



ETHICS FOR MARINES

How Ethics Drives Lethality
and Combat Effectiveness

COL DENNIS W. KATOLIN, USMC

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Preface

In April 2004, I was a lieutenant in 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, newly arrived in Al Qaim, Iraq. I had been in country less than twenty-four hours. That morning I was at the battalion retransmission site when an explosion went up roughly two kilometers from my position. The radio came alive. Someone asked for casualty status. A voice came back and said it was Whiskey Six, and that he was killed in action.

I felt hollow, terrified, and enraged at the same time. It was close to an out-of-body experience. I was a lieutenant in a battalion that had just lost a Marine in the opening hours of a deployment, and I stood there with no framework for what I was feeling and no vocabulary for what was happening to me. I was unable to recite the Law of Armed Conflict well enough at that point to know whether it mattered to the moment I was in. I certainly did not know the term ‘moral culmination.’ That deployment would take more of our Marines before it ended, and each time, the same thing happened. Something would move inside me and I would have no name for it, no means of addressing it, and no sense of how to keep it from eroding my capacity to lead.

I did not know it then, but I had walked into the problem this book is written to solve. The institution had not given me the intellectual tools to understand what ethics is, how it helps us in war, why it is hard, what it costs under sustained pressure, and what happens to warfighters and units when those costs go unaddressed. The deployment taught me in the hardest way possible that the tools were missing. It would take me another decade to understand what the tools should be.

In 2013, I attended the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program Instructor Trainer Course. That course was the first time I saw ethics taught inside the conditions it is actually meant to operate in. The character discipline of the program is not delivered in a clean classroom on a quiet morning. It is delivered under physical exhaustion, inside interpersonal violence, and in the elevated anxiety those conditions create. The whole point is to demand adherence to values when the body is failing, the heart rate is through the ceiling, we had to work as a team, and the instinct is to give up or

lash out. That is ethics as a warfighting function, finally in the environment where the function actually matters.

At some point during the course, an instructor was explaining why the program emphasizes ethics, morals, and values through its character discipline. He said that the goal was to give America a better citizen when the Marine rejoined society. I remember the moment clearly because it was the only thing in all of my MCMAF training that I disagreed with.

Making a better citizen is *a* benefit. It is not *the* benefit.

We do not conduct physical training so Marines can return to civilian life in better shape. We conduct physical training because war imposes physical stress, because warfighters culminate physically, and because physical capacity increases the speed and tempo at which we fight. A fit force closes faster, lasts longer, and recovers quicker. The civilian dividend is real, and it is secondary. We train for war.

Ethics is the same. A warfighter guided by values is a better citizen, and that matters. But that is not why the institution needs to teach ethics. The institution needs ethics because warfighters culminate morally, because moral culmination is as real and as operationally consequential as physical culmination, and because ethics, properly understood, produces cohesion. Cohesion accelerates the OODA loop. It increases speed and tempo. It enables a force to support policy, which is the theory of war we carry in MCDP 1. Ethics is too often used as a ‘feel good’ counterbalance to the brutal business of warfighting. I reject the dichotomous logic of ethics as a contradiction to success in war. *Ethics makes us better at war.*

MCMAF woke me up to the value of ethics in warfighting. It is the only place in the operating forces that has a codified curriculum on character and ethics inside the training of interpersonal violence, rather than outsourcing that work to a schoolhouse. That is exactly where this work belongs. My disagreement with the framing I heard in 2013 is not a criticism of the program. It is a single moment that pointed me toward a larger problem, and I have been working on that problem ever since.

Years later, I was a Faculty Advisor at Expeditionary Warfare School. My bosses there were exceptional leaders. On the way out of the job, one of them made an

observation I have carried with me since. He was not sure we needed to keep ethics on the curriculum. The reason was not hostility to ethics. The reason was that what we were teaching was not helping the students. We were not teaching them about moral culmination. We were not teaching them about ethical dilemmas. We were not teaching them how ethics is a function in war that generates speed and tempo and helps us support policy. We were giving them an obligatory hour from an academic, and the director of the school could report up the chain that the box had been checked. He thought critically about what we were doing, and he saw that it was not preparing officers to be commanders and principal staff officers. He was right. The honest thing to do, in the absence of a real curriculum, was to ask whether the curriculum we had was worth the time.

That moment stayed with me because it came from inside the institution, from a leader who was as serious about developing officers as any I have worked for. The problem was not that he did not value ethics. The problem was that the profession had not produced an ethics curriculum worth the time of the officers sitting in the chairs.

The larger problem is this. The Marine Corps has been mandating ethics for as long as any of us have worn the uniform, and the Marine Corps has never built an ethics doctrine. We have a doctrinal definition of war. We have doctrinal treatments of intelligence, logistics, command and control, and learning. We do not have a doctrinal treatment of ethics. We have not addressed, at the doctrinal level, why ethics is a function in war, why it is hard, where values come from, what moral culmination is, how ethical leadership and followership work, how ethical dilemmas should be reasoned through, or how to build an ethical organization. For an institution that tells its warfighters ethics is essential, we have not done the intellectual work to say what ethics is.

Two things have filled that vacuum, and both are inadequate.

The first is academia. The institution has largely delegated the study of ethics to chairs, centers, and visiting fellows. Once they speak, the box is checked. I do not say this to dismiss the individuals who hold those positions. Some of them are serious people doing serious work. I say it because the structural arrangement is wrong. Too many of the people we have asked to think about military ethics have

not served. Their credential is a graduate degree, and in some cases that degree is not in ethics or philosophy at all. They do not study warfighting. Their output tends toward two modes. The first is aspirational, bravado telling Marines they are like ‘the knights-of-legend’, prose that tells warfighters who they should want to be without telling them what ethics is or how it operates under pressure. This approach is motivational and inspirational, but it is not informational. The second is the survey of Kant, Aristotle, and Hobbes, delivered as if the names themselves were the instruction. Neither mode reaches the warfighter, because neither mode speaks to those who carried the weight of a decision in combat and studied the nature of war as a profession demands.

The second inadequate answer is the substitution of law and regulation for ethics. The Law of Armed Conflict. The Uniform Code of Military Justice. Service policy. Command directives. These are necessary, but they are not ethics. They are specific and niche. They tell a warfighter what is permitted and what is prohibited inside a defined set of circumstances. They do not provide a framework for the circumstances the rulebook did not anticipate, and war is full of those circumstances. A warfighter who has only been taught rules has been given a checklist. A warfighter who has been taught ethics has been given a way of thinking. The institution has settled for the checklist and called it complete.

This book does the work the institution has not done, and doing so inside the tradition the institution already uses to provide Marines a way of thinking about the awful work of war.

The book is modeled on the Marine Corps Doctrinal Publications and is reconciled with them. I chose this route because of the utility of *Warfighting*. It takes tens of thousands of pages from dozens of war theorists and distills them into a concise and relevant framework for Marines. Its brevity is not a shortfall. It’s an asset.

MCDP 1 teaches us about war by examining its nature, our theory of war, and how to prepare and conduct war. The functional publications, on intelligence, logistics, command and control, and learning, apply that same architecture to the functions that support warfighting. *Ethics is a function in war*. It deserves a doctrinal treatment that examines its nature, its theory, and its preparation and conduct, so that a Lance Corporal, a Staff Sergeant, a Squadron Commander, a Sergeant Major, and a General

share a common intellectual framework and a common language for the moral dimension of what they do.

Our existing doctrine already carries implied tasks about ethics. They are embedded in the treatment of cohesion, trust, leadership, and the moral forces of war. An implied task, in the profession of arms, is a task the order does not specify but the mission requires. The problem is that an implied task that is never converted into a specified task is a task that will not be executed under pressure. This book is that conversion. It takes what our doctrine has implied about ethics for decades and states it, defines it, and gives warfighters and leaders the framework to prepare for it, teach it, and act on it.

What follows is a precise definition of ethics. An argument for why ethics is a warfighting function. A theory of how it operates. An examination of why it is hard and where warfighters are most likely to culminate. A framework for understanding the sources of values, the nature of ethical dilemmas, the demands of ethical leadership, the obligations of ethical followership, and the construction of ethical organizations. A doctrine, in other words, for a function the institution has declared essential and left undefined.

I write this from inside the institution, not from a lectern. The argument in these pages is not built on credentials. It is built on a problem the profession has failed to solve and a conviction that solving it is the profession's work to do. To be clear, the Marine Corps has not adopted this as its official doctrine. It never mandated this. I wrote it because I saw a gap in our understanding of war and was compelled to arm Marines with a philosophy of ethics that would create stronger Marines, stronger teams, and a path to 'keep our honor clean.' The audience I have in mind is every warfighter who has been told that ethics matter and never been told, in terms that hold up under pressure, what ethics is, how it helps in war, and how to create ethical teams.

The institution has mandated ethics and has not defined it or armed Marines with how to operationalize it. That work is long overdue. This book provides it.

Semper Fidelis,
D.W. Katolin

Ethics For Marines

Chapter 1. The Nature of Ethics

Understanding Ethics – Ethics Defined – Applied Ethics – Defining Values – Morality – Logical Fallacies and Mental Traps – Critical Thinking – Ethical Dilemmas – Ethical Relativism – Reflection – Humility – Identities and the Marine Identity

Chapter 2. The Theory of Ethics

Ethics and Policy – Support and Defense of the Constitution – Ethics and Trust – Trust and Maneuver Warfare – Culture and the Nature of War – Culture in Command and Control – Marine Corps Ethos and Ethics in a Military Organization – Ethics in Horizontal Cohesion – Ethical Leaders and Followers – Ethics and the Nature of War – Moral Injuries – Aggression – Empathy – Ethics and Will – Perseverance and Resolve – Ethics' Value in War

Chapter 3. Ethical Development

Approach to Ethical Development – Organizational Culture – Strong Culture – Weak Culture – Subculture Alignment – Function Ethics – Aligning Individuals to Unit Values – Ethical Education – Ethical Training – Consistent Reinforcement – Resistance to Ethical Development – Integrated Training Plan – Deliberate Planning and Avoiding Abuse

Chapter 1

The Nature of Ethics

“...the good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, or if there are more kinds of virtue than one, in accordance with the best and most perfect kind.”

-Aristotle

“The raw material of war is the human being.”

-Warfighting

INTRODUCTION

The value of ethics cannot be overstated. Any study of war that does not address values in action, the sources of those values, and the elements that challenge ethical conduct is ultimately incomplete. While the Uniform Code of Military Justice and internal orders provide specific directives that govern behavior, all Marines must understand the broader underlying traits, qualities, and principles that underpin those laws. That understanding reveals the why behind the rules and provides a framework for doing the right thing when no specific directive exists.

This chapter explains the nature of ethics. It provides the definitions and concepts necessary for a Marine to understand the relationship between values, morals, ethics, ethical dilemmas, and sources of values. Understanding these relationships and how they inform thinking is what ultimately produces ethical action.

UNDERSTANDING ETHICS

Being ethical is the single most important quality of a Marine. Physical fitness, mental acuity, and technical competence are essential but they are not defining. Ethics is defining because it shapes and enhances every other quality. An organization that seeks to create cohesive teams working selflessly toward a common goal in spite of the challenges they face requires its members to apply the qualities, traits, and principles that the organization has determined are essential to its purpose. Applying values in action requires constant study and creative interpretation. That is what ethical conduct demands of every Marine.

ETHICS DEFINED

Ethics are principles of conduct governing an individual or group. More specifically ethics are the manifestation of values through action. This definition requires three things simultaneously. An individual or organization must have clearly defined values. Those values must be understood well enough to be applied in action. And they must actually be applied, even when doing so creates friction, inconvenience, or danger.

Ethics requires creativity because no specific directive can anticipate every situation. The individual Marine must ultimately determine how best to express a value through action when no guidance exists. Ethics also requires personal integrity because ethical conduct often demands additional effort, burden, or risk. The temptation to act on what is comfortable or convenient rather than what is right is real. Integrity is what prevents self-deception when the two diverge.

Ethical conduct does not require popularity. It requires adherence to values regardless of the social cost. A Marine who corrects a teammate's bearing when that teammate is exhausted and frustrated is applying loyalty, the quality of faithfulness to country, Corps, unit, seniors, subordinates, and peers, even at the cost of momentary discomfort. That is ethical conduct in its most practical form.

Every organization must decide what values matter and why. That decision flows from an honest analysis of the organization's purpose and what qualities are required to fulfill it. Those values then become the framework for discriminating between right and wrong. Behavior that reflects the organization's values is ethical. Behavior that contradicts them is unethical. Unethical conduct stems from one of two sources. The first is malicious intent, knowing what is wrong and doing it anyway. The

second is ignorance of values or a failure to apply them creatively in action.

Every Marine must consistently ask whether what they are about to do reflects or departs from the institution's core values. That habit, developed deliberately over time, is the foundation of ethical conduct.

APPLIED ETHICS

There are three categories of ethics. The first is meta-ethics, which studies the fundamental nature of what constitutes good versus bad and right versus wrong. It is a broad philosophical approach that does not seek to provide specific guidance on how to act. Meta-ethics asks what is good or bad. It does not answer what to do about it.

The second category is normative ethics, which moves beyond the question of what is good or bad to create rules of conduct. Where meta-ethics seeks to understand what is right, normative ethics attempts to build models of what right action looks like.

The third category, and the one this publication is concerned with, is applied ethics. Applied ethics is a focused element of normative ethics. It addresses the ethical standards within specific fields or occupations so that those fields can fulfill their purpose. Applied ethics produces ethical codes for law enforcement, medicine, business, and the military.

This publication is focused entirely on the applied ethics of warfighting. The remainder of this chapter addresses the nature of ethics in general terms only to build the framework that Chapters 2 and 3 will then apply specifically to warfighting. The goal throughout is not philosophical

understanding for its own sake. It is doctrine that Marines can actually use.

DEFINING VALUES

A value is a principle, concept, or quality deemed important to an individual or an organization. Values are linked to an organization's purpose. They shape individual and collective action in ways that help the organization fulfill that purpose. Values are not abstract ideals. They are operational requirements derived from what the organization exists to do.

People rarely belong to a single organization. Every Marine is simultaneously a member of a family, a community, a religious tradition, a professional institution, and potentially other social groups. Each of those memberships carries its own values. Many will be complementary. Some will diverge. The Marine who has not identified which value source governs their conduct will be inconsistent at precisely the moments when consistency is most critical.

This is why the Marine Corps requires its members to prioritize their identity as Marines above all other identities. Not because other identities are without value but because diverging value sources produce divided loyalties and divided loyalties produce unreliable conduct in war. The institution's values must govern. (See Figure 1)

Sources of Values

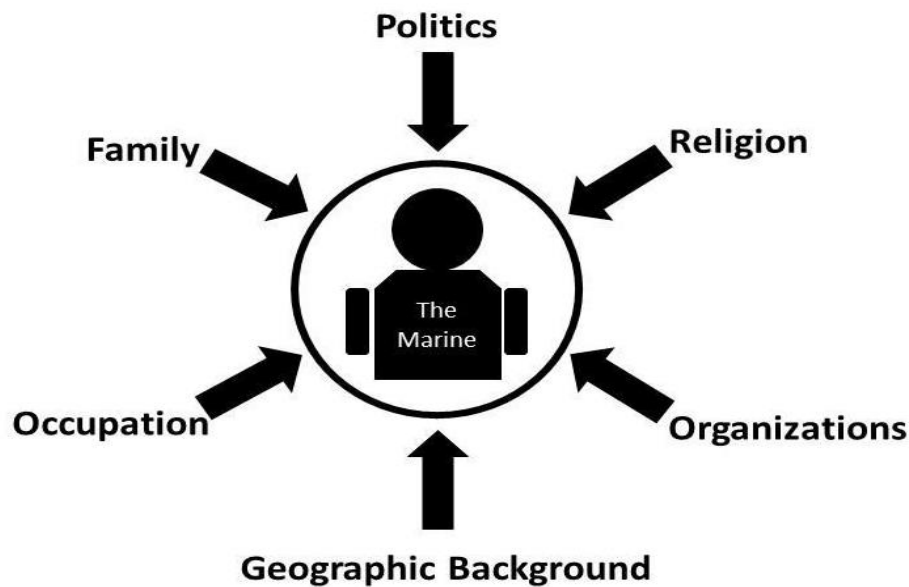


Figure 1: An individual's sources of values

MORALITY

Ethics, values, and morals are related but distinct. Values define what is important. Morality uses those values to evaluate whether an action is right or wrong. Ethics translates that evaluation into action. The three are sequential. Ethics requires morality. Morality requires values. Morality is principles relating to right and wrong or good and bad. ¹

Morality is the bridge between knowing what matters and doing something about it. It answers the question what is the right thing to do by applying values honestly and logically to a specific situation. That

¹ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/morality>

honesty is the demanding part. Morality requires intellectual integrity because it forces a Marine to use values when determining right from wrong even when the answer contradicts what is comfortable or convenient.

When someone consistently applies this honest and logical approach to value-driven evaluation, they develop what can be described as a moral lens. A moral lens is the perception and evaluation of events using values. It is a positive framework that connects values to ethics by ensuring that a Marine considers whether their actions truly reflect their values before they act rather than after.

The bully analogy illustrates the distinction cleanly. A child sees a bully picking on a younger child at a playground. The child assesses that the bully's conduct is wrong because it departs from the child's values. That assessment makes the child moral. But the child has not yet acted. Once the child intervenes, whether by getting a teacher or telling the bully to stop, the child becomes ethical because they have acted on their values. If the child then places themselves between the bully and the younger child and is willing to fight for them, the child has become an ethical warrior.² (See Figure 2)

² Jack Hoban, *The Ethical Warrior: Values, Morals and Ethics for Life, Work, and Service*, RGI Media Publications, Spring Lake, 2012. p.114.

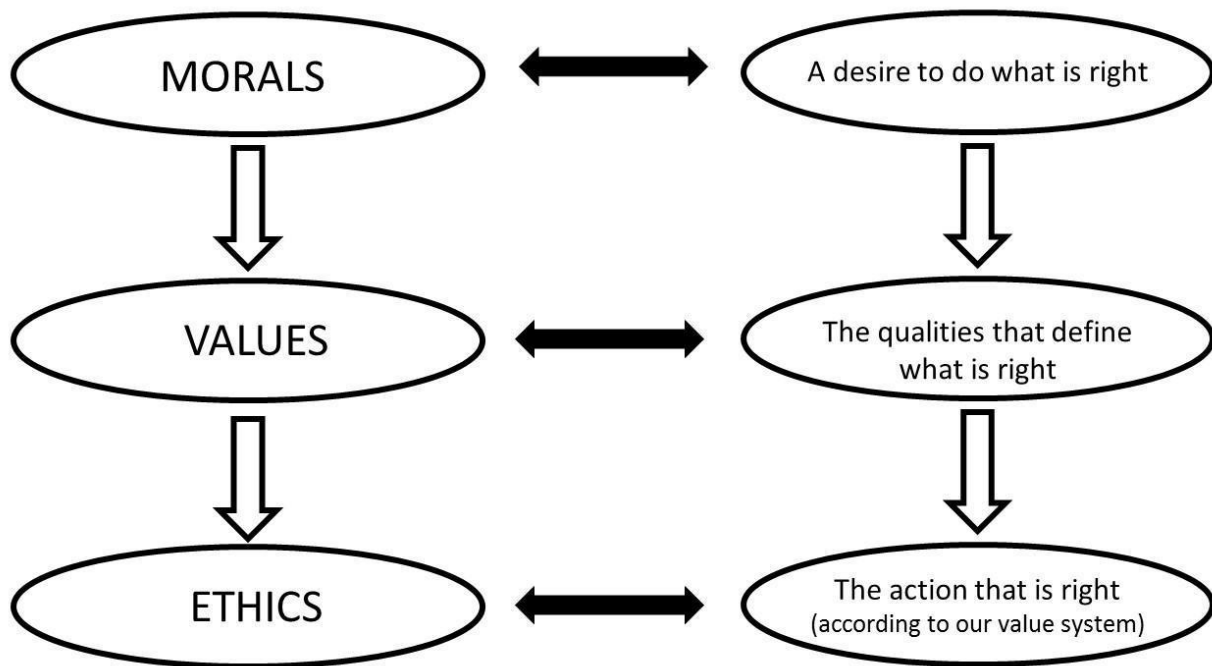


Figure 2: Delineating between morals, values, and ethics

LOGICAL FALLACIES AND MENTAL TRAPS

Morality demands logic and intellectual integrity. Both are vulnerable to predictable patterns of flawed thinking that can skew perception, corrupt reasoning, and produce unethical conduct while appearing internally consistent. Understanding these patterns is essential to maintaining the honest decision making that ethics requires.

A logical fallacy is a flawed or deceptive argument that can be disproven through reasoning. Four fallacies appear most frequently in the kind of poor choices that produce unethical conduct.

The bandwagon fallacy holds that something is right if enough people agree with it. Large numbers of people can be wrong. Consensus is not a substitute for values-based reasoning. When the majority is wrong

someone must exercise moral courage and say so, tactfully and respectfully, but clearly.

The strawman argument counters a position by attacking a distorted or irrelevant version of it rather than the position itself. It redirects debate through emotional appeal rather than logic. A Marine who responds to a suggestion about improving administrative processes by defending the unit's honor is attacking something nobody raised. The original argument is left unaddressed.

Ad hominem, more commonly known as mudslinging, attacks the person making an argument rather than the argument itself. It may target irrelevant characteristics such as rank, gender, race, or past mistakes that have no bearing on the matter at hand. Attacking the messenger rather than the message is a reliable indicator that the attacker has no logical counter to the message.

The false dichotomy presents two options as mutually exclusive when they are not. Asking whether Marines should be fit or well-read implies the two are in opposition. They are not. The Marine Corps requires both. Recognizing false dichotomies prevents the artificial narrowing of options that produces poor and often unethical decisions.

In addition to logical fallacies there are cognitive pitfalls that corrupt reasoning not through flawed argument structure but through unconscious bias in how information is perceived and processed.

Confirmation bias is the tendency to favor information that supports conclusions already held and to discount evidence that contradicts them.³ Anchoring is the tendency to rely too heavily on the first piece of information received, making subsequent information harder to weigh

³ Cherry, Kendra, "How Cognitive Biases Influence How You Think and Act," <<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-a-cognitive-bias-2794963>>.

fairly.⁴ Sunk cost thinking continues a course of action because of prior investment even when that course is no longer prudent. Groupthink occurs when groups of individuals make irrational or non-optimal decisions because of the urge to conform. It produces irrational or suboptimal decisions because of the social pressure to conform rather than reason independently.⁵

A person's schema, the framework through which they interpret experience, shapes all of these pitfalls.⁶ Two Marines can observe the same event and interpret it entirely differently based on the experiences, training, and cultural context each brings to the observation. Understanding one's own schema is essential to honest moral reasoning.

These fallacies and pitfalls compromise the quality of ethical decision making. Avoiding them requires the discipline to recognize them when they appear and the intellectual integrity to correct course before they produce unethical action.

CRITICAL THINKING

The most effective tool for overcoming logical fallacies and cognitive pitfalls is critical thinking. Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating one's own reasoning with the goal of improving it.⁷ It is not negative thinking. The word critical simply means examining thought processes to ensure they are producing sound decisions.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ "Groupthink," Psychology Today, <<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/groupthink>>.

⁶ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/schemata>

⁷ Linda Elder and Richard Paul, *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking: Concepts and Tools*, The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2006, p. 4.

Critical thinking applies five standards to information and reasoning.⁸ Clarity asks whether something is genuinely understood and communicated in a way that addresses what was asked. Accuracy asks whether the information is precise and factual. Relevance asks whether the information connects to the problem being solved. Logic asks whether conclusions follow from evidence and sound reasoning. Fairness demands impartial treatment of information regardless of its source or whether it supports the conclusion one would prefer to reach.

Applying these standards to values-based reasoning is how morality develops over time. A Marine who repeatedly asks whether they are falling for a false dichotomy, allowing confirmation bias to filter evidence, or reaching a conclusion driven by emotion rather than logic develops a mental habit of values-aligned decision making. That habit becomes increasingly automatic with practice.

Critical thinking must be self-directed. It requires the discipline to recognize when one's own reasoning is compromised and the honesty to correct it. Fear, frustration, and anxiety are powerful forces on thought. They can make emotionally satisfying or comfort-based decisions feel rational. Critical thinking is the mechanism that keeps values in control of decisions when those forces are most intense.

Any organization seeking to move faster than its adversaries must cultivate people who think this way. The OODA loop depends on accurate observation and sound orientation. Both are compromised by unchecked logical fallacies and cognitive pitfalls. Critical thinking is not a soft skill. It is an operational requirement.

⁸ Ibid.

ETHICAL DILEMMAS

An ethical dilemma is a conflict between two or more values.⁹ By adhering to one value a person violates another. These dilemmas arise from multiple sources.

The first source is competing value systems from different identities. A Marine who grew up in a community that values nonviolence faces an ethical dilemma when the institution requires the lawful application of violence in war. Both values are real. Both have legitimate sources. The Marine must determine which takes priority.

The second source is conflict between values within the same system. Loyalty to a teammate and loyalty to a mission can pull in opposite directions. Enthusiasm and professional bearing can conflict in the same moment. In either form the Marine will be right and wrong simultaneously depending on which value governs their response.

The critical discipline here is prior prioritization. Marines cannot wait until they are inside a dilemma to decide which value takes precedence. That decision must be made in advance through reflection and honest reasoning. A Marine who enters a difficult situation without having already answered the question which identity governs my conduct will make that decision under pressure, emotionally, and often badly.

The Marine Corps does not require Marines to renounce other identities or abandon other value sources. Family, faith, and community are legitimate and often complementary parts of a Marine's character. They cannot, however, take priority over the institution's values in the conduct of duty. A Marine who consistently prioritizes another value source over the Corps' should honestly reassess whether serving as a Marine is right

⁹ Hegde, Susmitha, *What Is An Ethical Dilemma?*, Science ABC, www.scienceabc.com, 2019.

for them. That is not a judgment. It is a recognition that the mission is too consequential for divided loyalties.

All Marines must uphold the institution's values. Deviation from them is not a personal matter. It is an operational liability. The Marine Corps' mission has compelled it to place enormous weight on these qualities because they are directly linked to success in war.

ETHICAL RELATIVISM

Ethical relativism holds that there are no absolute values and that all values are relative to time, place, persons, and circumstances.¹⁰ It allows someone to hold that stealing is wrong for them but acceptable for another person. It permits a Marine to apply the institution's values on duty while reverting to a different value system off duty.

The Marine Corps does not accommodate ethical relativism within its ranks. Unit cohesion, trust, and consistency of performance require Marines to adhere to the institution's values at all times. Ethical relativism enables post hoc rationalization, the reverse engineering of justifications for unethical conduct after the fact. That pattern is incompatible with the reliability warfighting demands.

The one context where the Corps does accept ethical relativism is in its interactions with those outside the institution. The Marine Corps does not impose its warfighting values on civilians. Applied ethics are specific to a profession. Civilians have not agreed to live by the warfighting ethos. Marines have. This means the institution's values apply to every Marine

¹⁰ Newstrom, John, *Organizational Behavior: Human Behavior at Work Organizations*, McGraw Hill Publishing, New York, 2007. p 87.

at all times without exception, while those same values are not imposed on those who have not chosen this profession.

Ethical relativism is particularly dangerous in operational environments where stress, danger, and exhaustion create powerful temptations to set aside values in exchange for comfort or safety. Those are precisely the moments when consistent adherence to values matters most. A force that is reliable only when conditions are comfortable is not reliable at all.

REFLECTION

Critical thinking requires time and honest self-examination. Reflection provides both. Reflection is careful deliberate thought about experience, values, and their application.¹¹ It is not passive. It is a disciplined practice that enhances ethical decision making by creating the space for honest analysis before, during, and after action.

Reflection is anticipatory. A Marine who has spent time thinking through how values apply to situations likely to arise in their operating environment has effectively completed three quarters of an OODA loop before those situations occur. When the moment comes they observe, orient, and decide with greater speed and accuracy because the analytical work was done in advance.

¹¹ https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/reflection

Reflection helps us anticipate the emotional toll that comes with being ethical. It requires declarative stances on issues, giving priority to values at the cost of convenience and comfort. As previously stated, this is not always popular, creating social stress. For Marines, being ethical can result in danger. After all, the value of courage requires one to act in the presence of fear. One cause of fear is violence or death. When determining what is right or wrong, one must also anticipate the moral and emotional challenges associated with their ethical choices. When applying this to militaries, Clausewitz wrote that:

“Men of low intelligence, therefore, cannot possess determination in the same sense in which we use the word. They may act without hesitation in a crisis, but if they do, they act without reflection; and a man who acts without reflection cannot, of course, be torn by doubt.”¹²

Reflection is also retrospective. Examining previous decisions, identifying where reasoning was sound and where it was compromised by emotion, bias, or fatigue, builds the moral lens over time. This process, sometimes called reflective learning, is how experience becomes wisdom rather than simply accumulated time.¹³

General Mattis, serving as Secretary of Defense, addressed this directly in guidance to the entire Department of Defense. He wrote that prior reflection and the choice to live by an ethical code will reinforce what Marines stand for so they remain morally strong especially in the face of adversity. In a subsequent interview he added that if he were to identify the single biggest problem of leadership in the Information Age it would

¹² Clausewitz, Carl, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989. p. 103.

¹³ William T. Branch, Maura George, *Reflection-based Learning for Professional Ethical Formation*, AMA Journal of Ethics, 2017, p. 351.

be a lack of reflection. Solitude allows leaders to reflect while others are reacting.

The information age actively works against reflection. Portable devices and constant connectivity saturate Marines with stimuli that compete for attention and time. Discipline in managing those distractions is not a personal preference. It is an operational requirement. An organization that does not deliberately protect time for reflection will produce Marines who react rather than decide and who are driven by emotion rather than values when conditions become most demanding.

Organizations that consistently outpace their adversaries cultivate people who have internalized their values deeply enough to act on them without deliberation. That internalization does not happen automatically. It is the product of reflection practiced consistently over time.

HUMILITY

Humility is the quality of having a modest opinion of one's own importance.¹⁴ It is not self-deprecation or the performance of modesty. It is the disciplined recognition that one's knowledge, judgment, and capabilities are finite and that the knowledge, judgment, and capabilities of others have value.

For Marines humility is an operational requirement. A Marine who cannot accurately assess their own limitations cannot be trusted to accurately assess a tactical situation, seek counsel when it is needed, or acknowledge error before that error compounds into something catastrophic. Overconfidence in one's own judgment is among the most dangerous

¹⁴ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/humility>

cognitive states a leader can occupy. It produces the closed reasoning that logical fallacies exploit and the rigid thinking that prevents adaptation when circumstances change.

Humility enables learning. Chester Barnard, writing on the functions of organizational leadership, observed that effective executives must remain genuinely open to input from every level of the organization because the information required for sound decisions rarely resides entirely at the top. A Marine who believes their rank or experience exempts them from learning has confused authority with wisdom. Authority is assigned. Wisdom is earned through the honest integration of experience, feedback, and continued study.

Humility also enables ethical conduct specifically. A Marine who cannot acknowledge their own potential for bias, error, or self-deception cannot apply the intellectual integrity that morality demands. The logical fallacies and cognitive pitfalls addressed earlier in this chapter gain their greatest foothold in people who are too proud to question their own reasoning. Humility is the disposition that keeps those pitfalls visible rather than allowing them to operate unchecked beneath the surface of confident decision making.

This does not mean humility requires deference to every opinion or hesitation in the face of every decision. Marines must be decisive. Humility is compatible with decisiveness because it operates before the decision rather than during it. A humble Marine seeks input, examines their own reasoning honestly, identifies their blind spots, and then decides with confidence. The confidence is earned precisely because the reasoning has been tested rather than assumed sound.

Clausewitz understood this. He wrote that the great uncertainty of all data in war and the interplay of chance and good fortune require that a

commander bring genuine intellectual humility to every assessment of the situation because the map is never the territory and the plan is never the battle. The commander who approaches war with the assumption that their initial assessment is correct will be slower to adapt when reality diverges from expectation. The commander who approaches with honest humility about the limits of their information will be faster because they anticipated the divergence.

Every Marine regardless of rank must practice humility as a deliberate discipline. Seek feedback. Acknowledge gaps in knowledge rather than concealing them. Correct errors quickly rather than defending them. Learn from those below as readily as from those above. The Marine who does these things consistently is not weak. They are building the honest and accurate self-assessment that makes every other quality in this chapter function as intended.

IDENTITIES AND THE MARINE IDENTITY

Every Marine arrives at the institution with multiple identities already formed. Family. Community. Faith. Ethnicity. Each carries its own beliefs, values, and behavioral norms. Many of these will complement the Marine Corps' values and should be embraced. Some will diverge. Where divergence occurs the Marine must determine which identity governs conduct.

A dichotomy of identities occurs when the value systems of two identities are incompatible. A Marine raised in a community that prohibits violence faces exactly this dichotomy when the institution requires the lawful application of violence in war. The dichotomy is real. The resolution is mandatory. One identity must take priority.

The Marine Corps requires every Marine to prioritize their identity as a Marine above all others. That identity is earned. It is obtained only after demonstrating honor, courage, and commitment and completing the training and education that transforms a civilian into a Marine. Once earned it must govern. The gravity of warfare and the cost of its consequences in human life leave no room for identity divided at the moment of decision.

This requirement is not a false dichotomy. The Corps does not assert that Marines can only identify as Marines. Other identities and their values are often complementary and strengthen the character of the individual Marine. They are accommodated where they align. They cannot take priority where they conflict. A Marine who consistently finds that another identity is governing their conduct in ways that contradict the institution's values must honestly assess whether serving as a Marine is right for them.

Prioritizing the Marine identity strengthens culture, reinforces the application of the Corps' ethos, and produces the cohesion, resolve, and warfighting effectiveness the mission demands.

CONCLUSION

Ethics is not a peripheral concern for the Marine Corps. It is a function of war. The concepts addressed in this chapter, values, morality, applied ethics, critical thinking, logical fallacies, ethical dilemmas, relativism, reflection, and identity, are not philosophical abstractions. They are the foundational elements of a framework that produces reliable ethical conduct under the conditions that test it most.

A Marine who understands these concepts and applies them consistently is not simply a better person. They are a more effective warfighter. Their decisions under pressure are faster because they have already been made in reflection. Their conduct is more reliable because it is governed by internalized values rather than situational convenience. Their contribution to unit cohesion is greater because their teammates can trust them to act in accordance with shared values regardless of the circumstances.

Chapter 2 will show how that individual ethical framework connects to trust, cohesion, combat power, and ultimately to the policy the Marine Corps exists to serve. The individual Marine is the beginning of that chain. This chapter has established the foundation. The chapters that follow will show why it matters in war and how to build it deliberately across an entire organization.

Chapter 2

Theory of Ethics

“When we go to war, we go to war with our values.”

-General Joseph Dunford

“If you treat a civilian population with anything other than respect, you’re working for your enemy.”

-Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster

INTRODUCTION

Military ethics are an applied ethic focused on the qualities that are valuable to a warfighting organization. Those qualities become a unit's values and military ethics are the manifestation of those values through action. That action translates into stronger warfighting capacity and capability, ultimately resulting in success in combat.

While there are secondary benefits to ethical conduct, among them a strong public image and individual character development, the fundamental basis for Marine Corps ethics is mission accomplishment. The theory of ethics supports warfighting in two specific ways. The first is that ethics supports the theory of war by ensuring that the manner in which Marines operate advances national policy. The second is that ethics creates trust, which produces the cohesion that is central to maneuver warfare. (see figure 3) Everything in this chapter flows from those two connections.

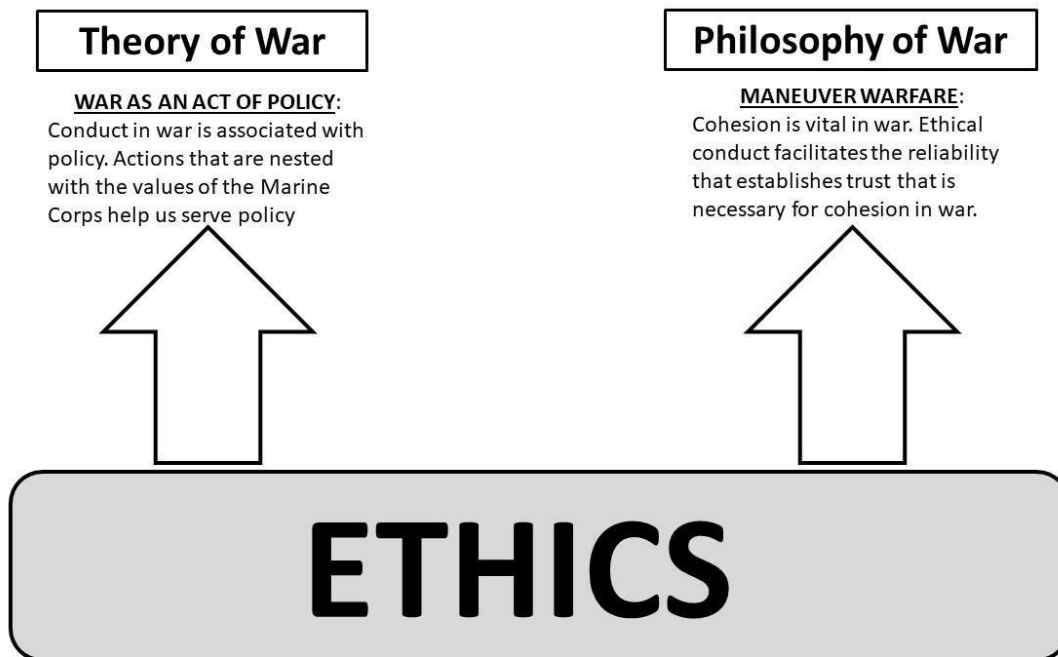


Figure 3: Our theory of ethics supports our theory and philosophy of war

ETHICS AND POLICY

The Marine Corps has adopted Clausewitz's view that war is an extension of both policy with addition of military force.¹⁵ *Warfighting* states that "the single most important thought to understand about our theory is that war must serve policy."¹⁶ In his book, *Supreme Command*, Eliot Cohen elaborates on Clausewitz's approach to tactical actions having strategic implications. Cohen states that:

"Although Clausewitz fully recognized the power of war untrammelled to overwhelm political rationality-by intoxicating men with blood lust, or through the sheer difficulty of making things happen, which he termed as friction-he thought that all activity in war had potential political

¹⁵ Clausewitz, Carl, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989. p. 88.

¹⁶ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p.23.

consequences and repercussions, and that every effort must therefore be made to bend war to serve the ends of politics.”¹⁷

Marines are apolitical by profession. The oath every Marine swears subordinates personal political preference to the professional obligation to support and defend the Constitution. The Constitution gives the power to make national policy to America's elected leaders. Those leaders may provide guidance on how a war is executed based on policy considerations. Marines must understand how their activities impact policy for good or bad. Any study of warfare that does not acknowledge how ethics shapes the ability to wage war effectively is incomplete.

The Marine Corps' success at Iwo Jima illustrates this directly. That tactical victory carried strategic weight at a moment when American public support for the war effort was eroding. The image of Marines and Sailors raising the flag on Mount Suribachi was seen across the country. It gave the American people evidence that success was within reach and reinforced support for the policy objective of unconditional Japanese surrender. Ethical conduct made that image possible. Unethical conduct at Iwo Jima would have undermined the very policy the battle was fought to advance.

Article I of the Constitution gives Congress authority to govern all land and naval forces. This couples the manner in which Marines conduct operations directly to the achievement of policy. Marines must view themselves in garrison and in combat as ambassadors of the nation and of the policy they are sent to fulfill.

When Marines act in accordance with institutional values they give legitimacy to policy and serve as a tangible instrument of national

¹⁷ Cohen, Elliot, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*, The Free Press Publishing, New York, 2002. p.8.

leadership. Inversely unethical actions contradict policy objectives. Such contradictions impede strategic goals regardless of tactical success. This link between tactical conduct and strategic consequence is often captured in the concept of the strategic corporal. While this phrase is frequently invoked in a negative context, where a Marine's unethical actions at the tactical level harm strategic policy, the inverse is equally true. A Marine's ethical actions at the tactical level can directly advance national policy.

The means by which war is waged carry equal importance to the ends being sought. If Marines accomplish tasks through unethical means those accomplishments will be short lived. Erosion of popular support from the American people, from partners, and from allies will damage both the Marine Corps' reputation and America's credibility. Ethical conduct demonstrates professionalism, assures civilian leadership that Marines are aligned with policy guidance, builds support for those policies, and makes strategic success more likely.

SUPPORT AND DEFENSE OF THE CONSTITUTION

Every Marine swears an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. That oath is not sworn to a political party, an individual leader, or a personal ideology. It is sworn to a document that codifies the form of government the founders established to secure the liberties articulated in the Declaration of Independence.

The Constitution matters to the theory of ethics because it identifies what Marine Corps ethics ultimately serve. Ethics serve policy. The Constitution defines the framework within which all policy is made. Understanding and defending that framework is therefore not merely a

legal obligation. It is the ethical foundation of everything the Marine Corps does in war.

Article II identifies the President as Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Article I gives Congress the power to declare war, fund the military, and regulate all land and naval forces. This deliberate diffusion of authority was designed to prevent the concentration of military power in any single individual. Marines serve both branches and by extension the American people who elect them.

Supporting the Constitution means faithful execution of all lawful orders issued through the constitutional chain of command regardless of personal political preference. Marines vote as private citizens. They serve as professionals. In their professional capacity all personal political views are subordinated to the obligation to support the duly elected government in the conduct of its constitutional duties.

Defending the Constitution means more than physical defense against foreign enemies. It means conducting operations in a manner consistent with the values and principles that document enshrines. A Marine who acts unethically in the conduct of operations is not merely violating a regulation. They are acting against the very framework their oath obligates them to defend.

This is why constitutional fidelity is a component of the theory of ethics and not merely a legal formality. The ethical Marine understands that every action in war either reinforces or undermines the legitimacy of the government they serve. That understanding connects individual ethical conduct directly to the strategic level of war.

ETHICS AND TRUST

Trust is defined as reliance on the integrity, strength, and ability of a person or organization. Actions, good or bad, communicate true intentions and reveal what is or is not valuable to the person or unit taking them. When Marines consistently use institutional values to govern their actions they demonstrate the critical thinking and consistency of conduct that assures those around them that a values-based intellectual framework shapes what they do.

The Marine Corps' values, nested in the warfighting ethos, provide a common foundation for everyone who adopts the identity of United States Marine. Shared core values coupled with shared leadership traits form the basis for shared behavior. Trust is earned by demonstrating that one's values and actions are consistent and predictable. Ethics is the foundation of trust.

Every action is an opportunity to communicate. Every task, no matter how routine, is a chance to demonstrate understanding and application of the values the Marine Corps deems essential. This must be habitual, in garrison and in combat, applied consistently over time. The Marine who performs to the standard only when observed has not internalized the values. The Marine who performs to the standard regardless of observation has.

Character is the complex of mental and ethical traits that mark an individual, a unit, or a nation. The mental dimension of character is the moral framework used to interpret values, understand their importance, and apply them when determining right from wrong. The ethical dimension is the resolve to implement those values through action regardless of fear or frustration.

Competence and character, being a good or sincere person or having ethics or integrity, is foundational and essential to trust.¹⁸ Though incompetence must be corrected, character takes priority. An extremely competent Marine who is weak in character erodes trust in their loyalty to teammates and unit. A Marine who demonstrates strength of character will apply effort to develop competence. Reliability, the consistent demonstration of character through action over time, is the fundamental component of trust.

TRUST AND MANEUVER WARFARE

Warfighting states that maneuver warfare is the warfighting philosophy that seeks to shatter the enemy's cohesion through a variety of rapid, focused, and unexpected actions.¹⁹ A study of this philosophy reveals that while attriting enemy capability matters, it is the intangible quality of cohesion that maneuver warfare is designed to destroy. Cohesion is therefore central to warfighting effectiveness on both sides of every engagement.

Sustaining the Transformation defines cohesion as “the intense bonding of Marines and units that results in absolute trust. It is characterized by the subordination of self and an intuitive understanding of the collective actions of the unit and of the importance of teamwork, resulting in increased combat power.”²⁰

¹⁸ Covey, Steven M. R. *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything*, Free Press Publishing, New York, 2006. p. 29.

¹⁹ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p.73.

²⁰ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Sustaining the Transformation*, MCRP 6-11D, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p. 24.

While this definition is friendly-centric it applies equally to adversaries. Marines seek to shatter the enemy's trust in their leadership, their units' ability to mutually support, and their capacity to accomplish their mission. Breaking cohesion erodes will. This is why cohesion is a source of strength and why ethical conduct, which builds cohesion, is an operational asset rather than a constraint.

Once a Marine reflects on values and applies them consistently through action they demonstrate the reliability that enables trust. Once trust is established cooperation follows. *Tactics* defines cooperation as the union of self-discipline and initiative in pursuit of a common goal.²¹ Cooperation aggregates collective capabilities and focuses them on a shared challenge. This aggregation of our collective capabilities enables us to apply combined arms, which uses all the available resources to our advantage.²² To counteract one capability the enemy must become more vulnerable to another.

Trust is invaluable and must be cultivated deliberately. It takes sustained effort to develop. Failures of knowledge stemming from insufficient study, selfishness, and deliberate deception shatter trust and degrade cohesion. Trust is earned in drops and spilled in buckets. (See figure 4)

²¹ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Tactics*, MCDP 1-3, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p. 92.

²² Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 2018. p.4-21

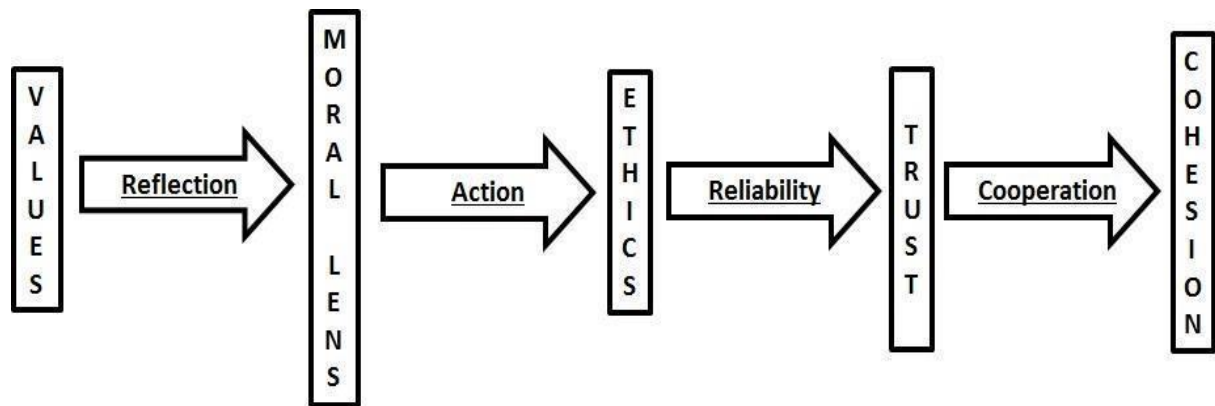


Figure 4: Understanding ethics facilitates cohesion

CULTURE AND THE NATURE OF WAR

War is the violent clash of irreconcilable wills characterized by the use of military force. While technology has always played a vital role in warfare, war is ultimately a social phenomenon. Its nature encompasses friction, violence, disorder, complexity, and uncertainty, compounded by physical, mental, and moral factors. Any organization that seeks to succeed in such an environment must develop a culture capable of coping with those demands.

The Marine Corps must have a culture that empowers teams to operate cohesively under the conditions war imposes. That culture must be capable of achieving assigned ends through ways that are successful and acceptable in spite of the obstacles inherent in war's nature. A strong culture is critical to building such an organization. Without it the friction of war erodes the values and cohesion on which warfighting effectiveness depends.

A central component of war's nature is friction. *Warfighting* identifies self-induced friction as among the most dangerous kinds, caused by

unclear goals, poor coordination, and complex command relationships. Culture nested within the Corps' ethos is an asset that reduces internal friction by facilitating shared values, goals, and practices that maintain cohesion. Culture does not eliminate the friction inherent in war. It prevents Marines from adding to it unnecessarily.

Marines must also understand the culture of every organization they interact with, whether in conflict, competition, or cooperation. War is an inherently social phenomenon and the human dimension, the intangible moral factors shaped by human nature and emotion, is central to it. As *Warfighting* states, since war is an act of violence based on irreconcilable disagreements it will invariably inflame and be shaped by human emotions.²³ Culture shapes those emotions and must therefore be understood as an operational variable rather than a soft concern.

The social interactions of war extend across political leaders, military members, and the societies they represent. Culture governs those interactions at every level. The ethical Marine who understands culture as an operational variable is better positioned to exploit it against adversaries, leverage it with partners and allies, and protect it within their own force.

CULTURE IN COMMAND AND CONTROL

Command and control is the means by which a commander recognizes what needs to be done and sees to it that appropriate actions are taken.²⁴

²³ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 2018. p.1-12

²⁴ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Command and Control*, MCDP 6, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 2018. p.1-4

It encompasses all military functions and operations, giving them meaning and harmonizing them into a coherent whole. No single activity in war is more important than command and control.

Command and control requires the ability to observe the situation, orient on the objective, decide what actions the team must take, and then harmonize the actions of individuals and units to accomplish the mission. This is the OODA loop, the foundational framework of Marine Corps command and control theory.

In any conflict, the force that cycles through the OODA loop faster gains an ever-increasing advantage. An inherent challenge is that complex organizations take longer to cycle than simple ones. Achieving the harmonious flow of information and unity of action the OODA loop demands requires productive personal interactions built on trust and shared understanding.

Culture accelerates the OODA loop. It does this by producing the unity of effort and interpersonal trust that enable implicit understanding. Implicit understanding and communication are the basis for cooperation and coordination in maneuver warfare. Command and Control states that implicit understanding and communication do not occur automatically. They are abilities that must be actively fostered and are the product of a common ethos and repeated practice.

Marines arrive in their units from diverse backgrounds with different customs, traditions, and perspectives. Without a strong institutional culture those differences create friction that slows every step of the OODA loop. The Marine Corps' culture, focused on warfighting, unit cohesion, and a common set of values and customs, overcomes those differences by creating shared experiences and shared expectations. That

shared foundation fosters the implicit communication that aggregates individual talent toward a common goal.

When a unit has a strong culture nested within the institutional ethos, Marines begin to act harmoniously across every step of the OODA loop. Observation is focused on what matters to the shared mission. Orientation aligns complementary capabilities on the same objective. Decisions are supported by an honest culture of courage and cohesion. Actions are consistent with shared values and performance standards. That harmony produces tempo. Tempo produces operational advantage.

MCDP 6 states that the greatest command and control resource is the common ethos and the resulting bond shared by all Marines. A warfighting organization seeking tempo in an environment of chaos, violence, friction, and uncertainty must have a culture that is comfortable with violence, proficient at decentralized execution, and technically and emotionally intelligent. Ethics builds that culture. Culture accelerates command and control. Command and control wins wars.

MARINE CORPS ETHOS AND ETHICS IN A MILITARY ORGANIZATION

The Marine Corps has identified three core values that are the foundation upon which all other principles are built. Honor, courage, and commitment are not aspirational virtues. They are operational requirements derived from what the Marine Corps exists to do. Understanding how these values facilitate mission accomplishment is the obligation of every Marine.

Honor is honesty, fairness, and integrity in beliefs and actions. It compels Marines to tell the truth and maintain personal integrity. It also requires respect for the Constitution, the chain of command, and every member of the unit regardless of rank. When Marines uphold honor they become reliable. That reliability establishes trust vertically and horizontally throughout the organization. Compromising honor costs trust. Losing trust costs cohesion. Losing cohesion costs wars.

Courage is the moral, mental, and physical strength to resist opposition, face danger, and endure hardship. As America's force in readiness the Marine Corps inherently operates in austere and dangerous environments. Courage is not the absence of fear. It is the decision to act in accordance with values in the presence of fear. Physical courage confronts danger. Moral courage confronts opposition from within the organization when standards are being violated or decisions are being made poorly. Both are essential. Neither can be assumed. Both must be developed.

Commitment is the quality of being dedicated to a cause. It drives resolve and initiative simultaneously. A Marine who is committed to the mission will seek out and apply innovative solutions to problems in order to fulfill obligations. That initiative earns trust. That trust enables the decentralized execution maneuver warfare demands.

Military organizations require these values to function under the conditions of war. Without honor there is no reliability. Without reliability there is no trust. Without courage there is no willingness to act when action is dangerous or unpopular. Without commitment there is no sustained effort when circumstances become most demanding. These three values are not separate qualities. They are mutually reinforcing components of the ethical framework that makes a Marine unit effective in war.

ETHICS IN HORIZONTAL COHESION

Military organizations require strong teamwork, unit cohesion, and loyalty. These qualities are at a premium on the battlefield where terrain, weather, and enemy action all generate friction that degrades effectiveness. Terrain and weather will never accommodate Marines. The enemy will exploit every advantage available. The one source of friction that Marines can directly control is internal friction.

Culture nested within the Corps' ethos reduces internal friction by facilitating shared values, goals, and practices that maintain cohesion. It does not eliminate the friction inherent in war's nature. It prevents Marines from adding to it unnecessarily.

The cohesion that ethics produces stems from Marines operating as known goods, people whose conduct is sufficiently predictable and values-aligned that others can trust them without verification. This applies both vertically and horizontally.

For horizontal cohesion Marines must serve as effective teammates. This requires knowing what role they play in the unit's success, understanding how fellow Marines depend on them, and applying values to fulfill that role reliably. Every time a Marine asks for help they extend trust. Every Marine who receives that trust has an obligation to validate it.

Horizontal cohesion also demands the moral courage to develop peers. When a Marine's moral lens reveals that a peer is falling short of the institution's ethos, the ethical response is not silence. It is honest, tactful correction. Peers occupy a different relationship than seniors and subordinates but Marines do not derive authority solely from rank. They

derive it from the soundness of their values and decisions. Exercising that authority horizontally, pointing out a peer's deficiency and helping them correct it, shows loyalty not just to the individual Marine but to every senior and subordinate whose success depends on that peer performing to standard. Policing conduct within the peer group is a fundamental requirement of ethical conduct and a necessary component of horizontal cohesion.

ETHICAL LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS

Vertical cohesion is the dimension of cohesion between subordinate and senior that develops from mutual trust and shared purpose. It requires that both leader and follower are trustworthy and cooperative so the unit can accomplish its mission. Sustaining the Transformation describes vertical cohesion as the building of mutual trust and respect among individuals of different rank or position. It requires unity of purpose and comes from the combined effects of mutual support between leader and subordinate.

Vertical cohesion is achieved through ethical leadership and ethical followership. Both roles apply the same values and require the same level of skill, creativity, perseverance, and effort. The difference between an ethical leader and an ethical follower is not what their values are but how they apply those values to their respective roles in achieving unit cohesion.

Leadership is the ability to inspire human beings to put forth their efforts in pursuit of a collective goal. Leaders occupy positions of significant power and responsibility. To exercise the influence that leadership demands, leaders must earn the trust of those they lead. Ethical leadership requires the consistent application of the Marine leadership traits: justice,

judgment, dependability, integrity, decisiveness, tact, initiative, endurance, bearing, unselfishness, courage, knowledge, loyalty, and enthusiasm. Leaders whose actions adhere to these values demonstrate the ethical leadership that motivates Marines to perform to the highest standards and instills the self-discipline that mission command requires.

Mission command requires a commander to identify what needs to be accomplished and then delegate execution to subordinates. The command portion of command and control is fulfilled when the leader provides clear intent. The control portion is fulfilled when the subordinate demonstrates the initiative and judgment to execute that intent without constant supervision. This works only when the leader trusts the subordinate and the subordinate has earned that trust through demonstrated ethical conduct.

All Marines are followers. Even the most senior are subordinate to someone. The vast majority of followers are simultaneously leaders of subordinate units. Fire team leaders follow their squad leaders. Company commanders follow their battalion commanders. The journey toward effective leadership runs directly through effective followership. A Marine who has not learned to follow cannot lead.

The values of an ethical follower are identical to those of an ethical leader. What differs is application. The ethical follower studies the leader's guidance, analyzes the environment, assesses available resources, and applies creative and innovative solutions to complex problems with limited supervision. As *Warfighting* states, subordinates must always think above their own level in order to contribute to the accomplishment of the higher mission.²⁵ This requires intelligence, perseverance, and the

²⁵ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 2018. p.4-19

initiative to act within the scope of the commander's intent without waiting to be told what to do. (See figure 5)

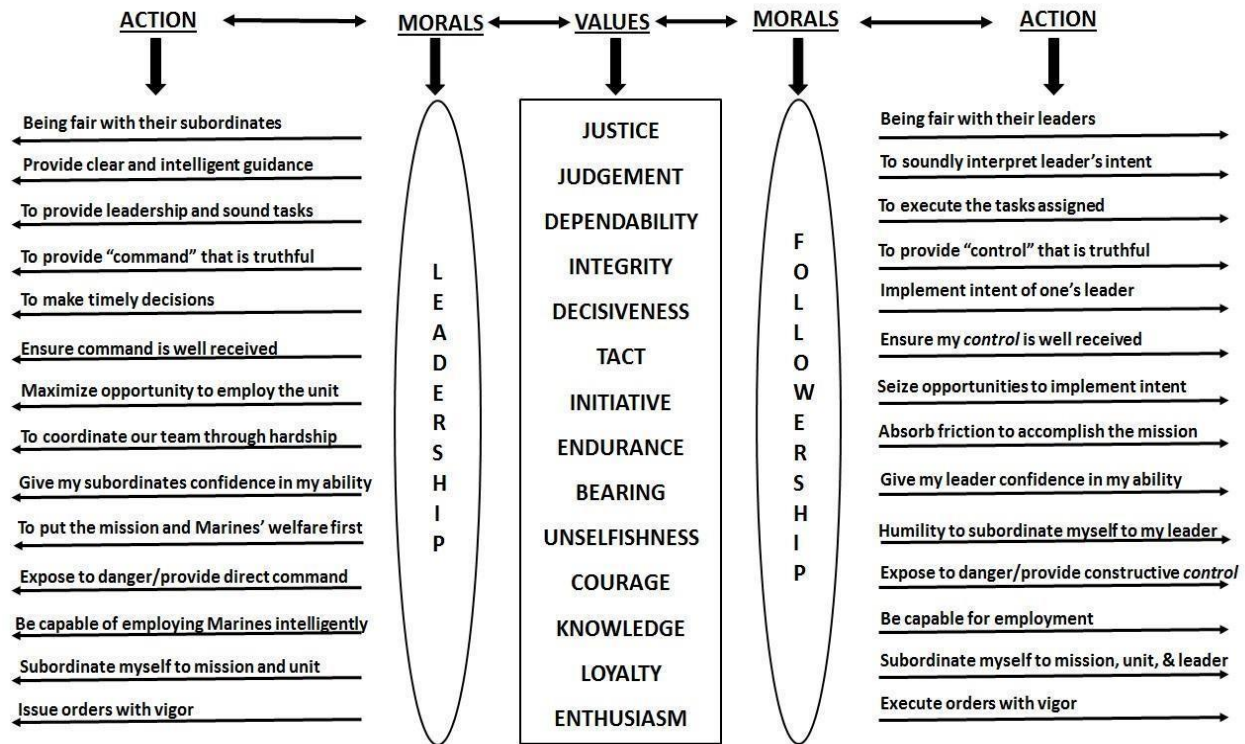


Figure 5: JJDIDTIEBUCKLE as leader or follower

When a subordinate fails to demonstrate this capability the commander loses the ability to trust decentralized execution and becomes more prescriptive. Prescriptive command reduces flexibility, slows tempo, and consumes the commander's attention with details that subordinates should be handling. As Command and Control states, while distrust is not an inherent feature of detailed command and control, organizations characterized by distrust tend toward it. Marines who resent micromanagement must understand that trust is earned through demonstrated ethical followership. The solution to micromanagement is not frustration. It is performance.

Leaders must also accept risk in trusting subordinates. Command and Control is explicit that leaders should foster an atmosphere of mutual support where subordinates are encouraged to demonstrate initiative and effect necessary coordination locally. A zero defect mentality that penalizes initiative destroys the trust that mission command requires. Leaders who punish subordinates for good faith failures teach their units to be cautious rather than bold. Caution costs tempo. Tempo costs lives.

Critical to both leadership and followership is humility. Leaders must understand that while they carry authority they cannot accomplish the mission alone. The skill, initiative, and ethical conduct of subordinates is what makes any leader's intent executable. That dependency demands genuine respect for the follower's role and the humility to acknowledge it. Followers likewise must understand that while they may possess superior knowledge of the immediate situation their leader carries responsibility for an operational picture they cannot fully see from the tactical edge. Trusting that the leader sees a larger picture is not blind obedience. It is the sophisticated discipline that makes decentralized execution possible.

ETHICS AND THE NATURE OF WAR

War is the violent clash of interests between organized groups characterized by the use of military force. By its nature warfare is painful, difficult, dangerous, and exhausting. As Clausewitz stated, war is the realm of physical exertion and suffering.²⁶ War erodes physical, mental, and moral power simultaneously.

²⁶ Clausewitz, Carl, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989, p. 100.

Warfighting acknowledges that certain moral factors such as morale and boldness may increase with successful attack, but that these often cannot compensate for the physical losses involved in sustaining an advance.

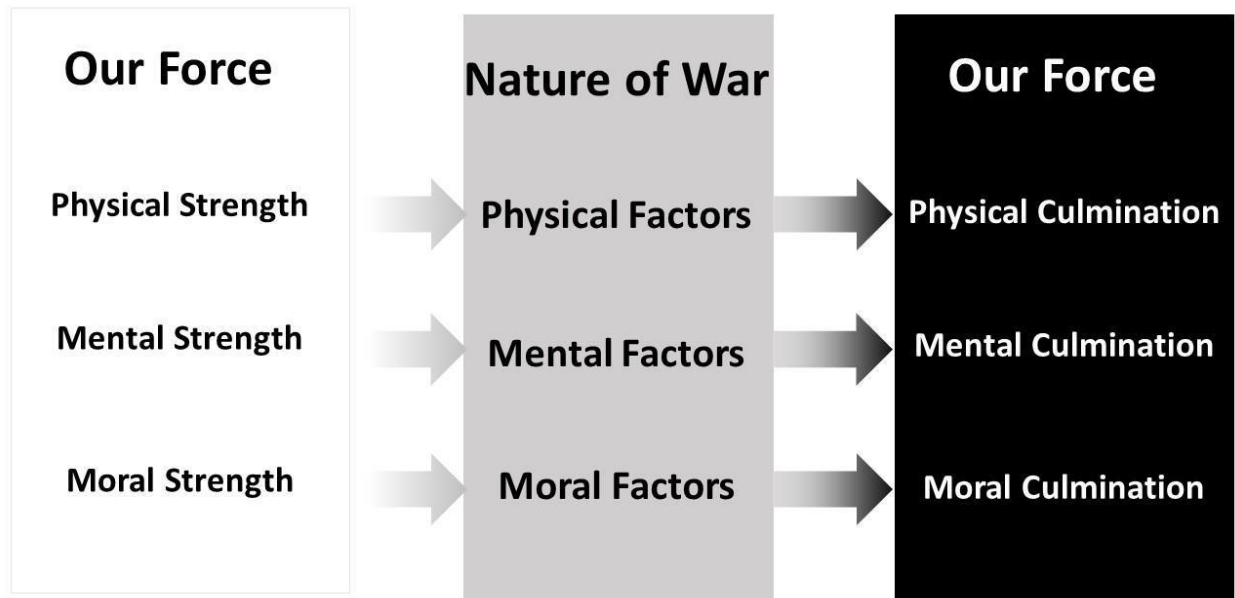
Warfighting states:

“Certain moral factors, such as morale or boldness, may increase with a successful attack, but these very often cannot compensate for the physical losses involved in sustaining an advance in the face of resistance. We advance at a cost in lives, fuel, ammunition, and physical and sometimes moral strength, and so the attack becomes weaker over time.”²⁷

Every step forward in war costs something. Lives. Fuel. Ammunition. Physical strength. And moral strength. The attack becomes weaker over time. This is the nature of culmination.

The culminating point is the moment at which a force no longer has the capacity to continue its current operation. Culmination is most commonly understood in physical and mental terms, when a force can no longer move or a commander can no longer think clearly. But war can also produce moral culmination, the point at which adherence to values becomes inaccessible under the weight of accumulated pressure. (See figure 6)

²⁷ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 2018. p 2-3.



Any form of culmination makes us ineffective

Figure 6: War's impact on physical, mental, and moral strength

Moral culmination is not a failure of character. It is a failure of preparation. Marines who have never been given a framework for understanding why their values matter operationally, who have never been trained to maintain those values under conditions that make them expensive, and who have never built a reserve of moral strength through deliberate ethical development, will reach moral culmination faster and at lower levels of stress than Marines who have. The doctrine this publication provides is the framework that prevents moral culmination and extends the range at which Marines can operate ethically before the conditions of war erode that capacity.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs explains the mechanism. At the highest level of the hierarchy, self-actualization, a person has the cognitive and emotional capacity to reflect on values and apply them in action. Failure to meet the needs below that level, physiological safety, belonging, and

esteem, compromises the capacity for that higher order thinking. War systematically attacks every level of the hierarchy simultaneously. It removes food, water, and sleep. It threatens survival. When the physiological needs of food, water, clothing, and shelter are absent, people naturally focus their efforts towards fulfilling those needs.²⁸ War also isolates Marines from the social connections that provide belonging. It erodes the esteem that comes from competence and recognition. As each level of the hierarchy becomes inaccessible the capacity for values-based reasoning contracts.

Understanding this mechanism is essential to preventing moral culmination. Leaders must recognize the early indicators that Marines are sliding down the hierarchy. They must take deliberate action to restore the conditions that enable ethical reasoning wherever possible. And they must build the reserve of moral strength in garrison that extends the range at which their Marines can operate ethically when those conditions cannot be restored.

Social needs add additional complexity. The desire to belong is powerful. A young Marine who has not yet fully internalized institutional values may accommodate unethical conduct from peers or seniors simply to be accepted by the group. Unethical conduct cannot be accommodated. It erodes cohesion, harms operational effectiveness, and degrades the advancement of policy. Marines must be loyal to each other. That loyalty is expressed most fully by holding each other to the standard, not by excusing departures from it. (See figure 7)

²⁸ Newstrom, John, *Organizational Behavior: Human Behavior at Work Organizations*, McGraw Hill Publishing, New York, 2007. p 106.



Figure 7: Maslow's hierarchy of needs as it relates to ethics

MORAL INJURIES

Given war's capacity to erode physical, mental, and moral strength, Marines must prepare to prevent and address injuries in all three dimensions. Just as physical preparation reduces physical injury, ethical preparation reduces moral injury.

A moral injury is the damage done to one's moral compass when they perpetrate, witness, or fail to prevent an action that contradicts their values.²⁹ Moral injuries can arise from civilian casualties, the inability to protect a fellow Marine, ordering action that results in harm, or acting lawfully in accordance with institutional values while violating values from another source the Marine feels obligated to. Unlike physical injuries

²⁹ <http://moralinjuryproject.syr.edu/about-moral-injury/>

moral injuries do not manifest in visible physical forms, but can they produce heightened shame, guilt, anxiety, and anger that can persist long after the precipitating event.³⁰

Moral injury can also result from succumbing to human emotion rather than values-informed morality. When extreme conditions tempt a Marine to act in ways that contradict their values, and when that temptation is acted upon, the immediate emotional relief is often followed by lasting guilt. This pattern occurs when the instinct for self-preservation overrides the commitment to stand and fight, when the desire for revenge overrides the obligation to treat prisoners lawfully, or when exhaustion and frustration erode the bearing and discipline that define professional conduct.

Ethics mitigates moral injury in two ways. First it prevents actions that violate values. Prior reflection on why values matter operationally gives Marines a framework for making better decisions under pressure before that pressure arrives. Second it helps Marines reconcile the use of lawful and appropriate violence with the values they hold. Reflection on when violence is justified, how it serves policy, and what the rules of engagement require enables a Marine to understand that lethal force used lawfully in the appropriate context is not a violation of values. It is an expression of them. That understanding is critical for Marines using lethal force for the first time or when combat produces tragic collateral damage despite every effort to prevent it.

MCRP 6-11C, *Combat Stress*, states that good unit cohesion and morale offset the negative effects of combat stress. The trust built through ethical conduct, the cohesion that trust produces, and the shared sense of purpose

³⁰ Maguen, Shira PhD. and Litz, Brett PhD, *Moral Injury In the Context of War*, Department of Veterans Affairs: National Center for PTSD. https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/treat/cooccurring/moral_injury.asp

that cohesion creates form the most effective buffer against moral injury available to a Marine unit. Ethics does not eliminate the moral weight of war. It equips Marines to carry that weight without being broken by it.

AGGRESSION

Aggression is the quality that drives forceful action or procedure especially when intended to dominate or master a situation.³¹ Since war is a violent clash of wills the party that dominates through forceful action will prevail. Every Marine must develop an aggressive mindset. No other field of human endeavor demands the level of aggression that war requires.

Aggression is an ethical quality in the warfighting context because its absence has consequences. Reluctance to act concedes tempo to the adversary. Hesitation under fire costs lives. A Marine who understands why aggression matters operationally, who has reflected on what it costs when aggression is absent, is more capable of generating it under conditions that make hesitation feel rational.

Two common hindrances to aggression are ambiguity and a lack of reflection. Ambiguity is inherent in war. The fog of war and the uncertain nature of combat can produce paralysis in Marines who have not been trained to act under imperfect conditions. Marines cannot wait for perfect information. They must know what information is necessary to stop an attack, ensure everyone in the unit knows it, and trust subordinates to apply their judgment as the situation develops. Commanders who

³¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aggression>

establish clear intent reduce the ambiguity that inhibits aggression without eliminating the initiative that makes it effective.

The second hindrance, a lack of reflection, is more insidious. A Marine who has not thought through why right action matters will not feel compelled to act aggressively when wrong action is allowed to persist. If a Marine's moral lens has not been developed sufficiently to evaluate a situation as wrong, the motivation to address it forcefully will not arise. Aggression in the ethical sense is not random violence. It is forceful commitment to what is right, applied deliberately at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner.

Leaders must cultivate aggression in garrison so it is available in combat. This requires exposure to demanding training against thinking opponents, a command climate that rewards bias for action, and empathy for subordinates whose aggressive actions produce imperfect outcomes. When aggressive action results in mistakes those mistakes must be corrected. But the correction must not destroy the willingness to act aggressively again. Leaders who punish good faith failures teach their units to be timid. Timid units lose.

Aggression must be tempered and precisely applied. Aggressive conduct without justification off duty breaks faith with the American people. Aggression in combat cannot justify abuse of prisoners, disregard for civilian safety, or conduct that contradicts the rules of engagement. Marines must master their aggression, develop it deliberately, and employ it with the disciplined judgment that ethical warfighting demands.

EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to understand another person's feelings, experiences, and perceptions.³² Marines must leverage reflection and critical thinking to appreciate why people feel as they do, how their experiences have shaped their behavior, and how they perceive the world around them. While not codified as a leadership trait, empathy is essential to effective warfighting and to the ethical conduct of operations.

Marines rely on empathy for two reasons. The first is external, rooted in the understanding that war is an inherently human phenomenon. As a persistently forward-deployed force that operates among populations it has not encountered before, the Marine Corps constantly interacts with people whose cultural backgrounds, religious traditions, ethnic heritage, and social norms differ significantly from those most Marines grew up with. Empathy enables Marines to show genuine respect for those differences, develop the rapport necessary for cooperation with indigenous populations, and gain the popular support that sustains operational effectiveness. Without empathy Marines will be perceived as occupiers rather than partners. That perception erodes the legitimacy that policy requires.

Empathy for the enemy is among the most demanding applications of this quality. Understanding the adversary's perspective, anticipating what they will do based on their own logic rather than assuming they will act as Marines would act, is a critical component of effective intelligence and effective planning. When Marines project their own values and reasoning onto the enemy they make predictive errors that cost lives. Asking whether a course of action is what the enemy would do or what the Marine

³² https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/empathy

would do is a discipline that empathy makes possible and that critical thinking demands.

Empathy for the enemy also matters when combat produces the opportunity for surrender. Marines who have reflected on the adversary's fatigue, fear, and desire to survive are better positioned to make surrender feel like a viable option. An enemy who believes surrender means death or abuse will fight longer and cause more casualties than one who believes they will be treated lawfully and humanely. Acting with empathy toward a surrendering enemy is not weakness. It is operational effectiveness and legal obligation simultaneously.

The second reason Marines must develop empathy is internal. The Marine Corps discriminates on the basis of adherence to institutional values, leadership traits, and exacting standards. That discrimination applies both horizontally and vertically. Marines must correct peers, seniors must correct subordinates, and subordinates must correct seniors when the standard is not being met. That correction requires both tact and moral courage.

Empathy is the quality that prevents correction from becoming abusive or condescending. When a Marine falls short of standard the first question is not what is wrong with this person but what is causing this performance. Sometimes deficiencies stem from malice or indiscipline. More often they stem from inexperience, inadequate preparation, or personal struggles the Marine has not been able to address independently. Entry level training establishes a baseline. It does not comprehensively prepare every Marine for every situation they will face. Leaders who approach performance deficiencies with empathy are more likely to identify the actual cause and more likely to produce lasting correction rather than temporary compliance.

Marines who have experienced combat trauma, personal difficulty, or hardship before or during service may show performance deficiencies that are symptoms of a deeper struggle rather than indicators of character failure. Empathy enables leaders to recognize that distinction and respond with the compassion that validates a Marine's willingness to seek help. Senior Drill Instructors instill this standard from the first days of recruit training, directing that Marines will be treated with firmness, fairness, dignity, and compassion.

Empathy does not excuse unethical conduct or lower standards. It means understanding that every Marine is a human being subject to the same emotions, stresses, and vulnerabilities inherent in the human condition. A leader who uses empathy to understand what is producing a deficiency and then corrects it with firmness, tact, and genuine concern for the Marine's development is not going soft. They are building the trust that makes correction effective and the cohesion that makes the unit capable.

ETHICS AND WILL

Warfighting states that “one essential means to overcome friction is the will; we prevail over friction through persistent strength of mind and spirit.”³³ Human will, instilled and sustained through leadership, is the driving force of all action in war. Understanding what will is, how it develops, and how to cultivate it deliberately is essential to every Marine leader.

³³ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p.6.

Will is the purpose or determination to choose one's own actions regardless of obstacles. Will is the purpose or *determination* to choose one's own actions. Clausewitz said of determination that it is

“...an expression of courage; if it becomes characteristic, a mental habit. But here we are referring not to physical courage but the courage to accept responsibility, courage in the face of moral danger. This is often been called ‘courage d’esprit, because it is created by the intellect.”³⁴

Determination is a form of courage. Not physical courage but the courage to accept responsibility, the courage in the face of moral danger. He described this as courage d'esprit, created by the intellect. Determination is not a reflex. It is a reasoned commitment to act in accordance with values and mission requirements when every other force is pushing toward inaction or retreat.

Clausewitz was precise on this point. He stated that determination is “*engendered only by a mental act; the mind tells man that boldness is required, and thus gives direction to his will.*”³⁵ This is the connection between ethics and will. The Marine who has reflected deeply on values, who understands why those values matter operationally, and who has developed the moral lens to evaluate situations clearly, is a Marine whose will has been strengthened by the intellect that ethics demands. The Marine who has never been given a framework for understanding why values matter in war has no intellectual foundation to draw on when the will to act is tested.

The more a Marine understands and believes in the institutional values, and the more clearly they can articulate why those values enable success,

³⁴ Clausewitz, Carl, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989. p. 103.

³⁵ Clausewitz, Carl, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989. p. 103.

the stronger their resolve will be when conditions make adherence to those values most expensive. Ethics is the critical component of human will. It is not separate from the warrior ethos. It is the foundation on which that ethos stands.

PERSEVERANCE AND RESOLVE

War is among the most demanding endeavors in human experience. It is physically exhausting, mentally consuming, and morally costly. There will always be more reasons to stop than to continue. More reasons to accept failure than to push through it. More reasons to accommodate unethical conduct than to confront it. Perseverance and resolve are the qualities that overcome those reasons.

Resolve is the determination to succeed in spite of the obstacles war places before Marines. It is not the absence of doubt or fear. It is the decision to act in accordance with values and mission requirements regardless of what doubt or fear demand. Clausewitz understood resolve as a product of the intellect operating through the will. The mind identifies what boldness requires. The will executes it. Resolve is that execution sustained over time, through accumulating friction, loss, exhaustion, and uncertainty, without abandoning the values that define what victory is worth.

Resolve is developed deliberately. It does not emerge spontaneously under fire. Marines who have reflected on their values, understood why those values matter operationally, and tested themselves physically, mentally, and morally in training arrive at the moment of maximum pressure with a reserve of resolve built in advance. Marines who have never been pushed through genuine discomfort in garrison will discover

in combat that they have no reserve to draw from. This is why demanding and realistic training is not cruelty. It is preparation for the conditions that will test resolve when lives and missions depend on it.

Resilience is the complement to resolve. Where resolve is the determination to succeed, resilience is the capacity to recover when success eludes Marines. Missions will go wrong. Standards will be missed. Plans will not survive contact with the enemy. The Marine Corps does not operate under the illusion that excellence means perfection. It operates under the understanding that excellence means persistent effort toward the standard, honest acknowledgment when that standard is not met, rapid correction, and the refusal to allow failure to become a pattern or an identity.

A zero defect mentality is the enemy of resilience. When leaders treat every mistake as a catastrophic failure of character rather than an opportunity for correction and growth they produce Marines who are afraid to act, afraid to report problems, and afraid to take the initiative that mission command demands. That fear is more dangerous to a unit's combat effectiveness than the mistake itself. Leaders must correct failure without destroying the initiative that produced it. They must hold the standard without making the standard a source of paralysis.

Resilience also demands that Marines extend grace to each other and to themselves. War produces moral weight that accumulates over time. The Marine who made a decision under extreme pressure and imperfect information, who acted in accordance with values to the best of their ability in that moment, deserves honest after-action review rather than condemnation. That review corrects the decision process without destroying the Marine's willingness to decide again when the next moment of pressure arrives.

Together perseverance and resolve ensure that the ethical framework does not collapse under the conditions that test it most. They are the qualities that keep values operational when war makes values expensive. Every Marine must cultivate them deliberately, demand them of teammates honestly, and model them visibly from the first day of training through the last day of service.

ETHICS' VALUE IN WAR

War is an extension of both policy and politics with the application of military force.³⁶ The single most important understanding about the theory of war is that war must serve policy. Tactical effectiveness that does not support policy is not effectiveness. It is a liability.

This is the fundamental ethical obligation of every Marine in every operation. The Marine Corps does not fight to destroy armies as an end in itself. The doctrine of maneuver warfare seeks to erode the enemy's will through rapid and focused application of combat power precisely because destroying the enemy's capacity to resist while preserving the conditions that make policy success possible is more effective than pure attrition (though attrition is a part of maneuver warfare).³⁷ Mass destruction of the enemy that undermines the policy the war was fought to achieve is a tactical success and a strategic failure.

Everything Marines do in the conduct of operations, treatment of enemy prisoners, adherence to rules of engagement, interaction with civilians, personal appearance and conduct, and the tactics techniques and

³⁶ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p. 23.

³⁷ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p. 73.

procedures employed carries potential policy consequences. The ethical Marine understands this and governs conduct accordingly at every level from the individual Marine on patrol to the commander executing the campaign plan.

The ethical demand in this context is straightforward. Honor the oath. Obey lawful orders. Conduct operations in a manner that advances rather than undermines the policy the nation has sent the Corps to serve. Even when more aggressive or less restrained action might produce better immediate tactical results, the Marine who understands the theory of ethics understands why that restraint is not weakness. It is the disciplined application of values in service of the larger purpose that makes tactical success strategically meaningful.

CONCLUSION

Ethics is a critical component of success in war. The inherent requirements of will, trust, cohesion, and cooperation in maneuver warfare compel every Marine to understand ethics and treat it as a priority rather than a secondary concern.

The theory established in this chapter connects individual ethical conduct to the highest level of strategic purpose a Marine serves. Ethics produces trust. Trust produces cohesion. Cohesion enables the cooperative action that maximizes collective capability in maneuver warfare. That capability serves policy. Breaking any link in that chain costs lives and potentially costs wars.

Being an ethical Marine is not about being a good person in the abstract. It is about being a more effective warfighter and a more capable

teammate. Every Marine who internalizes that understanding and acts on it consistently makes the unit faster, more cohesive, and harder to break than any adversary who fights without the ethical foundation this chapter has established. Prior reflection internalizes our values and reduces emotional decision making. As Clausewitz states, “a strong character is one that will not be unbalanced by the most powerful emotions.”³⁸

Chapter 3 will show how to build that foundation deliberately across an entire organization through education, training, and the consistent reinforcement that transforms values from stated principles into internalized standards that hold under the conditions of war.

³⁸ Clausewitz, Carl, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989. p. 106.

Chapter 3

Ethical Development

“One might say that the physical seem little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely-honed blade.”

-Carl von Clausewitz

“From the second we step on the yellow footprints at boot camp, it’s instilled in us that there’s a bigger purpose, that the uniform we wear has a rich history and legacy...and that when we get in those bad parts of the world that nobody wants to go to, the Marine to our right and left is all we have. So, I would like to say it was me, I would like to think it was a little bit me, but absolutely, the Marine Corps and our history and just everything we stand for makes us want to be courageous and do those things.”

-Corporal Kyle Carpenter, USMC, Medal of Honor Recipient

INTRODUCTION

With an understanding of the nature and theory of ethics, the focus must turn to instilling an ethical bias in Marines, providing them the moral lens and bias for action needed to develop and maintain an ethical predisposition under the conditions of war. This chapter provides the Marine Corps philosophy on ethical development and how the force is trained and educated to be ethical in its conduct. It uses the nature and theory of ethics established in Chapters 1 and 2 to give every Marine a practical mental framework for applying institutional core values in everyday life and in warfare.

The central premise of this chapter is that a Marine's behavior can be changed and that leaders can positively influence their Marines' ability to internalize and apply ethics to mission success. This is not a philosophical assertion. It is a doctrinal one. The Marine Corps demands it of every leader at every level.

APPROACH TO ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT

The Marine Corps' philosophy of ethical development stems from the core understanding that individuals and organizations can adopt attitudes and mindsets as a result of being part of a team or institution. History provides countless examples, both good and bad, that confirm this. The Marine Corps' own definition of leadership states the ability to get human beings to put forth their efforts in pursuit of a collective goal. That definition is a statement about the capacity to shape behavior. The Marine Corps rejects the notion that a unit's behavior cannot be shaped. On the contrary, every leader is required to influence their Marines to adopt the warfighting ethos, adhere to institutional core values, and create a culture that aligns to the warfighting philosophy.

This philosophy of ethical development is more than an altruistic desire to produce better people, though the Marine Corps does take pride in returning better citizens to the country when service is complete. Ethical development is emphasized because, as established in the theory of ethics, consistent ethical conduct fosters the trust and cooperation that is critical to cohesion. That cohesion enables mission command, creating unified action to mass collective combat power at the right time and place.

At entry level training, recruits and officer candidates receive an indoctrination into the physical, mental, and moral factors required of a Marine to serve in any clime and place. The emphasis on all three disciplines initiates the transformation from civilian to basically trained Marine. As careers progress, physical and mental capabilities must grow through physical training and deliberate mental development. The same sustainment and growth must be applied to ethical development so that Marines can better cope with the demands of operating as part of a team under the conditions of combat.

This aligns directly to the study of war's nature. Marines conduct physical training to extend physical culmination. They study and think through problems to extend mental culmination. Because war consists of moral factors that erode moral strength just as surely as it erodes physical and mental strength, Marines must train deliberately to resist moral culmination. The fear of danger or concern for comrades can have a disruptive and exhaustive effect on behaviors and threaten individual or unit safety.³⁹ Culmination in any one of the three factors of war results in failure. All three must be addressed in training and education with equal seriousness. (See figure 8)

³⁹ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Combat Stress*, MCDP 6-11C, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p.2.

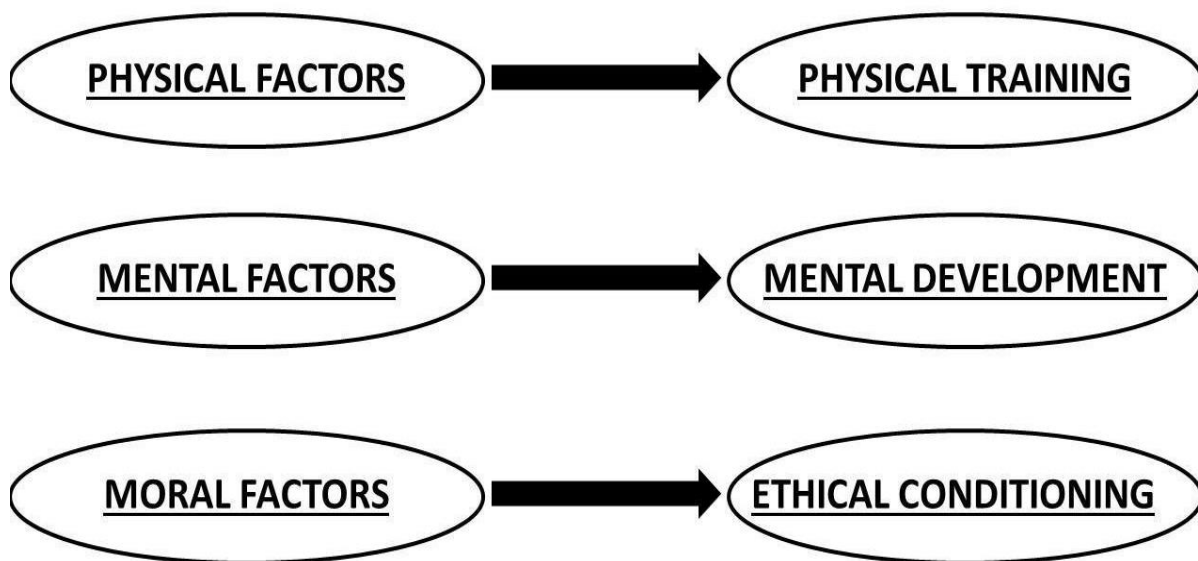


Figure 8: Factors of war driving training and education

The moral elements of war are among the most important. Warfighters will be inadequately prepared for combat if they emphasize the physical and mental, but disregard the moral factors of war.⁴⁰ As Clausewitz stated, “one might say that the physical seem little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely-honed blade.”⁴¹ Strengthening the moral factors of Marines is not optional. It is a warfighting requirement.

There is understandable resistance to ethical development because it is difficult to quantify. *Warfighting* tells us moral factors are more difficult to quantify than physical and mental factors in war.⁴² There is no percentage score for resolve, no numeric measure for conviction or fighting spirit. Physical and mental development produce binary and numeric data points that are easier to justify and validate. Ethical

⁴⁰ Clausewitz, Carl, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989. p. 184.

⁴¹ Clausewitz, Carl, *On War*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989. p. 185.

⁴² Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 2018. p. 1-15.

development does not. That difficulty is not a reason to neglect it. It is a reason to approach it with the same deliberate planning and structured investment that the Marine Corps brings to every other dimension of warfighter development.

The absence of a codified institutional philosophy on ethics has historically placed the burden on task-saturated units to construct ethics instruction from scratch, using intuitive reasoning rather than doctrine to determine where the institution stands on ethics. Given the time associated with that task, most leaders defaulted to neglecting ethical development entirely. This publication exists to solve that problem. Ethics for Marines is the codified doctrine that provides the institutional understanding of the nature, theory, and philosophy of ethics as it applies to war. Every Marine must use it to understand, discuss, and apply these concepts in action.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

All leaders are responsible for the ethical behavior of their organization. The benefits of creating and maintaining an ethical organization, in garrison and in combat, are substantial. People are social creatures. They want to be positive, productive, and contributing members of a team. Membership in an organization serves as a unifying factor that integrates Marines into the unit's culture and imbues them with its values. This is the central mechanism of organizational culture.

Organizational culture is the set of assumptions, beliefs, values, and norms that are shared by an organization's members.⁴³ It governs the nature of cooperation between teammates and shapes how individuals perceive themselves, others, and the organization as a whole.

⁴³ Newstrom, John, *Organizational Behavior: Human Behavior at Work Organizations*, McGraw Hill Publishing, New York, 2007. p 87.

Critical to organizational culture is the establishment of identity within the unit. Every Marine arrives with multiple identities already formed from family, community, faith, and other sources. Leaders must deliberately welcome new Marines as valued members of the team from the moment they arrive. That welcome begins the process of establishing the unit as a source of identity from which the Marine derives values and behavior. The critical component to influencing organizational culture is aligning individual values with the values of the organization. When that alignment is achieved the result is a strong culture. When it is absent the result is a weak culture.

STRONG CULTURE

Strong culture occurs when individuals align their values with the organization's or adopt the organization's values as their own.⁴⁴ This alignment creates less internal friction, facilitates greater cooperation, and adds to unit cohesion. It is associated with a positive command climate and is characterized by a Marine's strong identity as a member of the unit, clearly stated purpose and values, and a shared set of organizational traditions and customs.

Strong culture produces Marines who are prepared for the moral factors of war. When values are genuinely internalized rather than merely acknowledged, they remain accessible under the conditions that make them most expensive to apply. A unit with strong culture does not need constant supervision to maintain ethical conduct. The values govern behavior because they have been made the Marine's own.

⁴⁴ Maseko, Thokozani, *Strong vs. Weak Organizational Culture: Assessing the Impact on Employee Motivation*, Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review, 2017. p.2.

Strong culture requires five specific conditions to develop and sustain. First, a clear organizational purpose that connects individual effort to collective mission. Second, clearly defined values that are specific enough to guide decisions in ambiguous situations. Third, constant reinforcement of those values through every daily interaction and decision. Fourth, continuous honest feedback that connects individual behavior to the unit's standard. Fifth, explicit emphasis on each individual Marine's value to the organization's mission. Where all five conditions are present strong culture follows. Where any one is absent the culture begins to weaken. (See figure 9)

Leaders at all levels must strive for strong culture within their command. Without it Marines will be less prepared for the moral factors of war precisely when that preparation is most needed.

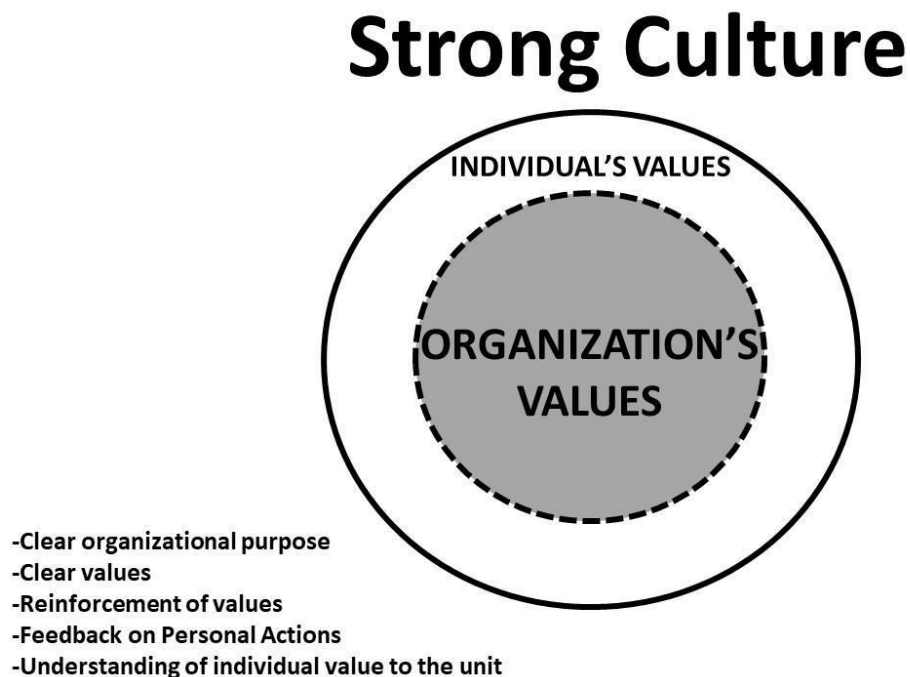


Figure 9: Strong Culture

WEAK CULTURE

Weak culture occurs when there is a disparity between individual values and the organization's values.⁴⁵ That disparity produces predictable consequences. Unit morale diminishes. Cooperation is compromised. The organization becomes less capable. Marines in a weak culture are less prepared for the moral factors of war and more likely to reach moral culmination at lower levels of stress and adversity.

Weak culture results from specific and identifiable failures of leadership. Ambiguous organizational purpose leaves Marines without a framework for understanding why their values matter. Poorly defined values cannot guide behavior in ambiguous situations. The absence of consistent feedback leaves Marines without the information needed to understand whether their conduct aligns to the standard. And a failure to communicate each Marine's individual value to the mission leaves people feeling interchangeable and therefore less invested in the organization's success.

Every unit has a culture whether it is deliberately built or not. The leader who does not actively shape the unit's culture does not produce a culturally neutral organization. They produce a weak culture shaped by the informal norms and individual value sources that fill the vacuum their leadership neglected to fill. Weak culture is not the absence of culture. It is the presence of the wrong one.

⁴⁵ Maseko, Thokozani, *Strong vs. Weak Organizational Culture: Assessing the Impact on Employee Motivation*, Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review, 2017. p.2..

Weak Culture

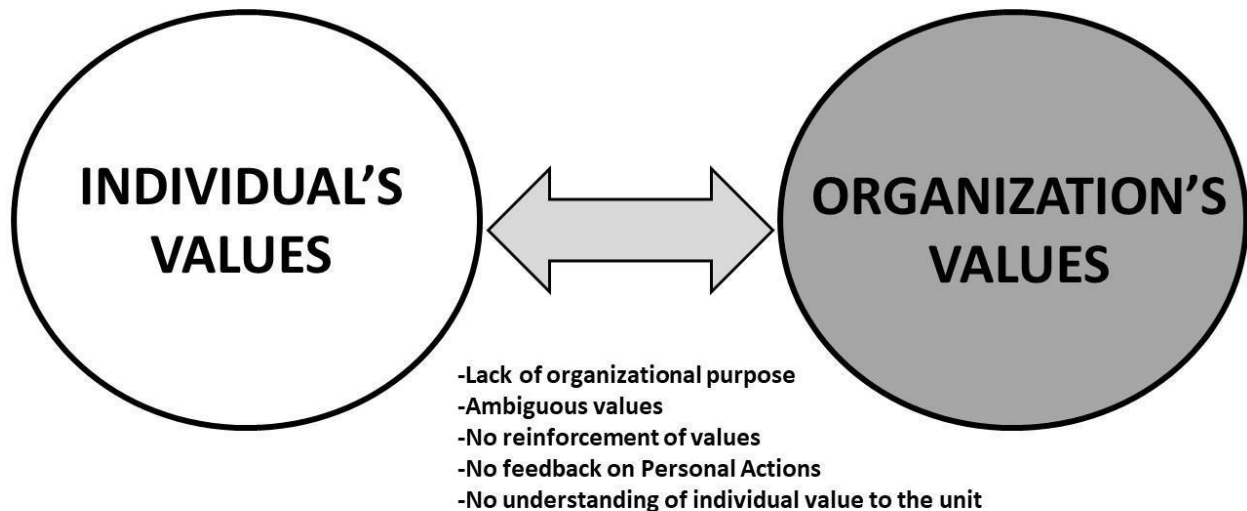


Figure 10: Weak Culture

SUBCULTURE ALIGNMENT

Every Marine arrives in a unit with existing subcultures formed before their service began. Family traditions, community norms, religious practices, and social group affiliations all carry their own values and behavioral expectations. Many of these will complement the Marine Corps' institutional values and should be embraced where they do. Some will diverge. Where divergence occurs it must be identified and addressed.

A subculture that aligns with the institutional ethos is an asset. It represents the creative application of shared values to a unique personal background and enriches the unit's culture. A subculture that contradicts the institutional ethos is a liability. It erodes the shared values, common identity, and behavioral consistency that cohesion requires.

Leaders must understand the subcultures their Marines bring with them in order to integrate talent and capabilities effectively. This is not a mandate to demand that Marines abandon all aspects of their previous cultures. It is a requirement to identify where those cultures diverge from the institution's values and to address that divergence honestly, tactfully, and directly. A Marine who consistently prioritizes another value source over the Corps' values in the conduct of duty must honestly assess whether continuing to serve is right for them. That is not a judgment. It is a recognition that the mission is too consequential for divided loyalties.

Leaders must also guard against internal subcultures that develop within their own units. These emerge when poor leadership, moral culmination, extended isolation from institutional influence, or a lack of understanding of the warfighting ethos produces behavioral norms that contradict the institution's values. Internal subcultures are particularly dangerous because they carry the appearance of institutional legitimacy while actually undermining it. Any subculture that erodes character, moral integrity, or the guiding beliefs that define the Corps must be identified and eliminated.

FUNCTION ETHICS

As ethics enables the implementation of policy and policy is the purpose of war, the Marine Corps must remain an ethical institution capable of producing ethical individuals and units. The definition that ethics requires action establishes that ethics is not merely a philosophical matter. It is a functional one.

The challenge for the Marine Corps is finding a way for individuals to perform this function in an environment of chaos, friction, violence, and uncertainty. Under those conditions people make decisions based on immediate physiological needs rather than the values they espoused in

safe and comfortable environments. To overcome this challenge the Marine Corps adopts a philosophy that shapes behavior nested with institutional values to foster greater cohesion and advance policy. That philosophy is function ethics.

Function ethics is an ethical philosophy that seeks to shape human behavior through a clearly defined purpose that is fulfilled by values and gives meaning to individual action by fostering will, resolve, and resilience regardless of the physical, mental, and moral challenges posed by the enemy or the environment. (See figure 11)

Function Ethics

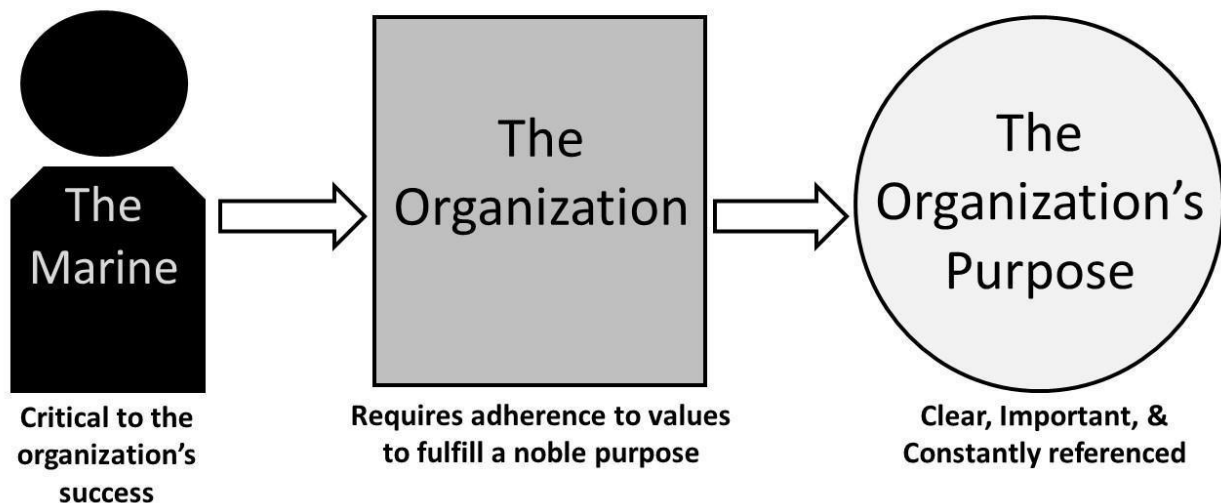


Figure 11: Organizations inspiring individual behavior through the organization's purpose

The parallel to maneuver warfare as the organizing philosophy of MCDP 1 is intentional. Maneuver warfare is not a tactic. It is a philosophy that organizes everything else in how the Marine Corps approaches war. Function ethics is not a program or a class. It is a philosophy that organizes everything else in how the Marine Corps approaches ethical development. Just as maneuver warfare asks what philosophy of fighting best exploits the nature of war, function ethics asks what philosophy of values development best exploits the nature of organizational culture to produce Marines who act ethically when the conditions of war make ethical conduct most difficult.

Rather than prescribing every action, function ethics provides Marines a mental model that demonstrates individual value through morally sound action toward an organizational purpose that is vital to the unit's success in war. Individual decision making is critical to the speed and tempo that must exceed the enemy's. Function ethics uses values as an additional guide to help Marines navigate that decision making under conditions when specific guidance is unavailable.

Just as commander's intent compels a Marine to ask how they can still meet the commander's vision in a changed environment, a Marine who has internalized function ethics can use their understanding of institutional values to inform action more rapidly and fulfill the organization's purpose when specific orders do not exist or can no longer be followed.

Function ethics also validates each Marine's worth by linking the institution to a noble purpose, making the values necessary to fulfill that purpose clear and specific, and then showing every Marine's individual value to the organization as long as they adhere to institutional and unit values. This philosophy stems from the reality that Marines consistently cite when asked why they joined the Corps. They wanted to serve something greater than themselves. Function ethics gives that impulse a doctrinal foundation. By serving honorably every Marine becomes a

valuable component of mission accomplishment and a responsible steward of the Corps' noble cause.

ALIGNING INDIVIDUALS TO UNIT VALUES

Function ethics requires more than understanding the unit's mission and the values that support it. One of the primary challenges of aligning individuals to unit values is convincing Marines that the organization's purpose is important enough to make the values that serve it meaningful. To believe a value matters, a Marine must first believe that what the organization exists to do matters.

Without that foundation of purpose, subordinates default to short-term tasking without understanding why those tasks connect to anything larger. This is the short-term versus long-term vision conflict. When Marines do not understand the long-term purpose of the organization they cannot understand why the organization's values are essential to that purpose. Without that understanding they will not adopt those values and will fail to act in accordance with them when conditions make adherence difficult.

Marines must understand that institutional and individual values are critical operational enablers. They reduce internal friction, establish trust, and accelerate unit cohesion. Leaders must therefore seek participation from every Marine. Participation is the mental and emotional involvement of people in group situations that encourages them to contribute to group goals and share responsibility for them.⁴⁶ This begins when Marines are inspired to believe in the institution's values, which cannot sit idle on a poster or a read board. They must be part of consistent conversations and deliberate messaging at every level of the organization.

⁴⁶ Newstrom, John, *Organizational Behavior: Human Behavior at Work Organizations*, McGraw Hill Publishing, New York, 2007. p 183.

This messaging is the responsibility of all leaders regardless of the size of their unit, whether an office of three or a regiment of three thousand. The Marine Corps as an institution does an effective job of messaging its values but institutional messaging does not automatically translate into organizational messaging at the unit level. Unit leaders must incorporate and relate those institutional beliefs to their specific missions, their specific Marines, and their specific operational context. That translation is what makes institutional values feel personal and relevant rather than abstract and distant.

To align individual values to organizational values leaders employ three distinct and complementary processes. The first is ethical education, an initial grounding in the values of the organization, what ethics are, and why they matter. The second is ethical training, which develops the bias for ethical action through deliberate application of that education to demanding scenarios. The third is consistent reinforcement, the continuous daily interactions that provide feedback on whether individual conduct adheres to the organization's values. The convergence of these three elements over time produces the ethical mindset. The ethical mindset is an instinctive thought process developed through critical thinking that guides a Marine to act in accordance with values without deliberate conscious effort. It is the internalization that makes ethical conduct reliable under the conditions that test it most.

ETHICAL EDUCATION

Just as Marines are prepared for the physical and mental factors of war, they must be prepared for the moral factors as well. Ethical education is the foundational step in that preparation. It is an academically grounded endeavor focused on instilling knowledge and fostering active thinking about ethics, values, and their application to warfighting.

Ethics requires the knowledge of values and morality to be coupled with creative interpretation and application in dynamic situations. No military education is complete without it. As *Warfighting* states, professional military education is designed to develop creative thinking leaders and should be viewed as a continuous progressive process of development at every stage of a Marine's career.⁴⁷

Marines must be informed about ethics, what it is, how it applies to the warfighting philosophy, and how it produces combat effectiveness, before they can be expected to apply those principles through action. As Bloom's taxonomy establishes, access to knowledge and the ability to comprehend it is a prerequisite to applying it. Instruction must precede application.

Informing Marines about ethics is necessary but not sufficient. Marines must be consistently reintroduced to these concepts through both formal and informal means to reinforce understanding and demonstrate basic comprehension. This occurs through scheduled classroom instruction, field discussions, and informal conversations in garrison and during training. Allocating time for ethics discussion serves as a forcing function that gives Marines the space to think through the application of values to the situations they are likely to face.

Ethical education is not restricted to critical thinking and ethics in the abstract. Marines must also be educated on the organizational purpose that makes the values meaningful, the policies that govern conduct in war, and the specific dimensions of war's nature that will challenge their values. MCRP 4-11.8B, *War Crimes*, states that Marines are less likely to commit war crimes when they are trained in the law of war, understand that violations will be prosecuted, and realize that compliance benefits mission accomplishment. (See figure 12)

⁴⁷ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 2018. p.3-11

Bloom's Taxonomy provides a model for how Ethical Education and Ethical Training helps Marines achieve an Ethical Mindset

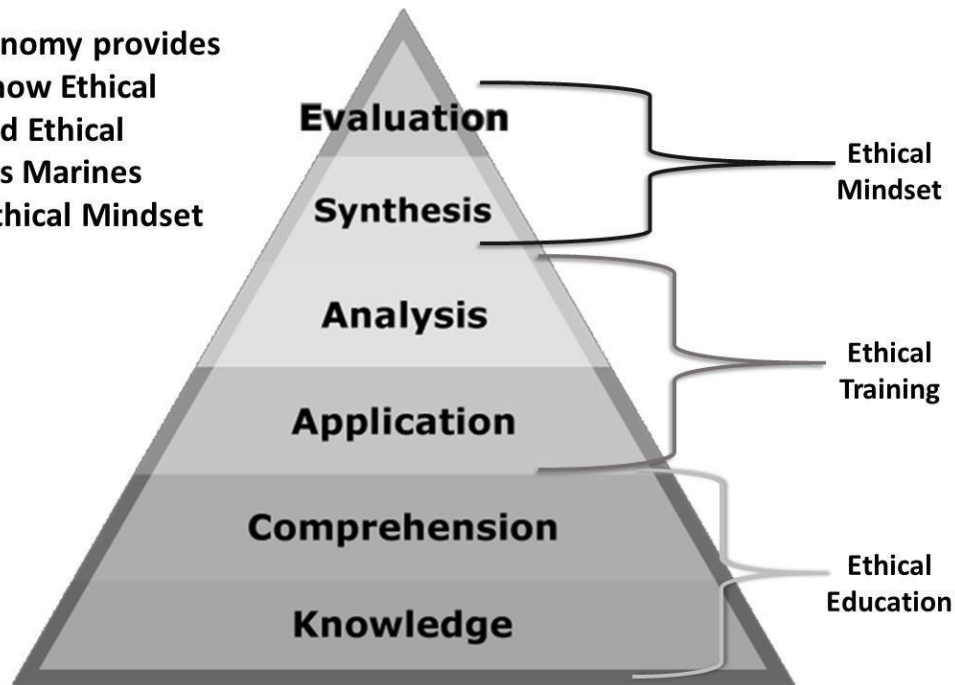


Figure 12: Bloom's Taxonomy in understanding ethics

At the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, Lieutenant General H. R. McMaster identified ignorance as the first cause of unethical conduct among American servicemembers. Warriors were ignorant of values and what was expected of them.⁴⁸ Ethical education is the primary remedy for that ignorance.

Ethical education must be implemented at the institutional level, the unit level, and the individual level simultaneously. As *Warfighting* states, responsibility for professional military education resides with the education establishment, the commander, and the individual.⁴⁹ Leaders cannot abdicate this responsibility to formal institutions alone, nor can they leave it entirely to individual Marines to develop on their own. All three levels must operate in parallel. All leaders must continuously connect ethical education to the unit's purpose and mission requirements

⁴⁸ McMaster, H. R, *The Future of the American Military*, Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs, 2015.

⁴⁹ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Warfighting*, MCDP 1, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 2018. p. 3-12.

so that Marines understand not just what the values are but why adhering to them is inseparable from mission success.

ETHICAL TRAINING

Ethical training is the application of the knowledge received in ethical education. Where education instills understanding, training develops the habit of acting on that understanding under conditions that make it difficult. Every Marine must be consistently challenged to make decisions based on institutional values and then act on those decisions in realistic and demanding environments.

This can be accomplished through group discussions using case studies and ethical decision exercises that require Marines to apply values to ambiguous situations and determine the right course of action. These events strengthen the moral lens and develop the mental habit of values-based decision making. But discussion alone is insufficient. Since ethics is the application of values in action, ethical training must include both ethical decision making and a requirement to act on those decisions in conditions that simulate the friction of war.

The constant requirement to act on values instills a bias for ethical action. It also reaffirms to Marines that they are capable of acting ethically even under pressure, removing the doubt and insecurity that can strip a Marine of the confidence to act when their moral lens identifies the need. The action must be justifiable within institutional values. Leaders must guard against allowing Marines to reverse engineer justifications for action based on instinct rather than values-informed reasoning. Critical thinking must precede action, not follow it.

Cognitive dissonance is the discrepancy between one's behavior and beliefs.⁵⁰ The stress of war can compel Marines to deviate from values even when those values are genuinely held. Fear, fatigue, hunger, and sleep deprivation are causal factors. So is the frustration that accumulates from casualties, from an enemy that does not adhere to the law of war, and from the grinding moral weight of sustained combat. That frustration is understandable. It is not a justification for unethical action. The theory of war does not permit abandonment of the values that enable the implementation of policy regardless of what the enemy chooses to do.

As General Mattis said, “we define who we are by maintaining our ethical standards...we do not want the enemy to dictate to us our ethical standards, whether they carry out the ethical standards or not is really immaterial.”⁵¹

Ethical training must be conducted consistently. Just as physical and technical training require regular application, ethical training must consistently force both decision and action in accordance with institutional values. It must also build resolve by injecting the type of friction that will erode the desire to adhere to values. Fear, discomfort, physical fatigue, lack of sleep, hunger, and mental stress must be responsibly incorporated into moments of ethical decision making so that Marines develop the conditioned response to apply values precisely when they are most difficult to apply.

This type of training is often referred to as stress inoculation, which proves to an individual that their perceived needs for comfort and certainty are unnecessarily high. This training shows Marines that their baseline physiological and safety needs are lower than most people, that

⁵⁰ Zimbardo, Philip, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, Random House Publishing, New York, 2007 p. 219.

⁵¹ Mattis, James, *United States Naval Academy Forrestal Lecture*, 2012.

they can thrive in an expeditionary environment with few resources while succeeding in an arena of violence. In the end, leaders must make Marines face combat stress since denial of this in training is unhealthy.⁵² Stress inoculation gives an individual the necessary assurance that they can endure the hardship of war without sacrificing ethical conduct. Marines are often placed in stressful and austere environments, which are closely linked to expeditionary operations.⁵³

As Maslow's hierarchy explains, perceived erosion of physiological needs causes people to focus on personal preservation rather than institutional values. Marines must become comfortable with operating in environments that do not meet what they would otherwise consider minimal physiological requirements. This expeditionary mindset, the expectation and willingness to endure hardship, is not separate from ethical development. It is a precondition for it. The Marine who cannot function under austerity cannot access the higher order thinking that ethical conduct under pressure demands.

Rarely are Marines given the perspective that a demanding physical training event is simultaneously exercising their ability to adhere to values under austere and stressful circumstances. Providing that perspective, explaining that the way a Marine endures the hardship matters as much as the completion of the event, connects the physical training environment directly to moral development. That connection transforms existing training events into ethical training without requiring additional time or resources.

⁵² Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Combat Stress*, MCDP 6-11C, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p.19.

⁵³ Headquarters US Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Operations*, MCDP 3, Washington, DC: Headquarters US Marine Corps, 1997. p. 35.

CONSISTENT REINFORCEMENT

A critical step in building and maintaining strong culture is consistent reinforcement of the organization's purpose and values. Consistent reinforcement occurs when leaders accompany each correct behavior with acknowledgment and each incorrect behavior with correction.⁵⁴ This cannot be formally mentioned once when a leader takes charge and then left to fend for itself. The purpose and values of the organization must be demonstrated verbally and through action every day.

Persistent reinforcement is not limited to formal briefs on the unit mission. It is reflected in the example set by every leader and in the application of values in every daily interaction. This requires leaders to reflect deliberately on how they will demonstrate those values in their own conduct and how they will respond to the actions of others depending on whether those actions adhere to or deviate from the standard.

Leaders set the conditions for strong culture because Marines want to feel included in a unit. The authority given to a leader provides a platform to communicate what actions are acceptable and which are not. The Marine Corps uses its core values, leadership traits, and leadership principles to discriminate between Marines. Those who adhere to the ethos and practice the culture are valuable members of the unit and must be made to understand how important their honorable service is to the Corps' success.

Feedback is the critical mechanism of reinforcement. Feedback is the timely provision of judgment regarding task-related results.⁵⁵ Every interaction a leader has with their team communicates what is important to the organization. That communication comes in one of three forms.

⁵⁴ Newstrom, John, *Organizational Behavior: Human Behavior at Work Organizations*, McGraw Hill Publishing, New York, 2007. p 115.

⁵⁵ Newstrom, John, *Organizational Behavior: Human Behavior at Work Organizations*, McGraw Hill Publishing, New York, 2007. p 115.

The first is approval, the acknowledgment and encouragement of correct behavior. Rewarding ethical conduct is a necessary feedback mechanism. It is a reaffirmation of a Marine's individual contribution to the unit and confirmation that the role they play matters to the organization's success. It produces self-efficacy, the internal belief in one's own capabilities and competencies. Leaders must resist the temptation to dismiss ethical conduct as simply doing the job and therefore unworthy of acknowledgment. Frequent positive reinforcement of good conduct is among the most powerful tools a leader has for building strong culture. It should be exploited as much as possible.

The second is disapproval, the honest and direct correction of unethical or substandard conduct. Disapproval is necessary because the leader's message of unit purpose is not always the only message within the unit. Cynical, unconvinced, or unethical individuals may present narratives that contradict the leader's guidance. Disapproval communicates that those narratives are not acceptable and that deviations from institutional values compromise the unit's ability to fulfill its purpose. Disapproval must never be abusive, condescending, or belittling. Abusive correction may produce behavioral compliance through fear but it does so at the cost of the trust and initiative that decentralized execution requires. Effective disapproval changes behavior through a Marine's genuine understanding that their conduct was a departure from shared values that compromised the unit's collective success.

The third is inaction, the failure to respond when ethical or unethical conduct occurs. Inaction is the easiest feedback mechanism for a leader to employ and the most damaging to strong culture. When a Marine behaves unethically and the leader does nothing, the organization receives an unmistakable signal that the behavior is acceptable. As Zimbardo established in *The Lucifer Effect*, the failure to act can be a form of evil

in itself when helping, dissent, or correction is required.⁵⁶ Inaction also harms Marines who are behaving ethically by denying them the positive reinforcement that confirms their conduct is right and valued. Leaders must understand that inaction is never neutral. It is passive approval of whatever behavior it fails to address.

The convergence of these three feedback mechanisms operating consistently and in alignment with institutional values is what creates an ethical organization. When approval, disapproval, and action are all calibrated to the same ethical standard, the culture reinforces itself. Marines learn what is valued, what is not, and what the organization will not tolerate through the accumulated weight of daily interactions rather than through formal instruction alone. (See figure 13)

⁵⁶ Zimbardo, Philip, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, Random House Publishing, New York, 2007 p. 314.

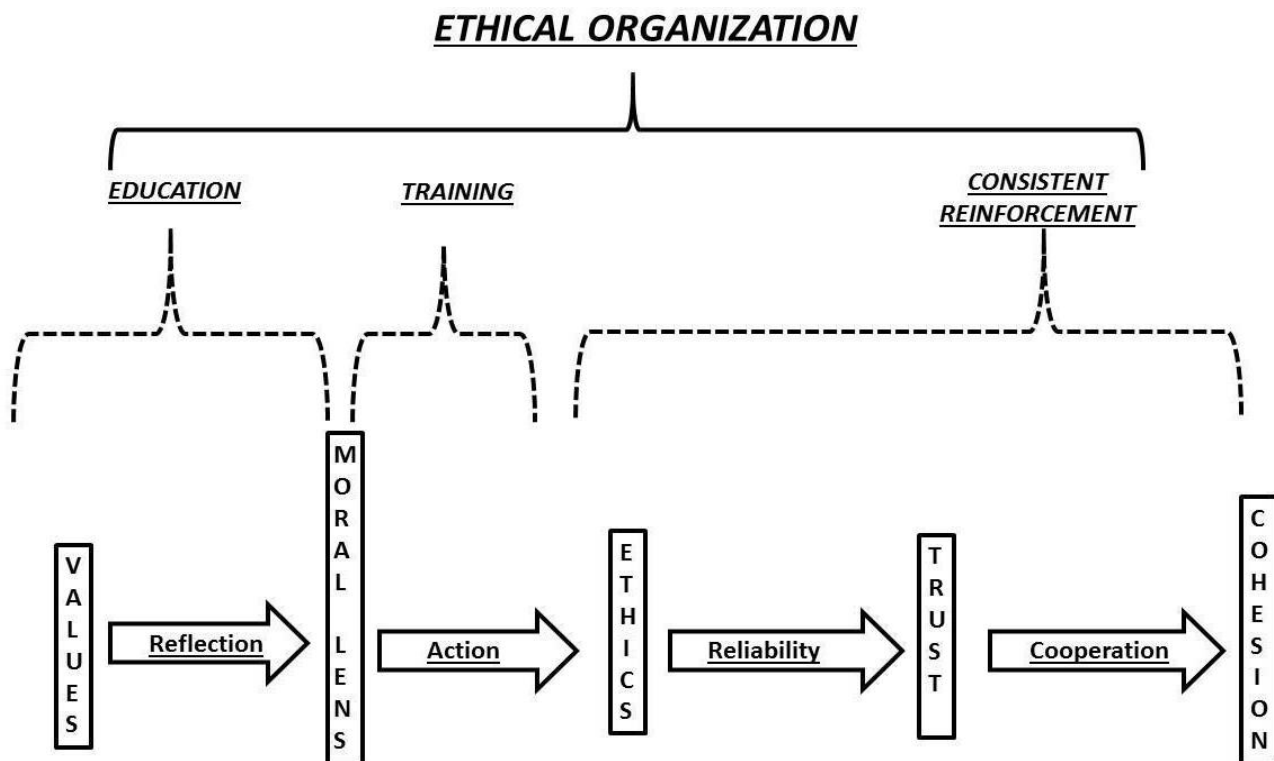


Figure 13: Creating an Ethical Organization

RESISTANCE TO ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT

Creating an ethical mindset requires deliberate and sustained effort. There will be resistance. Some Marines will not understand the operational importance of ethical development. Others will be uncomfortable with the absence of clearly defined measures of effectiveness for ethical training. The operational tempo of most units creates pressure toward short-term tasking and short-sighted vision that competes directly with the sustained investment ethical development requires. All of these are predictable obstacles. All of them must be anticipated and addressed.

The most common form of resistance is the belief that ethical development is someone else's responsibility, that it belongs to chaplains, academics, or formal PME institutions rather than to unit leaders. This publication exists specifically to refute that belief. Ethical development is

the responsibility of every Marine leader at every level. It cannot be outsourced. It cannot be deferred. And it cannot be accomplished by any institution or individual acting alone.

A second form of resistance is the toxic leadership and subculture that actively undermines ethical development by modeling unethical conduct, punishing ethical behavior, or creating an environment in which reporting violations feels more dangerous than concealing them. Leaders must identify and eliminate these influences decisively. A single toxic leader or a single entrenched negative subculture can undo years of deliberate ethical development more quickly than any enemy action. This is not an abstraction. It is the mechanism that produced every major institutional ethics failure in the Marine Corps' recent history.

A third form of resistance is the zero-defect mentality that treats any ethical failure as evidence of irredeemable character rather than an opportunity for correction and growth. That mentality produces Marines who conceal failures rather than report them, who comply superficially rather than internalizing values, and who are afraid to take the initiative that mission command requires. Leaders must hold the standard without making the standard a source of paralysis. The goal is Marines who are ethical because they believe in the values, not Marines who appear ethical because they fear the consequences of being caught.

Understanding these forms of resistance and deliberately eliminating the conditions that produce them is as important as understanding and implementing the conditions that build strong culture. Every unit has a culture whether it is deliberately built or not. The leader who does not actively address resistance to ethical development does not maintain a neutral environment. They allow the resistance to win by default.

INTEGRATED TRAINING PLAN

Ethical conditioning must be a continuous line of operation in every unit's training plan. Just as physical training, equipment maintenance, and weapons qualification are enduring requirements that cannot be addressed in a single event, ethical development must be sustained throughout the training year rather than addressed in isolated blocks of instruction.

Many leaders will perceive ethical development as another requirement competing with finite time and resources. That perception misunderstands the opportunity. Much of ethical training does not require additional time. It requires the deliberate exploitation of training events that already exist.

Ethical education should be front-loaded when a new leader takes charge and repeated throughout the year as new Marines arrive. This ensures that the foundational understanding of values, purpose, and the theory of ethics is established before Marines are asked to apply it under pressure. Ethical training, however, can occur within field exercises, physical training evolutions, and even safety briefs. The key is making Marines aware that the event is going to test their resolve to adhere to values, not just their physical or technical capability.

During physical training events leaders should construct team building elements within rigorous physical evolutions, log PT, casualty evacuations, obstacle courses, that require success to depend on Marines maintaining loyalty to their peers. Marines must understand that enduring the hardship for a teammate is the application of the value of loyalty in action, not merely a physical challenge to be overcome.

Field exercises provide the richest environment for ethical training because they can simultaneously stress physical endurance, sleep deprivation, hunger, mental clarity, and the requirement to apply focused and restrained violence in conditions that approximate combat. Leaders must explain to their Marines that successfully enduring these hardships

is not the only measure of the event's value. The manner in which they are endured, the decisions made under pressure, the treatment of peers and subordinates when conditions become most demanding, these are equally important measures of the training's success.

Marines are rarely given this perspective when enduring training hardships. Introducing the rigors and explaining their moral dimension helps foster the willingness to persevere through adversity and helps Marines understand that successful completion of intense training events is not simply an end to be achieved. It is evidence that the values can hold under the conditions of war.

DELIBERATE PLANNING AND AVOIDING ABUSE

The ethical training described in this chapter requires Marines to endure significant hardship. Leaders who administer that hardship carry a profound responsibility to do so safely, deliberately, and within the bounds of the trust Marines place in those who lead them.

That trust is among the most valuable assets a leader holds. Marines trust their leaders to train them hard without jeopardizing their safety. Violating that trust would damage unit cohesion, demoralize the force, and undermine the very ethical development the training is designed to produce. Needless injuries compromise the Marine Corps' readiness and ability to respond to global crises. They also communicate to every Marine in the unit that the leader who caused them is not worthy of the trust that mission command requires.

All leaders must approach demanding ethical training with the same deliberate planning they would apply to a combat operation. Operational risk management must be applied thoroughly. Every physical and mental challenge that tests moral adherence must be designed to be demanding

without being dangerous, intense without being abusive, and realistic without creating conditions that cannot be safely controlled.

This is not a call for reduced standards or softened training. It is a call for the same professionalism in the design and execution of ethical training that the Marine Corps demands in every other dimension of warfighter development. The goal is Marines who have been pushed to their limits in a controlled environment and emerged with greater confidence in their ability to maintain ethical conduct when war pushes them to those same limits without control.

CONCLUSION

The ethical development of every Marine is a warfighting requirement and the responsibility of every Marine leader. It is not a supplementary concern or a secondary priority. It is as fundamental to combat effectiveness as physical training, technical proficiency, and tactical skill.

This chapter has established the practical architecture of ethical development. Organizational culture creates the environment in which values can be genuinely internalized. Strong culture produces the alignment between individual and institutional values that makes ethical conduct reliable. Subculture alignment removes the competing value sources that undermine that reliability. Function ethics provides the organizing philosophy that connects individual ethical conduct to organizational purpose and warfighting effectiveness. Ethical education builds the foundational knowledge. Ethical training develops the bias for ethical action under demanding conditions. Consistent reinforcement sustains both through the daily accumulation of feedback that either builds or erodes the culture the unit depends on.

The chain this book has established from its first page to this final section is not an abstraction. It is the operational reality that every Marine leader faces every day. Ethics produces trust. Trust produces cohesion. Cohesion enables the cooperative action that generates combat power. Combat power serves policy. Breaking any link in that chain costs lives and potentially costs wars.

Every Marine who understands this chain and leads accordingly makes the force faster, harder to break, and more capable of fulfilling the purpose the nation has given it. That is the standard. This publication provides the doctrine to meet it