



ADF PHILOSOPHICAL DOCTRINE

0 Series | Command

Character in the Profession of Arms

Edition 1

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Character in the Profession of Arms

0 Series | Command

Edition 1



Australian Defence Force – Philosophical – 0 *Character in the Profession of Arms*, Edition 1 is issued for use by the Australian Defence Force and is effective forthwith.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'AShell', is positioned below the text.

Angus J Campbell, AO, DSC
General

Chief of the Defence Force
Department of Defence
CANBERRA ACT 2600
31 March 2023

Preface

Military doctrine describes fundamental principles that guide actions by armed forces to achieve their objectives. While authoritative, doctrine requires judgement in application.

Australian Defence Force (ADF) doctrine describes principles that guide the employment and operational effectiveness of a joint force. ADF doctrine publications are designed to concisely describe these principles, and so promote coordinated actions in support of missions and the commander's intent. ADF doctrine publications are written at several levels—capstone, philosophical, integration and application.

The content of this publication has been derived from general principles and doctrine contained in other relevant publications, Defence manuals, and allied publications and agreements. Every opportunity should be taken by users of this publication to examine its content for applicability and currency. The Doctrine Directorate invites assistance from you, the reader, to improve this publication. Please report any deficiencies, errors or potential amendments.

Aim. This first edition of ADF-P-0 *Character in the Profession of Arms* articulates the ADF's approach to character in the context of the development of ethical leaders. It is the principal text on character and character development in the ADF.

Audience. This doctrine is written for, and relevant to, all ranks.

Purpose. Character lies at the heart of leadership and underpins ethical conduct. *ADF-P-0 Character in the Profession of Arms* describes how ADF members can develop good habits of social and professional practice which represent the highest levels of civilised personal conduct. Through an emphasis on cultivating practical wisdom, this doctrine guides the behaviour of ADF members in critical public service, particularly in the exercise of lethal force. This publication does not seek a narrow definition of 'character in the profession of arms', but rather applies and evolves the classical pursuit of virtuous conduct in the contemporary Australian military setting.

Amendments

Proposals to amend *ADF-P-0 Character in the Profession of Arms* may be sent to:

Deputy Director Doctrine
Doctrine Directorate
Joint Warfare Development Branch
Russell Offices
PO Box 7909 | Canberra BC | ACT 2610

[Doctrine Directorate](#)

Amendment number	Chapter(s)	Amendment	Effected date

Doctrine publication hierarchy

The hierarchy of ADF doctrine, and the latest electronic version of all ADF doctrine publications, is available on:

Defence Protected Network Defence Doctrine Library
(<http://drnet/vcdf/ADF-Doctrine>)

and

Defence Secret Network Defence Doctrine Library
(<http://collab.defence.gov.au/vcdf/org/FDD-FID-MSCD/CITEB/doctrine/SitePages/home.aspx>).

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Chapter 1 - Character as a moral construct

Introduction

This doctrine builds on the material presented in [Australian Defence Force – Philosophical – 0 \(ADF-P-0\) ADF Leadership](#) and [ADF-P-0 Military Ethics](#). It also references a number of disciplines and academic fields—including biology, neuroscience, philosophy, psychology and theology. These are included as further readings to allow you to deepen your understanding of the nature of character.

We start with an acknowledgement of the calibre of people like you, who choose to serve in the profession of arms. We also recognise that your character development journey started prior to you joining the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Character is important to our profession, yet it is difficult to define. It is a concept that is used and explicitly defined in quite varied ways. For that reason, the following description is our starting point for a conversation about character:

*Character is the set of personal qualities
that are unique to you and inform
motivation and guide conduct.*

This idea will be developed further through the publication. More specifically, for members of the profession of arms, character needs to be understood as a moral construct, reflecting your disposition to think, feel and behave in an ethical manner. It is underpinned by the combination of personal principles and our unified Defence Values. This construct is supported by principles outlined in ADF-P-0 *ADF Leadership* and ADF-P-0 *Military Ethics*.

This doctrine is written in a way to help you understand character as a component of social mastery, part of the human element of our profession. Character relates to how we use moral sense to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, just from unjust, and virtue from vice.

Moral sense is a complex construct. It has evolutionary and social aspects that continue to develop under the influence of interpersonal relationships and experience. Moral sense can be enhanced through learning and reflection and is relevant to moral character in the context of the profession of arms.¹

Research helps explain how character relates to an innate, human ability for self-development. Character is something that develops throughout our lives. We also know character is related to our ability to cooperate—and the capacity to act cooperatively—and to consider collective interest over self-interest.

Character shapes our capacity to care for others, to react to those who try to harm us, and to create principled norms and moral rules that allow us to live together. This is an important starting point for doctrine about character. It reinforces the idea of character as a moral construct; one not just about us, but also about the relationship between ourselves and others.

A story about compassion

In 2022, a Navy Petty Officer and his small team were tasked with aid to the civil community on Operation FLOOD ASSIST in Lismore and the surrounding area. After each demanding day, they slept on stretchers in the mud. One night, their tent collapsed under the weight of the rain. Despite mounting fatigue and difficult living conditions, the team persisted with their task and continued with all assistance that they could offer the people of Lismore.

At times, the stress of fatigue and vicarious trauma of loss suffered by local citizens spilled over into momentary displays of frustration. The team, however, maintained composure and strength throughout the mission while operating in a completely unfamiliar and very uncomfortable role. With support from the community, the sailors did their duty with understanding and compassion, stemming from a commitment to serve others.

1 Limone, P and Toto, GA 2022, 'Origin and development of moral sense: A systematic review'. *Frontiers of Psychology*, vol 13.

Character and morality

Moral development and our ability to reason morally is a universal feature of humanity. Human beings have the innate capacity for critical reflection, including our ability to make judgements about who and what belongs in a moral community. That element of our character is always exercised in relation to others. Character, therefore, is not just about who you are when no-one is watching, but what you do in practice.

The key influence over the development of character is the way in which our minds work. Although this doctrine will not seek to explain this in detail, it is important to understand how the mind helps shape an inner sense of rightness about our behaviour and the behaviour of others. Indeed, scientists who study different societies around the world have shown that—despite cultural and individual differences—character is, in part, the moral expression of how we feel, think and act around concepts of ‘good’ and ‘bad’.

Our understanding of moral character is represented in the framework in Figure 1.1, and includes motivation, ability and identity elements.

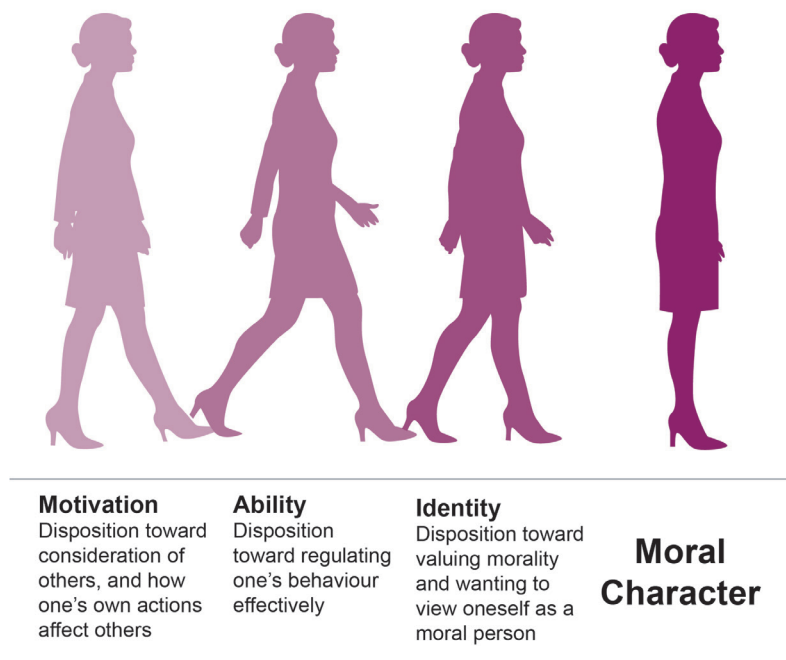


Figure 1.1: Moral character model

This approach to character as a moral quality will be further considered from two additional perspectives to highlight its relevance in practice for members of the profession of arms:

- **Me versus Us.** This relates to how character can overcome self-interest, allowing us to act collectively out of concern for others.
- **Us versus Them.** This aspect relates to how character allows us to consider the interests and concerns of those we might normally consider as 'others'.

This doctrine makes use of stories to assist in articulating the relationship between character and morality. Stories are how we make meaning and are one of the most basic ways we relate human experience. Real stories from serving ADF members, therefore, are incorporated in each chapter to reinforce key character concepts and make the doctrine meaningful.

Finally, this doctrine explains how character influences the application of self-control and informs our ability to act with integrity. It will demonstrate how character, ultimately, is about the choices we make. How we use abilities like critical thinking and emotional intelligence as components of social mastery. And how practical wisdom is earned by combining ability with experience to rationalise our intuitive moral sense, and to learn how to transcend some of the limitations of our instinctive reactions.

A story about empowerment

In August 2021, an Army Corporal was part of the 1RAR Combat Team which deployed at short notice into Hamid Karzai International Airport to evacuate Afghan citizens fleeing from the Taliban. When his platoon inserted into the airport, he linked up with one of the other 1RAR platoons which had been in country for four days and started to assist them in running the Evacuee Processing and Holding Area before they could transport the evacuees out of country.

At this stage, they were struggling to resupply food and source water to sustain not only themselves but the evacuees under their protection and care. While in country, the Corporal witnessed many of his soldiers willingly go without food so the evacuees could eat. In addition, when not on any form of security detail and during their rest periods, they got together and helped to break up ration packs so the evacuees would have food to eat and made sure that every evacuee had bottles of water before themselves.

When they ran low on Australian rations, the soldiers found an abandoned container filled with ration packs and again the Corporal witnessed his soldiers willingly sit down over and over again, to show the evacuees how to use the packs so they could eat.

At this point, consider the following questions in relation to this story and the preceding Navy story about character:

What elements of character are on display here?

Why is strength of character important to the ADF in this context?

How do you think we can develop character for a future situation like this?



Key points about character

We all have unique personal qualities that can be demonstrated as character strengths. Character strengths are qualities that motivate actions that are morally good. Our actions can also have intellectual, civic or performance-related aspects, which have an instrumental role in enabling other character strengths.

Character evolves through the different ages and stages of your lifetime and can be developed through deliberate, intentional and habitual practice over time. A person can be known to have a good or bad character, and we all exist and act on a moral continuum between virtue and vice.

Your character will influence how you function as an individual in relation to others, the social systems in which you operate, and the context or environment. The ADF deliberately emphasises the moral aspect of character, or moral character, in supporting the development of social mastery and practical wisdom. This enables the development of good moral sense in doing the right thing.

This is crucially important because our central responsibility within the profession of arms involves the requirement to exercise lethal force in combat. You must be capable of fulfilling this obligation professionally, ethically, legally and morally.

Character, therefore, involves being intrinsically motivated to choose between right and wrong actions. It acts to balance our moral sense, personal identity and the tendency toward self-interest, and is fundamentally about your ability to function well in community with others. It is at the heart of leadership and underpins your ethical conduct as a member of the profession of arms.

Character does, however, as previously mentioned, defy precise definition. Many philosophers and belief systems agree that the origin and tradition of character began as a thinking activity. It is also agreed that an understanding of character has a common golden thread; that it is ultimately about the embodiment of moral character in being a good person.

For this reason, we will not define character here; instead, each chapter will contribute an element of what will form a comprehensive character description in the final chapter.

Character is the set of personal qualities that are unique to you and inform motivation and guide conduct. Character matters for leaders and teams in achieving our mission.

Chapter 2 - Character and self

Introduction

This chapter is focused on you and relates to the moral dimension of self in terms of individual character. It is written in the context of the influences of your background and life experiences, the demands of the profession of arms, and the challenges of an uncertain, ambiguous operating environment. This chapter also discusses the importance of aligning your personal world view with Defence Values. Individual character behaviours and their relationship to our values will also be discussed. Finally, some practical thinking about how to overcome self-interest for the greater collective good will be introduced.

Context

Service in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) connects you to something bigger than yourself and creates an opportunity to be recognised as a person of character who acts consistently and respectfully, regardless of the circumstances.

You should also consider the detailed history of the profession of arms and the importance of character in war. Conflict does not transform character, it merely exaggerates the character traits in us and places them on display. Therefore, a person of character must grow and mature in peacetime, because this capacity cannot be suddenly developed on the outbreak of armed conflict.

It is important to acknowledge the growing uncertainty and ambiguity in our operating environment. This is why we place considerable emphasis on the character of our people. People define the ADF's capacity to adapt to change. People lead, make decisions, and forge enduring partnerships and relationships in the face of an uncertain future. People like you.

Adopt as your fundamental creed that you will equip yourself for life, not solely for your own benefit but for the benefit of the whole community.

Sir John Monash²

2 Serle, G 2002, *John Monash: a bibliography*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton.

A story about support

At the beginning of 2022, HMAS *Adelaide* deployed to Tonga to provide assistance following a volcanic eruption and subsequent tsunami. The ship arrived and immediately began to unload 88 tonnes of supplies onto Vanu Wharf in Nuku'alofa. Later that day, at anchor, HMAS *Adelaide* suffered a major electrical power outage.

The engineering department on board clearly understood that unless power could be restored, it was likely their mission to assist Tonga would be compromised. To rectify the defects, the technical crew worked around the clock tirelessly until power was restored. The department rose to the challenges as a team, understanding the dire need of Tongan citizens, and that the reputation of their ship and country were at stake.

Their persistence and resilience in the face of a complex problem, in very difficult conditions, ensured that the mission was a success. Their work demonstrated the values of service and excellence, the selflessness of character to place the security and interests of others ahead of their own, and the willingness of character to strive each day to be the best they could be.

Morality and You

There is one very important point to make before we discuss character, morality and you. We do not always want to collaborate with everyone. Or more specifically, we sometimes struggle to cooperate between groups, at least with groups we consider as 'other'.

Cooperation develops within in-groups to promote solidarity. Moral character is frequently the way we put Us (group) ahead of Me (self) in order to build these supportive groups. This is often a positive attribute of what it is to be human. However, there are situations and contexts in which we put Us (our group) ahead of Them (another group). This can be the source of much tension and inter group conflict, and we will explore this in Chapter 3.

In returning to moral character and self, it is worth noting how the mind allows you to think and reason. Its principal role evolved and developed to help you survive, and it uses lots of tricks to do just that. This was effective when the risks to you involved avoiding being eaten by natural predators in our hunter-gatherer past. Our recent history makes it more challenging,

when you need to rationalise, to reason and use facts in making sense of a complex, modern world. This includes, for example, how we collectively respond to climate change, or how we can alter our behaviour to live sustainably on a planet with eight billion people. These challenges require a different kind of thinking.

Threats to humanity or humanity as a threat?

To emphasise this challenge, consider the following thought problem:

As a species, we have access to all the food we need. We have learned how to build and create things to protect us from the weather, pandemics and other threats. We are now possibly the world's most successful and dominant species.

Yet despite this status—and notwithstanding all our progress and technological triumphs—is our most formidable threat ourselves?

In part, this challenge can only be solved collectively and collaboratively and by improving the quality of our individual and combined critical thinking.³

Everyone thinks. It is in our nature to do so. This is why it is important to be curious about how our minds work and how this enables us to be a person of moral character.

Concepts and theories from academic disciplines like biology and psychology—and more recent advances in neuroscience—help us understand current evidence about this question. There is no doubt this is extremely complex, and further readings are provided to assist you in creating a deeper understanding of these topics.

Put simply, our mind is continually performing a number of functions, some of which are particularly relevant when we consider moral character:

- a. thinking – making sense of the world (eg perceiving, analysing, synthesising)
- b. feeling – evaluating our thinking or informing us on how we are doing (eg happy, sad, anxious stressed)
- c. wanting – driving us to act (eg goals, values, motives).

3 Greene, J 2014, *Moral tribes: Emotion, reason, and the gap between us and them*, Atlantic Books, London.

Feeling and wanting are both known as 'affect responses'. To be human is to feel pulled in different directions by these functions. No wonder it is so challenging to control your emotions and behaviours. Character is the foundation for helping you do just that—to exercise greater self-control and put Us before Me in thought and action.

The practical relevance of all of this relates to your capacity to reinforce character and moral behaviour as an aspect of social mastery. Morality supports a variety of collective social purposes. These include building and maintaining relationships and alliances, and recruiting others to support and follow you in activities common to daily life in the military. Most powerfully, moral behaviour builds your reputation as a reliable person of character.

Consider the following questions in the context of the story about the deployment to Tonga. Reflect on the relevance of the many untold stories and situations that help us develop character as individuals and enable us to be better team members.

**How do I
bring personal
character strengths
to my team?**

**Why are aspects of individual
character important in forming
effective teams?**

**What elements
of my character
need development
right now?**



World view and Defence Values

Your personal world view is a very important part of the relationship between you as a moral person and your character. Your world view evolves over the stages and ages of your life as you integrate knowledge and experience into a coherent moral framework.

Your world view allows you to make sense of your life and, importantly, it also informs the decisions you make about how to live and what to do with that life. Your world view is the overall perspective from which you can act as a moral person in accepting the world in all its diversity and complexity. The significance of world view as part of character relates to its role in developing social mastery. Everyone has a world view, and everyone's world view constitutes the set of beliefs that guide our judgement and action in all spheres of life.

One important distinction to make is that character is different from personality. We might recognise those people we know to be of good character as possessing many positive personality traits—such as conscientiousness, openness and agreeableness—but character is more than and distinct from having any particular style of personality.

Character in Defence requires you to choose a code of behaviour, or world view, that moves beyond self-interest. It includes accepting accountability for living the Defence Values and recognising the responsibility to prioritise the needs of others.

Our values indicate what is important to Defence. These values refer specifically and deliberately to character. This allows them to be internalised as personal qualities and expressed as positive character strengths.

Your actions provide the bridge between what Defence stands for in terms of our values and what you might aspire to as a person of good character. Figure 2.1 reinforces how character is about actions, not just ideals.

Our Values	Character actions
Service The selflessness of character to place the security and interests of our nation and its people ahead of my own	Actions enabling you to be an engaged and responsible citizen contributing to the greater good (eg judgement, reasoning)
Courage The strength of character to say and do the right thing, always, especially in the face of adversity	
Respect The humanity of character to value others and treat them with dignity	Actions enabling you to perform well in situations that require an ethical response (eg humility, self-control)
Integrity The consistency of character to align my thoughts, words and actions to do what is right	
Excellence The willingness of character to strive each day to be the best I can be, both professionally and personally	Right action, and the pursuit of knowledge, truth, and understanding (eg civility, volunteerism)

Figure 2.1: Defence Values, definitions and character actions

Activating values as actions is fundamentally important to the development of character. It enables you to embrace the values, standards and requirements of the profession of arms. We reinforce this point because of the professional risk of being killed and the professional responsibility to apply lethal force to others as a part of your service.

The application of lethal force is governed by exacting rules and codes of conduct and requires you to demonstrate levels of discipline and strength of character unique to the profession of arms. This involves constantly revisiting how your character is shaped and influenced by attitudes, beliefs, interpretations, opinions, perceptions and values that develop and test your world view.

Summary

Practically speaking, when the problem is Me versus Us (or Me versus You), the evidence suggests a well-developed moral sense is useful in determining an appropriate response. You might be familiar with this as 'trusting your gut instinct'. In the context of the profession of arms, however, listening to and acting on your moral sense should also include critical reflection and consideration of other psychological, situational and contextual factors. This is an important part of demonstrating good character.

It is important to understand how your moral sense informs your development as a person of character every day. We act honestly and with integrity. We give respect to everyone, and we work to earn the trust of our mates. Being intrinsically motivated to develop the abilities and identity of a person of good character allows us to be our best selves.

This chapter's contribution to our collective description of character is drawn from [Australian Defence Force – Philosophical – 0 ADF Leadership](#). Our leadership doctrine describes character as who you are when no-one is watching. It defines character as a habit, a daily practice of choosing between right and wrong. Importantly, it reinforces the requirement to develop and mature character as a moral quality in peacetime. Character is not something we can suddenly develop on the outbreak of armed conflict.

Character is the set of personal qualities that are unique to you and inform motivation and guide conduct. Character matters for leaders and teams in achieving our mission. In part, it is who you are when no-one is watching.

Chapter 3 - Character and others

Introduction

This chapter is focused on your relationships with others. Or more specifically, how character helps us to overcome our sometimes selfish or negative tendencies regarding others. It aims to help you understand why we pay very close attention to where people reside in our social universe. It will highlight our tendency toward group loyalty and how we intuitively divide the world into Us versus Them.

It will also describe how the moral dimension of character allows you to overcome the tension created by those we view as 'others'. The context for this is the complex social space we all occupy in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Consider the thought experiment from psychologist, neuroscientist and philosopher, Joshua Greene.

Your social universe

Imagine life as a set of concentric social circles. Your closest relatives, friends and teammates immediately surround you. A larger circle of more distant relatives and acquaintances form the next layer. Beyond this are other individuals and strangers who you are connected to via membership of groups of various kinds and sizes (eg your unit, service, ethnic group, country and/or religion).

Your social universe is also influenced by other connections in addition to these concentric groups; for example, via your likes and dislikes, the sports teams you support, or the music and the bands you follow.

All these circles influence who you are and your sense of identity. It is probably quite easy to recall situations where you felt strongly associated to a particular group. These bonds are very strong. They are deliberately so in the ADF, because they promote things that are important to us like teamwork, trust and cohesion. They can, however, create problems when your team or group first meets another group.

This chapter highlights how moral character supports our ability to overcome problems caused by ‘Us versus Them’ thinking in the profession of arms. It explains how societal principles and norms—plus our psychological and physiological make up—influence the choices we make and inform our behaviour in ways that allow us to cooperate with others for the collective good of our mission.

It is worth noting that despite the evidence that suggests we are wired for group loyalty, our current understanding suggests this does not mean we are fixed in our habits. In fact, research shows that we can overcome some of the less positive aspects of human nature via an intrinsic motivation to be a good person, through experience and reflection, and via active learning.

*We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then,
is not an act but a habit.*

WJ Durant⁴

Us versus Them

You are probably no stranger to the ‘Us versus Them’ mentality. Whenever you are stressed, regardless of the source, it will cause you to want to react defensively. You automatically want to protect yourself and your identity, and this often involves the influence of all sorts of different biases against others.

Things do not have to be this way. It is worth acknowledging this as a challenge we all face, but we are capable of overcoming Us versus Them thinking. Moral character allows us to approach tense social situations in a more positive manner.

4 Durant, W 2022, *The story of philosophy*, Dover Publications, Garden City, New York.

Us versus Them is more than simply picking a side

As another thought experiment, consider why you chose to join a particular Group or Service in the ADF. Ask yourself, what assumptions are you making about the types of people who are in your group? You will also know (or think you know), that other members of this group share your principles, ideas and beliefs.

Consciously or unconsciously, we all make assumptions about other groups. We all make judgements about the sort of individuals that make up these other groups. And there is a significant downside to this; we learn to think favourably about our groups and look down on other groups.

This reinforces the importance of moral character in the ADF to overcome the tensions created by Us versus Them thinking.

We previously highlighted how we are social animals in the context of Me versus Us. This included appreciating the importance of the rights and roles of individuals (Me) versus societal norms and the greater good of the group (Us). To be human, however, is also about understanding how we can be blindly loyal to our team or group—how we treat some groups favourably and yet ostracise others.

Essentially, Us versus Them thinking is the way you favour people in your immediate social universe and disapprove of or are wary of people in other groups. The good news is you can use skills like critical thinking and emotional and cultural intelligence to put moral character to work to resolve these tensions.

This is important to understand, because sometimes resolving Me versus Us inter-relational problems can take you into the equally complex dynamic of Us versus Them.

A story of trust and confidence

A young recruit at Kapooka believed weapons training was their weakness and was back squadded for not passing a live fire test. They were worried, exhausted and started hating range practice to a point that they requested discharge papers.

Having heard that 'every sunrise was a new chapter in your life waiting to be written', they then experienced this when they returned to the rifle range. Their name was called by the Section Commander, and they rushed over with their weapon and logbook. After the safety brief, the Section Commander asked them to get behind their weapon. After 20 shots, the Section Commander commented 'you shoot just fine, all you need is just a bit of work on your breathing, trigger and adjustment'.

The young recruit walked over to practice in the dry fire area with their logbook and weapon, reminding themselves that all they needed was to work on just three elements—breathing, trigger and adjustment—otherwise they could shoot just fine!

That sentence stuck in their mind; it gave them hope and energy. They went from wanting to put in their discharge papers to aceing their final assessment. The Section Commander could have given them negative comments but instead gave them three elements to work on. The Section Commander was not just an instructor; but was the instructor every recruit needs to become a soldier.

How to use your head

The previous story is a great example to all of us. It is a demonstration of how we can thrive by learning to trust other people and by working cooperatively with them. It explains (in part) how sociability can be a learned behaviour. It is worth taking a moment to highlight some more theoretical aspects about how our minds work and how this relates to the nature of moral character.

The first thing to consider is how affect responses influence how we feel and act in difficult situations. A whole group of visceral emotions were experienced by the recruit in the previous story, particularly related to anxiety about fear of failure. Knowing this is likely to happen in stressful situations allows us to develop strategies to better manage our responses (see Chapter 4).

This aspect of the way our mind functions is also implicated in us being fearful of other groups, particularly if we do not know whether they represent a threat to ourselves or our group.

This thinking is very useful in allowing us to explain and predict the behaviour of others in social contexts (see further readings for more references for this). Affective components of our make-up refer to the ability to infer the emotions felt by others; the cognitive component relates to our ability to make inferences about the thoughts, beliefs and intentions of others.

This helps explain functions related to the generation of feelings such as trust and familiarity. Imagine how this system is implicated in your ability to demonstrate self-control when confronted by a task that involves collaborating with people you perceive as 'other'.

There are several coalition operations in our recent military history in which this would have been commonly experienced. There is real value, therefore, in understanding how your mind works and learning how to be intrinsically motivated to think and act as a person of moral character in the context of others.

Ultimately, research suggests developing a sense of responsibility for your own moral actions goes hand in hand with the capacity to empathise with others. This evidence also conforms to the idea that the more you master your own actions, the more rigorous your moral sense and judgement will be. In other words, moral character is something that can be practised and mastered in choosing morally optimal actions over other possibilities.

A story of empathy and acceptance

A young indigenous man enlisted into the Indigenous Pre-Recruit Program, in pursuit of a career in the Australian Army. Little did he anticipate that the physical conditioning requirements of non-combat corps recruits in the Australian Army would be so hard.

For the 17-year-old boy—who had been through lockdowns, restricted schooling and no physical conditioning throughout a global pandemic—basic life skills such as treading water, riding a mountain bike or marching to cadence seemed nigh impossible.

However, for the 12-year veteran Air Force instructor and father responsible for the recruit's training—whose passion was drawing out the very best in every recruit under his tutelage—this was an unmissable opportunity. Not only to impart a fraction of his knowledge and experience to a potential junior leader, but to coach and mentor an eager, driven young man through some of the most basic life skills.

In six short weeks, this phenomenal young soldier recruit had not only learnt how to tread water, but volunteered to be the first to attempt a capsize drill during a controlled adventure training scenario. He successfully graduated as the most improved recruit and commenced initial military training.

The stages of Us versus Them thinking

The first way an 'Us versus Them' mentality influences your thinking occurs when you categorise people in your social universe. This is quite normal behaviour, and it helps you to understand your social surroundings and where you stand in any given situation. We all do this, categorising people by their roles in day-to-day life. This allows you to learn social norms and how to interact with and respond to others. Consider how many formal and informal ways this occurs for you between your work in a military context and your social life.

While you are busy categorising people in many different ways, it is also possible for you to belong to multiple different categories. It helps you develop a sense of identity and belonging when you feel you fit into a particular group. Reflect on how you felt when you posted into your current unit, or when you joined a new civilian sporting team in your local area.

Once you have decided what a category of people acts like, you begin to take on those qualities. A good example of this is when a junior rank gets their first promotion in the workplace and transitions into a leadership and management role. When this happens, they begin to act more like a leader or manager. They take on the qualities they perceive of this category of people so that they fit in. It is quite a test of character to transition to leading your former peers, and so understanding these thinking processes becomes extremely relevant.

This is where things can get interesting. Once you have worked out where you fit in, you may begin to identify those groups or individuals who do not fit. You may subconsciously see your group as better than other groups without even realising it. As a person of character, you must understand how you are defined not only by what you think and by your actions, but by your motivation to act.

This is a crucial point and goes to the heart of transcending Us versus Them thinking and behaviour. Put another way, the way your mind functions provides you with the ability for right thought and action, and moral character provides the motivation to act for a collective good, even when dealing with 'others'.

Think of it like this; at some point in your military career, perhaps in combat or perhaps in the barracks, you may be required to stand apart from your colleagues, at great physical and/or moral risk to yourself. Will you be able to recount the episode to your family or friends and say with clarity that when it mattered, you did the right thing? Will you be able to say you were prepared? In the ADF, we require people of character who are willing to face that test.

How to overcome Us versus Them thinking

Appreciate the difference. One way to overcome categorising people into rigid groups is to look for different perspectives in our vibrant, multicultural organisation. Diversity of thought and perspective is one of our greatest strengths. Learn to harness that strength.

Identify similarities. When you meet someone that you may tend to categorise as being different to you, identify ways that you are the same. This helps build connections to others by establishing empathy. Over time, you can habitually shift your thinking and attitude to seek things in common with others instead of differences.

Enhance your self-awareness. Use our unified Defence Values as a focal point as you work to reset how you view yourself and others. Biases can be built into how we approach social situations, but you can overcome them. This can take the form of a simple day-to-day question, 'How can I develop my character by being supportive to and trusted by those around me?'.

Act intentionally. It takes conscious effort to overcome the Us versus Them mentality. If there is someone in your life who falls into a category of people who tend to be discriminated against, it is your responsibility as a person of character to ensure they are included and treated respectfully and fairly.

Summary

You can choose to act as a character exemplar in your social universe. You can empower your friends, family and teammates through your personal example, and show them that you reject the exclusion of people based on categories.

It is important for you to understand how good character can have magnifying effects at a strategic level. More directly, your decisions and actions as an individual (Me), can have significant consequences for our Organisation (Us) and the ADF's contribution in an environment of strategic competition (Them). Good character enhances the capacity of the ADF to fulfil its mission and builds on our reputation as a reliable and trustworthy partner.

This chapter highlights how character can work positively when dealing with people whom you perceive to be different. Knowledge of how character can reduce Us versus Them thinking enhances your capacity to contribute to the mission. The addition to our character description speaks to this; how acting with character allows us to use our differences as an opportunity to cooperate and collaborate.

Character is the set of personal qualities that are unique to you and inform motivation and guide conduct. Character matters to leaders and teams in achieving our mission. In part, it is who you are when no-one is watching. It shapes and influences your closest relationships, helps you develop collective identities, and enables you to cooperate and collaborate with others for a common good.

Chapter 4 - Character in practice

Introduction

Previous chapters established why moral character matters to the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and to you. Our developing description of character has emphasised how your thinking about character needs to be understood in relation to others. More specifically, it is about what you do in practice, not simply what you might think or what you say you do. This idea about character, therefore, does not shy away from the fact that it is difficult, and that being self-disciplined in finding purpose and meaning in day-to-day life can be exactly that, hard work.

This chapter is focused on the practical application of character in the profession of arms. The context for this part of the doctrine is to highlight a character development pathway for you, one that is focused on practical examples. It aims to help you take the next steps in deepening established character and enabling the practice of social mastery.

The first part of this chapter is focused on character strengths related to self-control and integrity. This includes elements like trust and drive, and their influence on critical thinking. Emotional intelligence will be presented as another character-enabling ability; this argument hinging on the link between emotional control and your moral instincts.

Lastly, this chapter emphasises how practical wisdom—gained through the combination of self-control, integrity, critical thinking and emotional intelligence—is the goal of character development in the ADF. Practical wisdom is rooted in the moral capacity to choose to do the right thing, in the right place, at the right time and in the right way, irrespective of hardship, adversity and the lure of easy but wrong choices.

Character is the psychological muscle that moral conduct requires.

A Etzioni⁵

5 Etzioni, A 1995, 'Character building and moral conduct', *The spirit of community: Rights, responsibilities and the communitarian agenda*, Crown Publishers, New York.

Self-control

Self-control as an ability is applicable to moral character because it permits you to self-regulate in solving problems. It also informs good decision-making. A useful metaphor for understanding self-control is to think of it like strength and conditioning. Building muscle takes effort and willpower, and without habitual practice, muscles do not develop or can atrophy if you do not use them.

Think of it as a kind of 'use it or lose it' approach. Reflect for a moment on what you could do right now to develop greater self-control if you treated it like any other training program. How might you break things down into manageable sized chunks, and how might it include the following elements?



You would probably agree, this is a useful way to think about developing greater self-control.

Research about self-control

Several researchers define self-control in terms of cognitive processes that regulate emotions, thoughts and behaviours in the face of temptations and impulses.

Conceptually, self-control is highly correlated with an individual's willpower. Research around this strength model suggests the self control process functions like muscles, and the activation of self-control consumes energy, strength and/or resources.

Much of what we know about self-control suggests the main resource behind it is willpower or drive. Drive is an essential characteristic required in the ADF. There are many ways to foster your willpower and drive, progressively strengthening your self-control.

Character questions



What higher-order goals could you set to enhance your character development journey

How would you explain what motivates you to your teammates?

Why do you think resolving the internal conflicts between passion and reason can help you personally and socially?

Integrity

A second cluster of character strengths relate to the concept of 'integrity'. For the purposes of this doctrine, integrity relates to your capacity to be internally self-consistent. Character dispositions of integrity include being a person of your word, being transparent with yourself, accepting responsibility and accountability, and being resistant to self-deception.

You act with integrity when your actions match your words. This is what integrity is about in the ADF. You feel it as a responsibility—that is, your behaviour includes intentional acts of self-control in the pursuit of moral aims. Integrity can also be felt as part of your identity. Acting as a person of moral character is viewed as a simple necessity and does not feel like a difficult choice when constructed in this way.

Integrity is also important in relating well to people. It allows you to build and maintain strong social networks and relationships with others across our organisation. Ultimately, integrity enables you to build trust in fulfilling your duty as a member of the profession of arms.

Research about integrity

Much of the contemporary research shows morality is the core foundation for integrity as a character strength. The basis for these arguments is largely from work related to deficient moral reasoning.

Evidence from these studies suggests how deficient moral reasoning has been consistently implicated and empirically linked as a precursor to delinquent or deviant behaviour.

Other research has also explored how moral judgement and moral reasoning influence your thinking and behaviour, which in turn can influence productive work relationships. Societal principles and norms are also linked to the moral status of integrity and various ethical leadership theories and constructs.

Consider how you would debate the following statements about moral character and integrity:

Character debate statements

1. Regardless of concerns about principles, in today's world you have to be practical, adapt to opportunities and do what is most advantageous for you.
2. It is important to me to feel that I have not compromised my principles.
3. It is important to fulfil your obligations at all times, even when nobody will know if you do not.



Critical thinking

Critical thinking is a key enabler of moral character. If you are to be an effective military professional, you must first and foremost be prepared to think critically. Critical thinking and effective decision-making support every other aspect of daily military life. You need to have developed the thought processes to sustain what you do before you can put any of your education and training into action.

Making decisions and taking action must be based on critical thinking. This requires you to develop the strength of character and intrinsic motivation to overcome biases, and regulate moods and emotions that can affect your judgement.

Put another way, the most useful way to enhance your critical thinking is to interact with others in allowing moral problems to be shared, discussed and negotiated. This interactive behaviour, in parallel with consideration of environmental factors, allows you to explore new skills and knowledge that can significantly boost your capacity for moral judgement.

A guide to questions of self

To develop critical thinking as a character strength, ask the following questions about yourself when problem-solving:

What conclusions have I already drawn?

What assumptions underlie these conclusions?

Do I need to make any assumptions in this situation?

What is my desired end state?

Does all this seem fair, moral and the right thing to do?

Have I checked my reasoning against some intellectual standard?

The aim of this short exercise is to demonstrate that critical thinking as an ability can be learned as a fundamental element of moral character. The success of this learning, as with anything new, depends upon your motivation to master it. This doctrine aims to be a catalyst to you enhancing your critical thinking skills.



A guide to questions about others

Committing to studying critical thinking as a person of character also requires you to ask yourself the following questions about how others might be thinking:

What conclusions has the other person drawn? Are they accurate?

What assumptions has the other person made?

From what point of view are they approaching this conversation?

Am I fully understanding their perspective?

Commitment to practising critical thinking will help it become second nature as your default thinking pattern. This supports the formation of moral character—the more you practise, the quicker you will improve. You may find the initial practice difficult, especially as you challenge yourself to think in new ways, to remain open to new ideas, to be willing to learn and change your mind, and in doing so confront the biases of your ego.

Over time you will begin to recognise uncritical thinking in others. At this point, and as a person of character, you must attempt to develop and encourage better thinking in others. Your approach to this should be characterised by humility, empathy and respect, showing them how character in action is enabled by critical thinking

Emotional intelligence

A useful way to think about moral character and emotional intelligence is to consider them as two mutually supporting parts of your capacity to achieve influence as a leader. Influence is usefully defined in [Australian Defence Force – Philosophical – 0 ADF Leadership](#). Emotional intelligence is best described as the innate ability to anticipate and manage one's emotions and the emotional responses of others.

If character and emotional intelligence are a part of who you are as a good person, then character is the foundation, and emotional intelligence is the framework upon which you can base your leadership. A good way to visualise this is to see emotionally intelligent behaviours built through experience supported by the foundation of moral character strengths.

Junior leaders can struggle to understand and apply the art of leadership if they have not built a strong character foundation and emotional intelligence framework. This process, therefore, must be understood as a continuous, lifelong journey, and it involves both trial and error in practice, and specific learning and growth. The best leaders learn to integrate emotional intelligence into everyday leadership. When practised as a habit, emotional intelligence can help you develop as a leader of character.

Leaders of character

Consider how the following reflections rely on moral character and emotional intelligence:

- Leaders of character pursue moral or ethical goals.
- Most failures in leadership are failures in character not failures in competence.
- Character is why people follow leaders in adversity.
- What are you doing to develop your character and the character of those you are called to lead?

The key link between character and emotional intelligence relates to impulse control. This involves knowing the difference between feelings and actions, and learning to make better emotional decisions; firstly, by controlling the impulse to act, then identifying alternative actions and their consequences before acting.

Imagine how relevant this skill is in an operational context. Whether you are operating in the heat of battle or working across a multinational headquarters, you will be required to read unfamiliar social and emotional cues, to listen (actively), to resist negative influences and stereotyping of 'others', to take the perspectives of others into account, and to understand motivations, values and behaviours in a different cultural context.

Ultimately, a person of character recognises the role of emotional intelligence in demonstrating empathy, care and concern for the perspectives of others—and not just those in their group. They know how to motivate and connect to others. And they role-model how to cope with challenges and difficulties in ways that inspire confidence and foster trusting relationships.



The path to practical wisdom

The expertise required of you as a military professional includes both technical competence and insight into complex, context-sensitive human deliberation and judgement. Of the two components, technical competence is easier to master, but insight is more powerful. In combination, they are expressed as your practical wisdom.

Through exercising practical wisdom, we can truly act as a person of moral character. This is the path by which you preserve and promote your humanity in the face of the most demanding challenges inherent in the profession of arms.

Practical wisdom is not simply the ability to deliberate about the best means to achieve one's desired ends; it is also about the ability to consider what things are good in themselves.

The character development challenge for all of us is to commit to a lifetime of reflection, awareness and curiosity. Attaining practical wisdom, rather than the superficial appearance of it, requires us to embrace the unsettling knowledge of our own ignorance. It also involves an ongoing commitment to examining our own lives in meaningful ways.

Practical wisdom often comes through listening carefully to the views of others. Listening is an underdeveloped yet highly useful critical-thinking and emotional intelligence skill. Disagreements are often caused by misunderstandings, or simply by not paying attention to 'others'. A person of moral character is open to thinking critically about their own beliefs and actions.

Summary

This doctrine has been built around the idea that character is a fundamental part of what it is to be a military professional. An accumulating description encouraged you to think about the concept of character as it relates to you, to others and to our mission. A significant part of the relevance of good character is your ability to effectively cooperate with others. The future success of the ADF is likely to be defined by our collective abilities in this regard.

We have highlighted how thinking is a fundamental part of our nature, but recognised that some of our habits of thinking can be problematic. Each chapter then asked you to reflect on the ways moral character can help you think, act and be better.

This doctrine asked you to consider the ongoing development of moral character as a practical activity, not simply a concept related to beliefs or ideals. This is supported by the exercise of self-control, a necessary ability to inform and moderate the emotional aspects of character.

We highlighted the importance of understanding how the development of good character must be a continuous journey in preparation for the stresses of a combat environment. This, we argue, is essential because good character cannot be developed 'in the moment' and is most often revealed during combat operations.

We also argued for the development of character through self-control, integrity, critical thinking and emotional intelligence as the pathway to practical wisdom. This trajectory as a person of character will always be informed by the principles, norms and values that codify your membership within the profession of arms.

Ultimately, character is underpinned by your motivation to make better decisions, to take the right actions and to pursue excellence for the common good. It is fitting then that the final addition to our character description deliberately emphasises the practical and social aspects of character.

Character is the set of personal qualities that are unique to you and inform motivation and guide conduct. Character matters to leaders and teams in achieving our mission. In part, it is who you are when no-one is watching. It shapes and influences your closest relationships, helps you develop collective identities, and enables you to cooperate and collaborate with others for a common good.

Ultimately, character in the profession of arms is about developing practical wisdom, where skills and experience combine to allow you to act and live well in a military context.

Acknowledgements and further reading

To further your personal journey, you are encouraged to access the Centre for Defence Leadership and Ethics Australian Defence College online resources at the [Character Hub](#) of [The Forge](#), where we encourage further professional development, engage in ongoing discussions and seek to deepen understanding of issues covered in this doctrine.

The Australian Defence Force also acknowledges an intellectual debt to all the sources that have shaped the preparation of this document. The following readings are recommended:

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ADF-P-0 *Character in the Profession of Arms*

Summary Placemat

Character defined

Character is the set of personal qualities that are unique to you and inform motivation and guide conduct.

Character matters to leaders and teams in achieving our mission. In part, it is who you are when no-one is watching. It shapes and influences your closest relationships, helps you develop collective identities, enables you to cooperate and collaborate with others for a common good. Ultimately, character is about developing practical wisdom, where skills and experience combine to allow you to act and live well in a military context.



Character in Practice

- Character development is a lifelong journey
- Character is about what you do, not just what you think or say
- Acting with self-control and integrity—when your actions match your words—enables you to build strong relationships
- Critical thinking and emotional intelligence builds the practical wisdom needed to be a trusted member of Defence





Character as Moral Construct

- Character is important, but hard to define
- Character includes your **motivation** to act ethically, your **ability** to regulate your behaviour, and your drive to **identify** as a moral person
- Character develops throughout our lives, through the choices we make
- Moral character enables you to be your best self (Me) while working in community with others (Us) to achieve Defence's mission, across the spectrum of competition (Them).



Character and Self

- Character is a habit, a daily practice of choosing between right and wrong
- Moral character enables self-control
- Character in Defence requires you to choose a code of behaviour that puts others before self
- Our Defence Values enable the practice of moral character—even under stress and pressure



Character and Others

- Categories help us understand our social environment and our place in it
- Moral character helps overcome the tensions created by 'Us versus Them' thinking
- Building empathy, giving others a fair go, and developing self-awareness enhances Defence's ability to fulfil its mission

Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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Glossary

The source for approved Defence terms, definitions and abbreviations is the Australian Defence Glossary (ADG), available on the Defence Protected Network at <http://adg.dpe.protected.mil.au/>. Note: The ADG is updated periodically and should be consulted to review any amendments to the data in this glossary.

Terms and definitions

ethics

Moral principles or standards of acceptable behaviour by which any particular person is guided.

Note: Ethics is a branch of philosophy that examines what is right or wrong, good or bad, required, allowed or prohibited.

leadership

The art of positively influencing others to get the job done.

moral

Relating to or concerned with right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong.

social mastery

The balanced and continual development of leadership, ethics, character and cultural intelligence in order to understand, influence and act in the best interests of our mission and people.



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