ENCOURAGING MORAL MILITARY BEHAVIOUR THROUGH
THE INFRASTRUCTURAL DESIGN OF THE MILITARY
ORGANIZATION
THE AWKWARD PSYCHOLOGICAL REALM OF THE MILITARY
PROFESSION AND ORGANIZATION

LIESBETH GULPERS

ABSTRACT

Military organizations attempt to encourage moral and effective military behavior simultaneously. However, there is a tension between effective and efficient military behaviour on the one hand and moral responsible military behaviour on the other. This tension exists in the psychological processes and dynamics that are mobilized through the infrastructural design of the military organization that primarily aims to encourage effective military behavior and in the paradoxical demands of the military profession. The paper discusses military effective behavior and how it is encouraged through the mobilization of psychological processes. It then discusses military moral behavior and the psychological processes that encourage such behavior. These psychological processes are in tension: the psychology of effective military behavior may negatively affect moral behaviour and moral development. This paper aims to present and raise awareness for the awkward psychological realm where military effectiveness and efficiency and moral military behaviour meet.

KEYWORDS

Military organization, infrastructural design, moral behaviour, virtue ethics, moral psychology

1. INTRODUCTION

Military organizations want and need good soldiers. Good soldiers are able to perform their tasks and fulfil their responsibilities in an effective and in a moral responsible way simultaneously (Aronovitch 2001: 17). Military organizations are therefore committed to train and encourage their personnel to behave effectively and morally. However, there is a tension between effective military behaviour on the one hand and moral responsible military behaviour on the other hand. Not because good soldiers do not exist, but because of what soldiers have to be trained to do to become good soldiers (Aronovitch 2001: 14, emphasis in original). In this paper I discuss this tension, and show how effective and moral military behavior require different and potentially conflicting psychological processes and dynamics. I argue that the military profession and the good soldier operate in an ‘awkward psychological realm’. I think that this tension has to be addressed more explicitly by military organization and therefore my aim is to raise awareness for this tension rather than solve it.

This is how I attempt to achieve this aim. The paper starts with a brief introduction of the tension between effective moral behavior and military behavior (paragraph 2). I discuss what both types of behavior involve and how they are enabled. I start with effective military behavior (paragraph 3). I discuss effective military behavior in terms of the core tasks and responsibilities of the military profession and the differentiated role of the military. Then I turn to military psychology to argue which psychological dynamics enable and underlie effective military behaviour. I demonstrate that characteristics of the infrastructural design of the military organization enable these dynamics. In the next paragraph I discuss moral military behavior in general terms and then I raise three questions that draw attention to the prescriptive, descriptive and instrumental aspects of moral military behavior (paragraph 4). I argue that the military organization should address these questions to decide to what end and how moral responsible military behavior should be encouraged. In the next paragraph I attempt to answer the first two questions (paragraph 5). I first suggest that the military should adopt an aspirational view on moral military behavior and that this view is best put to practice along the prescriptive and descriptive lines of a virtue ethics approach. After this, I draw on insights from business ethics to describe the psychological requirements for moral military behaviour and the development of moral character. Here, I develop a theoretical model for moral decision making and moral development. By way of conclusion I suggest that the military is confronted with an awkward moral realm that it has to acknowledge and then deal with, in order to encourage good soldiering (paragraph 6).

1 Nijmegen School of Management, Radboud University Nijmegen, Nijmegen, Netherlands.
2. THE TENSION BETWEEN EFFECTIVE AND MORAL MILITARY BEHAVIOR

Military organizations are simultaneously committed to encourage effective military behavior and moral military behavior. It is even suggested that both types of behavior are mutually dependent. For example, military ethicists suggest that moral military behavior contributes to the effectiveness and success of military operations, especially in the context of irregular warfare (cf. Robinson et al. 2008; Carrick et al. 2009; Olsthoorn et al. 2010). Indeed, moral military behavior and effective military behavior are not mutually exclusive, nor is it impossible for soldiers to be both effective and moral (Aronovitch 2001; Osiel 1999). With Aronovitch I assume that good soldiers are capable of acting in a way that is effective and moral at the same time. However, a tension exists between effective military behavior and moral military behavior, and to encourage effective military organization, the military organization mobilizes psychological processes that may negatively affect moral military behavior. I will draw on Aronovitch’ discussion of this tension as it is especially illuminating (Aronovitch 2001: 14), and I will draw on Osiel’s discussion because he suggests that the tension can be dealt with at the organizational level.

Aronovitch suggests that the tension between effective and moral military behavior becomes visible when the question is raised what soldiers must be trained to do. Then, we find that: ‘Soldiers must be trained to kill, but also be trained not to be brutal; soldiers must be trained to react in combat situations almost automatically, lest hesitation be fatal or harmful to a mission, but also be trained to deliberate and decide if a command is unlawful; and soldiers as peacekeepers must be trained to be impartial, but they must also be trained to know right from wrong and to be firmly committed to what is right and to oppose what is wrong. Additionally, of course, peacekeepers who are soldiers must be trained to fight and yet also trained to resist the impulse to fight even in situations where for soldiers it could otherwise be just and obligatory to do so’ (Aronovitch 2001: 14, emphasis mine).

Osiel (1999) also discusses the perceived tension between effective and moral military behavior. He concludes that this tension disappears when we think of military behavior as a form of situational judgment. This always requires the simultaneous consideration of the demands of effectiveness and morality. This provides opportunities within the military organization to encourage both simultaneously. However, his analysis focuses on international law and how it defines the responsibility of the individual soldier and the military organization in moral behavior.

What is most important in both accounts is that practical solutions can be found to seriously deal with this tension. However, this means that the tension should be taken seriously. Indeed, the contradictory demands of the military profession demonstrate ‘the theoretical perplexity and the practical difficulty involved [in training for good soldiers]’ (Aronovitch 2001: 14). It is this theoretical perplexity and practical difficulty of the demands of good soldiering that I want to discuss and raise awareness for in the next paragraphs.

3. INFRASTRUCTURAL DESIGN AND EFFECTIVENESS

Military effectiveness can be discussed in terms of how it is ensured in an organizational infrastructure. An organizational infrastructure is designed to contribute to the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization in setting and realizing its goals and to ensure that the organization is capable to behave meaningful in its environment (Achterbergh & Vriens 2009: 11). In order to be able to survive in this sense, organizations have to be able to perform transformation processes and to regulate them (see figure 1). The performance of transformation processes and their regulation is enabled through the organizational infrastructure. I will first discuss the transformation processes and their regulation, and then discuss the role of the organizational infrastructure. After that I will discuss the psychology of encouraging military effectiveness.

3.1. INFRASTRUCTURAL DESIGN

An organization attempts to realize its goals through transformation processes. This implies that the organization has to be able to formulate and re-formulate its goals (strategic regulation). In addition, in transformation processes ‘disturbances’ can occur. To deal with such disturbances, operational regulation is required. Operational regulation controls and changes the transformation processes to deal with disturbances. For the strategic and operational regulation of an organization a third type of regulation is required: regulation by design. Through this type of regulation the conditions are created for the strategic and operational regulation, the transformation processes and regulation by design itself. In short: in order to be viable and to make a meaningful contribution to society, an organization has to be able to set goals and to realize them. This requires transformation processes as well as three types of regulation: strategic regulation,
operational regulation and regulation by design. The role of the infrastructural design in improving the viability of an organization is that the infrastructure of the organization creates the conditions for the three types of regulation and for the realization of the transformation process (Achterbergh & Vriens 2009: 14).

The infrastructural design of an organization is the way in which the division of labour, human resources and the systems for their management, and technology are organized in conjunction to contribute to the viability of the organization (Achterbergh & Vriens 2009: 14). Together they enable the transformation processes as well as their strategic regulation, operational regulation and regulation by design.

1. The structure of the organization (division of labor) defines and relates tasks that are required for the performance of the transformation processes and their regulation. Through the division of labor the operational and regulational functions required for the transformation process are separated and then related to each other and the environment in a specific way (De Sitter 1994).

2. Human resource and the systems for their management (HRM) concerned the human resources (the people) of the organization. Its aim is to manage the people within the organization in such a way that the goals of the organization are realized and performance (and wellbeing) is improved. HR-systems are meant to ensure that the organization has ‘the right people in the right place at the right moment’ (Robbins & Coulter 2008: 273). They organize, describe, operate and include the activities required to ensure that the organization has sufficient and qualified employees and to improve their performance.

3. Technology. Technology is also required for realizing and changing goals and regulating an organization. Technology is defined broadly: it includes all the things an organization requires to realize its goals other than people. The technology of an organization thus includes a wide variety of things, including ICT (Information and Communication Technology), buildings, methods and machines. The choice and quality of the technology influences the possibilities for realizing and changing goals and thus the viability of the organization.

Theoretically, the organizational design can have a direct influence on effective and moral behavior. This line of reasoning is not pursued here. Instead, I focus on the way the infrastructural design indirectly influences effective and moral behavior by mobilizing specific psychological processes. The psychological processes and the organizational infrastructure that underlie effective military behavior are discussed in the next subsection.

Figure 1: the organizational infrastructure (adopted from: Achterbergh & Vriens 2009: 65).

3.2. THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MILITARY EFFECTIVENESS

Military effectiveness can be defined in terms of the goals and core tasks of the military organization. For the purpose of this paper, I propose a limited definition of military effectiveness: I define military effective in terms of the use of violence in order to gain military success. The military holds the monopoly on violence: together with the police it is the only institution who has the right to use violence. It has the responsibility to use violence, up to ultimate violence. This is the most extreme task of the military, and military effectiveness as the effective use of violence, including the use of ultimate force, to achieve military success. (What constitutes military success is mission-dependent.) The goal of the military organization is then to train and
equip soldiers in the use of violence. To this end, soldiers have to develop skills such as the correct use of different weapon systems and other military systems, even up to the point where it an automatic response, so they can do this even under extreme complex, confusing and stressful situations.

This is where the military is presented with a difficult situation, for human beings have a strong aversion to killing. This is partially innate, and partially the result of strong and consistent social pressures against the use of violence. In general, people do not think of themselves as a person who would wound and kill. But in the context of war they do, and when they become soldiers it even becomes part of their professional task and responsibility to use violence. To create good soldiers, the military organization therefore has to enable its personnel to overcome their aversion against killing.

To this end, the military has developed (and uses) sophisticated techniques, especially in the last centuries (Grossman 2009). These techniques built on psychological characteristics of human beings. E.g., as human beings we are sensitive to group pressures and authority, and we are more likely to use violence when the psychological and physical distance between ourselves and the other is large (cf. Glover 2001; Grossman 2009; see also oft-quoted studies such as Bandura et al. 1999, Milgram 1974, Zimbardo 2007). These psychological characteristics are actively addressed in the military organization in order to enable soldiers to overcome the resistance to killing. The psychological processes that are involved in enabling the use of violence in close combat or long-range combat differ. At close range, the use of violence is difficult because the soldier witnesses the suffering he causes and experiences his own fear of being shot at. In long-range combat, this is not the case and this makes it more easy to use violence. To enable both types of combat, the physical and psychological distance between the soldier and civilian society is increased, the distance between the soldier and his opponent is increased, while the distance between the soldier and his superior and peers is decreased. This is done through measures in the organizational infrastructure, e.g., in the division of labour and HR-systems.

The military operates in a separate space, at a physical and psychological distance from civilian society. This is a characteristic of military operations, and during military training the military actively increases the distance between the soldier and civilian society. For example, soldiers often live in barracks, go on long training sessions, wear a uniform, and learn a new language. These measures are part of the physical and psychological removal from the everyday social context and incorporation into the military context. This process weakens the ties to the civilian moral community, weakens civilian restraints on violence, and it erodes the civilian moral identity (Glover 2001: 51). Simultaneously, ties with the military community become stronger and deeper and a new military identity is formed. There is also a physical and psychological distance to the victim or opponent. This includes the social, cultural, moral and mechanical distance. This distance too is enlarged. This can be done through the use of long-range weaponry, or through an appeal on social and cultural differences, or by emphasizing the immorality of the opponent or one’s own moral superiority.

In addition, the military uses the demands of authority and obedience to enable the use of violence. There is a strong appeal on the demands of authority. The success of this approach is determined by the (physical and psychological) proximity of the authority figure, the respect a soldier has for his superior or peer, the intensity of the demands made by the authority figure, and his perceived legitimacy (Grossman 2009). The division of labour in the military emphasizes the role of groups and encourages teamwork. Such groups enable effective military operation, as they can lend absolutism for the use of violence and enable the operation of complex weapons systems. Whether this encourages effective military behavior further depends on identification with the group, the proximity of the group, the intensity of the group’s support for killing, the size of the group, and the legitimacy of the group. All of these factors are ensured through intensive and extended training in groups, and the buddy system of the military organization.

The training and conditioning of the soldiers are important HR-measures to enable the use of violence (Grossman 2009: 187-190). Military training is to a large extent concerned with operand conditioning: through training combined with immediate rewards and punishment an automatic, conditioned response (automaticity) is developed. The same act is repeated over and over again; it is a drill. According to Glover, this is done because ‘[a]rms need to produce something close to a ‘robot psychology’ in which what would otherwise seem horrifying acts can be carried out coldly, without being inhibited by normal responses’ (Glover 2001: 48). However, learning skills and drills also helps to overcome panic. They instil discipline, and this discipline contributes to the reliability of the military organization under extremely uncertain circumstances. Skills and drills prevent hesitation and delay which may pose dangers to the individual and to the success of the mission, but they also enable the soldier to use violence ‘coldly’ (Aronovitch 2001: 14; Glover 2001; Grossman 2009). The soldier is further trained to demonstrate this behaviour only under authority and with a focus on the enemy combatant (Grossman 2009). All these measures are meant to contribute to the effective and smooth functioning of the military organization and to enable the soldier to perform his tasks effectively. For long-range combat, the organizational infrastructure contributes to the use of violence through the encouragement of phased decision making, weapon technology, fragmentation of
defend property as well as fire upon when necessary, and ready to obey orders from above. We can see that
an awkward moral realm – ideally (or we may say, traditionally) presented as ready to kill or be killed,
"Even though the great moral purpose of the soldier is to protect life and property, the armed man stands in
the civil realm are laid aside' (Mosely 2008: 180).

The processes these authors describe have direct links to the infrastructural design of the military
organization. It relates to the way responsibility is divided in the organization, the distance that is increased
through weapon technology, and processes that enable phased decision making. It involves HR-systems such
as teaching and training and the formation of a professional identity through the management of the relation
with the civilian world.

4. HOW TO THINK ABOUT MORAL MILITARY BEHAVIOR

In this paragraph I discuss what moral military behavior is and how it can be encouraged. First I start by
describing the differentiated role and the related awkward moral realm of the military profession. The
definition of moral military behavior I then offer does not provide sufficient insight in the practice of moral
military behavior. Therefore I argue that the military should answer three questions that will define its
ambitions, challenges, and methods in encouraging moral military behavior. In other words, the military
should state its ambitions in encouraging moral behavior, gain knowledge and insight in the processes that
enable moral and immoral behavior, and then design measures that are meant to encourage moral behavior.
In this paragraph I introduce these questions and argue for their relevance. In the next paragraph I suggest
answers to the first two questions.

4.1. THE DIFFERENTIATED ROLE OF THE MILITARY

In general, moral responsible behavior in organizations is behavior that is in accordance with social and
organizational standards and values. These standards and values may conflict in which case moral dilemmas
may arise, but most of the time there is a clear overlap. For the professions such as the legal, medical or
military profession, this overlap does not exist for core values. Members of a profession work in a separate
moral domain, with norms and values that do not apply to those who are not a member of the profession.
Hartle uses the term ‘differentiated role’ to describe this special moral position of the professions. He argues
that given the moral differences between the profession and wider society, professionals have a special
obligation to justify their behaviour in moral terms, and to act in ways that are at least morally acceptable to
society and to the profession (Hartle 2004: 7). In addition, conflicts between professional and societal norms
and standards cannot be avoided, since professionals are also members of the wider social context in which
other values apply.

The military can be regarded as a profession because it holds a ‘differentiated role’ in society. This is
visible in three domains: (1) weaponry: the military possesses and controls special weaponry, including
lethal, technologically complex weapons that general members of society are forbidden to possess or control;
(2) authority: military leaders have the authority to order persons into situations of great danger; (3) deadly
force: soldiers are authorized to use deadly force in ways that general members of society are not (Hartle
2004: 9). In light of these domains, the military can be regarded a profession with its own norms and values.
In practice this means that ‘various considerations that would be relevant or even decisive in moral
evaluations are disregarded or weighted less heavily [in the military]' (Hartle 2004: 7). Some of the central
values of society do not apply as strongly in the military organization, while other values and rules apply to
the military profession and society equally. The differentiated role both enables military behavior and
constrains it as soldiers have to be able to justify their behavior towards wider society and the military.

Mosely refers to the special moral position of the military profession as an ‘awkward moral realm’: “Even
though the great moral purpose of the soldier is to protect life and property, the armed man stands in
an awkward moral realm – ideally (or we may say, traditionally) presented as ready to kill or be killed,
defend as well as fire upon when necessary, and ready to obey orders from above. We can see that
the soldier exists in what is a strange moral limbo in which the assumptions of peace that drive the mores of
the civil realm are laid aside’ (Mosely 2008: 180).

The phrases ‘differentiated role’ and ‘awkward moral realm’ hint at the theoretical and practical
difficulties of encouraging moral responsible and effective military behavior simultaneously. They also hint
at the difficulties involved in defining moral military behavior. Moral military behavior is behavior that
meets the requirement of the military profession while simultaneously being acceptable to society. This
definition is not satisfactory when we attempt to deal with the practical challenges of good soldiering.
Therefore I propose three questions that help to gain insight in the practical challenges of good soldiering, and that I think should underlie attempts to encourage good soldiering.

4.2. THREE CORE QUESTIONS

The definition of moral military behavior does not provide insight in the ambition, opportunities and challenges for moral military behavior, or an idea on how moral military behavior can be encouraged. It merely suggests that moral military behavior is a special type of moral behavior, one that requires some negotiating between the military and society. I therefore propose three core questions that should, when answered, provide a framework within which it is possible to design measures to encourage moral military behavior. They help to first distinguish and then relate the prescriptive, descriptive and instrumental aspects of encouraging moral behavior in organizations. These questions are: (1) What are the ambitions of the military in encouraging moral military behavior? (2) What factors influence moral military behavior, i.e., which factors influence how soldiers deal with moral issues in real life situations? And given the answers to the previous questions: (3) Which organizational measures are required to encourage moral military behavior? The answers to these questions should be in line with each other and consistently applied throughout the organization to increase the success of moral military behavior. In this paragraph I want to briefly discuss these three questions.

The first question aims to make explicit the ambitions of the military in encouraging moral behavior. This can be done along two lines. First, Wolfendale’s distinction between a functional and an aspirational view on moral military behavior is helpful (Wolfendale 2008). In the functional view moral military behavior is encouraged because it promotes effective military functioning (Wolfendale 2008: 164). In contrast, an aspirational view aims to improve moral behavior as an end in itself. It aims to cultivate good moral character (Wolfendale 2008: 164). In the aspirational view the relation between effective and moral behavior becomes a practical issue, as military effectiveness and the moral character of soldiers become equally important goals (Wolfendale 2008: 172). Second, the ambitions of the military can be expressed through the adoption of a prescriptive approach to moral responsible behavior. Prescriptive approaches are based on moral philosophy. They are theories on what moral decision an agent should make and how. They express an emphasis on a functional or an aspirational view on moral military behavior. Examples of descriptive approaches are a rules-based or deontological ethics, a consequentialist approach, or a virtue ethics approach. Adopting a prescriptive approach in the military defines what constitutes moral military behavior and how it is evaluated. Should soldiers act in accordance with laws and rules, or in accordance with general principles, or do the consequences of their actions define whether an action was moral or not, or should the morality of soldiers be defined in terms of the individual’s moral character?

The second question aims to increase insight in factors that influence moral military behavior in practice. The military should develop a descriptive theory on moral military behavior; it should increase its insights and knowledge regarding the way soldiers engage in moral behavior and how they deal with moral issues in real life. Descriptive approaches to moral behavior can be based on moral psychology and business ethics. Researchers in these fields attempt to uncover how people make moral decision making and which factors influence that process (Rest 1979; Rest 1986; Trevino and Nelson 2007: 95). Insights from moral psychology and business ethics can help the military to see which personal, situational and contextual factors positively or negatively affect moral decision making. In addition, the military can draw on insights from studies that focus explicitly on moral behavior in the military organization.

The third question suggests that the military has to develop measures to encourage moral military behavior that are in accordance with its ambitions and that take into account the practical challenges of moral behavior. The combination of clear ambitions and descriptive knowledge provide guidelines and insights for measures in the military organization meant to encourage moral military behavior. This combination of ambition and knowledge will contribute to the success of attempts to encourage moral military behavior (Trevino and Nelson 2007: 95). Answering the third question goes beyond the scope of this article, but in paragraph 3.1. I have suggested that the military organization can be designed in such a way that it encourages effective and moral military behavior simultaneously.

The answers to the first two questions provide insight in the ambitions of the military as well as the practical challenges of encouraging moral military behavior. They help to define moral military behavior and to gain insight in the possibilities to encourage it. In addition, answering these questions will raise awareness for the relation between effective and moral military behavior. In the next paragraph I will discuss the first two questions.

5. MORAL MILITARY BEHAVIOR

In this paragraph I answer the first two core questions. In line with Wolfendale I first suggest that the military
should adopt an aspirational approach. When put to practice, this approach is more demanding, but it is also more respectful of the autonomy of soldiers and it enables soldiers to deal with a larger variety of moral issues. In line with the aspirational approach I adopt I then discuss the descriptive approach that fits this approach best, i.e., a virtue ethics approach.

5.1.1. AN ASPIRATIONAL VIEW

Wolfendale distinguishes a functional and an aspirational view on moral military behavior (Wolfendale 2008). In the functional view moral military behavior is encouraged because it enables military personnel to behave in accordance with legal and organizational standards (Wolfendale 2008: 162). In this view, the military aims to encourage reliable behavior primarily because it promotes effective military functioning (Wolfendale 2008: 164). This view is not based on any moral commitment or overarching goal and as a consequence it does not impose restraints on the methods that may be used to enable moral behavior. Thus, there is no obligation to respect the autonomy of soldiers; it may even undermine it, for example when drugs are used to encourage moral behavior (Wolfendale 2008: 172). In addition, in a functional view effective behavior is more important than moral behavior. Moral behavior is instrumental to effective military functioning, and its relevance is limited to its contribution to effectiveness. In contrast, an aspirational view aims at ‘improving the moral character of military personnel not just because this will lead to more reliable behavior, but also as an end in itself. […] [T]he aim is (partly) to cultivate good behaviour through the cultivation of good moral character. But the justification for cultivating good moral character is not purely instrumental; it is taken to be a morally desirable end in and of itself’ (Wolfendale 2008: 164). In an aspirational approach the tension between effective and moral behavior increases, as military effectiveness and the moral character of soldiers become equally important goals (Wolfendale 2008: 172).

For the military it is tempting to adopt a functional view to moral behavior. While the military profession is demanding in any case, a functional view is less demanding than an aspirational view. However, the functional view is not a moral view at all, and it does not encourage moral behavior but effective behavior. In addition, it may demand measures in the organization that can be considered immoral in their own right. For those reasons, this view should not be adopted and in fact be rejected.

The military should rather adopt an aspirational view on moral military behavior. A downside of this view is that it is more demanding on the military and on military professionals. For example, the ambition to encourage good behavior and good character cannot be limited to some ranks; all ranks are included in this commitment. It also means that military should adopt and encourage an operational ethics (which governs the behavior of soldiers) and an institutional ethics (ethical standards that define good institutional functioning) (Wolfendale 2008: 166). In addition, the military has to respect the moral autonomy of soldiers and this imposes restraints on the possible methods that can be used to encourage moral behavior (Wolfendale 2008: 172). This also requires a willingness to allow for conscientious objection and difference of opinion in the military (Wolfendale 2008; see also Mosely 2008 for a discussion of implications of ethics education on the soldiers’ contract). And, the cultivation of good character extends beyond the boundaries of the profession, for it is not just concerned with professional behavior. Despite the demanding nature of an aspirational view, it also has advantages that make it preferable over a functional view. When put to practice, it enables soldiers to deal with a large variety of moral issues. Rules and laws alone do not provide sufficient grounds to decide how to deal with moral issues, and rules themselves always need interpretation in the context of a specific situation to decide how to act (Aronovitch 2001; Osiel 1999). In today’s military operations, soldiers are confronted with new and more moral issues than in regular warfare (Olsthoorn et al. 2010: 138). Also, the demand for operational ethics and institutional ethics, and the related respect for autonomy, and tolerance for critical thinking and argument within the military are positive aspects of this approach. The aspirational view in addition relates moral behavior to overall good behavior. On the one hand, this creates possibilities to relate effective and moral military behavior. On the other hand, it may also create possibilities to deal with the awkward moral realm and to raise awareness among military personnel for their responsibilities towards society. Overall, I think the military should adopt an aspirational approach.

5.1.2. VIRTUE ETHICS AS A PRESCRIPTIVE APPROACH

The second part of defining the ambitions of the military in encouraging moral military behavior concerns the prescriptive approach that underlies organizational measures. Prescriptive approaches are based on moral philosophy. They are theories on what moral decision an agent should make and how. Adopting a prescriptive approach in the military defines what constitutes moral military behavior and how it is evaluated. Should military personnel act in accordance with laws and rules, or in accordance with general principles, or do the consequences of their actions define whether an action was moral or not, or should the morality of soldiers be defined in terms of the individual’s moral character? Examples of descriptive approaches are a rules-based or deontological ethics, a consequentialist approach, or a virtue ethics approach. In the military,
the consequentialist approach is generally rejected, but advocates can be found for a rules-based ethics as well as a virtue ethics approach (Olshtoorn 2008: 119; see also Osiel 1999, for an argument on how consequentialism in practice informs military ethics). Currently, the virtue ethics approach appears most popular in Western military organization (Robinson et al. 2008; Carrick et al. 2009). Some authors adopt a combination of rules-based ethics and virtue ethics: e.g., Aronovitch adopts a deontological approach incorporating elements of a virtue ethics approach (Aronovitch 2001: 16), and Osiel’s argument also suggests such a combination (Osiel 1999). In my view, virtue ethics best fits the aspirational view.

A virtue ethics approach expresses the aspirational view best, as it involves a commitment to the development of good habits and ultimately eudaimonia or 'human flourishing' (Achterbergh & Vriens 2009). The morality of behavior is then based on an evaluation of the moral character of the moral agent. Virtue ethics states that human beings should develop their moral character (or moral dispositions) and attempt to achieve eudaimonia or 'human flourishing'. Virtue ethics is also a descriptive approach, for it describes how moral character is developed: ‘by cultivating habits, through engaging in the practicing of virtue, and doing that by following noble examples as much as precepts, that is, by reference to the deeds and ways of virtuous persons [...]’ (Aronovitch 2001:20). In an Aristotelian perspective on virtue ethics, human flourishing can be reached through the development of moral character. This means that our natural capacities for reason and desire have to be developed to enable us to do the right thing (Sherman 1989; Achterbergh & Vriens 2009). More specifically, the development of moral character requires the development of moral virtue and practical wisdom. Moral virtue is the ability to desire the right thing in a specific situation. This includes the ability to find the mean between two vices – the virtue. Virtues are dispositions of character that do not come to us naturally but are acquired and developed through practice and extensive experience (Achterbergh & Vriens 2009). They involve perceptual, affective and cognitive capacities. Good conduct, in this perspective, requires the right judgment, the right emotion and the right action (Sherman 1989: 158, 166). Practical wisdom entails knowing which act will fulfill the desire. Some (military) theorists focus on which moral virtues should be developed, but in this paper I focus on the development of moral character in general, and the main question then becomes: how is moral character developed, specifically in organizations.

5.2. MORAL MILITARY BEHAVIOR IN PRACTICE

The second core question the military should address was: What factors influence moral military behavior, i.e., which factors influence how soldiers deal with moral issues in real life situations? This question should be addressed to gain understanding of moral military behavior in practice, and the factors that influence it. These insights can then be used to develop measures that are meant to encourage moral military behavior. Sources of information for the military organization are moral psychology and business ethics: studies in this field provide insight in the way moral decision making actually take place. In practice, a virtue ethics perspective demands attention for two different processes: the process of moral decision making and the process of moral development. To describe the process of moral decision making I use Rest’s Four Component Model (Rest 1984; Rest 1986). To describe the process of moral development I draw on Sherman’s account of virtue ethics (Sherman 1989). In addition I provide insight in the factors that influence both processes. Finally, I combine these insights in a theoretical model of moral decision making and moral development.

5.2.1. MORAL DECISION MAKING

For moral decision making I use the Four Component Model, through which Rest describes moral decision making as process that consists of four psychological components. These components are:

1. **Moral awareness:** recognizing that the agent could do something that affects the interests, welfare, or expectations of others. This may include the recognition of the situation as a moral problem, but ‘this is neither necessary nor inevitable’ (Rest 1986: 5);
2. **Moral judgment:** weighing the various alternatives for action and judging ‘which course of action [is] morally right (or fair or just or morally good), thus labeling one possible line of action as what a person ought (morally ought) to do in that situation’ (Rest 1986: 3);
3. **Moral intent (or moral motivation):** reaching a decision ‘to intend to do what is morally right’ (Rest 1986: 3). This requires that a moral agent given priority to moral values above personal values;
4. **Moral action:** acting based on the decision taken, including dealing with impediments, difficulties, physical challenges like fatigue and frustration, and resisting distractions. It requires ‘perseverance, ego strength, and implementation skills’ (Rest 1986: 4).

Although these components do not describe characteristics of individuals but rather processes that ‘go into the production of moral behaviour in a specific situation’, it can be related to a virtue ethics approach to moral behavior in the military. For, in Aristotle’s theory similar distinctions and relations can be perceived between perception, deliberation, motivation and action, and between affect, cognition and behavior.
(Sherman 1989). The model can also be incorporated into models that describe moral development. In an Aristotelian view, we develop moral character through the development of skills, practical wisdom and virtues (Sherman 1989). This is done in practice as well as through teaching. Rest’s theory supports this idea, since it too considers moral behavior as based on a combination of cognition, affect and behavior and as the result of a process of development, experience and education (Rest 1986: 4-5).

5.2.2. FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE MORAL DECISION MAKING

Studies in the fields of moral psychology and business ethics provide general insights in factors that influence moral behavior, while studies in the field of military psychology provide insights that are especially relevant for the military profession and that demonstrate that moral military behavior is influenced in different ways. I start with a general discussion of the factors that influence moral behavior and then focus on moral military behavior.

Moral (military) behavior is influenced by many factors. This is demonstrated in various theoretical and empirical studies of moral behavior. This complexity is confirmed by the results of empirical studies in the field of moral psychology and business ethics. Several reviews address the problem of the variety of results. One of the problems concerns the methodological quality of the studies; definitions vary and the research design is sometimes weak (cf. Rest 1979; Trevino et al. 1991; Thoma and Rest 1999; Thomson et al. 2005). Research in the field of moral psychology and business ethics is confronted with the complexity of its topic. However, there is another important issue. Most studies in moral psychology are clinical tests and experiments rather than studies of moral decision making in real life situations. In real life, moral behavior is extremely hard to predict (Rest 1986). This is even more so when moral behavior is studied in a context that is characterized by stress, pressure and equivocality.

I propose a distinction between the levels at which moral behavior is influenced. It is a rough distinction and does not take into account that there is overlap in factors. However, at this point it is only meant to indicate at which levels moral behavior is influence, thus suggesting that an organizational design should attempt to encourage moral behavior by taking into account factors at the various levels. The levels I distinguish are: the person, the situation, the moral issue, and the social or organizational context. Moral psychology has distinguished characteristics at each of these levels (O’Fallon & Butterfield 2005, Trevino et al. 2006; Trevino & Nelson 2007; Thoma and Rest 1999).

1. Characteristics of the person: e.g., cognitive bias, locus of control, ego strength;
2. Characteristics of the moral issue: e.g., the moral intensity of the moral issue (Jones 1991);
3. Characteristics of the situation in which the moral issue occurs: e.g., the ambiguity or equivocality of the situation;
4. Characteristics of the social or organizational context: e.g., societal norms and values, the culture of the organization and the formal systems of the organization (or its infrastructure).

The different levels interact. For example, characteristics of the individual define how the situation in which an issue occurs is perceived (Trevisão 1986).

In the military context, moral behavior is made more difficult because of the ambiguous and complex situations in which soldiers operate (Kramer 2004; Olsthoorn 2008; Soeters et al. 2010). Some classic studies that are relevant to the military context are: Zimbardo’s Stanford experiment (Zimbardo 2007), Bandura’s theory on moral disengagement (Bandura et al. 1996; Bandura 1999), Milgram’s experiments on obedience to authority (Milgram 1974). These studies are especially relevant for the military organization because they point to factors that may negatively influence moral behavior that are prevalent in the military organization. These authors suggest that strong authority figures, peer pressure, diffusion and fragmentation of responsibility, psychological distance and dehumanization among others may negatively influence moral behavior.

In addition, relevant insight is provided in studies that explicitly focus on moral military behavior, for example Glover’s study of the erosion of moral resources in the context of war (Glover 1999), Grossman’s study of the mechanisms used to enable the use of force in the military (Grossman 2009), Slim’s critical study of how the military enables civilian suffering in war (Slim 2008, chapter 6 especially), Osiel’s study of obedience in international law and how it influences military practice (Osiel 2008), and Grassiani’s study of everyday moral behavior of Israeli soldiers (Grassiani 2009). These studies also demonstrate that a myriad of factors influence moral military behavior. On the one hand, the result of these studies largely correlate with the findings in studies of moral behavior in general. Several of the studies mentioned above draw on studies of moral behavior in general such as Milgram’s study of obedience and Bandura’s study of moral disengagement. On the other hand, however, two factors are visible that marks a difference between military moral behavior and ‘ordinary’ moral behavior. First, moral military behavior appears to be more profoundly (and consciously) influenced by factors in the organizational design (Grossman 2009; Glover 2001; Slim 2008). Factors in the military organization are consciously employed to encourage effective military behavior.
but they also affect moral military behavior, sometimes in a negative way. Second, soldiers have to demonstrate moral behavior in situations that can be characterized as extreme: they are chaotic and ambiguous (Glover 2001). The chaotic, unpredictable and ambiguous nature of military situations influences moral military behavior; it is more difficult to demonstrate moral behavior under extreme situations.

5.2.3. MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Virtue ethics entails a perspective on moral development. My concept of its developmental model is derived from Sherman’s account of Aristotle’s theory on this point (Sherman 1989: 157-199). According to this account, the cultivation of good character is based on (critical) practice, experience. It involves the cultivation of the perceptual, affective and deliberative capacities that are involved in virtuous conduct (Sherman 1989: 166). In addition, significant others play an important role in the developmental process: as tutor, teacher, model, expert or friend (Sherman 1989: 191). As the moral agent (in this case the soldier) gains experience he develops habits, practical wisdom and virtues. Since this process involves the development of cognitive, affective and perceptual capacities this may mean that moral decision making will become more intuitive, but this is not necessarily the case (Sherman 1989: 168). The development of moral character thus requires experience as well as feedback and reflection on those experiences and the development of (theoretical) knowledge and insights. This perspective is supported by research into moral development, which suggests that moral development is both a natural process (moral reasoning improves with ages), and a process that requires guidance, teaching, practice, experience, examples and reflection (cf. Rest 1979; Rest 1986; Dreyfus & Dreyfus 1991; Trevino et al. 1991; Thoma and Rest 1999; Thomson et al. 2005).

What these theories seem to have in common is that the development of moral character or expertise is based on training, experience and reflection. It requires the continuous application of knowledge, skill and emotions in specific contexts, and a process of continuous reflection and improvement. In addition they all explicitly or implicitly assume an innate human capacity for moral growth and development. In figure 2 I have attempted to combine the insights and theories I discussed in the previous paragraphs to demonstrate how moral decision making and moral development are related. This model is my preliminary answer to the second question, and can serve as a starting point to answer the third core question: Which organizational measures are required to encourage moral military behavior?

Figure 2: Moral behavior and moral development

6. CONCLUSION: AN AWKWARD PSYCHOLOGICAL REALM
In this paper I have discussed the tension between effective military behavior and moral military behavior. Essentially this tension concerns the psychological processes involved in the use of force and its limitation, or what soldiers must be trained to do. I discussed the requirements for effective and moral military behavior, which demonstrated that there is tension between the requirements of effectiveness and morality, as well as a tension between the psychological processes that underlie both types of behavior. I then argued that attempts to encourage moral military behavior should be based on a consistent and coherent understanding of moral military behavior in practice as well as clear ambitions. I have argued that the military should address three related questions before attempting to encourage effective and moral military behavior. In answering the first two questions I have argued that the military should adopt an aspirational approach to moral responsible military behavior and that this suggests a virtue ethics approach to moral military behavior and moral development. I discussed the factors that influence moral military behavior in practice, as found in studies in the fields of business ethics, moral psychology, and moral military psychology. This demonstrates that the factors that are identified in business ethics and moral psychology also influence moral behavior in the military, but that the dynamics of the military are more extreme, something that should be taken into consideration when encouraging moral military behavior. In addition, the study demonstrates that the psychological dynamics that are mobilized in order to encourage effective military behavior may negatively affect moral military behavior. It is for this reason that we can speak of an awkward psychological realm in the military profession.

Since the psychological processes that limit and enable the use of force are the same, it will be difficult to develop measures that meet the requirement of both. This is the awkward psychological realm of the military profession. It illustrates the ‘theoretical perplexity and practical difficulty’ of encouraging moral and effective military behavior. The analysis above suggests that the theoretical perplexity is best accepted as it is; the tension between moral and effective military behavior should not be reasoned away as this will obscure the practical difficulties involved in overcoming it. The military is confronted with practical difficulties when attempting to design organizational measures and an organizational infrastructure that encourages both moral military behavior and effective military behavior. The model for moral decision making and moral development that I have developed attempts to provide insight in (and thereby raise awareness for) the theoretical perplexity of the issue, and may be a starting point to design organizational measures meant to encourage moral military behavior and effective military behavior simultaneously.

REFERENCES


