

INTEGRATING ETHICAL PRINCIPLES INTO LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR OFFICER CADETS: THE CASE OF THE MILITARY INSTITUTE OF ARMORED FORCES

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Abstract. This article examines the practical implementation of ethical principles in the Leadership course within the educational process at the Military Institute of Armored Forces of the National Technical University “Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute”. The study is based on the premise that military leadership cannot be limited to operational effectiveness and technical competence but must be grounded in strong moral and ethical foundations. It analyzes contemporary international and Ukrainian research on ethical leadership and its role in the professional training of officer cadets. Particular attention is paid to the integration of ethical values into professional military education in the context of NATO standards and the ongoing transformation of Ukraine’s military education system during wartime. The scientific novelty of the study lies in examining the practical implementation of ethical principles in the Leadership course at a Ukrainian military higher education institution. The study systematizes methods for developing ethical leadership among officer cadets under wartime conditions. It also combines NATO standards, Ukraine’s combat experience, and practice-oriented forms of officer cadet training within an integrated approach to leadership education. The key areas for developing the leadership skills and personal qualities of officer cadets through ethical education are identified and systematized. Particular emphasis is placed on instructors and mentors with combat experience as carriers of ethical values and practical leadership models. Ethical leadership is regarded not only as a professional competence but also as a core value orientation that ensures adherence to military ethics, international humanitarian law, and democratic standards of civil–military relations. The study characterizes the principal tools for developing the leadership qualities of officer cadets, including classroom instruction, individual and extracurricular activities, participation in research programs, involvement in the institutional life of the Military Institute, sports competitions, and military exercises.

Keywords: leadership, ethics, ethical leadership, leadership skills, leadership in the educational process, implementing of leadership, officer cadet.

1. INTRODUCTION

The development of leadership skills and personal qualities among officer cadets has attracted considerable scholarly attention, resulting in a growing body of research on moral development, leadership values, military ethics education, and practice-oriented leadership training (Agrawal, 2020; Brænder, 2022; Magnussen, 2023; Miron, 2024; Navas-Jiménez, 2024). The leadership in the military sphere has both a specific and universal essence. It is manifested in the Armed Forces of Ukraine in different ways in the everyday performance of service, in combat missions, in learning and training, and in the organization of the unit’s activities in field conditions. The need for purposeful formation of

leadership qualities in officer cadets is determined by the specific features of the military environment and the requirements for carrying out military activities.

In addition to weapons, personnel, and intelligence, the Armed Forces of Ukraine critically need modern commanders with a set of capabilities and qualities that can assure victory over a numerally overwhelming enemy. There are many factors that hinder this. Among them are traditions inherited from the Soviet period and an approach to officer cadet training that remains focused primarily on narrowly defined professional competencies. In this case, emphasis should be made on implementing the ideas and technologies of humanistic pedagogy using the best world and domestic traditions (Boyko, 2020). There has been noticeable progress in the involvement of NATO programs in the educational process at higher military educational institutions of Ukraine in recent years.

An important task is to find effective methods for developing leadership qualities, to educate potential leaders who can quickly and purposefully integrate not only into the army, but also into the society.

Leadership development is a purposeful formation and deepening of relevant qualities and skills, a process of personal development. Purposeful training and self-study of cadets/students aimed at developing so-called soft skills will be more effective with the use of ethical principles. D.T.L. Shek and A. Yuen consider "ethical leadership" to be an important attribute of successful leadership (Shek, 2019).

In this study, we examine the importance of ethical principles in shaping future commanding officers, as well as the ways in which officer cadets are trained through the "Leadership" courses at the Military Institute of Armored Forces (MIAF). We also examine the role of the "Leadership" program implemented in NATO member countries. In our view, incorporating this component into officer training will contribute to the continued successful reform of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in accordance with NATO standards.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

If we look at the issue of historiography, the first person to talk about leadership as a phenomenon was Gregor Burns in 1978 (Burns, 1978). There are hundreds of studies published over nearly fifty years that were devoted to the study of leadership.

A noticeable impact on the understanding of leadership was made by John C. Maxwell in the monograph "The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership" published in 1998. The author highlighted the principles of leadership that are constant across time and cultural differences (Maxwell, 1998). In 2018 a landmark book by J. Willink and L. Babin was published, in which the authors set out their understanding when to lead and when to follow. They believe that leaders care deeply about their people and their individual success and livelihoods, while also looking out for the good of the overall team and above all accomplish the strategic mission (Willink, 2018).

Currently the historiography of leadership is extensive. We pay attention to studies that focus on "Ethical leadership".

Researchers pay a lot of attention to the study of the influence of leadership on the development of organizations. Korean business researchers concluded that ethical leadership has a considerable impact in the Corporate social responsibility (CSR) psychological safety link. Furthermore, "leaders" ethical characteristics would facilitate the positive influence of CSR practices in an organization (Kim, 2021). Ukrainian scientists A. Turylo, N. Holoborodko and L. Burkova made a similar conclusion: "Ethical leadership focuses on fairness and moral behavior, thus ensuring the effective implementation of CSR" (Turylo, 2023). The main context for analysis in the paper of R. Audi from University of Notre Dame is organizational. In his opinion "Leadership" is essential for the success of organizations and morally significant in their daily operations. The paper also describes its nature and role in less structured realms (Audi, 2022). The important role of the implementation of ethical leadership in organization activity is revealed in the article of Ukrainian researchers O. Vinoslavska and M. Kononets They show that the

psychological structure of a leader's business ethics consists of ethical attitudes, ethical behavior and focus on ethical relationships (Vinoslavskaya, 2021). Significant attention is paid to ethical leadership in educational institutions. V. Sherif, a researcher from University of Kentucky, describes components of the model and discusses the meaning this model might have for youth leadership theory and practice, leadership education, and policy (Sherif, 2017).

The researchers of The Hong Kong Polytechnic University claim that ethical leadership is very important for successful leadership. This statement is based on a multi-year analysis of a student, who learned "Leadership" at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (Shek, 2019).

Instructor of American Community Schools of Athens J. Grigoropoulos considers "When leadership skills are infused by educational institutions with ethics, empathy, and compassion within the Morfosis Learning Philosophy (Morfosis Learning Philosophy includes such elements as holistic thinking, meaningfulness, harmony, ethos and ethics) and environment through mentoring, modeling, and facilitating, students have a better chance to be prepared to assume desirable leadership roles, not only in their own learning but also in their current and future lives" (Grigoropoulos, 2020).

Sandra Peart from University of Richmond suggests that "leadership programs with the desire to "do good, but may lack the requisite knowledge, reflective capacity, or experience to know what the "common good" means and whether and how to advance it". She suggested that in university programs there should be in-depth study of historical and philosophical disciplines (Peart, 2024). Ukrainian scientists O. Lavrentieva and O. Krupsky reveal the topical problem of shaping the leadership qualities in student youth, educating potential leaders who can quickly and purposefully integrate into society, solve social and industrial issues and manage groups and innovative projects. It has emphasized the relevance of the problem of modelling the development of youth leadership and the study and adaptation of domestic and international experience in this area (Lavrentyeva, 2023). Ukrainian researchers L. Krymets, S. Hryliuk, O. Nedvyga and O. Saenko considered that the formation and development of the moral readiness of servicemen to execute the assigned duties depends on high-quality-education, training and acquisition of practical experience, effective management and leadership (Krymets, 2024).

At the same time, the study conducted at the National Defense University (USA) proved that one semester of professional military education did not produce a measurable change in students' moral reasoning. This result indicates that moral development requires a systematic and sustained approach rather than being confined to a single course (Agrawal, 2020).

Ukrainian scientists A. Vitchenko and V. Osyodlo from National Defense University of Ukraine in their article prove the need to overcome outdated views and approaches to leadership training in domestic higher educational institutions, to consider the military leadership innovative nature, successful implementation of which depends on compliance with several psychological and pedagogical conditions (Vitchenko, Osyodlo, 2023).

Several studies directly address the issue of ethical leadership as an important component in the educational process in high military school. A. Buzid considered leadership qualities in military education and different approaches to the model of its formation. She concluded that ethical principles the future leader should be formed through are the "competencies (intelligence, human capital, organization, business, and strategy), commitment (involvement, aspiration, and sacrifice), character (values, traits, virtues)" (Buzid, 2024). The researcher of leadership in Ukraine, O. Boyko, believes, that in modern Ukraine, while integrating educational processes into the system of professional education, the problem of shaping leadership skills and qualities for specialists, particularly in the military area, during the repulsion of Russian aggression, meeting social requirements and world standards, is gaining more and more importance. Leadership virtues and values must be formed in the cadet – the future officer (Boyko, 2020).

Thus, even a summary of historiography shows the relevance of studying "ethical leadership" as a crucial component not only for training the officer cadets, but also in civilian education and in various

types of organizations, including business structures.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The primary objective of this research is to analyze the role and effectiveness of ethical principles in the formation of leadership competencies among officer cadets studying at the MIAF. Overall, the research seeks to demonstrate that purposeful integration of ethical principles into leadership training is essential for shaping officers who can act decisively, humanely, and responsibly within rapidly evolving operational environments.

This article is based on a qualitative, interdisciplinary, and multi-method approach that combines elements of military pedagogy, ethics, psychology, management theory, and NATO professional military education standards. The methodology includes the following components: content analysis, comparative analysis, historiographical review, observation-based insights, case study analysis, interpretive analysis.

The study is grounded on three categories of data: documentary sources (leadership course syllabi (L-1A, L-1B, L-1C), programs of humanitarian courses, methodical recommendations and training plans, NATO Reference Curriculum on Leadership and Ethics (2024), Doctrine of Military Leadership of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (2024), Training materials of MDMP/TLP courses conducted jointly with the U.S. SONATA LLC), scholarly sources (International studies on ethical leadership, Ukrainian research works on leadership in military education), empirical/educational environment observations (classroom interactions, group activities, discussions, and debates, cadet self-government practices, mentoring sessions with combat-experienced instructors, observations during internships in primary command positions).

The methodological framework of this research ensures a rigorous evaluation of the ethical dimension of leadership development in the MIAF. It connects theoretical foundations, international best practices, and real educational processes, enabling a holistic understanding of how ethical leadership is formed in the Ukrainian military context.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There is currently ongoing debate among leadership researchers about whether people are born with innate leadership qualities and traits, or whether they are acquired (Leadership and Ethics, 2024). The doctrine of military leadership in the Armed Forces of Ukraine unequivocally states that military leaders are not born, but become (Military Leadership Doctrine, 2024).

Not every student is (or can be) a leader, claims D. Shek and A. Yuen. Although teachers should encourage every student to develop one's own leadership and appreciate the merits of every student (Shek, 2019). O. Boyko agrees that not every cadet will become a leader. However, this should be strived for, so he suggests three steps, overcoming which will help on the path to leadership: the first is culture and education; the second is the ability to overcome stereotypes; the third is knowledge of one's unconscious (Boyko, 2020).

Whereas the ethics of relationships are formed under the influence of society, leadership qualities, albeit not fully, can be formed in the process of training and education. In our opinion, high-quality education, gaining practical experience, as well as effective management can become the basis for the formation and development of leadership qualities of officer cadets. In the process of training a cadet, the personality of the teacher, not the future officer leader, deserves special attention (Vitchenko, Osyodlo, 2023).

Ukraine has long recognized the need to study world experience and implement "Leadership" programs in the educational process. The Ukrainian Catholic University operates a leadership center that focuses on large-scale leadership research, the development of new educational programs, and the development of leadership in the fields of military affairs, management, and medicine. Ukrainian

Leadership Academy offers a 10-month development program for youth ages 16 to 20 based on values and personal and social development. The program combines elements of physical, emotional and intellectual development. Leadership program for women, organized United Nations Development Program in Ukraine that supports the professional development of women engaged in the digitalization of public services. It includes training and peer learning on leadership, emotional intelligence, stress resistance, etc. and challenges traditional views on leadership, emphasizing a more collaborative, empathetic and inclusive style of leadership. There are also online platforms that offer Leadership training courses and programs, including The Knowledge Academy, Prometheus, Coursera etc. (Lavrentyeva, 2023).

However, institutions mentioned above do not train officer cadets. The Leadership course has been taught at the Hetman Petro Sahaidachny National Army Academy for many years. In recent years, due to close cooperation with NATO countries, the process of introducing the Leadership course in all higher military institutions of Ukraine has begun.

The teaching of the "Leadership" course is driven by the urgent need to train military leaders capable of effectively leading in combat, fostering qualitative changes in the professional culture of military personnel, and contributing to the overall development and improvement of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Leaders set the direction, develop a vision, and their values and behavior shape the behavior of members of the organization or society. However, the influence of a leader is not always positive, as history shows. V. Sherif states that without ethical virtues, values, decision making, and ethical behavior, leadership can destroy itself and people around (Sherif, 2019).

"Ethical leadership" is defined as demonstrating normatively appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and promoting such behavior among followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making. Thus, "Ethical Leadership" is important for the main reason. Leaders have ethical responsibilities because they are in a unique position where they have more opportunities to influence others in different ways, and therefore outcomes. In our opinion, leadership virtues and values need to be formed in a cadet – a future officer.

Ethical values are primarily formed in the humanistic plane. At the MIAF, among the major academic courses are those of the humanitarian cycle, which are taught at the Departments of social and humanitarian sector. Among them it is worth mentioning "Military Pedagogy and Psychology", "Psychology of Management Activity", "Internal communications and psychological support", "Philosophy (religious studies, logic, ethics and aesthetics)", "History of Ukraine and Ukrainian culture", "Political Science and Sociology". They serve as a kind of basis for further study of the course "Leadership".

During the second year of study, cadets from all faculties: Command and Control of Tank Units; Operation and Maintenance of Armored Equipment and Military Hardware; and Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense and Environmental Safety of Troops - take the course "Fundamentals of Military Leadership," which is based on the L-1A course. During the fourth year, cadets take the course "Development of Military Leadership," based on the L-1B course. In the fifth year, they study "The Influence of a Military Leader on a Combat-Effective Team," which is based on the L-1C course.

The work programs of the disciplines mentioned above utilize a reference curriculum for leadership and ethics, which reflects the efforts of a multinational group of scholars, researchers, and practitioners aimed at developing knowledge and practice of leadership and ethics in the profession of arms (Leadership and ethics, 2024).

The main emphasis is placed on studying NATO procedures for planning and military decision-making in the system of professional military education. Therefore, short-term courses on combat planning in accordance with Troop Leading Procedures (TLP) and Military Decision-Making Process (MDMP) procedures according to NATO standards are regularly held at the tactical level of military education in higher military educational institutions and military training units of higher educational institutions. The Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the American company SONATA LLC conduct

course training according to NATO standards at the MIAF. For this training, a special time is allocated, where cadets have the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership qualities and improve their English language skills.

The formation of leadership competence of cadets in the MIAF occurs through the development of spiritual and moral perfection, officer mentality, military-professional competence and psychological and pedagogical training and the most favorable social and educational environment. The process of studying humanitarian courses and "Leadership" will promote group exchange, discussion and self-assessment. Individual tasks will help self-understanding and self-reflection, which are very important for effective leadership service. Practical classes, which use interactive teaching methods (debates, panel discussions, forums, case study), will contribute to the formation of communication skills and critical thinking.

The experience of Colombian military educational institutions similarly demonstrates the practical value of integrating military ethics through lectures, discussions, scenario-based exercises, digital tools, and train-the-trainer sessions (Miron, 2024).

Systematic assessment will consolidate the acquired knowledge, which will be transformed into skills. To systematize the described process of leadership development of cadets in the MIAF, a structural model of leadership formation based on educational, military-professional, ethical and social components is presented in Tab. 1.

In their extracurricular hours, cadets are involved in various kinds of social activities and perform scientific work in the course. Each department has a scientific club where cadets could conduct scientific research, which later helps them both in the educational process and in self-development. Many cadets, who have high physical fitness scores regularly participate in sports competitions of various levels, which form the habit of working in different teams.

Cadets regularly review cases (e.g., a case study of the action of a warrior leader, described in Vitchenko's material (Vitchenko, 2018)) that analyze the ethics of managerial decision-making, ethical dilemmas, ethics of relationships, ethical behavior of an officer, etc. That is, the values of competence here have priority over professional competence. Without proper training, it is very difficult for a future officer leader to remain ethical, which can lead to a violation of International Humanitarian Law. In addition, it is difficult to remain at the appropriate level of ethical values when the enemy acts completely unethically.

If cadets never have an opportunity to play a role during learning activities, debate, employ reflective thinking, civic engagement etc. we cannot expect for them to develop and apply leadership qualities and skills. Therefore, the institute encourages the development of cadet self-government (under the control of senior officers) as a key to the formation of a socially active personality capable of leadership and positive social initiatives.

Mentors with combat experience occupy a special place in the training of officer cadets. The importance of supportive leadership is confirmed by a study of 363 officer cadets at the Spanish General Military Academy, which found that secure base leadership was positively associated with cadets' work engagement, while work engagement mediated its relationship with organizational identification and resilience (Navas-Jiménez et al., 2024). By emphasizing self-development, personal responsibility, transparency in communication, and interdependence, mentors provide officer cadets with practical models of effective leadership.

The internship process, which takes place after each course of study, is considered by us as an element of preparation for the role of a leader in the future and helps to the development of leadership qualities. First, during the internship in the primary positions of the commander of the section, and later during the internship in the army, the cadets acquire the ability to manage personnel.

Tab. 1

Structural model of leadership development of officer cadets at the MIAF

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT OF A MILITARY LEADER	Introduction	Bachelors				Masters
	Psychological and pedagogical selection Assessment of motivation level	1-course	2-course	3-course	4-course	5-6-course
	Developing leadership qualities based on combat experience				Formation of leadership competencies based on combat experience	
	Ceremonies	Humanitarian Disciplines				
	Handing over weapons	Philosophy (religious studies, logic, ethics and aesthetics)	Fundamentals of Military Leadership L1A	Politics and Sociology	Development of Military Leadership L1B	The Influence of a Military Leader on a Combat-Efficient Team L1C
	Handing over beret	History of Ukraine and Ukrainian culture	Psychological preparation	Psychology of Management Activity		Pedagogy of Higher School
	Military oath	History of wars and military art	Fundamentals of social management	Internal communications and psychological support		National Security and Strategic Communications
		Military Pedagogy and Psychology	Fundamentals of military law and International humanitarian law	Fundamentals of military management		
	ACQUISITION OF PRACTICAL SKILLS					
	Basic military training	Field output	Comprehensive training; Teaching practice	Comprehensive training; Teaching practice	Military internship	Educational and pedagogical practice
	Physical development of a leader (character development)					
	Passing physical training standards	Scheduled physical education classes				
		Participation in competitions in various types of martial arts, track and field and weightlifting, obstacle courses, swimming, game sports, personal fitness.				
		Physical activity throughout the life				
	Social-environmental	Life in barracks, dormitories: subordination, statutes and standards, management and delegation				
Code of Good Conduct and Professional Ethics of Military Personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine; Ethos of the Infantryman						
Cadet Oath: Strength, Courage, Honor, Mission First, People Always!						
Cadet self-organization under the supervision of officers						
Organization of extracurricular activities						
Feedback	Assessing the leadership qualities of junior commanders during their appointment to positions					
	Analysis of the actions taken to develop leadership qualities					
Mentoring	Appointment of mentors for cadet units from among the most trained and authoritative officers of the institute					
Festive ceremonies	Tanker Day; Day of the RSB Defense Troops; Day of the Armed Forces of the Ukrainian, Sergeant's Day; Day of the Military Institution of Armored Forces; Graduation of Lieutenants ~ Oath of an Officer of the Armed Forces of the Ukrainian					

Source: created by the authors

Ethical leadership involves making honest and fair decisions, even in difficult situations. Officer cadets must: 1) learn to assess the consequences and prioritize the well-being of their teams; 2) develop fairness by ensuring that their actions are consistent with moral and professional standards. Ethical leaders are accountable for their decisions, building trust and respect among their subordinates; 3) embrace diversity, listen to different perspectives, and ensure equal opportunities within their teams. Leadership should foster unity and cooperation, strengthening organizational discipline; 4) understand the importance of clear, honest communication to build trust and maintain morale within their teams. Transparency also helps prevent misunderstandings and promotes accountability; 5) shape ethical behavior by serving as a role model for those ones whom they lead.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Ethical leadership is a cornerstone of military professionalism, ensuring that officers act with integrity, responsibility, and fairness. The analysis of the practical implementation of ethical principles in the Leadership course at the Military Institute of Armored Forces of the National Technical University "Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute" confirms the importance of integrating ethical values into the professional training of officer cadets. Ethical leadership should be regarded not only as a professional competence but also as a core value orientation that supports adherence to military ethics, international humanitarian law, and democratic standards of civil-military relations.

The study identifies and systematizes the principal methods used to develop ethical leadership among officer cadets under wartime conditions. Their comprehensive application combines ethical

education with academic, research, military-practical, and mentoring activities. This approach enables the integration of NATO standards and Ukraine's combat experience into officer cadet training and directs it towards the development of the professional, moral, and ethical qualities of a military leader. A leader's behavior shapes discipline, commitment, and professionalism within a military unit, while adherence to ethical values encourages subordinates to follow the same principles.

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Кочергін Ігор, Криленко Іван. Інтеграція етичних принципів у навчальні програми з лідерства для майбутніх офіцерів: досвід Військового інституту танкових військ. *Журнал Прикарпатського університету імені Василя Стефаника*, **13** (3) (2026), 125-134.

У статті розглянуто практичне впровадження етичних принципів під час викладання навчальної дисципліни «Лідерство» в освітньому процесі Військового інституту танкових військ Національного технічного університету «Харківський політехнічний інститут». Дослідження ґрунтується на положенні, що військове лідерство не може обмежуватися оперативною ефективністю й технічною компетентністю, а має спиратися на міцні морально-етичні засади. Проаналізовано сучасні зарубіжні та українські дослідження етичного лідерства та його ролі у професійній підготовці курсантів. Особливу увагу приділено інтегруванню етичних цінностей у професійну військову освіту в контексті стандартів НАТО та трансформації системи військової освіти України, що триває в умовах війни. Наукова новизна дослідження полягає у вивченні практичного впровадження етичних принципів під час викладання навчальної дисципліни «Лідерство» в українському вищому військовому навчальному закладі. У дослідженні систематизовано методи формування етичного лідерства у курсантів в умовах війни. Також у межах комплексного підходу до навчання лідерства поєднано стандарти НАТО, бойовий досвід України та практико-орієнтовані форми підготовки курсантів. У статті визначено та систематизовано ключові напрями формування лідерських умінь і особистісних якостей курсантів і студентів засобами етичної освіти. Наголошено на ролі викладачів і наставників із бойовим досвідом як носіїв етичних норм і практичних моделей лідерства. Етичне лідерство розглядається не лише як професійна компетентність, а як базова ціннісна орієнтація, що забезпечує дотримання норм військової етики, міжнародного гуманітарного права та демократичних стандартів цивільно-військових відносин. Охарактеризовано інструменти, здатні формувати лідерські якості курсантів/студентів, а саме: аудиторна, індивідуальна та позааудиторна робота, активна участь у наукових програмах, повсякденна діяльність військово-практичного закладу освіти, військово-практичні заходи (спортивні змагання, військові навчання).

Ключові слова: лідерство, етика, етичне лідерство, лідерські навички, лідерство в освітньому процесі, впровадження лідерства, майбутній офіцер.