

Military Leadership: Emotion Culture and Emotion Coping in Morally Stressful Situations

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Abstract : In irregular warfare contexts, military personnel are often presented with morally ambiguous situations where they are aware of the morally correct choice but may feel prevented to follow through with it due to organizational demands. Moral stress and/or injury can be the outcome of the individual's experienced dissonance. These types of challenges put a large demand on the individual to manage their own emotions and the emotions of others, particularly in the case of a leader. Both the ability and inability for emotional regulation can result in different combinations of short and long term reactions after morally stressful events, which can be either positive or negative. Our study analyzed the combination of these reactions based upon the types of morally challenging events that were described by the subjects. 1)What institutionalized norms concerning emotion regulation are favorable in short-and long-term perspectives after a morally stressful event? 2)What individual emotion-focused coping strategies are favorable in short-and long-perspectives after a morally stressful? To address these questions, we conducted a quantitative study in military contexts in Sweden and Norway on upcoming or current military officers (n=331). We tested a theoretical model built upon a recently developed qualitative study. The data was analyzed using factor analysis, multiple regression analysis and subgroup analyses. The results indicated that an individual's restriction of emotion in order to achieve an organizational goal, which results in emotional dissonance, can be an effective short term strategy for both the individual and the organization; however, it appears to be unfavorable in a long-term perspective which can result in negative reactions. Our results are intriguing because they showed an increased percentage of reported negative long term reactions (13%), which indicated PTSD-related symptoms in comparison to previous Swedish studies which indicated lower PTSD symptomology.

Keywords : emotion culture, emotion coping, emotion management, military

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