocism may lead to abuse of positional power, which further leads to conformism and 'yesmanship';[32] intolerance to errors and subsequent 'ending of careers' because of a single incident may lead individuals to be risk-averse and

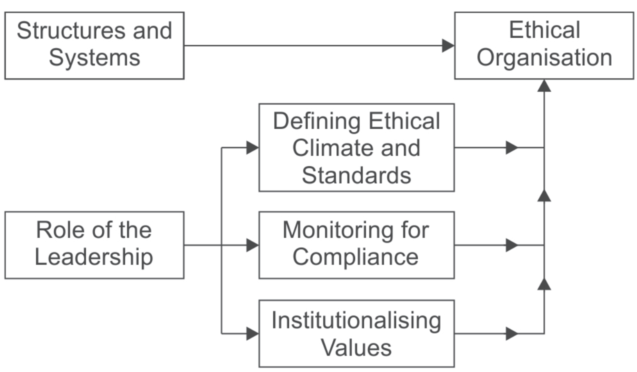

Figure 3 Ethical Climate and Moral Values of an Organisation

Source: S. Manikutty, *Being Ethical*, Mumbai: Penguin Random House Ltd, 2015, pp. 50–80.

under-report incidences (which subsequently hinders organisational learning from errors); and lack of differentiation between genuine procedural errors and ethical lapses, and further constituting Boards of Inquiry as culpability-attributing mechanisms rather than fault-finding processes, may promote decision paralysis and diffusion of responsibility among leaders.[33] Thus, it isn't that most individuals are voluntarily unethical; rather a misperception and misrepresentation of situational factors often makes leaders see ethics as the first casualty in a situation when an 'ends justify the means' approach begins to guide decision making.

Therefore any constructive step towards instilling a higher ethical yardstick within the organisation must take into consideration both individual and organisational factors that lead to ethical transgressions. The following discussion attempt to enlist some such factors, their manifestations/reasons, and recommend how these can be best ameliorated. This list is by no means exhaustive, but only indicative of the direction that our efforts should take.

Organisation-centric Factors

Table 1 shows the organisation-centric factors that may be responsible for dilution in ethical standards.

Individual-centric Factors

Table 2 lists the dynamics among individuals that may be construed responsible for ethical transgressions at an individual level.

Ideal Practices to Foster Ethical Behaviour

Flowing from the above discussion, the following practices/traits appear to be the most desired/aspired for:

Organisationally

1. Setting realistic tasking, timeframes and deadlines.
2. Fostering a culture that supports out-of-box thinking and discourages conformism and 'look-back-march-forward' approach. This will help individuals to resist the easier temptation of blindly following past precedence, peers and faulty organisational practices. Furthermore, fostering a culture that distinguishes failures arising despite sincere efforts versus blunders arising from negligence/incompetence/negative motivations, etc., is essential.

Table 1 Factors Affecting Ethical Standards

Perceived Faulty Work Ethic Practices	*Manifestations/Reasons*	*Recommendations*
Unrealistic expectations and paucity of time.	• Unrealistic tasking, deadlines and infructuous demands. • Limited time in an appointment to prove one's ability. • Organisational tokenisms in name of ceremonials.	• Realistic and negotiable timelines to be set. • Inputs to be sought and considered from on-ground units before tasking. • Institute more professional/ operations-oriented working methodology.
One minor incident is enough to malign an individual/ entire unit.	• Individuals with long, illustrious careers get judged based on a single incident. • Having blame-centric approach to incidences promotes risk aversion and decision paralysis.	• Critical review of incidences with objective of fact finding rather than culpability attribution. • Incorporating a more 'punish the sin, not the sinner' ideology.
Intolerance to error		• Cater for reasonable errors in processes/operations without compromising minimum safety standards.

Source: Author.

Table 2 Causes of Ethical Transgression

Factors	*Reasons*	*Recommendations*
Fear of repercussions Risk aversion Desire to impose one's ideas Abuse of positional power Adhocism	Reasons could include: • overweening ambition;[34] • yesmanship; • lack of professional competence; • fear of dissent and lack of trust between echelons; • diffusion of responsibility; • exaggerated sense of entitlement; • ACR-oriented loyalty; • conformism and lack of decision-making autonomy; and • reasons mentioned in the section 'Implications for Military Leaders' (point 1[i–v]).*	• Amalgamate ethics training with professional training (discussed next). • Leaders should make their intentions and expectations clear and appear credible by practicing transparency, impartiality and objectivity. • Out-of-box thinking and risk-taking ability within the bounds of safety to be encouraged. Conversely, conformism/ 'yesmanship' to be discouraged.

Source: Author.
Note: * ACR: annual confidential report.

3. Distinguishing between ethical transgressions and genuine procedural errors caused by factors/circumstances beyond the leader/decision-makers' control, and adjudicating cases accordingly.
4. Minimal adhocism and paradigm shift from personality-oriented way of functioning to procedure-oriented way of functioning. Also, minimising procedural and organisational tokenisms and infructuous work.
5. Maintaining greater uniformity and consistency in procedures and processes. This becomes most relevant during ceremonials, VIP visits, and the like. In the quest to enhance the 'image' of the unit, leaders at times, but not always, resort to practices that are not only unethical but illegal as well. This puts added strain on organisational resources. The recent directive of the serving Chief of the Naval Staff[35] calling for minimising adhocism and irrelevant ceremonials in official functions, for example, is a step in the right direction.

Individually

1. Creating an ethical climate in respective domains of influence.
2. Thinking and taking decisions more socio-centrically than ego-centrically.
3. Inculcating moral courage in self and subordinates.[36] Moral courage is the ability of a person to stand by what he thinks is right, against any pressure which may manifest itself in a variety of ways, ranging from simple advice to threat and coercion. It implies admitting one's mistakes, giving honest professional inputs and saying 'no' when the situation demands.
4. While professional competence vis-à-vis performance in courses is a standard yardstick for assessing individuals for career advancement, this mindset needs introspection. Judging an individual's moral fabric is just as important. Recognising this aspect may lead to higher ethical standards among personnel.

Flowing from the exhaustive discussion of what constitutes ethical behaviour, the key issue that comes to the fore is that of approaches to ethics training. Interestingly, this continues to be a challenging discipline for the classroom, considering unlike other skills or competencies which can immediately be tested in a tangible, measurable way, the effectiveness of any ethics training programme remains elusive. Bearing this in mind, two broad approaches are discussed next, without strictly prescribing to any set format, or syllabi.

Approaches to Ethics Training

While it is strongly recommended that ethics training be amalgamated with professional training, the vital question remains: *how* to conduct such training? Two models, one theoretical and the other in practice, will be discussed here.

Lawrence Kohlberg, one of the most eminent psychologists of the twentieth century, developed a famous (though disputed) model of moral development which delineates three levels of moral development: (i) the pre-conventional level, in which individuals are primarily driven by rewards/punishment orientation; (ii) a conventional level, where they respond to peer pressure and are driven by a concern for reputation/ social standing; and(iii) a post-conventional level during which individuals use their own reasoning to determine 'universal ethical principles' of right and wrong, and then abide by them and challenge status quo to improve things at a broader level.[37]

A model, based on above-mentioned assumptions has been constructed here (see Figure 4). Junior leaders, with service lengths of 0–5 years, are assumed to be in pre-conventional level. Thus, ethics training for them emphasises on adherence to core military values, basic regulations and setting a strong ethical foundation. For mid-level leaders, with service lengths of 6–15 years, the emphasis is on certain higher-order concepts, such as moral reflection, laws of armed conflict, real-time case studies and understanding dichotomy between ethics and law.

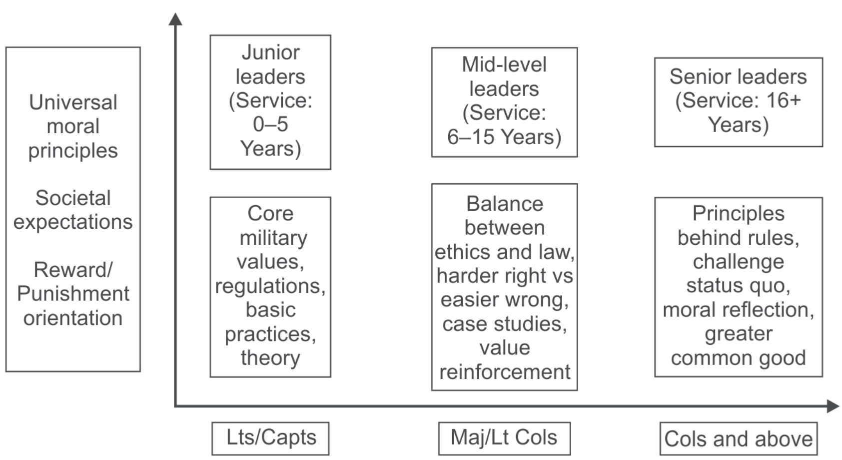

Figure 4 An Incremental Approach to Ethics Training

Source: Author.

For senior leaders, that is, with service lengths of 16 years and more, the emphasis should be on challenging the status quo, grooming and mentoring juniors, and deep moral reflection.

The practical model being considered here is the ethics training methodology of Norwegian defence forces. The objective is to describe how ethics training is carried out in other academies and if found feasible, to consider the same for introduction in our own institutions.

Norwegian Defence Forces Ethics Training Model

At the Norwegian military academy, the three-pronged approach consists of addressing moral dilemmas in the military context, mentoring on these aspects, followed by moral reflection (see Figure 5).[38]

In the first year, cadets undergo basic orientation to ethics, followed by a deeper engagement with the concepts of military ethics. This provides cadets with a basic understanding of the moral foundations of the military profession and of the use of force. Some of the topics that are introduced are: ethical theory; professional ethics; the ethics of war; cultural challenges in international operations; and post-war

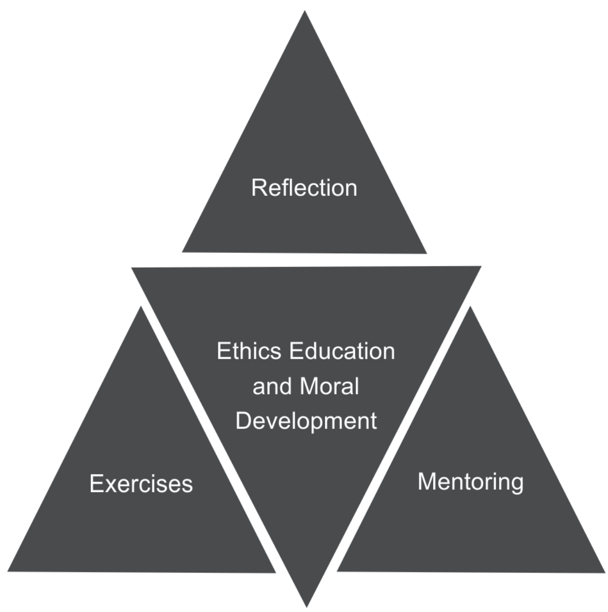

Figure 5 Pedagogical Model

Source: Bernsten and Rolfsen, 'Ethics Education in the Norwegian Defence Forces', n. 40, p. 98.

ethics. During the course of the training, cadets are encouraged to apply various ethical theories to potential real-time challenges they may face on the ground, followed by robust, critical discussions. Moreover, cadets are honed to formulate their own 'ethical language', so that they may relate to the different ethical problems and dilemmas they may be faced with, both from an individual and organisational perspective. Finally, they are not only pushed to think, reflect and critique various ethical dilemmas and grey areas, but are also mentored by professors and serving military professionals towards honing their own values and practical behaviour. This equips them to understand the importance of moral integrity as a shield against unethical temptations, and thereby practice leadership in a morally sensitive and integrated manner.[39]

In the Indian context, it would be interesting to note that dedicated ethics training schools for military officers—such as the Indian Navy's Centre of Excellence in Ethics, Leadership and Behaviour Studies (CELABS), and the Indian Air Force's Air Force Centre of Ethics and Behavioural Sciences (AF-CLABS) do exist. Further, officers undergo capsule courses in ethics during different junctures of their service tenures. Such a training pattern ensures timely and periodical reinforcement of institutional values, provides cognitive course correction, and adds to the overall maturity of military leaders. Thus it maybe surmised that ethics as a subject receives due institutional emphasis.

Despite this, the pedagogical pattern and syllabi of these courses needs to be revisited. In this regard, the case study approach, which is a staple pedagogical tool at most premiere business schools, is a proven and effective way of inducing change at behavioural (cognitive and affective) level. However, for the former to become a classroom reality in the ethics training schools, declassification of Boards of Inquiry (at least at an institutional level) and more institutional openness and maturity will be the first steps, followed by training instructors in the delicate art of writing usable case studies. In this regard, it would be significant to mention that the US Department of Defence had published an 'Encyclopaedia of Ethical Failures'[40] in 2014 to sensitise and educate personnel. Furthermore, as has been the practice at CELABS, civilian psychologists are empanelled in the faculty to cover important behavioural aspects of decision making. Not only does this entail a more holistic, richer understanding of behavioural ethics for the trainees, but also indicates that a more dynamic approach towards structuring of the ethics training pedagogical framework is necessary.

Conclusion

Ethical behaviour is a complex amalgamation of situational factors and individual motivations. Military leaders must carefully tread the thin line between being wary of perceptual distortions caused by situational/positional power, and honing moral courage to 'speak truth to power' both in themselves and in subordinates. Aligning one's moral compass to that of the institution, devising personal cognitive mantras such as the three-legged stool model, and always being acutely mindful of one's decisions is of utmost, topical relevance. Further, while individual commitment to institutional values cannot be overemphasised, situational and organisational causes which lead to transgressions must also be factored while adjudicating human conduct. As an interesting end note to this inference, Lehman et al.'s insightful conclusion regarding the relation between rules and compliance patterns in a host of institutions that 'more complex rules are more likely to be broken', is pertinent.[41] Additionally, leaders at all levels must foster an ethical ecosystem as ethical behaviour, as has been illustrated, becomes more a matter of practice than mere incidence. Lastly, ethics-related pedagogies in training institutions must be made more dynamic, aligned to the complex demands of the field, and focussed on moral reorientation by pushing trainees to introspect into their own value systems and holistic mentoring.

The onerous responsibility of safeguarding belief in the system and inculcating sound values befalls on military leaders at all echelons. This can only be achieved by setting personal examples, taking ownership of our responsibilities and reforming institutional mechanisms to foster ethical behaviour and emphasising core military values at all times.

Notes

1. While this also opens a window for discussions on the limits of legitimate violence and proportionality, the same is considered beyond the scope of this article.
2. See Samuel P. Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, Massachusets: Harvard University Press, 1957, pp. 11–21.
3. For a more in-depth understanding of behavioural ethics and subsequent pedagogical approaches, see Max Bazerman and Francesca Gino, 'Behavioral Ethics: Toward a Deeper Understanding of Moral Judgment and Dishonesty', *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, Vol. 8, December 2012, pp. 85–104.

4. Herbert Simon coined the term 'bounded rationality' to explain how human logical reasoning faculties are limited in their scope to make rational decisions, as previously assumed, especially in classical economics theory (which assumes man is a 'rational agent'). Simon enlists two important factors, namely, cognitive biases and limitations in information-processing capacity, resulting in bounded rationality. See Herbert Simon, 'Bounded Rationality and Organizational Learning', *Organization Science*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 125–34. Like rationality, it is also posited that ethicality or ethical behaviour will have its limitations in view of cognitive and affective (emotional) human limitations. For more, see 'Bounded Ethicality', Ethics Unwrapped, University of Texas, available at http://ethicsunwrapped.utexas.edu/glossary/bounded-ethicality, accessed on 8 June 2018.
5. Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, United States: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011, pp. 20–24. For a more concise elaboration of concepts,see Simon Sloman, 'Two Systems of Reasoning', in Daniel Kahneman and Thomas Gilovich (eds), *Heuristics and Biases: The Psychology of Intuitive Judgment,* London: Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 379–96.
6. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, n. 5, pp. 23–27.
7. See Dan Ariely, 'The Context of Our Characters', in Dan Ariely, *Predictably Irrational*, New York: HarperCollins, 2009, pp. 195–230. The book deconstructs many assumed fallacies about decision making and brings to light important concepts such as framing, hyperbolic discounting and influence of emotion/arousal on decision making.
8. Ibid., pp. 198–200.
9. Ibid., pp. 220–30. Also, see Paul Slovic, 'The Affective Heuristic', in Kahneman and Gilovich (eds), *Heuristics and Biases*, n. 5, pp. 398–420. The paper succinctly explains how emotion distorts decision making in various situations.
10. Nina Mazar, On Amir and Dan Ariely, 'The Dishonesty of Honest People: A Theory of Self-Concept Mainteinance', *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 45, No. 6, 2008, pp. 633–44.
11. Ibid., p. 633.
12. Ann E. Tenbrunsel, Kristina A. Diekmann, Kimberly A. Wade-Benzoni and Max H. Bazerman, 'The Ethical Mirage: A Temporal Explanation as to Why We aren't as Ethical as We Think We are', Harvard Business School Working Paper 8-12, September 2007.
13. M.R. Banaji, Max H. Bazerman and Dolly Chugh, 'How (Un)ethical are You?', *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 81, No. 12, December 2003, pp. 56–64.
14. Such behaviour is consistent with the fundamental law of diminishing returns in economics, which states that the perceived value of payoffs from

successive gains diminishes with time if the value of payoffs remains the same. In the paradigm of unethical behaviour, the perceived gain derived from an ethical conduct follows a similar trend. Thus, an escalation of commitment is always observed in such cases, as the perceived value of, say, a bribe taken the first time will seem less the next time, and hence an escalation of demand.

15. See Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, New York: Vintage, 2009, pp. 23-24. In fact, Lieutenant General (Retd.) S.R.R. Aiyengar also uses the term 'moral numbing', which he defines as *'the ethical implications of stand-off weapon systems generating hubris in technical performance that may mask reality, by making us forget or become numb to the fact that we are killing* (emphasis mine)'. See S.R.R. Aiyengar, *Military Ethics*, New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2015, pp. 109–25.
16. Dean C. Ludwig and Clinton O. Longnecker, 'The Bathsheba Syndrome: The Ethical Failure of Successful Leaders', *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 12, No. 4, April 1993, pp. 265–73.
17. Ibid., p. 270.
18. Craig Whitlock and Kevin Uhrmacher, 'Prostitutes, Vacations and Cash: The Navy Officials "Fat Leonard" Took Down', *The Washington Post*, September 2018, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/seducing-the-seventh-fleet/, accessed on 1 April 2019.
19. Craig Whitlock, '"Fat Leonard" Scandal Swells; Three More Navy Figures Charged', *The Washington Post*, 27 May 2016, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/fat-leonard-scandal-swells-three-more-navy-figures-charged/2016/05/27/2e1d7b0e-2442-11e6-aa84-42391ba52c91_story.html?utm_term=.0c409a7d0b46, accessed on 28 March 2019.
20. Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View,* New York: Harper and Row, 1974, p. 103.
21. Ibid., p. 23.
22. For a comprehensive understanding of Bandura's theory, see Albert Bandura, 'Social Cognitive Theory',*Annual Review Psychology*, Vol. 52, February 2001, pp. 1–28.
23. See Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: How Good People Turn Evil*, Washington: Ebury Publishers, 2007, pp. 83–120.
24. Ibid., pp. 23–25. In fact, this experiment conducted in 1971 serves as a morbid precursor to the infamous prison tortures at Abu Ghraib (2001), which earned the US immense global ignominy. Zimbardo served as one of the expert witnesses. His recommendation was that Abu Ghraib wasn't a case of 'a few bad apples', as was commonly believed, but that the 'whole

barrel was bad', meaning that the accused soldiers weren't properly trained to handle the commensurate psychological and moral complexities involved in handling Iraqi prisoners, or the extenuating situations that arose involving lopsided power equations.

25. See William Golding and Edmund L. Epstein. *Lord of the Flies: A Novel*. New York: Perigee, 1954 and George Orwell, *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*. New York, NY: Signet Classics, 1996.
26. See Jonathan Haidt, 'The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Decision Making', *Psychological Review*, Vol. 108, No. 4, 2001, pp. 814–34.
27. See Francesca Gino, 'See No Evil: Why We Fail to Notice Unethical Behaviour', in R.M. Kramer, Ann E. Tenbrunsel and Max H. Bazerman (eds), *Social Decision Making: Social Dilemmas, Social Values, and Ethical Judgments*, New York: Psychology Press, 2009, pp. 241–63.
28. See Francesca Gino, 'Vicarious Dishonesty: When Psychological Closeness Creates Distance from One's Moral Compass', *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, Vol. 119, No. 1, 2012, pp. 15–26. In her article, Gino illustrates that psychological closeness/distance from an ethical/unethical person in a superior position likewise affects follower's/individual's behaviour.
29. See S.Y. Shrikhande, 'Indian Naval Leadership: A Perspective', in *Leadership Conclave Seminar Proceedings*, Kochi: CELABS, 2017, pp. 18–19.
30. See S. Manikutty, *Being Ethical*, Mumbai: Penguin Random House Ltd., 2015, pp. 50–80.
31. Ibid., pp. 83–86.
32. Dhruv Katoch, 'Ethics and Morals in the Armed Forces: A Framework for Positive Action', *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, April–June 2013, pp. 151–162.
33. S.R.R. Aiyengar, 'Ethics and Military Leadership', *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, April–June 2013, pp. 121–42.
34. Arun Prakash, 'Roots of Moral Decline in the Armed Forces: Time to Reclaim our Izzat', *Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, April–June 2013, pp. 11–26.
35. See Snehesh Alex Philip. 'New Navy Chief's First Order—No 'Quasi Religious' Functions, Please, We are the Navy'. *ThePrint.in*, 6 June 2019, available at https://theprint.in/defence/new-navy-chiefs-first-order-no-quasi-religious-functions-please-we-are-the-navy/245834/, accessed 25 September 2019. Also see, Press Trust of India, 'Same Food, Drinks for All: Navy Chief Targets Inequality in First Address', *Business Standard*, 5 June 2019, available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/

same-standards-of-food-drinks-no-bouquets-navy-chief-issues-elaborate-guidelines-to-force-119060401425_1.html, accessed on 25 September 2019.

36. Ibid. Also see Prakash, 'Roots of Moral Decline in the Armed Forces', n. 34, pp. 14–16.
37. For a brief discussion on Kohlber's model see Kendra Cherry, 'Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development', 19 September 2019, available at http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm, accessed on 4 October 2019.
38. ArneBernsten and Raag Rolfsen, 'Ethics Education in the Norwegian Defence Forces', in Paul Robinson, Nigel de Lee and Don Carrick (eds), *Ethics Education in the Military*, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008, pp. 95–110.
39. Ibid., p. 102.
40. See Office of General Counsel, Department of Defence, 'Encyclopaedia of Ethical Failures', October 2014, available at https://www.jag.navy.mil/distrib/instructions/EncylopediaofEthicalFailures(2014).pdf, accessed on 11 October 2019.
41. David Lehman, Bruce Cooil and Rangaraj Ramanujam, 'Why Some Rules are More Likely to be Broken', *Harvard Business Review*, 7 October 2019, available at https://hbr.org/2019/10/why-some-rules-are-more-likely-to-be-broken, accessed on 11 October 2019.