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Ethics 102:

The ethical land navigation model

"Army leaders should focus on developing the 'enduring competencies' of self-awareness and adaptability…self-awareness is the ability to understand how to assess abilities, know strengths and weaknesses in the operational environment, and learn how to correct those weaknesses. Adaptability is the ability to recognize changes to the environment; assess against that environment to determine what is new and what to learn to be effective…"

— Army Training and Leader Development Panel Officer Study Report to The Army

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There is more to doing the right thing than doing the right thing. Leaders need to know how to make good decisions in rapidly changing environments across a full spectrum of operations. These decisions include the ability to make ethical decisions that reflect Army values and maintain the warrior ethos in situations extending from our motor pools and training areas into our areas of operations in Kosovo or Afghanistan. *[From* The Army Training and Leader Development Panel Phase II NCO Study Final Report*. The study emphasizes the role of the warrior ethos for the NCO, "compels soldiers to fight through all conditions to victory, no matter how long it takes and no matter how much effort is required. It is the soldier's selfless commitment to the nation, mission, unit and fellow soldiers (FM 6-22)."]*

If a child were wounded in the streets, would you stop your squad and help? This is typical of the ethical decisions NCOs must face.

Ethics is the process of putting our values into action. One size or style doesn't fit all. Ethical decisions require both self-awareness and adaptability. This article is about understanding the four different ethical systems at work in the Army today (self-awareness), and applying this knowledge in order to lead soldiers (adaptability).

Consider this scenario, a variation of a scenario based upon after action reports that is used in ethical training courses:

You are deployed in a stability operation, and have directions not to give medical treatment to any wounded civilians because your soldiers might acquire some diseases that are out of control in this country. One day you are on a patrol and you pass a young wounded child. One of your soldiers stops to help. You order the soldier to leave the child alone, and the soldier refuses your order. The child will die without help, and your soldiers are the only ones in a position to help. What will you do?

There are different answers to this scenario based upon which ethical system you use to put your values into play. You could obey the directive, follow orders, leave the child alone and drive on. Or, you could disobey the directive, and help the child. If you choose the second option you could justify your actions by citing the purpose of the mission (Stability Operation), the effects of your actions upon the civilian population, an inner value that it is wrong to let a wounded child die or appealing to a higher rule of law. These options are the product of the four ethical systems that are used by leaders to make decisions: rules, results, situation, and character. So, which system is better?

In the Fall 2002 *NCO Journal*, Sgt. Maj. Mark Kalinoski described the Army's Ethical Reasoning Process found in FM 22-10. The process has four basic steps:

— Define the problem.
— Know the rules.
— Develop and evaluate courses of action.
— Choose the course of action that best represents Army values.

He compared this ethical process to following a set of instructions to assemble a bicycle. Instructions can save a lot

of heartburn. However, what happens if the same instructions have four different configurations for the same bicycle? The finished bike will depend on which configuration we used for assembly. Likewise, our ethical decisions depend upon the ethical process we use. So which process is better?

Herein is the problem with the ethical decision making process. It is a very good decision matrix, but it does not help us develop or judge between courses of action that are the product of different ethical systems. First, it assumes that rules will resolve any situation, and that the Army values are a simple standard of measurement. But what happens in a situation like the previous scenario where rules and values conflict? Second, suppose we don't have the time to work the process, but we have a "gut instinct" about what is right? Time and emotion play a role in ethical decision making. What about the role of conscience in ethical decision making? It is good to stop and think, but the process assumes a reasoned response is better. Some decisions give us the luxury of time for reflection, but some situations place us in an intersection where we have a split second to make a decision.

The Army's Land Navigation Model helps soldiers understand how to make ethical decisions that account for more variables.

Any soldier who has been to National or Joint Regional Training Center knows that the battlefield is a fluid environment where rehearsed plans do not always survive contact with the enemy. We are also dependent upon battles drills, experience, commander's intent and situational awareness when we execute a mission. That is why training beforehand is vital for success and survival. The same is true for ethical training. It requires both a self-awareness of ethical systems and values, and the adaptability to use these systems to put our values into action.

Four ethical systems and Army values

There are four ethical systems used in the Army today – rules, results, situations and character. Army values are the product of the ethical system used to give meaning to each value. I will use the Army value "Duty" as an example of the relationship between values and the ethical systems.

Rules. These are actual laws, regulations, orders or principles that we appeal to as absolute authority for our actions. Therefore, duty is a matter of obeying these rules and authority. We justify our actions by saying, "I am following orders."

Results. Some label this system as the "ends justify the means." In the Army, we use "mission" and "end state" to define our purpose and measure our progress. Therefore, duty is a matter of mission accomplishment. We justify our actions by saying, "I did what the mission required."

Situations. In the Army, we reward initiative. Situationism acts upon what a particular scenario requires. It makes use of experience and current data by acting on the question, "What is the best result we can achieve in a particular situation?" Duty seizes opportunity, and it is defined by the circumstances we encounter. We justify our actions by saying, "I acted this way because the situation called for me to do _____."

Character. This system is dependent upon deep-seated/ingrained beliefs that we live by. Communities teach and reinforce these beliefs, and character becomes a matter of conscience. Army values and the methods we use to teach and reinforce them are efforts to build a character ethical system where these *values become a reflex action for us.* Here, duty is a bottom line – an internal line that we don't cross *regardless* of rules, results or situations. A soldier operating out of a character system of ethics could justify his/her actions similar to the way this young private explained his actions while on a mission in Vietnam:

"We all figured that we'd be dead in the next minute, so what difference did it make what we did?

But the longer I was over there, I became convinced that it was the other way around that counted – that because we might not be around much longer, we had to take extra care how we behaved."

— Pvt. Erickson, quoted in Daniel Lang's "Casualties of War"

People and organizations use all four systems in different times and in different combinations. So how do we decide which system to use or which system is better? As leaders I would like to suggest a model consistent with the Army's ethical decision making process that puts these systems to use in developing and evaluating courses of action.

The Land Navigation Model

If a value such as duty can be defined four different ways by rules, results, situation or character — how does this knowledge help us make ethical decisions? It doesn't, unless we ask the question: can duty be a combination of all four systems? So, the key question is how we make these four ethical systems work together? I believe the best way to put these systems to work is to approach an ethical problem like a land navigation problem, using the four ethical systems as tools for land navigation.

- Compass – rules, regulations, and principles. These elements orient us and give us direction. These elements also set limits to our actions.
- Destination/Distance – results, mission, intent, or vision. Where are we going? What is the end state? How far until we get there?
- Terrain – The situation, equipment, time available, etc. What is going on around us? What are our resources, and what do the circumstances require?
- Map – Character. What are the ingrained values that we use to interpret our situation, and what are the boundaries of conscience that we will not cross?

Thus the ethical decision process is somewhat revised to look like the accompanying chart.

A leader with land navigation skills will use a map, compass, destination and terrain together to choose the best route of travel. Disregarding any one system can mean a "no-go", even though it is possible to choose a route using any one system. Any soldier who has ever misused a compass, missed a pace count, misplotted a destination, walked through a swamp or wondered how a mysterious road not on the map suddenly "appeared" knows that selection of a good route always depends upon a combination of using all the systems together.

The same is true of ethical decision making. We can and we do make decisions using any one of four ethical systems, and for the most part our decisions are good. But what happens when a decision isn't easy and choosing between courses of action is difficult?

Professional soldiers will disagree about the best course of action to a particular problem, and they may do so *because* of the different ethical systems they are using to make their decisions – not because they are unethical or failing to reflect Army values. In these circumstances, taking the time to lay out the problem like a land navigation problem gives us tools to develop courses of action and to choose the route that best obeys the rules, completes the mission, regards the situation and reflects our character.

The land navigation method also offers help when all the systems do not align. It offers a self-critiquing mechanism that reveals the ethical traps that we are prone to trigger. When mission doesn't align with rules, or the situation we are facing seems to go against our conscience, or we find ourselves moving in a direction contrary to both our destination and our compass this should indicate a red flag for any course of action we are taking, and a method to rethink our approach to the problem.

Conclusion

Doing the right thing is as simple as building a bicycle. Doing the wrong thing is also as easy as falling off the bicycle we build. As leaders we are accountable for our decisions, and ethical problems will us give us much ground to cover. A land navigation approach to ethical problems builds upon the existing decision matrix by using the ethical systems and values already present in the Army. It holds us accountable to the all the ethical systems at work in any given situation by adding an internal check on our decisions. For the most part, the right thing is obvious, but for those tough times we need tools that provide us both the self-awareness and adaptability that allows us to make good decisions. Our profession demands this ability from us.

Comparing the old to the new

Army Ethical Decision Process

1. Define the problem.
2. Know the rules.
3. Develop and evaluate courses of action.
4. Choose the COA that best represents Army values.
5. Choose the COA that is consistent with all four systems.

Land Navigation Process

1. Define the problem.
2. Ask yourself:
   - What are the rules (compass)?
   - What is the result (destination/distance)?
   - What is the situation (terrain)?
   - What does character require (map)?
3. Align all four systems.
4. Develop COAs (routes).