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**AN ESSAY ON AIR FORCE ETHICS AND LEADERSHIP
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References:

THE JAMIE CULLENS DEFENCE LEADERSHIP AND ETHICS ESSAY
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Ethics and leadership are often viewed as separate entities, however, to be successful at one, you need to display the other, hence now there is more emphasis on ethical leadership. One cannot exist without the other in a successful workplace environment. Leaders influence actions, the completion of tasks and how a team behaves. They also influence workplace processes, can stimulate change in a team's attitudes and work values, they empower and help others to visualise the workplace mission and vision. To lead ethically means that leaders promote a high level of integrity which in turn leads to trust and encourages an acceptance and positive attitude towards the overall workplace vision. Character and integrity are the core foundation for ethical leadership as they direct a person's beliefs, values and decisions. These principles are discussed in more detail to highlight how each plays a role in a successful leadership model and how leadership and ethics are closely linked to each other.

Ethics are principles that governs a person's behaviour and decision making and is taken from the Greek word "*ethos*". They shape a person's character and habits and can be defined more simply as the ability to know right from wrong, good from bad, and fair from unfair. For example, a person may think they are doing what is right as a matter of course, and others will choose the incorrect way to carry out a task knowing it is wrong. Whichever way a person chooses to behave, they are making an ethical decision. Ethics sits at the core of what society defines as a correct decision or provides us with a guide to what the best option in the circumstance may be, whether a person chooses to advance their own goals and interests or consider only what makes the most money. Others may choose to focus on what is likely to be the most popular choice and create the least resistance.

Whilst ethics guides us in the right direction, the decision a person makes ultimately is shaped by the individual's values, principles and purpose. What that individual strives for, desires and seeks to protect. How they set out to achieve the result and the reason they make the decision they do. Ethics therefore guides the process we use to question, discover and defend our values, principles and purpose. It is about discovering who we are and staying true to that in the face of temptations, challenges and uncertainty. It is not always "fun" and is not easy, but if we commit to it, we set ourselves up to make decisions we can stand by, building a life that's truly our own and a future we want to be a part of.

Putting this into the broader military context, it is not just the management that make decisions daily. The NCO's and the most junior troops also make ethical decisions every day, and these very decisions at any level will affect another person, the decisions they make and, in some way, their life. The Defence Leadership Framework Manual shows that as an organisation this is recognised when it states "*No activity whether operational or nonoperational can be*

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conducted effectively without the motivation and inspiration provided by a leader. During the course a career in Defence, military or civilian, there will be times when all of us are called upon to take up a leadership role. Consequently leadership ability is fundamental for all Defence employees.”

At times, there is a tendency in the service to dismiss or even a failure to understand the leadership role and the ethical decision-making taking place. There are many things the more junior ranks are not privy to or don't see that form the basis of the decision made by the more senior leaders, and the ethical problems and the ethical decisions they make. By having a clear connection via ethical leadership, trust in the leadership will be fostered and less questions will arise about these decisions that are being made. As stated in The Air Force Leadership Companion Manual, “*a person may be clever, competent and hardworking, but it is the combined elements of Social Mastery...that can inspire the commitment of others,*” where Social Mastery is defined as character, professional ethics, followership and leadership.

Successful and effective leaders display and have a clear distinguishing ethical basis to their overall approach to leadership and decision making. The leader's ability to influence others is most pronounced when they can successfully guide the values and ethics of those, they are responsible for, from the top to the bottom of the organisational structure. This builds an organisation where everyone clearly knows what they are supposed to do and have a united reason to be doing it. These leaders show a level of integrity, agility and teamwork that creates an environment that encourages ethical behaviour.

Integrity is a commitment to the highest personal and professional standard and is an important military leadership virtue, if not the most important, as it is the fundamental principal of a military service. Without it the larger organisation will lose the trust of the public, the trust of those within the organisation, and everyone's self-respect. Integrity can also be further divided into personal integrity, organisational integrity, and the interaction between the two. How a person's individual principles, values, ethics and intentions ultimately fits into the values and beliefs that guide the behaviours, systems and practices required to achieve an organisation's goals.

Being a person with integrity builds trust. Airmen and Airwomen reflect the society from which they are drawn. If a person has integrity this is someone others will trust. It is someone who has the moral courage to express when something is unethical or doesn't fit the objective of the organisation. They can handle greater responsibility, and will build workplace relationships that are healthier, stronger and create a more harmonious workplace environment and strength in camaraderie.

We often assume that leaders and followers within the same organisation, especially the military, have the same understanding of ethics and integrity. But there can be subtle differences in the individual's belief systems that may lead to misunderstandings. Therefore, having a written and understandable code of conduct within an organisation that clearly lays out the expectations of that organisation is not only important, but also necessary. This is how leaders and followers can form the right behaviours and ensure they are operating with integrity within

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the organisational framework. If everyone is working in the same ethical framework, there is less room for error or misunderstanding.

Workplace integrity is where the workforce demonstrates understanding, mutual trust, respect and communication. With integrity, our leaders must understand, trust and respect the members of their workforce. If the workforce has a lack of understanding of the leader's intentions and efforts, then mutual relationships will suffer, and sound judgements will fail along with productivity.

Integrity assists in effective rank relationships. Therefore it is essential for a leader to have a clearly defined code of conduct that is in line with that of the organisation. It doesn't matter how intelligent, affable, persuasive or personable someone is, if their actions create confusion, or they do not act with integrity, they will not and can not be an effective leader. The same is true of a follower, if they are not seen to have sound ethical principles, the leader cannot lead effectively, and the entire team and organisation will suffer.

Integrity is the main character strength of virtue and courage, of honesty and authenticity. An organisation must have leaders that are truthful, act genuinely and sincerely, take responsibility for their feelings and actions, and are accountable for their decisions. Personal accountability therefore forms the basis of building a culture of organisational integrity. Organisational integrity is formed through solid leadership from the top down, and is built on a framework of common goals, observable ethical actions, and behaviours that fit the organisation's code of conduct and expectations, clear rules and boundaries, and void of self-interest and self-gain. An organisation that has integrity allows room for individual growth through coaching, constructive feedback and an understanding of behaviour born from good intentions. Without integrity there is no trust, no accountability or room for positive growth, after all, no leader is stronger than the people he leads.

Agility is thinking smart, moving swiftly, being able to overcome challenges, and adapting to situations around us. Agility requires quick decisions, but not at the expense of safety or consideration of the situation. This becomes difficult within an organisation if the person having to make the decision is not seen to have the same integrity or moral code either within work or between friends, peers or the wider community, and as a result has their decision questioned, regardless of whether it was right or wrong.

Organisational agility is how the military evolves to meet the constant changes within the current environment, by encouraging ethical decisions through consideration and questioning, before tasks or statements are released. This creates a team environment that is resourceful and capable to respond to both internal and external factors. This "team" can then be innovative, adapt, and put in place process improvements. It is particularly important in today's environment when leaders are required to draw from the workforce to achieve more with less, and with the interaction and constraints of external agencies that organisation decisions are thoroughly discussed and confirmed that everyone supports the concluding decision.

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While an organisation needs to be agile, it also requires some basis of stability. It is the anchor point that forms the foundation of the team and doesn't change, reducing the impact of the areas that are changing constantly. Two of the most important foundations are solid organisational values and inspirational leadership. These allow for empowerment, resilience and innovation to thrive within an organisation.

Empowering leaders can share the organisations purpose with the varying levels of responsibility they interact with. They make the goal of the organisation the goal of that individual, creating shared organisational mindfulness and team cohesion. For example, a leader can talk through their ethical decision-making process and explain the purpose behind key decisions which directly influences an individual's decision in a moment requiring decisive action, even at the lowest levels. Acknowledging and recognising each member's contribution to the task in the overall organisational purpose and priority also empowers the members of the team.

Innovation is the support architecture to anchor a team against constant disruption and change. Leaders need to foster an environment that encourages and supports the team's identification of strategic, operational and tactical solutions to the changes. An environment that fosters a transparent and open forum for issues that arise, creates a team that is empowered to be innovative in their own responses to changes within their immediate workplace, the greater capability platform and the overall organisational environment.

Delegating jobs and empowering by encouraging reasonable debate and input into the decision making will motivate individuals to personally invest in achieving the overall goal or intent. Where possible, a leader encourages debate and ethical reasoning by involving the team in creating action plans that they can be accountable for and have a sense of ownership over. Sharing information with the team and engaging them in the process creates an empowered environment that promotes comrade and a cohesion to the given instruction because they are now invested in what they are doing and the overarching mission. A leader that promotes agility, integrity, ethics and morality is also a leader who encourages and prepares others for their future leadership roles. By developing the team, it is encouraging them to be better contributors, leaders, thinkers and ethical decision makers.

Agility in the ethical decision-making process is also about admitting when mistakes are made and taking ownership and responsibility for them to allow for timely correction of the mistake and to help foster an open and honest work environment. A good leader uses a mistake as an opportunity for growth and learning to better improve themselves and the team they are in.

The essence of leadership is accomplishing the goals of the organisation through the combined effort of others. This definition shows how crucial teamwork is for successful leaders. A leader cannot achieve the outcomes alone. Having a strong leader as a valued team member sets the standard of a strong, positive, and accomplished team.

To create this solid team, the leader must first appreciate how the various functions, individuals and needs of the organisation fit together and how to make it work cohesively. This is also true

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for individual team members. With this understanding, the leader can mould the objectives of the organisation and the individuals into a shared outcome creating a stronger group, with each team member understanding how each individual fit into the team.

Teamwork improves efficiency as employee relations tend to improve creating a more cohesive unit. To create a team that works well together, a successful leader will need to lead consistently and with integrity in a collaborative manner by:

- a. Engaging the team in the vision of the organisation and goals allowing the team to work collaboratively;
- b. Adequately defining the roles and responsibilities of all members so they fully appreciate the importance of their individual contributions, and establishing both individual and group accountability;
- c. Ensuring that everyone is committed, including the leader, to deliver on his or her own responsibilities and to work as a member of the team;
- d. Ensuring that the team works under an environment of trust. Mutual respect and trust with a clearly defined set of values, a mission statements and a vision that the team has created and can maintain and be accountable to is a cohesive team; and
- e. Creating lines of open communication in both directions while remaining adaptable and flexible.

A leader's ability to influence others is most pronounced when the guiding values of that leader are clear and the team, from top to bottom works cohesively to achieve the required outcome. This essay has discussed the key values that are vital to leaders within the Royal Australian Air Force, from the Commanding Officer to the tradesman on the floor. Every individual should be encouraged to employ these qualities in their daily interactions with each other, as building future leaders is part of the role of a leader.

These key values should form the basis of any leadership training from recruits through to Officer training and should form the foundation from which leadership skills are measured. As a service we need to ensure we lead using these core values with less emphasis being placed on a leader being more human, approachable, and politically correct. Whilst there is merit in this approach, the very nature of the work we do requires a more structured and regimented form of leadership, care must be taken to ensure we don't move leadership training into a realm of like ship over leadership.

Organisational changes have led to more pressure on leaders, and as a result the people within the organisation tend to be handled more as a commodity. Whilst care must be taken not to hold like ship above leadership, we cannot lose the human element of our leadership. This creates challenges to our new leaders and how to best handle these challenges needs to be a focus during leadership training and development. These challenges are minimised with a solid

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ethical framework from which to work from, that aligns with individuals within the organisation as well as the mission and vision.

As a service we need to move forward with the changing nature of the society in which we are a part of, but we must also remember that as a military organisation, the expectation on everyone is higher than that expected of a civilian. Similarly, the expectations of quality of the leadership within our organisation is higher than that of a typical business. As an organisation, the focus should be on building this level and quality of leader. If the expectations of how the military behaves is not met, it doesn't matter how ethical the decisions being made are, or the quality of the leadership being displayed, without the trust and respect of the those outside the organisation we cannot expect trust and respect within the organisation. It is crucial to how successful a military organisation we are. This exact point has been made in The Royal Australian Navy Leadership Ethic Manual which states, "*Leadership influence does not derive from positional power or authority but from character. Leaders inspire others when they are recognised as ethical people who energise trust and commitment in the pursuit of missions by ethical means.*"

By maintaining our core values as the foundation and marrying those with the capabilities and vision our organisation provides, the leaders we are capable of producing throughout the entire organisation should be successful at motivating, influencing and directing others to understand and accomplish the mission. Ethics and leadership cannot be viewed separately, but instead must be treated as one in the leadership model. In a military context, leadership is not just about the management of tactics or strategy, it is about guiding the social interactions of its people to develop a team that has social and technical mastery to create an Air Force of influence.

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