

Recent ethical and moral lapses, defined as decisions or actions not in line with the Air Force Core Values, are not isolated occurrences. Rather, they are punctuated events on a spectrum of behavior. This spectrum exists in a complex culture with competing and conflicting values and interests that can create a moral dilemma for Airmen. Positive and negative behavioral drivers determine the choices of an individual who is faced with such a dilemma. An organization can also influence the individual's decision-making through separate negative drivers collectively referred to as moral gravity. Lapses in an individual's commitment to the Air Force Core Values occur when positive individual drivers are not emphasized in the presence of moral gravity. The purpose of this report is to identify specific actions that will eliminate negative drivers and replicate positive drivers, and thus promote behavior and decision-making more in line with the Core Values.

# Promoting Sound Ethical Decisions in the Air Force

**CGO SOLUTIONS TO AIR FORCE  
MORAL AND ETHICAL LAPSES**

Think Tank 14D

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This paper was submitted for proposal to the Commander of the Air Education and Training Command (AETC) in response to the request to examine a current Air Force concern and propose solutions by which it may be mitigated.

The contents of this paper reflect the research and view of 24 selected Company Grade Officers for Think Tank 14D and are not necessarily endorsed by the Squadron Officer School or the Department of Defense.

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## **Executive Summary**

Recent ethical lapses in the Air Force have caused some observers to question the moral health of the service. Think Tank 14D has been asked to provide a Company Grade Officer (CGO) perspective on that problem and suggest what CGOs should do to reinforce the Air Force's commitment to its core values among themselves, their peers and their subordinates.

The Think Tank began by reframing the problem; rather than assuming that recent publicized ethical lapses in the Air Force are isolated incidents, these lapses were considered as punctuated events occurring on a spectrum of behavior. This spectrum exists in a complex culture with competing and conflicting values and interests that can create a moral dilemma for Airmen. Positive and negative behavioral drivers determine the choices of an individual who is faced with such a dilemma. An organization can also influence the individual's decision-making through separate negative drivers collectively referred to as "moral gravity." Lapses in an individual's commitment to the Air Force Core Values occur when positive individual and organizational drivers are not emphasized in the presence of moral gravity.

Think Tank 14D identified six core drivers of behavior that CGOs can readily impact: Using Core Values (particularly Excellence) as Standards; Mentorship and Feedback; Lessons Learned from Previous Ethical Lapses; Unified Group Vision (Resolution of Competing Values); Culture of Trust, Transparency, and Accountability; and Locus of Control. These drivers can be used positively or negatively to influence behavior. Thus, the goal is for CGOs to promote the use of positive drivers while reducing or mitigating the impact of negative drivers.

Before considering what courses of action CGOs can implement to promote positive drivers and mitigate negative drivers, the Think Tank took an intermediate step of identifying the

roles and responsibilities of a CGO—essentially proposing a three-part vision of what a good CGO should *be*.

Next, Think Tank 14D proposes four specific actions for promoting ethical behavior by addressing the core drivers. First, developing specific roles and responsibilities for CGOs would provide a common understanding of the priorities and responsibilities of CGOs who are officers in the Profession of Arms, and not only technicians in their specific fields. Second, the Think Tank recommends creating a publication to use as a study tool and discussion-starter for learning lessons from others' ethical successes and failures. Third, creating a CGO Toolkit will enable CGOs to focus on continuous professional development, with an emphasis on ethical development and leadership. Finally, The Think Tank suggests creating a "To Do List" to help identify processes that can be eliminated or streamlined to optimize Airmen's time and values.

The Think Tank proposes implementing these courses of action in three steps. The first step is to utilize future Think Tanks at Squadron Officer School to address these issues and carry out the specific actions above. The second step is to create a Cross Check program—essentially franchising the Think Tank process in smaller groups across the Air Force as a forum in which CGOs can lead discussions and address ethical dilemmas with other individuals of all ranks and AFSCs. Finally, the Think Tank proposes that AETC stand up a cell at Maxwell AFB to provide guidance to Cross Check forums that exist across the Air Force. The Reach Back cell would coordinate between Cross Check groups to maximize the positive impact of cross-functional problem-solving power by distributing information so others can build on the problems and solutions that are being discussed.

## I. Framing The Analysis

*“Air Force Leaders Testify on Culture That Led to Sexual Assaults of Recruits.”*<sup>1</sup>

*“Air Force Cheating Scandal Widens; 92 Nuclear Officers Linked.”*<sup>2</sup>

*“Air Force Drug Probe Widened to Include Cheating, Official Says.”*<sup>3</sup>

These are recent headlines describing members of the United States Air Force, an institution that embraces integrity, service and excellence above all. The question posed to Think Tank 14D is “from a CGO perspective, what is the problem?” Why have moral and ethical lapses occurred? The easy answer is that the individuals committing the violations put their own interests before the good of the service—violating the core values of “Integrity First” and “Service Before Self.” The more difficult and more critical question, however, is WHY are Airmen putting their own interests ahead of the Air Force in direct contravention of the Air Force core values?

Think Tank 14D suggests that these moral and ethical lapses are occurring in an Air Force culture that spans a spectrum of behavior—from behavior that degrades the Core Values to that which promotes them, as shown in Figure 1. This spectrum exists in a complex service-wide culture of competing and conflicting values that can create a moral dilemma for Airmen. An individual who is faced with such a dilemma will make choices that are determined by factors that positively or negatively influence their ethical behavior. An organization can also influence

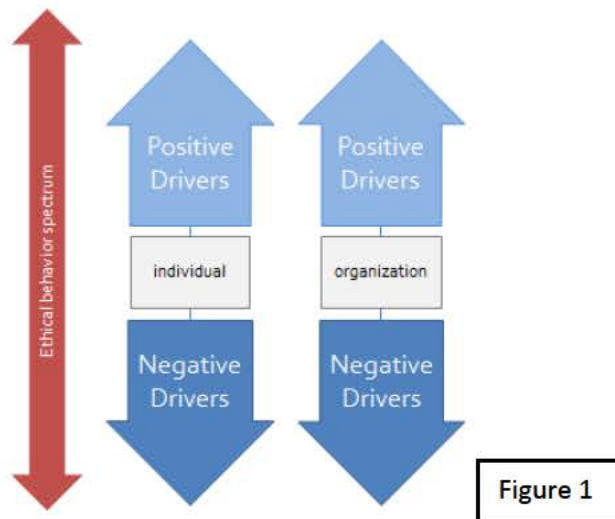
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<sup>1</sup>James Risen, “Air Force Leaders Testify on Culture That Led to Sexual Assaults of Recruits.” *New York Times*, 23 January 2013 [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/24/us/air-force-leaders-testify-on-culture-that-led-to-sexual-assaults-of-recruits.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/24/us/air-force-leaders-testify-on-culture-that-led-to-sexual-assaults-of-recruits.html?_r=0) (accessed 29 June 2014).

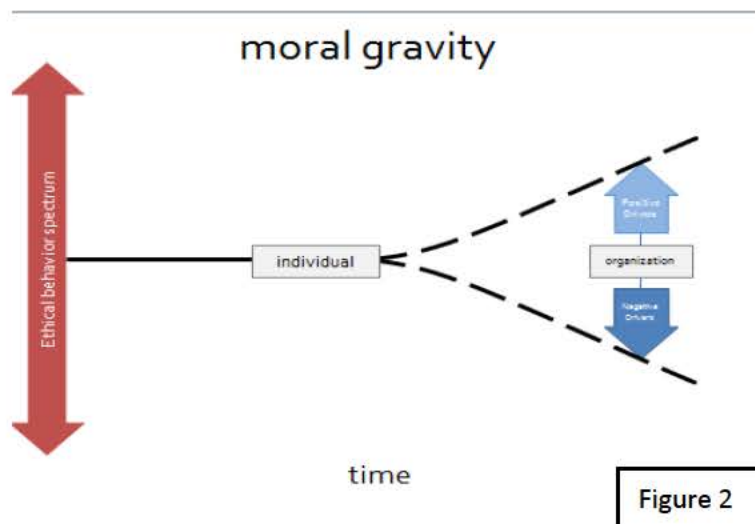
<sup>2</sup>Mark Memmot, “Air Force Cheating Scandal Widens; 92 Nuclear Officers Linked.” *NPR*, 30 January 2014. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/01/30/268880352/air-force-cheating-scandal-widens-to-92-nuclear-officers>, (accessed 29 June 2014).

<sup>3</sup>Lolita Baldor and Robert Burns, “Air Force Drug Probe Widened to Include Cheating, Official Says.” *Huffington Post*, 17 March 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/15/air-force-drug-probe\\_n\\_4603620.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/01/15/air-force-drug-probe_n_4603620.html) (accessed 29 June 2014).

the individual's decision-making through separate negative drivers collectively referred to as moral gravity.<sup>4</sup>



In this paper, those factors will be referred to as “drivers” because they direct and propel behavior by exerting influences on the actor that is subject to them. This paper proposes that ethical lapses in an individual's commitment to the Air Force Core Values occur when positive individual and organizational drivers are not emphasized in the presence of moral gravity (see Figure 2).



<sup>4</sup>John Price, “Joint Competence for the Joint Warfighter: The Missing Element in Defense Transformation (Thesis),” Joint Forces Staff Collect. Joint Advanced Warfighting School (April 2006): 21-24.



## **Research Limitations & Methodology**

To adequately understand the Think Tank's research methodology, it is important to consider the limitations of scope and resources placed upon the researchers. First, student volunteers conducted this project over seven weeks, in addition to completing Squadron Officer School curriculum. This complex topic is worthy of an entire social science dissertation; however, the time limitation prevented the Think Tank from doing additional research to expand upon some points within this paper. Although the Think Tank believes it has provided a quality assessment, time did not permit more thorough research methods such as interviewing individuals involved in the Lackland basic training and Malmstrom cheating scandals, or to conduct a survey of other ranks throughout the Air Force. Second, the perspective of the Think Tank participants (Captains with 4-8 years of commissioned AF service) is likely different than individuals of other ranks and experience; thus, the conclusions and actions proposed only reflect the perceptions and world views of a portion of CGOs. Additionally, the Think Tank's task was narrowly-scoped: the proposed courses of action had to be largely CGO-driven and implemented. The narrow scope of the task continually vectored the team away from recommendations for institutional or higher-level changes during the literature review, course-of-action development, and refinement phases of this project.

Using the concepts of the ethical spectrum, core drivers, and moral gravity, Think Tank 14D approached the question by reframing it: rather than assuming that these ethical and moral lapses are isolated instances, these lapses were considered to be punctuated events on a spectrum of ethical behavior. This paper proposes that the spectrum of behavior that exists in the Air Force includes behavior that, although not in line with the Core Values, has become accepted in Air Force culture (i.e. the choice to bypass mandatory reading in Computer-Based Training

(CBT) to get to the test without reviewing the information). It also includes instances of misconduct that are clearly contrary to the Core Values and are recognized and punished as such. The salient observation from this model is that sometimes individuals may not be acting in accordance with the Core Values, but rather than individual influences causing the ethical deviation, it is systemic organizational factors—moral gravity—that encourages them to commit ethical lapses. The Think Tank discussed whether and why the Air Force has become a culture where “cutting corners” has become acceptable in some cases when it is clear that the corners are “not important,” and at what point a culture of cutting small “unimportant” corners can become a culture in which clear ethical and moral lapses occur.

To further analyze this spectrum of behavior, the extent to which behavior is influenced by internal and environmental factors was considered. Based on personal experience, literature review, case studies, as well as psychoanalytical and sociological research, Think Tank 14D hypothesized that ethical and unethical decisions are influenced by a large variety of factors at the individual and organizational levels. Additionally, a survey was developed for students at Squadron Officer School (SOS). The purpose of the survey was three-fold: 1) Quantitatively validate anecdotes and beliefs with statistical significance; 2) Understand the CGO perspective on root causes of Core Value violations; and 3) Solicit CGO thoughts on our proposed recommendations. The survey was randomly distributed to 125 students in SOS Class 14D, as SOS students provide a representative sample of Air Force captains. Non-line, Air Force Reserve, and Air National Guard officers may be underrepresented in this sample, as 100-percent in-residence SOS attendance is currently not required for these groups. The survey contained 45 questions on a Likert Scale and 13 free response questions. The Likert Scale is a commonly used scale in questionnaires that allows respondents to rate their feelings for a specific item (i.e.

strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree). Of the surveys distributed, respondents returned 115, providing a 92% response rate. The survey was not intended to be a scientifically-precise assessment of experience, opinion, and behavior; rather students were polled to ensure that the experiences of the members of the Think Tank were, in fact, fairly representative of the experiences and opinions of the rest of the students at SOS.

After considering personal experience, case studies, military literature, psychoanalytical and sociological research, as well as the survey results, the various organizational and individual drivers that influence ethical behavior at all levels were listed and discussed. Because many of these factors were very similar, overlapped, or were interrelated, they were consolidated into six broadly-framed core drivers. This consolidation was accomplished by identifying the fewest overarching categories that would be collectively exhaustive of the underlying larger set. Think Tank 14D also considered the extent to which a CGO could affect a given factor when choosing these core drivers.

- Use of Core Values (particularly Excellence) as Standards
- Mentorship and Feedback
- Lessons Learned from Previous Ethical Lapses
- Unified Group Vision
- Culture of Trust, Transparency, and Accountability
- Locus of Control

Each of these drivers can be a positive or negative influence on the spectrum of behavior, and are discussed more fully below.

## II. Drivers of Behavior

### Using Values as Standards

The Air Force's treatment of values—particularly “Excellence in All We Do”—as a standard rather than as a goal contributes to the promotion of mission completion over ethics. To understand the foundation of values and moral behavior in the Air Force, it is useful to consider how the Air Force utilizes its Core Values. To this end, the Air Force Culture directive (AFPD 1) and the Air Force Standards instruction (AFI 1-1) provide a meaningful start. Beginning first with AFPD 1, the ethical conduct of the Air Force is prescribed as a "policy with regards to the professionalism and standards expected of all Airmen."<sup>5</sup> This focus on an ethical standard is qualified in AFI 1-1. There, it identifies how the Air Force will implement the directive about standards and professionalism, focusing on three key areas: 1) environment, 2) conduct, and 3) appearance. Concerning environment, the Core Values of Integrity, Service, and Excellence are explicitly identified as "standards of conduct."<sup>6</sup> In the conduct section, military ethics are described as "the highest standards of conduct and integrity."<sup>7</sup> From this discussion, it is clear that standards are important. The military also needs its members, as a community, to identify with this mission.

An understanding of the meaning of a Core Value standard is crucial. The Air Force uses the Core Values as a standardized, functional tool to guide professional behavior to accomplish a mission. The military has the responsibility of providing defense for the nation. Air Force doctrine maintains, “Success hinges on the incorporation of these values.”<sup>8</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>5</sup> Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 1, *Air Force Culture*, 7 August 2012: 1.

<sup>6</sup> Air Force Instruction (AFI) 1-1, *Air Force Standards*, 7 August 2012: 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Toner, "A Critique of Air Force Core Values," *Air & Space Power Journal* (Winter 2006): 99-108.

Air Force does not officially define Core Values as ends in themselves, but rather they are a necessary component for mission execution.

Prioritizing mission accomplishment as the way to measure a standard of conduct may impair the individual's ethical thought and decision-making ability. This impairment results from weighing mission accomplishment against an ethical concern. Specifically, when excellence is used as a standard, there is no room for inevitable human error. This standard creates a burden on individual and organizations to prioritize product over principle.<sup>9</sup> Thus, an individual may be more inclined to act unethically to obtain a standard of excellence, rather than appreciating the fact that excellence does not necessarily equate with perfection. By focusing on these Core Values as standards, they lose some of their aspirational power; they become a tool for evaluation and not empowerment. Excellence should be something that everyone strives for, but not a standard of perfection that must be achieved at all costs. Specifically, military ethics are further defined not with an ethical decision-making framework to combat these potential dilemmas, but through legal guidance that identifies illegal activities.<sup>10</sup> Rather than providing an ethical decision-making framework to prepare Airmen, Air Force guidance limits the discussion to an application of federal law as a way to judge moral mission accomplishment. Tellingly, 74% of survey participants agreed that the Core Values are used as standards instead of a moral framework, causing pressure to “cut corners.”

Airmen are professionals, members of the time-honored profession of arms. Civil-military relations scholar Sam Huntington provides insight into this identity as a military professional, positing that “a profession is one that its practitioners display expertise,

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<sup>9</sup>John Price, “Joint Competence for the Joint Warfighter: The Missing Element in Defense Transformation (Thesis),” Joint Forces Staff Collect. Joint Advanced Warfighting School (April 2006): 3.

<sup>10</sup>AFI 1-1, *Air Force Standards*, 7 August 2012: 16.

responsibility, and 'corporateness' or unity and consciousness of themselves as a group apart from laymen."<sup>11</sup> Thus, in communicating this sense of professionalism, the military prioritizes the collective, communal identity over individual ethical conduct - what the group values and does (the mission), the individual also values. Air Force leaders further use the Core Values to articulate this identity as one focused on mission accomplishment through metrics that qualify success - how well does the service fly, fight, and win? Metrics are good - they measure achievement. However, metrics alone may further a notional interpretation of the Core Values—that their main purpose is to drive unit/mission success.

High expectations are crucial for the success of an organization and should be utilized in the Air Force to ensure that Airmen are striving for excellence. However, a concern arises when expectations for excellence are unattainable considering resources or factors outside the control of the individuals upon whom the expectations are imposed. Some career fields have created such expectations for perfection that Airmen are put in positions where they feel tremendous pressure to be perfect—a pressure that does not always lead to an ethical lapse, but possibly makes an ethical lapse more likely.<sup>12</sup> For example, when discussing the cheating scandal that occurred at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James said, "It had become this zero-defect mentality, where even the smallest of the small kinds of errors could cause an entire failure." She opined that "That wasn't a healthy environment."<sup>13</sup> To combat ethical lapses, high expectations should remain a measure of excellence, rather than a source of stress and a temptation to commit an ethical violation.

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<sup>11</sup>Christopher Toner, "A Critique of Air Force Core Values," *Air & Space Power Journal* (Winter 2006): 103.

<sup>12</sup>Geoff Brumfiel, "Ex-Missile Crew Members Say Cheating is Part of the Culture." National Public Radio (NPR), 12 March 2014. <http://www.npr.org/2014/03/12/289423404/ex-missile-crew-members-say-cheating-is-part-of-the-culture> (accessed 9 June 2014).

<sup>13</sup>Tyrone C. Marshall, "SecAF outlines changes for nuclear force." *American Forces Press Journal*, 18 June 2014. <http://www.af.mil/News/ArticleDisplay/tabid/223/Article/485633/secaf-outlines-changes-for-nuclear-force.aspx> (accessed 29 June 2014).

Although not directed by Air Force policy, one can derive a moral framework from Air Force Core Values. According to Col Charles Myers, when Airmen use the Core Values for moral reasoning, it is important that they see that each of the Core Values expresses both obligations and aspirations. When placed into a potential framework, our “Integrity First” obligation and standard is to have integrity by being honest and forthright. Our “Service Before Self” standard is to serve through unconditional obedience to lawful orders. Our “Excellence in All We Do” standard is to use every effort to accomplish the mission. In addition, Airmen should aspire to be people of integrity, placing Air Force service before their individual interests, and pursuing excellence in all areas, not only mission accomplishment.<sup>14</sup> However, one concern Colonel Myers expressed was the potential this framework becomes one of evaluation wherein “performance emphasis [focuses] almost exclusively on mission impact [and] may cause Airmen to undervalue character as they achieve the mission.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Mentorship and Feedback**

Air Force Manual 36-2643, *Air Force Mentoring Program*<sup>16</sup> emphasizes the importance and benefits of a mentorship program, stating that “[m]entoring is an essential ingredient in developing well-rounded, professional, and competent future leaders.”<sup>17</sup> Among the stated benefits of a mentorship program is “an [e]nhanced capacity to translate core values and strategies into productive actions.”<sup>18</sup> Mentorship is a crucial factor directly affecting the behavioral spectrum. Amid challenges for which Airmen cannot have been formally trained to face or with which they do not have experience, they need more experienced personnel to guide them and to provide feedback tailored to the circumstance and to the officer being mentored.

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<sup>14</sup>Charles Myers, “Framing and Resolving Ethical Issues for the Air Force,” *Airpower Journal* (Spring 1997): 49.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>16</sup>Air Force Manual (AFMAN) 36-2643, *Air Force Mentoring Program*, 1 May 2013.

<sup>17</sup>AFMAN 36-2643: 2.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

Study of historical figures can be a form of utilizing mentorship, though it is not effective in terms of obtaining tailored advice and feedback about particular situations. It is, however, a form of leveraging the experience and knowledge of others and applying it to one's own circumstances, which is the point of mentorship. Some Airmen do not feel as though they have a mentor in the Air Force—of the 115 current SOS students who completed the survey, only 47% responded that they had someone in the Air Force they would call a mentor.

Without mentorship, Airmen may find themselves in situations where they do not know the appropriate response, and they do not know where to turn for assistance. In these cases, personal accountability to the Air Force Core Values is paramount, and Airmen of all ranks are placed in positions of responsibility with the expectation that they can meet the challenges they face. A lack of mentorship, however, can create an environment in which moral and ethical failures occur because Airmen do not have mentors who are positive counterbalances for the moral gravity that begins to take effect. In this type of workplace, Airmen may start to develop a tunnel-vision mentality that fails to recognize their role in the Air Force mission, take shortcuts, easy fixes can become systemic problems, and cynicism can become more prevalent.

### **Learning From Previous Lapses**

Mentorship can take many forms. One important form of mentorship consists of communicating lessons learned from one's experiences, both positive and negative. Air Force leaders of all ranks should take advantage of opportunities to learn from other's positive and negative leadership experiences. Exposure to these lessons learned goes beyond teaching CGOs how to respond to ethical, moral, and criminal lapses; it also provides CGOs an opportunity to learn about what drivers led up to these lapses and how they could have been prevented. Often, the Air Force does not effectively communicate information to Airmen (particularly CGOs) that



would provide “lessons learned” from situations in which other leaders have had to deal with ethical, moral, and criminal violations. For example, of the 115 polled in the SOS survey, only six stated that their primary source of information about the Malmstrom cheating scandal was official Air Force communications. The majority of those polled stated that they received their information from radio or television news, the Internet, the *Air Force Times*, or *Stars and Stripes* magazine. This data point is cause for skepticism about the reliability of information being absorbed by Airmen, and also highlights a potentially missed opportunity to use such high profile events as an avenue for learning. Just as aircraft mishap reports<sup>19</sup> help flight crews avoid similar incidents, so too could official communications about large ethical lapses help Airmen learn from events like the Malmstrom cheating scandal.

The Air Force does have some mechanisms in place to communicate official information regarding ethical, moral, and criminal lapses such as Status of Discipline (SOD) meetings, the Standard of Conduct Office’s Encyclopedia of Ethical Failures, and official leadership or public affairs communications. The Wing Judge Advocate’s office is required by Air Force Instruction to conduct a quarterly Status of Discipline meeting, chaired by the Wing Commander.<sup>20</sup> Squadron and Group commanders attend, as well as their First Sergeants. The goal of a SOD meeting is to ensure trends across the base are recognized, discipline is being meted out consistently, and the Wing Commander can convey to all leaders his discipline philosophy. Most importantly, SOD meetings exist for commanders to discuss in a safe and open forum what moral, ethical, and criminal lapses they observed, how and why they took action, what drivers led up to the lapse and what, if any, preventive measures taken to ensure the lapse does not recur.

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<sup>19</sup>Air Force Legal Operations Agency, Claims and Tort Litigation, AIB Reports, <http://usaf.aib.law.af.mil/> for aerospace and ground mishap reports (accessed 20 July 2014).

<sup>20</sup>Air Force Instruction 51-201, *Administration of Military Justice*, 6 June 2013: 13.12.

Unlike squadron, group, and wing commanders who are able to attend a SOD meeting each quarter, CGOs generally do not have access to a forum in which lapses are discussed. Thus they may not be exposed to the range of moral, ethical, and criminal lapses at their installation, their leaders' discipline philosophy and most importantly, they do not have the opportunity to learn from other leaders' experiences. Often, the first time a CGO will have to deal with a lapse is when they are a flight commander. When a CGO steps into a flight commander role it is often the first time they have had the authority to exercise discipline. Unfortunately, CGOs are often left out of the loop when higher-level commanders take disciplinary actions that affect their subordinates.

Similarly, CGOs are not required to and often do not attend courts-martials being conducted on their installations. The first time they ever see a court-martial is possibly when they are selected to be on the jury panel and are charged with deciding the guilt, innocence, or punishment of a fellow Airman. Additionally, CGOs, unless they are commanders, do not impose nonjudicial punishment via Article 15, as doing so requires G-series orders.<sup>21</sup> Nonjudicial punishment is not a "public" process; as a result CGOs in the squadron are not typically aware of the actions taken. Though the base legal office typically writes articles for the base paper or website about completed actions, the information may not be utilized at all leadership levels to open a discussion about the lessons learned from these actions.

CGOs (and Airmen service-wide) have even less exposure to the lessons learned from purely moral or ethical lapses (which might not rise to the criminal level). Though the DOD Standards of Conduct Office publishes an Encyclopedia of Ethical Failures<sup>22</sup> on its website for public consumption, it is not widely-disseminated and such failures are not routinely discussed

<sup>21</sup>Air Force Instruction 51-202, *Nonjudicial Punishment*, 7 November 2003: 2.2.

<sup>22</sup>Department of Defense, Office of General Counsel, Standards of Conduct Office, *Encyclopedia of Ethical Failure*, July 2012.

among CGOs. As a result, “lessons learned” from dealing with such ethical failures are not imparted to CGOs who may have to address similar lapses in their role as supervisors.

Ultimately, opportunities exist at the individual and organizational level to learn from ethical lapses. Taking advantage of these opportunities is one way to promote individual and organizational positive drivers, mitigate moral gravity and advocate for ethical behavior.

### **Unified Group Vision – Resolution of Competing Values**

Personal values, implicit or explicit, are inherent in moral behavior and vary from one person to another.<sup>23</sup> Inputs to ethical thinking include family influence, religious or spiritual values, cultural considerations, gender, age, and personal needs.<sup>24</sup> A competition of values and moral stress results when an individual encounters a situation where his or her personal views are incongruous with Air Force values. As addressed above, the Air Force Core Values have been adopted as standards of practice.<sup>25</sup> The issue with using values as standards is that Airmen have a variety of worldviews that inform their moral decision-making ability. As a result, the Core Values may not be prioritized if they fail to fit into the individual’s values construct. Any situation can provoke an ethical dilemma when institutional values conflict with personal values. Moral questions of right or wrong underlie professional decision-making.<sup>26</sup> Despite challenges, the core task for a person with ethical concerns is to maintain integrity, defined as “living up to one’s ethical beliefs.”<sup>27</sup> Non-aligned values and interpretation of values may be a cause of unethical behavior by members of the Air Force as tough ethical challenges balance complementary and sometimes competing values. This is to say, Airmen may believe the Air

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<sup>23</sup>Ron DiBattista, "Providing a Rationale for Ethical Conduct From Alternatives Taken in Ethical Dilemmas," *General Psychology* 116, no. 2 (1998): 208.

<sup>24</sup>Davis et al., “Influencers of Ethical Beliefs and the Impact of Moral Distress on Conscientious Objection,” *Nursing Ethics* 19, no. 6 (2012): 739

<sup>25</sup>Air Force Instruction (AFI) 1-1, *Air Force Standards*, 7 August 2012: 4; Air Force Policy Directive (AFPD) 1, *Air Force Culture*, 7 August 2012: 1.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 738.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 739.

Force values performance over integrity. In the survey completed by SOS students, a plurality of CGOs polled (31%) believed ethical leadership and integrity are valued less by the Air Force than making the organization, their self or their unit look good. The implications for the organization are evident—a difference in opinion between Airmen of all ranks can end or stall a subordinate’s career or have other adverse consequences. Drastic consequences for action outside prescribed Air Force ethics fail to facilitate moral engagement - the kind of opportunity Airmen need to harmonize individual values with organization values.<sup>28</sup>

### **Culture of Honesty, Transparency, Accountability**

Honesty and transparency between leaders and followers is crucial, whether it is about lessons learned from previous ethical mishaps or expectations in the unit and their second and third-order effects. When it comes to discussing expectations and ethical dilemmas, all Airmen should feel empowered to speak honestly up and down the chain of command. Communication—in the form of mentorship, utilizing lessons learned, and in addressing expectations and challenges without fear of repercussions—is an integral part of healthy institutions, and the Air Force is no exception. Creating a culture in which trust up and down the chain of command is emphasized is vital to setting a stage where Airmen feel comfortable identifying negative drivers that might eventually give rise to ethical or moral failures.

### **Locus of Control**

Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Welsh, has said “if it doesn’t make common sense, if it doesn’t make the mission better, if it doesn’t take better care of our people, then just don’t do it and tell your boss you are done.”<sup>29</sup> General Welsh’s statement empowers Airmen at all levels to make a positive change. General Welsh has authorized and empowered Airmen to

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<sup>28</sup>Christopher Toner, "A Critique of Air Force Core Values," *Air & Space Power Journal* (Winter 2006): 105.

<sup>29</sup> Jeff Schogol, “Welsh: Empower airmen to do what they think is best.” *Air Force Times*, 17 September 2013.

speak up and address inefficiencies and situations in which their tasks do not make common sense. Therefore, leaders at all levels should strive to create a culture in which Airmen are empowered to carry out General Welsh's instructions and identify things that do not make common sense or take care of people or the mission, thereby freeing up time and energy to invest in process-improvements that will result in a more ethically-sound environment. In a culture where trust, transparency and accountability are emphasized, Airmen are more likely to feel as though they have an internal locus of control—essentially, the ability to make positive changes, rather than have circumstances imposed upon them from external sources.<sup>30</sup> If they can approach their supervisor or subordinate and address inefficiencies or problems, or ask a question about “doing the right thing” with confidence that they can have a positive impact on the situation (an internal locus of control), there is a higher likelihood that sound ethical decisions will result. Such an environment promotes a unified vision of the Air Force's goals and Core Values, ensuring everyone is invested, can feel comfortable addressing ethical challenges without fear of repercussions, and feels confident that they can make a positive difference in their environment.

Considering and analyzing these core drivers reinforced the Think Tank's hypothesis that recent publicized moral and ethical lapses are not isolated events, but rather punctuated events occurring in an Air Force culture that spans a wide spectrum of behavior—from unethical to ethical—that is influenced by positive and negative individual and organizational drivers. The Think Tank suggests that an emphasis on positive drivers—such as using the Core Values as an aspiration, rather than a standard, effective and regular mentorship, utilizing lessons learned from

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<sup>30</sup> J.B. Rotter, “Generalized expectancies for internal versus external control of reinforcement,” *Psychological Monographs: General & Applied* 80, no. 2 (1966): 1-28; Paul E. Spector, “Behavior in organizations as a function of employee's locus of control,” *Psychological Bulletin*, 91, no 3 (May 1982): 482-497.

ethical lapses, maintaining a unified group vision to resolve competing values, creating a culture of trust, transparency and accountability, and promoting a culture in which Airmen feel empowered to make positive changes—will result in more ethical decision-making. These suggestions are the foundation of the courses of actions proposed below.

### III. What Can CGOs Do Now?

CGOs are in a position to influence change towards driving ethical behavior in their subordinates, peers and leaders during times of ethical dilemmas. Think Tank 14D has been tasked with developing actionable courses of action (COAs) for CGOs to implement as they strive to lead all Airmen into ethically healthy environments. Through promoting positive drivers and eliminating negative drivers and moral gravity, moral courage is facilitated and Airmen are given the tools to make ethically sound decisions when faced with competing values. In addition to facilitating an environment for ethical decision-making, it is first important to recognize an individual's identity and relationships needed to positively drive moral behavior. Thus, while developing these COAs, we took an intermediate step of evaluating a CGO's identity, basic roles and responsibilities. Essentially, before determining what CGOs should *do*, we wanted to determine what CGOs should *be*.

For CGOs to reinforce the Air Force's commitment to its core values, they must be empowered to lead Airmen of integrity in environments that foster ethical behavior. While the Air Force has Core Values that apply to all service members, there is not a unique vision applicable to CGOs that guides them in how to carry out the core values. Enlisted personnel can reference Air Force Instruction 36-2618, *The Enlisted Force Structure*<sup>31</sup>, for guidance on the expectations for them as Airmen. Likewise, a commander's specific responsibilities or "job description" are outlined in the Air Force Instruction 1-2, *Commander's Responsibilities*<sup>32</sup>. There is no similar guidebook for CGOs. Therefore, Think Tank 14D has developed a vision of how an effective CGO should perform. This vision incorporates three critical roles: Officers First, Stewards of Culture, and Relentless Streamliners.

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<sup>31</sup> Air Force Instruction 36-2618, *The Enlisted Force Structure*, 27 February 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Air Force Instruction 1-2, *Commander's Responsibilities*, 8 May 2014.

**Officers First:** CGOs' identities should be centered on the fact that they are leaders in the Profession of Arms, rather than technicians or operators in their professional specialty. At their core, CGOs are leaders and facilitators between senior commanders and the enlisted force. By holding to the vision of being an Officer First, CGOs will reaffirm their devotion to the Core Values and highlight Integrity First as the keystone of the profession of arms.

**Stewards of Culture:** CGOs should be stewards of an Air Force culture that promotes positive drivers (transparency, trust, accountability) and seeks to mitigate negative drivers (disenfranchisement, individualism, arrogance, disloyalty). By learning from the examples of excellence, integrity and service exemplified by past Air Force leaders, as well as by utilizing the tools currently at their disposal, CGOs can foster a culture in which moral growth and development are valued. They can set the ethical tone at the operational and tactical level and promote a culture that fosters ethical and moral principles. By acting as Stewards of Culture, CGOs will reinforce the Core Values not only in themselves, but in all Airmen, and maintain the legacy of service, integrity and excellence of past Air Force leaders.

**Relentless Streamliners:** CGOs should continuously identify inefficiencies that impede the mission, constrain the ability to perform primary duties, or inhibit an officer's ability to be an Officer First or a Steward of Culture. Attaining excellence for specific tasks is only possible if Airmen are given the time to succeed. By removing redundant, truly unnecessary tasks or simplifying a process, it is possible give Airmen more time for developmental opportunities and to focus not only on the urgent, but also on what is important. Streamlining or eliminating processes does not mean cutting corners and neglecting tasks that have an indirect, but important, effect on the mission. Rather, the goal of Relentless Streamliners should be to maximize their



own time, as well as their unit members' time at work, ensuring that all personnel are engaged in tasks that are related to executing the mission in a way that promotes the Core Values.

Having a clear vision of what CGOs should be will help drive what CGOs must do to positively influence the ethical environment in the Air Force. CGOs who are focused primarily on being officers, and who are empowered to foster healthy ethical cultures and eliminate drivers that impede the mission or do not help Airmen, are able to take effective actions at their levels to address the root causes of moral and ethical failures. Having clarified what CGOs should be, Think Tank 14D then turned to the primary question—*What Can CGOs Do?*—and proposed the following broadly-framed COAs below.

**Define CGO Roles & Responsibilities.** Just as enlisted personnel can reference AFI 36-2618 for guidance on their roles and responsibilities, and commanders can now reference AFI 1-2 for a specific delineation of their duties as commanders, CGOs should have a core document that identifies and defines the CGO role. A document containing verbiage such as the statement below would be a powerful reminder to CGOs of their roles and responsibilities, and would ground CGOs across the Air Force in a common understanding of their role.

As CGOs we are fully capable technicians and operators – but we are officers first. Beyond merely accomplishing the mission, we strive to constantly improve ourselves and others, mentor younger airmen, and pursue and provide feedback. We relentlessly revise and seek to eliminate processes and requirements that do not advance the mission or promote a positive Air Force culture.

**Learn from Ethical Lapses and Reinforce Ethical Behavior.** Ethical lapses occurring throughout the AF can be summarized and disseminated by a network of CGOs for a “lesson-learned” analysis. In its most basic form, peers discussing with each other their personal experiences with lapses that they have observed could carry out this action. In professional military education courses—both by seminar (such as the Leadership Development Program)

and correspondence—students could engage in exercises designed to promote critical thinking about ethical dilemmas. To address this more formally, CGOs could create “Core Values Mishap Reports,” (see Figure 3 ) which relate sanitized versions of the facts involved in ethical or moral lapses, the root causes, the responses, lessons learned and the question: “What Would You Do?” to prompt critical thinking.<sup>33</sup>



Figure 3

At all levels of leadership, CGOs must make a conscious effort to reinforce, recognize, and potentially reward ethical behavior. While in their assigned units, they must create a culture in which Airmen exhibiting exceptional ethical decision-making skills that are true to the Core Values are held out as examples to others. Whether it is recognition in a commander’s call, a staff meeting, or with a quarterly award for exemplifying the Core Values, highly ethical Airmen should be recognized for their contribution to an ethically-sound Air Force in the same way that Airmen who perform exceptionally in their core tasks or in physical fitness are recognized and rewarded.

<sup>33</sup> As with any official publication, the Ethical Mishap Report publication would be reviewed by relevant offices (Security Office, Public Affairs Judge Advocate) to ensure that legal considerations for individuals’ privacy and operational security matters are properly protected.

**Create a CGO Toolkit.** Students at SOS have opportunities to read, study and discuss leadership techniques while learning from colleagues in other fields who may have had more or different experiences than they have had. By implementing a process for communicating those development tools, captains at SOS can multiply the value of information they obtain at SOS. Developing and maintaining a “CGO Toolkit” would benefit the development of CGOs across the Air Force. The Toolkit would be a repository of lessons learned, helpful tips, and useful resources. It could include a CGO reading list (similar to the CSAF Reading List), tips for giving feedback, and multimedia resources that would emphasize success stories and shared experiences. The added value of tools created and chosen by SOS students is that they will be relevant to CGOs “in the field” because they are created and continuously refined by other CGOs who are also “in the field,” rather than CGOs who are not at the base level, are out of their career fields, or are personnel who outrank the CGOs and may have varying experiences as current CGOs.

**Streamline Tasks/Processes.** CGOs must identify and eliminate tasks that do not support the mission or their roles as “Officers First” and “Stewards of Culture.” This essentially entails supporting General Welsh’s instruction to Airmen by soliciting input from subordinates about inefficiencies and work task that are taking time, but not supporting the mission. CGOs should use that input from subordinates, as well as their own observations to use innovative ways to reduce inefficiencies, improve processes, and eliminate unnecessary processes or tasks. If those tasks or processes are not something controlled by the CGO, then the CGO should elevate the input to appropriate leadership levels. The goal of streamlining tasks and processes is not to simply create more free time; rather it has a two-fold purpose: 1) creating more time for professional development—the time and effort saved by streamlining tasks can be optimized by

using it to engage in mentoring, professional development, or further process improvement; and

2) streamlining tasks could potentially eliminate institutional pressures to commit ethical lapses. For example, now CBTs often contain an option for taking the quiz at the beginning of the CBT, rather than only at the end of the material. Streamlining the training process allows the same objective to be met (passing the quiz) and has eliminated the temptation to “click through” hours of slides to reach the quiz at the end of the CBT. If CGOs are focused on streamlining tasks in a similar fashion, their time and their fellow Airman’s time can be optimized.

#### **IV. How Do CGOs Make This Happen?**

The recommended actions described in Section III can be accomplished using three separate entities that complement each other and maximize each other's positive impact on ethical decision-making. First, maintaining the Think Tank program at SOS on a smaller-scale will enable SOS students to contribute to the professional development of the CGO Corps and the Air Force overall, despite the course being condensed to five weeks. Second, CGOs across the Air Force, ideally having been trained at SOS, can implement "Cross Check" programs in their Air Force communities. Cross Checks are cross-functional, multi-rank forums that can be used to address ethical concerns or other issues existing at a base or in a community. Finally, the creation of a Reach Back Cell located at Maxwell Air Force Base could facilitate and coordinate Cross Checks around the Air Force, provide guidance and continuity to individual Cross Checks, and continually collect resources and ideas for process improvement.

##### **Think Tank Next**

SOS has a unique ability to influence the CGO corps. It continually trains thousands of mid-level captains that represent a large cross-section of career fields in the Air Force. Many of the captains at SOS arrive directly "from the field," and therefore are familiar with current trends, strengths, challenges, and resources available to CGOs at the base level. It might be impossible to maintain the Think Tank process as it now exists considering the shortening of SOS to five weeks. An evolution of the Think Tank—Think Tank Next—however, could enable captains at SOS to continue the valuable process even in the condensed timeframe. Think Tanks could be convened in future SOS classes to consider smaller-scale projects and issues, and to create products that are pushed back out to the Air Force CGO Corps at large. As a first step, the captains in Think Tanks at SOS can carry out the four COAs described in Section III.

**Create a CGO Identity.** Think Tanks can create and continuously refine the vision of what CGOs in the Air Force should be, and describe what responsibilities they should have. Captains at SOS are in an ideal position to provide input on realistic expectations for CGOs, enabling the Air Force to produce a “job description” similar to that found in AFI 36-2618 and AFI 1-2. Allowing captains to provide input for this core document could be a useful avenue for AF leadership to obtain insight to the perspective of the individuals engaged in the fight on a day-to-day basis, making the document more relatable and executable.

**Create a “To Do” List.** Sharing experiences at SOS allows captains from different career fields and job duties to share experiences, and highlight common concerns about inefficient processes. This experience can be used to identify areas for improvement that, if carried out, will optimize Airmen’s time and values. By creating a “To Do List,” captains at SOS can highlight to Air Force leadership and their fellow captains what processes and tasks are considered wasteful or inefficient. The items on the To Do List can, in turn, be considered by Air Force leadership or in other small forums (such as future Think Tanks or Cross Checks, described below) for improvement, thus optimizing Airmen’s time and values.

**Learn Lessons about Past Ethical Failures.** Captains at SOS have a unique opportunity to associate with personnel who have dealt with and will deal with ethical, moral, and criminal lapses. The Judge Advocate General School, First Sergeants Academy, Senior Noncommissioned Officer Academy, Air Command and Staff College, and Air War College are all located at Maxwell Air Force Base or Gunter Annex, and provide an ideal opportunity for discussing lessons learned from leadership experiences. The academic environment at Maxwell-Gunter can be leveraged by encouraging discussion among the students of the various schools about the root causes and appropriate responses to ethical failures, as well as sharing best

practices and ethical successes. As captains learn these lessons during their time at SOS, Think Tanks can then produce a journal that can be shared Air Force wide. This journal could be used as a study tool or as a discussion starter at the base level, ensuring that the Air Force is learning from experiences with ethical lapses and successes to prevent unethical behavior and promote ethical behavior.

**Create a CGO Toolkit:** Creating an online CGO Toolkit could multiply the value of the leadership tools captains obtain at SOS. The added value of tools created and chosen by SOS students is that they will be relevant to CGOs “in the field” because they are created and continuously refined by other CGOs who are also “in the field,” rather than individuals who are not at the base level, are out of their career fields, or are personnel who outrank the CGOs and may have varying experiences as current CGOs. The Toolkit or Online Forum should contain, but is not limited to:

1) **Lessons Learned Publication:** Think Tanks could utilize the information they obtain at SOS—through case studies, discussion with peers, and discussion with senior leaders and SNCOs—to produce a journal containing lessons learned from others’ experiences with ethical lapses and ethical successes.

2) **Professional Reading Recommendations:** Think Tanks could make recommendations for professional reading that is relevant to CGO leadership; provide links to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force reading list; or facilitate a blog-centered book club for CGOs.

3) **Multimedia Shared Experiences:** SOS students could develop TEDx type products to share information and experiences. TED is a popular nonprofit

devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks.<sup>34</sup> The Air Force could utilize a similar professional and popular forum for members to share their experiences (ethics lessons learned, best practices, etc.) and be developed by students at SOS. Senior leaders, in particular, could utilize this form of medium to convey mentorship messages to CGOs and share their experiences and “lessons learned.”

4) **To Do List:** The Toolkit could contain a constantly-updated To Do List, created by a Think Tank, that can be used as a starting point for CGOs who will be returning to their home station with the intention of utilizing the Cross Check program.

5) **Helpful Hints/Best Practices/Resources:** The website could provide references and links to helpful tools for CGOs to use in their leadership experiences. Many of the readings and resources available to captains at SOS could be made available to the CGO Corps at large in this Toolkit. Making that information available will be particularly useful to CGOs who have not yet had an opportunity to attend SOS considering the correspondence course will be eliminated.

6) **Mentor Network:** The Toolkit could contain a network of senior leaders who have volunteered to answer questions and invest in the professional development of CGOs, much like the senior leaders available to students at SOS for career-development mentoring either via telephone, in person, or by interactive blogging advice and answering questions.

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Fidelman, “Here’s Why TED and TEDx are So Incredibly Appealing,” *Forbes*. 19 June 2012. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markfidelman/2012/06/19/heres-why-ted-and-tedx-are-so-incredibly-appealing-infographic/> (accessed 9 July 2014).



During the eight weeks of SOS, the 24 students on Think Tank 14D have considered why ethical and moral lapses are occurring in the Air Force and what CGOs can do to address them. Ideally, however, all students at SOS would be considering and reconsidering this problem on a continual basis—developing, refining and learning to execute courses of action that they can implement at their home station. In this way, SOS could operate like the USAF Weapons School<sup>35</sup> where mid to senior level captains officers from a particular career field come together to learn in-depth knowledge about their functions, discuss what is going on in the field, and brainstorm about how to better employ airpower. They use their time at weapons school to write the Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for their weapon system, and then they return to home station to serve as unit weapons and tactics officers, providing advanced instruction and technical advice to their commanders, operations officers, and personnel. The school also produces the Weapons Review magazine, the Combat Air Force’s premier professional tactics publication, collects tactical knowledge and lessons learned, and formally prepares those lessons for application across the force.

Attending SOS is a unique opportunity for captains to spend time, outside of their operational function, entirely devoted to improving their leadership skills and developing processes for continued growth. SOS structure to intentionally educate, equip, and grow the types of CGOs that we have suggested (Officers First, Stewards of Culture, Relentless Streamliners) are best suited to lead in a cultural shift of ethical decision-making at the unit level.

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<sup>35</sup>Nellis Air Force Base, 57th Wing Factsheet, <https://www.nellis.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=4098> (accessed 20 July 2014).

## **Cross Check**

Think Tank 14D proposes the implementation of “Cross Check” programs—essentially franchising the Think Tank at the Wing, base, or even AFSC-level. As described below, the Cross Check program promotes accountability, morally courageous leadership, and a cohesive Air Force identity through an open, solutions-oriented forum, in which participants voluntarily express their concerns and pursue solutions that will be presented directly to senior leaders.

In its basic form, Cross Check involves a meeting between individuals with a common interest in solving a problem. The problem could be one identified by leadership and posed to the group, or a problem the group itself chooses to address. The composition of the Cross Check group is intentionally flexible; it allows for inclusion of various AFSCs, ranks, and is not limited to Active Duty personnel. The Cross Check group meets—either during a specified Wing Down Day or any other convenient time—to discuss root causes of issues and propose solutions. With the assistance of the Reach Back Cell described below, these proposed solutions are eventually up-channeled to senior leaders that can take action and provide feedback to the Cross Check group. Cross Checks are essentially a network for individuals to address potentially critical Air Force problems across AFSCs, ranks, and even geographical location. It is another tool for ground-level CGO leaders to utilize as they take ownership of their organizations and become stewards of positive change.

An important aspect of Cross Check is the low maintenance and time commitment required from participants. Cross Check would be organized and facilitated by only a small cadre of CGO volunteers, and in the spirit of the Think Tank Franchise, the meetings would be action-oriented, and networked together throughout the Air Force to provide lessons-learned,

resources, and valuable insight to the problems they wish to solve, before solutions are brought up to leadership.

The initial phase of Cross Check would be devoted to an honest open communication between the CGO, NCO, and civilian member participants from the diverse range of Air Force specialties found on each installation. This phase would emphasize sharing concerns that these Airmen see in their own organizations, across their Wing, and even in the Air Force as a whole. Once ideas and concerns have been shared, small groups would be formed to enhance collaboration and a brief period would be given to research and organize the ideas they develop for presentation to the Wing Commander. Young leaders would be empowered to resolve their concerns, without any filtering from facilitators, squadron leaders, and community peer groups. While the issues uncovered in these meetings are important, the cross-functional and cross-grade communication that occurs in them is itself a key part of strengthening the Air Force's service identity. Airmen of all grades and specialties would have an opportunity to share common concerns and values, reflect upon how their duties complement each other's to complete the Air Force mission, and build an identify at Airmen.

Public awareness of the issues considered by the Cross Check program and its results would increase the organizational accountability by the Air Force, as it would reveal the concerns facing junior leaders and the responses that the service's senior leadership provides them. Cross Check facilitators, with the assistance of the Reach Back Cell described below, would ensure ideas and proposals are packaged into a well-formatted, polished brief that provides actionable information. Direct interaction with Wing leadership would create 360-degree feedback and give Wing Commanders an opportunity to hear CGO-level concerns for the Wing's climate with CGO-level solutions.

The responses, justifications, or pending actions as a result of these honest discussions between frontline and senior leaders would be publicized as well, fully institutionalizing accountability for the Air Force's most pressing issues. Feedback and discussion in a public forum<sup>36</sup> would allow CGOs across the Air Force to see issues being resolved by their fellow Airmen and provide feedback for Cross Check groups across the service. The communication of feedback—whether by word of mouth, Social Media site, or official Air Force publication—would show Airmen that their voices have been heard and would ensure that leaders are accountable for providing a response to the issues that Airmen face and problems that may have previously gone unnoticed.

As with any grassroots program, Cross Check has limitations. Because the program would be independently led by CGOs at various installations, there is a real possibility that the motivation to conduct the program will be lacking, considering the time and duty pressures facing CGOs at the Wing-level. Officers and senior leaders would need to buy-in and actively participate in order for this program to gather the necessary momentum to take hold. This momentum may be very difficult to obtain and maintain. General Officer support—prompted by senior leaders who have experienced the value that can be gained from Think Tank-like groups—could help combat this issue; if senior leaders encourage CGOs to take a more active role in problem solving and assure them that they will be heard, then CGOs at the base level will be more likely to lead and participate in Cross Checks. Additionally, the Reach Back Cell described in the next section should alleviate some of the burden on Cross Check facilitators and provide additional support, motivating CGOs at the base level to engage in Cross Checks.

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<sup>36</sup>Using Internet forums such as social media sites raises a legitimate concern about OPSEC. Those concerns could be mitigated by working with the unit OPSEC monitor to control access to the forum and screen posts before they are made public.

Cross Check would require ethical leadership and moral courage in both the Cross Check participants and the Wing-level leadership. CGO, NCO, and civilian participants would be required to take a morally courageous risk and speak the truth about their professional concerns in front of their fellow Airmen. As leaders, they bear the responsibility of representing and serving their units and those of lower grades. Similarly, Wing Commanders would show moral courage by being open to hearing potentially uncomfortable truths regarding their units in order to improve the units themselves. Taking the interests of front line leaders to heart and providing honest and open responses is a key step in fostering better leadership at all levels of the Air Force.

### **Reach Back Cell**

The final piece to the proposed solution is the creation of a reach back capability for Cross Check groups. One of the most valuable components of the Cross Check program is that, while it is formalized, is not institutionalized at an Air Force level. The grassroots nature of Cross Check, as well as its limited time commitment, is critical to ensure buy-in from participants. A formal Reach Back cell can be utilized to ensure that the grassroots nature of Cross Check is preserved and that the CGO time commitment is optimized. The Reach Back Cell could consist of one or two captains stationed at Maxwell Air Force Base (potentially at SOS), who would support Cross Checks across the Air Force by providing resources, training, continuity, connection to other groups working on similar problems, and access to already-existing products. Ideally the captains assigned to the Reach Back Cell would be dedicated full time to the Cross Check program. If the Reach Back capability was assigned as an additional duty, it is possible that the captains tasked with providing reach back support would be required to make a significant time commitment to handle the high volume of potential Cross Check

participants. Assuming, however, that the reach back capability saved time for captains at the base level and assisted with streamlining Air Force-wide programs, that benefit would be worth the additional duty requirement placed on the Reach Back Cell.

This Reach Back Cell would be a force multiplier, by connecting Airmen—particularly CGOs—who are solving problems across the service. Oftentimes, the root causes of ethical lapses and inefficient processes are not isolated to one person, one location, or one mission; therefore connecting problem solvers brings the Air Force’s CGO force together to address systemic, Air Force-wide issues. The Reach Back Cell would also provide Cross Check with access to appropriate resources for researching their issues and up-channeling solutions. Maintaining a repository of tools and products utilized by past Cross Checks would save time and energy for Cross Check facilitators working on the same or similar issues at their own location. The Reach Back Cell, therefore, eliminates the risk of a Cross Check group having to duplicate efforts. Instead, by utilizing the institutional knowledge and resources at the Reach Back cell, the Cross Check group can maximize their efforts, avoid duplicating efforts, and build on the good ideas of others who might have already addressed a similar problem.

Finally, the Reach Back Cell could maintain an internet forum where the current problems being tackled are posted and opened for discussion to the entire Air Force. Leaders from across the service would have a dynamic display of issues being resolved from wing to wing, or community to community. This internet forum could be modeled on BaseOps,<sup>37</sup> a highly popular website for air crew that is used to provide resources and open discussions of issues affecting the aviation world. Maintaining a similar forum would provide a forum to share concerns and solutions, build on successful Cross Checks, and allow collaboration by Cross Check groups working on similar issues.

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<sup>37</sup>BaseOps.Net, [www.baseops.net](http://www.baseops.net) (accessed 20 July 2012).

The following example will help clarify the roles and benefits of Think Tank Next, Cross Check and the Reach Back Cell. Captain America is a Mission Support Group Exec from Base X attending SOS Class 15D. He is working on a Think Tank that has been tasked with brainstorming some items to add to the To Do List—basically identifying inefficient processes that need to be streamlined or eliminated. One of the Think Tanks recommended additions to the To Do List is to streamline the process for writing award packages by ensuring that the AF Form 707 and the AF Form 1206 have the same number of characters. As a Mission Support Group Exec, Captain America knows how much time he spends converting 707s to 1206s and wishes he could spend that time doing something more leadership-oriented (e.g. mentoring an Airman or reading a book off the CFAF reading list). Captain America knows that his fellow execs at Base X also spend a lot of time converting 707 bullets to 1206 bullets and believes they could come up with a solution to streamline the process with a Cross Check group.

When he returns to Base X after SOS, he calls his fellow group execs and the civilian admin assistants and Airmen in the command section, as well as a friend who is a lieutenant in the Force Support Squadron, personnel section. He asks if they want to form a Cross Check group and discuss how they could streamline the award-writing process. They meet and discuss the issue. The other execs agree that this conversion process takes a significant amount of time that they could be using to do other mission-related tasks or devoted to professional development. The lieutenant from FSS explains the awards process at this base, as well as at other bases she has been to, and explains what would be required to change the process. The Cross Check group discusses some options for improving the process, but then they hit a dead end.

Captain America remembers that at SOS, his Think Tank proctor mentioned a Reach Back Cell that exists to help base level Cross Checks. He calls the Reach Back cell. The captain at the Reach Back Cell informs him that there are at least two other bases considering the same problem, one of which has made significant progress by recommending changes to the Wing's award system. The Reach Back cell puts Captain America in touch with the other two Cross Check groups, and they discuss the issues they have in common. Captain America relays this information back to his Cross Check group at Base X. They have some additional good ideas, which the Captain relays back to the other Cross Checks. During this process, Captain America has been discussing his concerns and some ideas with his Director of Operations and his Group Commander—they both agree that the awards process is inefficient and could be improved. They support the Captain America's efforts to propose improvements to the process.

After some brainstorming, the Cross Check group decides to suggest a change to the Wing's award process. Captain America calls back to the Reach Back cell to see whether any other Cross Check groups have submitted a proposal or Staff Summary Sheet that Cross Check at Base X can use as a template. Once he gets the template, he drafts the Cross Check's proposal. Eventually the proposal makes it to the Wing Commander. The Wing Commander reviews the proposal, asks questions, makes suggestions and ultimately adopts the process improvement suggested by Cross Check. The changes to the process are relayed to the Wing, resulting in significant time saved. Base X's Cross Check experience is noted by the Reach Back Cell's website for others to use as a guide. Additionally, the Wing Commander is so pleased with the initiative of the Cross Check group that he asks them to address another problem that has been plaguing the Wing, and the process begins again.



## **V. Conclusion**

The research presented in this paper supports that the recent ethical violations are punctuated occurrences along the spectrum of behaviors within the Air Force. Variation in ethical behaviors is a result of a complex culture with competing and conflicting values that can create a moral dilemma for Airmen. Positive and negative behavioral drivers determine the choices of an individual who is faced with such a dilemma. The core drivers identified in this paper are: Using Core Values (particularly Excellence) as Standards; Mentorship and Feedback; Lessons Learned from Previous Ethical Lapses; Unified Group Vision (Resolution of Competing Values); Culture of Trust, Transparency, and Accountability; and Locus of Control. Air Force CGOs can promote positive drivers, mitigate negative drivers, and combat moral gravity by taking four specific actions: 1) develop a common understanding of CGOs' roles and responsibilities; 2) learn from and communicate lessons learned from ethical successes and failures; 3) create a CGO Toolkit focusing on continuous professional development and ethical leadership; and 4) create a "To Do List" to help identify processes that can be streamlined to optimize Airmen's time and values. CGOs can implement these courses of action in future Think Tanks at Squadron Officer School or in Cross Check program, using the Reach Back Cell to maximize problem-solving power. Utilizing these tools will allow CGOs to catalyze a cultural shift and help restore the Air Force's ethical and moral posture.

## Appendix A

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. This anonymous survey is completely voluntary, confidential, and no personally identifiable information will be documented beyond demographics assisting the research process. Completion of the questionnaire implies your consent to participate.

*This section will assess core values and ethics amongst CGO's and leadership.*

**Read each statement and rate the degree in which you agree with the statement by circling a number ranging from 1 "Strongly Disagree" to 6 "Strongly Agree."**

	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. You make morally sound decisions without fear of personal or professional consequences.	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Other CGO's appear to make morally sound decisions without fear of personal or professional consequences.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. You have made decisions that violate your ethical standards.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Your moral values are stronger than those of your peers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Other CGO's have made decisions that violate Air Force ethical standards.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. You believe the Core Values are used as standards versus a moral framework for shaping the AF culture.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. Your unit would have a stronger appreciation for the AF Core Values by discussing relevant case studies during Wingman down days.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. Open discussion about the Core Values in your Squadron would promote healthy introspection.	1	2	3	4	5	6
9. You have the power to help change culture in your Squadron as a CGO.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10. Your leaders/commanders are more risk averse today than when you entered the Air Force.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11. You feel pressured by your supervisor to do things that go against the Air Force core values.	1	2	3	4	5	6
12. Risk-averse command climates generate "yes-man" followers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13. Recent scandals have made commanders overly cautious.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14. Air Force expectations for personal excellence drive Airmen to do whatever it takes to be stratified competitively.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15. Air Force expectations of your unit's performance challenge moral decision-making.	1	2	3	4	5	6
16. Air Force expectations for personal excellence place Airmen in morally challenging situations in order to meet them.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17. A strong culture of integrity and ethical behavior exists in the Air Force.	1	2	3	4	5	6



18.	The Air Force can improve adherence to the core values through education.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19.	The Air Force can improve adherence to the core values through increasing accountability.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20.	The Air Force should develop a foundation for the core values in Airman at the earliest point in their careers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21.	The moral/ethical culture of the Air Force has improved in the past five years.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22.	People bring pre-existing values into the Air Force that cannot be altered.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23.	Career-long education in ethical leadership and integrity are required for Airmen to internalize the AF core values.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24.	You have known an AF leader who demonstrated unethical behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6
25.	You have had an immediate supervisor who demonstrated unethical behavior.	1	2	3	4	5	6
26.	In your career field, an OTS/ROTC instructor position is valuable for your career progression.	1	2	3	4	5	6
27.	Your initial training instilled a strong sense of personal accountability.	1	2	3	4	5	6
28.	You were most apt to internalize the core values during your basic training.	1	2	3	4	5	6
29.	In your career field, a BMTS flight commander position is valuable for your career progression.	1	2	3	4	5	6
30.	Sometimes you have to bend the rules just to get the job done.	1	2	3	4	5	6
31.	It is an integrity violation for a cadet at basic training to wake up at 0345 to begin making their bed if they are told not to wake up before 0400.	1	2	3	4	5	6
32.	You believe in your Unit's vision and mission.	1	2	3	4	5	6
33.	Unrealistic expectations (suspenses, scores, etc) pressure you to <b>consider</b> cutting corners?	1	2	3	4	5	6
34.	Are you aware of the disciplinary actions taken against the officers involved in the Malmstrom AFB scandal, their leadership, and the changes to testing procedures?	1	2	3	4	5	6
35.	If you observed a peer backdate a document to meet a suspense you would confront the individual about it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
36.	If you did address your peer in the above scenario and they were unwilling to rectify the situation, you would report the incident to your chain of command or other appropriate agency.	1	2	3	4	5	6
37.	When you completed tech school, you were passionate about your role in the Air Force.	1	2	3	4	5	6
38.	Today, your level of passion for your role in the Air Force has increased.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Read each statement and rate the degree in which you agree with the state by circling a number ranging from 1 "Much Lower" to 5 "Much Higher."**

1	2	3	4	5
Much Lower	Lower	Equal	Higher	Much Higher

39.	How does your level of integrity compare to the ethical standard of other	1	2	3	4	5
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CGO's?					
40.	How does your level of integrity compare to the Air Force's ethical standard?	1	2	3	4 5
41.	How does your sense of service compare to that of your peers?	1	2	3	4 5
42.	How does your sense of service compare to the Air Force's standard?	1	2	3	4 5
43.	How does your level of excellence compare to that of your peers?		2	3	4 5
44.	How does your level of excellence compare to Air Force's ethical standard?	1	2	3	4 5
45.	Which core value is most important to you? _____				
46.	Which core value is least important to you? _____				
47.	Which core value seems most important to the Air Force, if any? _____				
48.	Which core value seems least important to the Air Force? _____				
49.	Which core value seems most important to other CGO's? _				
50.	Which core value seems least important to other CGO's? _				
51.	Were you aware of the Squadron Officer College's Leadership Development Program (LDP) distance learning courses for 2 <sup>nd</sup> Lt's?	YES / NO			
a)	If so, have you completed any LDP courses?	YES / NO / N/A			
52.	Do you currently have a mentor within the Air Force?	YES / NO			
53.	How often do you actively seek mentorship?	<input type="radio"/> DAILY WEEKLY <input type="radio"/> MONTHLY <input checked="" type="radio"/> OTHER: _____			
54.	In a recent speech, Gen Welsh said "if it doesn't make common sense, if it doesn't make the mission better, if it doesn't take better care of our people, then just don't do it and tell your boss you are done." How many hours per week do you devote to tasks that don't make sense, don't make the mission better, or don't help your people? _				
55.	You feel comfortable telling your boss that you won't accomplish tasks that don't make sense, don't make the mission better, or don't help your people (circle one).				
	1. Strongly Disagree	2. Disagree	3. Slightly Disagree		
	4. Slightly Agree	5. Agree	6. Strongly Agree		
56.	What was your primary source of information regarding the Malmstrom AFB cheating scandal?				
	<input type="radio"/> Air Force Times <input type="radio"/> Stars and Stripes <input type="radio"/> TV/radio news <input type="radio"/> Internet				
	<input type="radio"/>				

Word of mouth    ☐ Official AF Comms    ☐ Other (\_\_\_\_\_)

**57.** What do you believe is the **root cause** of risk-adverse leadership in the AF (circle one)?

- 1) No tolerance from senior leaders for less than perfect results
- 2) No tolerance from senior leaders for mistakes/failure
- 3) No tolerance from senior leaders for poor “optics”/ public perception
- 4) No tolerance from senior leaders for any negative mark on senior leader
- 5) Fear of impact to promotion
- 6) Other – Please explain.

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**58.** What do you believe is the **root cause** across all the recent breaches in Air Force Core Values? (sexual assaults, cheating on tests, etc.) (circle one)

- 1) Failure of leadership to monitor and address problems
- 2) Lack of accountability promotes risk-taking
- 3) Sense of entitlement among senior ranking offenders
- 4) American society’s morals/ethics are deteriorating causing ‘trickle’down” effect in AF
- 5) Ethical leadership and integrity are valued less by the Air Force than making (the organization) self/unit leaders look good
- 6) Other – Please explain.



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