

Bridging Expectations Versus Reality

Chaplain's Corner

Chaplain (Maj.) Glen Thompson
U.S. Army Signal School

Professor John Hare of the Divinity School defines the "moral gap" as "the profound space between one's ethical ideal and one's actual living according to that ideal." This concept offers a potent analytical framework for understanding the "Expectations vs. Reality" paradigm within an ethical context. For military professionals, the institutional expectation is the embodiment of the seven Army Values: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. However, the exigencies of daily operations often reveal the challenge of consistently upholding these ideals. The resulting divergence between expectation and reality constitutes not merely a source of professional frustration, but a fundamental ethical condition.

As an Ethics instructor at the U.S. Army Signal School, my goal is to equip every officer attending the Signal Basic Officer Leadership Course (SBOLC) and Signal Captain Career Course (SCCC) with the cognitive tools necessary to bridge this moral gap. Our curriculum is structured upon a three-tiered approach: diagnosing the gap, providing bridging frameworks, and fostering leadership across the gap.

Diagnosing the Moral Gap

The initial phase of instruction focuses on developing the officers' capacity for moral self-awareness and situational diagnosis. Through analysis of case studies – wherein Soldiers failed to adhere to the Army Values or the standards of the Army Profession – we illustrate how minor ethical deviations can escalate into significant institutional and leadership failures. This method cultivates a sense of professional vigilance, teaching future leaders that ethical consistency is critical regardless of other operational successes. The objective is for officers to learn to identify the moral gap in themselves, their peers, and their environment.

Providing Bridging Frameworks

Secondly, the curriculum provides practical, doctrinal, and proactive frameworks that enable officers to navigate ethical dilemmas. Instruction is grounded in established models, including Transformational Moral Leadership, the Army Leadership Requirements Model (Army Doctrine Publication 6-22), the Army Profession, and Army Ethical Standards. To translate theory into practice, we furnish two key instruments:

- Ethical Climate Assessment Survey: Officers are provided with a survey tool to assess, improve, and maintain a healthy ethical climate upon arrival at their future assignments.
- Annual Ethics Program: This resource contains a 52-topic syllabus, enabling leaders to systematically integrate ethical training into their unit's long-range calendar.

These tools are designed to facilitate proactive engagement, empowering officers to train their Soldiers for integrity-based responses *before* a crisis occurs.

Fostering Leadership Across the Gap

The final objective is to encourage officers to see their role as extending beyond personal morality to the ethical stewardship of their organization. The focus shifts to the officer's capacity to positively influence the moral gap within their subordinates. The frameworks provided are not merely for personal use but are tools for coaching, training, and mentorship. By actively and consistently addressing ethical issues, a leader reduces the collective moral gap within their platoon, section, or company. This process normalizes discourse surrounding ethics and morality, thereby fostering an environment where Soldiers are equipped with internal safeguards and are more inclined to make ethical choices in the honorable service of the nation.

In conclusion, bridging the moral gap is the fundamental work of a leader. It begins with courage to diagnose our own shortcomings and is advanced through disciplined application of ethical frameworks. But most importantly, it finds its expression in leadership that actively closes this gap for others. By normalizing conversations about ethics and empowering officers to be agents of positive moral change, we are investing in the very soul of our Army. The goal is not to create perfect leaders, but to develop resilient ones who can navigate the space between expectation and reality with integrity, building units where honorable service is the unwavering standard.

