

Applying Mission Command to the Army's Crucible of Character Development

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Foreword:

The operational environment requires an Army capable of executing Large Scale Ground operations in a Multi-Domain environment as part of a joint force. Army Soldiers and Leaders must be well trained and of strong character. Professionals that can operate effectively, fight and win in any environment. Soldiers and Leaders must possess strong character that enhances decision making, sound judgement and mission accomplishment. Character development initiatives include holistically training and developing leaders of character who are competent, confident, morally straight, strong team players pursuing excellence as Trusted Professionals. – MG Gary Brito, Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCOE) Commander

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The operational environment requires ethically grounded, cognitively adaptive, and physically dominant close combat leaders. The expectation for these leaders is to be Trusted Professionals who adhere to the Army's Professional Ethic.¹ They must consistently demonstrate character, commitment, and competence with effective, efficient, and ethical intent and action, in order to pursue the desired end state facilitated by a realized Mission Command Philosophy.^{2,3}

Within the context of multi-domain operations, near peer threats, and emerging artificial intelligence applications, multiple complex dilemmas are challenging the mind, body, and soul of today's close combat Soldier. Addressing character development tomorrow is too late. Holistic, collaborative, and cross domain leader development in the human dimension is an imperative that is non-negotiable, for as GEN Daniel Allyn (RET, VCSA, USA) declared, the pithy and profound truth is that: "you can't surge character."⁴ Growing leaders with character requires sustained purpose,

process, and passion because character is not a state that, once achieved, is impervious to the trials of time and context, but is instead a developmental process that unfolds across a lifetime.⁵ While the Army has always had many leaders who are of high character, it is also the case that character is neither universal nor something that can be assumed. Therefore, the Army needs a consistent, well-delivered, and transformative character development approach that includes growth-oriented feedback and that is applicable across the institutional, operational, and self-development domains.

In this manuscript we lay out an approach based on current efforts at the Maneuver Center of Excellence (MCOE). We identify existing challenges and opportunities, illustrate growth-oriented approaches, and make recommendations for further implementation. If done correctly, this work has the potential to systematically grow Soldiers who are not only proficient at technical and tactical tasks but who are also leaders of character – Soldiers who are at once both lethal and honorable. Our goal is to illustrate “a way” to develop character in our leaders through a collective learning environment.

Fostering Collaboration & Cohesion

The MCOE’s holistic character development initiative is intended

to inspire a process for developing combat arms maneuver Soldiers in a manner that achieves the Chief of Staff of the Army’s (CSA) intent of building organizations of trust capable of winning our nation’s wars.⁶ The MCOE trains over 69,000 combat arms maneuver Soldiers a year, from basic trainees to brigade commanders, in integrated warfighting functions and combat skills. The MCOE also develops doctrine for various warfighting functions, including multiple character development pilot programs impacting enlisted Soldiers, Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs), and Officers. The MCOE’s work on character development seeks to integrate key proponents including the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic’s (CAPE) strategic imperative to shape the Army Profession, the Army Chaplain Corps responsibility for moral leadership and ethics instruction, and the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences (ARI) role in the creation of assessments designed to support Soldier development.

The Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE)

CAPE is the “proponent for the Army Profession, the Army Ethic, and Character Development.” CAPE’s key tasks are to “support Army-wide efforts...[and] create and integrate...doctrine into training, professional military education, civilian education systems, and operations.”⁷ CAPE produced ADRP-1 *The*

Army Profession (2013), and, *The Army’s Framework for Character Development* (2017), by directives from consecutive CSAs. These guiding documents provide a valuable strategic framework that identifies the need and trajectory for the Army Professional Ethic and developing Trusted Army Professionals.

Building on these efforts, CAPE’s current focus is developing *The Army’s Framework for Character Development Implementation and Assessment Plan* with a projected rollout date of FY21. Leading this effort, CAPE already provides high-quality videos, vignettes, and curriculum via its website. However, CAPE faces a challenge in realizing its full vision for a variety of reasons, including the complexity of its Army-wide task, accommodating multiple stakeholders, non-infinite resources, and its location. At West Point, CAPE is able to “leverage the vast intellectual capital at the United States Military Academy.”⁸ While indeed valuable, CAPE’s geographical location at West Point also has the potential to limit direct access to additional environments that create, integrate, assess, and validate doctrine and curriculum. This gap has the potential to limit access to the Institutional and Operational spheres of influence and their intellectual and operational influencers.

Accordingly, given CAPE’s mission to develop doctrine, curriculum, and assess training efficacy for the entire Army, there is an opportunity to increase

impact by becoming better integrated with the Centers of Excellence (COEs) and with the Army Chaplaincy, specifically, the COE Ethics Instructors and Writers. At the time of this writing, efforts are underway to move CAPE to Ft. Leavenworth and become integrated with the Center for Army Leadership (CAL).

The Chaplain Corps

The Chaplain Corps’ (CHC) mission is to advise the Army on moral leadership: “The Chief of Chaplains (CCH) has the responsibility for moral leadership training in the Army.”⁹ Additionally, the CCH is required to staff, develop, and teach ethics and moral leadership in Army schools in support of the Army Profession and Ethic.¹⁰ The Army Ethics Instructor and Writer at each COE and Senior Service College fulfill these roles and responsibilities in conjunction with the Combined Arms Center (CAC). Within this context, Army Ethicists are the most strategically positioned and influential chaplains in the Army for developing doctrine, facilitating character development, and collaborating with CAPE on the Army Profession.

For FY19, the CCH’s priority is to “build spiritual readiness through the free exercise of religion, Soldier and Family care, and moral leadership.”¹¹ This includes all Chaplains and Unit Ministry Teams with the end state that “The Corps is prepared and inspired to enhance moral leadership training across the Army Enterprise leading to a morally strong Force.”¹² Furthermore, the CCH’s purpose includes strengthening “the Corps capacity to train moral leadership in order to increase unit and Soldier readiness and develop Leaders.”¹³ To begin movement toward this vision, we next describe efforts in character development that are in progress at the MCOE. At the time of this writing, the CHC is writing and reviewing DA PAM 165-16, Moral Leadership, in order to align narrative and publication with CACs directed revision of FM 6-22 and ADP 6-22.

Implementing Character Development

The MCOE Second Line of Effort, *Train the Fundamentals and Develop Leaders*, captures the high level objective to integrate transformational moral, ethical leadership and character development training into all Professional Military Education (PME) (Figure 1 and 3). In addition, the MCOE’s Maneuver Human Performance Model (HPM) establishes character as its foundation and spirituality as a critical component. (Figure 2). To do this, it is necessary to define what moral and ethical leadership and character development mean and to demonstrate their interdependence and holistic overlap in human development.

Figure 1. MCOE Lines of Effort

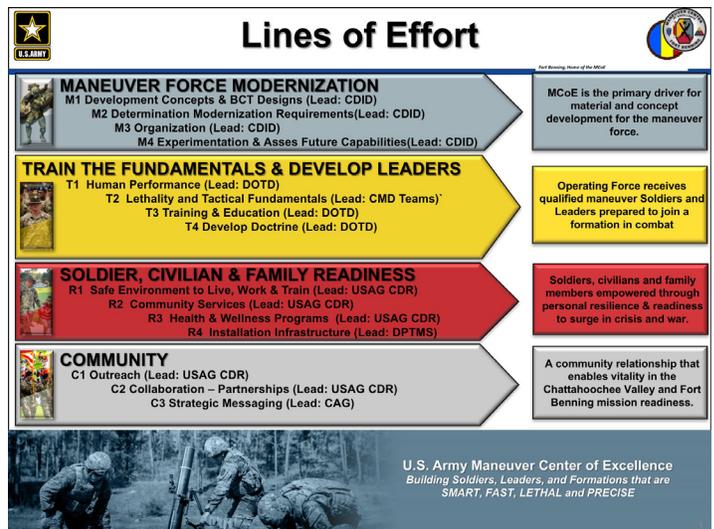


Figure 2. Human Performance Model

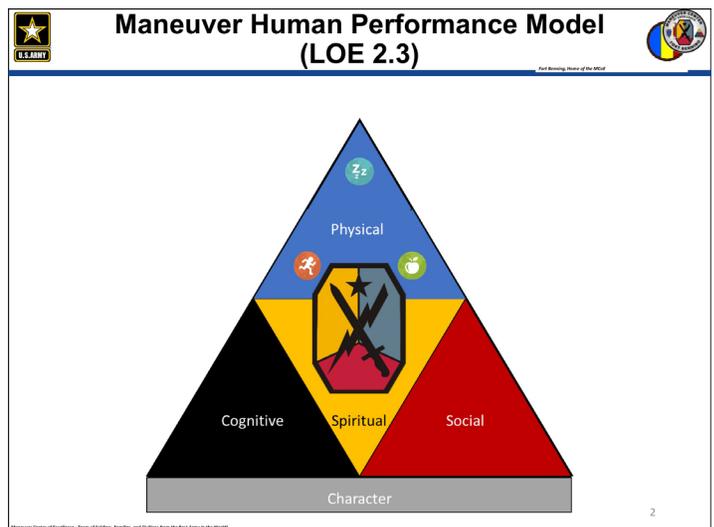
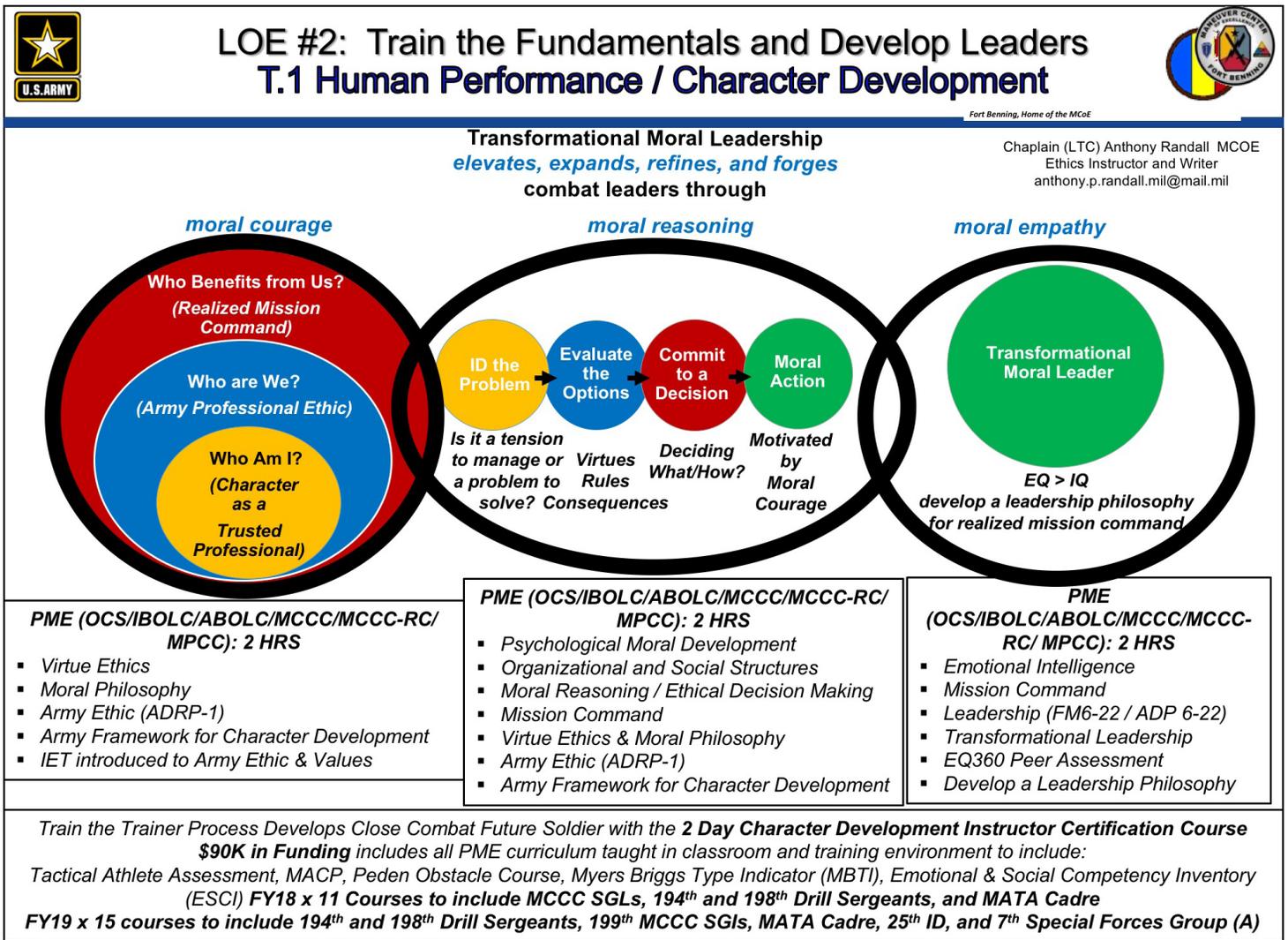


Figure 3. MCOE Character Development Model



Moral leadership emanates from an individual’s beliefs and values, it is not secular in nature. Moral leadership answers, “Who am I as a trusted professional?” Ethical leadership emanates from a systemic context and/or social constructs including code, creed, or ethos requiring individual ethical development. Ethical leadership answers, “Who are we as a trusted profession?” Character development is the metaphysical, cognitive, and psychological process of moral and ethical transformational leader development. The development of trusted professionals within a professional ethic confidently answers a third question, “Who benefits from us, and how?” Along these lines, in The Army Framework for Character Development, CAPE states:

Research on how people develop in character reveals that the process is multi-dimensional and informed by complementary, relevant disciplines and fields (e.g., philosophy, ethics, theology, law, medicine, psychology, sociology, anthropology, education). The science of human psychological and biological development confirms that our true nature evolves as we mature throughout our lives...In addition, our spirituality draws upon personal, philosophical, psychological, and/or religious teachings or beliefs and plays a significant role in character development.”¹⁴

Within the context of this guidance, MCOE approaches character development as having a complex, multifaceted foundation.

Research finds that the moral and ethical leadership principles shaping warrior codes throughout history are: “closely linked to a culture’s religious beliefs, and can be connected to elaborate rituals and rites of passage.”¹⁵ Consistent with this viewpoint, developing cognitively adaptive and physically dominant Soldiers without addressing the character of the soul contradicts thousands of years of warrior ethos, spirituality, philosophy, theology, and psychology. Accordingly, MCOE’s character development program collaborates with command teams, ethics instructors, strength coaches, combatives instructors, mental skills coaches, and research psychologists.

Building on this view, character should be addressed at every level as today’s Soldiers must embrace a mindset of becoming lifelong learners in a manner that feeds all aspects of human performance. Ethics instruction was integrated into the Programs of Instruction (POIs) of Officer Candidate School (OCS), Infantry Officer Basic Course (IBOLC), Armor Officer Basic Course (ABOLC), Maneuver Captain’s Career Course/Reserve Course (MCCC/MCCC-RC), and Maneuver Pre-Command Course (MPCC), effectively reaching over 3,000 officers a year. This level of effort equates to every Brigade Combat Team Infantry and Armor Platoon Leader, Company, Battalion, and Brigade Commander receiving 6-8 hours of teaching and training annually through professional military education.

In FY17, the Character Development Instructor Course (CDIC), a pilot program providing teaching and training for Drill Sergeants (DS) and MCCC Small Group Leaders, began at the MCOE. The two day (18 hour) CDIC was completed by Drill Sergeants in a BCT unit during 3rd QTR FY17. At the same time, the BCT trainee attrition rate for this unit went from 12% in the 3rd QTR to 3% in the 4th QTR FY17, potentially saving the Army resources in terms of retaining recruits and impacting talent management. Although correlational in nature, the unit’s CSM attributed part of this success to Drill Sergeants applying what they learned in the CDIC.¹⁶ Over 200 Drill Sergeants, MCCC Instructors, and Military Advisory Training Academy (MATA) instructors completed the course in FY18. In FY19, CDIC will

train 250-300 MCOE Cadre.

The CDIC provides an experiential learning environment in which instructors can assess their competence as moral and ethical leaders while building teams through creation of a shared understanding based on personality type conflict styles and socio-emotional competencies. The course provides a model for how experiential moral and ethical leadership development training can be deployed within their units. To create an experiential learning environment, the CDIC tries to build a bridge to students by linking basic skills to moral and ethical development. It incorporates a tactical athlete assessment, the Myers Briggs (MBTI) Conflict Style Report,¹⁷ a combatives and boxing workout, an obstacle course, and one-on-one coaching based on the Emotional and Social Competency Inventory (ESCI) evaluating the domains, competencies, and leadership styles of an individual’s emotional intelligence.¹⁸

To evaluate this approach, an initial sample of 70 Soldiers serving as Drill Sergeants and Small Group Instructors from one Basic Combat Training (BCT) Battalion (BN), three One Station Unit Training BNs, and one Military Advisor Training Academy (MATA) class completed a post-course survey. The purpose of the post-course survey was to measure participant reaction to the course and participant attitudes about character development. The responses were used to determine instructional quality of the CDIC and to provide recommendations to improve course training. Overall, the course surveys indicated that the training event was typically rated above standard. Participants commented on the quality of training (e.g., material/content, instruction, and venue), and comments indicated that participants thought the training was excellent, practical, and demanding. Participants also indicated that they better understood themselves and others, intended to apply what they learned, and that others should attend similar training.

Overall, these data constitute initial evidence regarding the

effectiveness of the approach, which is grounded in the MCOE's HPM as a holistic attempt to develop the 21st century American Soldier. To be the most cognitively dominant, realistically trained, and institutionally agile force in the world will require this type of development of strategic leadership and education across the Army.

Assessing Character Development

Along with these course content innovations, a complementary pillar of work at the MCOE has been the development of methods of character assessment. Like the instructor development course, the assessment development effort seeks to support growth. The assessments are intended to guide learning rather than to evaluate a level of competency.^{19,20}

Initial research efforts focused on assessment in the context of BCT.²¹ The emphasis was on Soldiers learning to embody the Army Values as a part of daily activities.²² In addition, the work sought to examine ethical decision-making as an application of the Army Values. Kohlberg's theory of moral development suggests that individuals' moral reasoning moves through stages wherein individuals initially focus on immediate personal consequences, and over time, they may transition to higher levels where they act in accordance with internalized principles (i.e., values based principles of conscious beyond specific rules of a society).²³ This framework casts trainee development as change over time rather than simply the presence or absence of character. Trainees arrive at their basic training units with some element(s) of character, so the challenge is to facilitate growth in character in alignment with the Army Ethic.

Given the pace of the BCT environment, DS workload, and DS-trainee ratios, this work relied on two sources of evidence on character development – peer evaluations and ethical decision-making scenarios – that could be collected in a platoon classroom setting during a concise period of time (less than 90 minutes per phase of BCT).

The ethical decision-making scenarios were created by developing questions to accompany videos available from CAPE. The videos included stories that present ethical dilemmas focused on Army Values as told by trainees in a BCT setting or Soldiers with previous deployment experience. The questions were designed in the form of situational judgment test (SJT) items, which are low-fidelity simulations comprising a scenario (in this case, presented in the CAPE video), a prompt (e.g., what should you do?), and set of responses that are intended to elicit similar judgment processes as would occur in real world contexts.²⁴ The trainees viewed the CAPE videos and responded to the SJTs using the clicker system. These assessments could be formative in the sense that the clicker software enabled the DS and trainees to see group-level responses in real time, based on which DS could adjust instruction and/or discussions based on the responses. In addition, following Kohlberg's theory, the response options were roughly mapped to stages of moral development, enabling interpretation of the responses by leveraging the idea that individuals at different levels may interpret issues differently.

The second source of evidence was peer evaluation. Each trainee rated every squad member on the Army Values and identified the top and bottom three members of their platoon. Peer evaluations were seen as critical because the trainees have unique perspectives on behavior in absence of the DS. Moreover, it is likely that trainees learn from one another in powerful ways by observation.^{25,26}

Initial empirical evidence suggests that these tools were able to capture changes in target attributes throughout BCT and, therefore, have the potential to provide the basis for a useful formative assessment approach. To test the tools, data were collected during the Red (beginning), White (middle), and Blue (end) Phases of BCT. Trainees across four platoons participated in the assessments. Performance on both the SJTs and the peer evaluations indicated that the trainees tended to grow over time on the assessed attributes.

The empirical findings also provided support for the view that locus of control – one’s general belief about the degree of personal control over the environment – is important for ethical behavior, as evidenced by adherence to the Army Values.²⁷ Specifically, results showed that trainees with a more internal locus of control (i.e., belief that consequences are a direct result of their own actions rather than beyond their control) were perceived as more trustworthy and rated more favorably by their peers on the Army Values. As training progressed, trainees became increasingly more internal in their locus of control.

In addition, feedback obtained from the trainees and DS on the assessment approach was generally positive. The trainees were engaged in the discussions and expressed interest in the peer evaluation results. Trainees also indicated that they especially benefitted from seeing how the other members of their platoons responded to the SJTs, as the resulting discussions helped them to better understand others’ perspectives.

Overall, as this example illustrates, it is indeed possible to assess character in Army settings despite constraints on time and personnel, and to do so in a manner that supports MCOE and unit objectives, helps learners, and builds on CAPE resources.

Summary and Recommendations

Fostering collaboration and integration of output between organizations such as CAL, CAPE, CHC, and COEs advances the common goal of developing Trusted Professionals who adhere to the Army’s Professional Ethic. Writing, developing, assessing, and updating curriculum for PME courses exponentially improves in such a collaborative environment.

Preliminary evidence suggests that the CDIC was effective at helping instructors self-reflect and better understand others. Drill Sergeants in particular saw a benefit to hosting the CDIC at their COE rather than at the Drill Sergeant Academy. A CDIC at their home station provided DS time during the cycle break to reflect personally and professionally on leader development. DS expressed concern that a CDIC at the DS school would likely lose its efficacy by becoming immersed in an already

demanding setting, which has the potential to marginalize the course’s value. The Ethics Instructor, strength coaches, mental skills coaches, and combatives instructors, along with selected chaplains and command team leaders served as the primary instructors for the course. MCOE funded the program to include professional certification, assessments, and course materials for instructors and students.

Work at the MCOE also illustrates that it is possible to empirically examine character development in Army training contexts. Additional approaches should be developed that are similarly based on theory, assessment, and programmatic feedback. In particular, it is important to extend these types of assessment approaches to Officer and NCO education, to other COEs, and to the operational force. In each case, it is necessary to understand how best to convey feedback and prepare instructors to give feedback to their target audience. Likewise, it is necessary to explore the development and validation of summative evaluations to accompany the formative evaluations outlined here. At the MCOE, efforts are already underway to develop assessment approaches for the OCS and the MCCC. It is also critical to better understand how Soldiers change across their career. To do so will require the collection of longitudinal data across institutional and operational training contexts. Such data will inform a deeper understanding of the rate at which Soldiers develop and will uncover opportunities to accelerate growth.

Conclusions

Ultimately, combat leaders are responsible for forging the Warrior Ethos of the American Soldier. General George C. Marshall said, “The Soldier’s heart, the Soldier’s spirit, the Soldier’s soul, are everything. Unless the Soldier’s soul sustains him, he cannot be relied on and will fail himself and his command and his country in the end.”²⁸ The Army’s greatest organizational constraint may be overlooking the timeless truth necessitating continual character development of a warrior ethos and culture. We must respond to our complex

world with a holistic and integrated approach that addresses spirituality along with character, social, cognitive, and physical performance. Success will require a realized mission command approach across the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, institutionally, operationally, and individually. The Army Professional Ethic finds its ethos in the internalized creeds of our force such as the Soldier Creed, NCO Creed, Ranger Creed, and Oath of Office. Developing the character of the warrior's soul is life-centric, life-long, and life-sustaining. It is multi-generational, customized to MOS/COE/Unit talent and makeup. It is a "bottom up" approach with "top down" intent and parameters empowering the moral autonomy of leaders to leverage the Army's leader development model. It cannot be one size fits all. Accordingly, it requires integrating the resources

and expertise of entities such as CAPE, the Chaplaincy, and leaders at all levels to develop trust and cohesion through cross-functional teams, quantified and qualified character development, and rejection of territorial instincts, instead favoring collaboration and shared understanding. We believe the recommendations presented here move in this direction by addressing doctrinal, organizational, training, assessment, and research needs. We illustrated current efforts at the MCOE as "a way," understanding it may not necessarily be "the way." We believe by modeling realized mission command philosophy and lifelong learning, the MCOE continues to embrace the soul of its own identity, humbly and resolutely "leading the way" in forging 21st century close combat Soldiers.



Chaplain (Lieutenant Colonel) Randall, Anthony served as the Ethics Instructor and Writer for the US Army's Maneuver Center of Excellence, Ft. Benning, Georgia, from 2016-2019, having taught ethical leadership and character development to over 10,000 Officers and NCOs. He has served in Cavalry, Airborne, Ranger, Special Forces, and Special Mission Units including seven deployments as an Engineer Officer and Chaplain. He holds a B.S. from the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, a Masters of Divinity from Denver Seminary, a Masters of Theology from Emory University, graduated from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, and is currently a Doctor of Ministry student at Fuller Theological Seminary.

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