



NRCP
RESEARCH JOURNAL

Full Paper

A Sequential Explanatory Analysis of the Ethical Decision-Making of the Military Cadets in the Philippines: The Case of the Philippine Military Academy

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Ethical decision-making emerges from the interplay between individual cognitive structures and the dynamics of social interaction. This study explored the ethical decision-making of military cadets of the Philippine Military Academy using a sequential explanatory mixed method aimed at capturing the presence of risky-shift in the Cadet Corps, determining the factors affecting the individual and group ethical decision-making of the military cadets, and exploring the organizational implications of group polarization among the cadets. The method of Isenberg (1986) with modification of his Choice Dilemmas Questionnaire was utilized to examine the social cognitive processes involved in one's exercise of choice. Based on the survey, results revealed that risky-shift is present in the Cadet Corps. The qualitative approach revealed that individual ethical decision-making involves 1) need to prudently discern, 2) strictly perform, 3) objectively decide, and 4) effectively communicate. On the other hand, group ethical decision-making involves the nature of disciplinary issues, offender, victim, and PMA context. Moreover, organizational implications are the need for data-driven decision-making and the aftermath of deliberation that affects the cadet's life. Hence, this study suggests that group pressure can lead cadets to prioritize group norms over ethical principles. Recommendations focused on environment scanning, documentation of best practices, and exploration of ethical organizational culture.

Keywords; group polarization, explanatory sequential mixed methods, ethical decision-making, military cadets, Philippines

Article history

Received : January 2, 2024

Revised : February 19, 2024

Accepted: February 19, 2024

Introduction

Ethical decision-making is a product of individual mental schema and group interaction. Studies show that individuals tend to take the extreme stance as a product of group dynamics and information exchange (Grosset al., 2019; Proietti, 2017; Rensheng, 2011). This is group polarization. Originally dubbed as the “risky shift”, it is characterized by a change in the decision of the individual after group discussion resulting in a movement to a more extreme stance hence, “more polarized” (West. 2023; Atas et al., 2018). The risk here is defined as the “relative extremity of position” given the assurance that, as a group, the responsibility is shared (Fraser, 1971).

In the Philippine Military Academy (PMA), the Honor Code is sacred. It dictates the conduct and decorum of the Cadet Corps Armed Forces of the Philippines. However, informal practices have emerged alongside the formal Honor Code and this is known as “Buhayan”. It is characterized by an implicit understanding among cadets, typically within the same year group, to impose unofficial punishments for Honor Code violations. These punishments often involve excessive physical exercise in lieu of formal reporting. The intention is to keep the erring cadet until graduation. Unfortunately, this has inevitable ramifications to the character development of the cadets and to the ethical environment PMA intends to cultivate. Hence, this study aims to 1) capture the presence of risky-shift in the Cadet Corps, 2) determine the factors affecting the individual and group ethical decision-making of the military cadets, and 3) explore the organizational implications of group polarization among the military cadets.

Methodology

This study employed a sequential explanatory mixed method approach to capture the concept of group polarization among the cadets of the Philippine Military Academy. Creswell (2017) posits that the sequential explanatory mixed methods approach involves collecting and analyzing quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis to explain or expand on the initial findings. Furthermore, he opines that this approach is valuable when you need to understand the “why” behind quantitative results and gain deeper insights from the perspectives of research participants. Voluntary participation was also sought and they were allowed to withdraw from participating without questions asked whenever they felt uncomfortable.

The Academy is a military training hub for young Filipinos who would be the future officers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). These young military cadets form part of the Cadet Corps Armed Forces of the Philippines and undergo four-year training. In the Academy, the Honor Code, Honor System, and rules and regulations are imposed to mold leaders of character fit for their AFP profession – Army, Navy, and Air Force. Moreover, within their organization, there is a hierarchical structure depending on their year level. They also have the Honor Code Committee and Cadet Conduct Policy Board membered by upperclass cadets who excel in all of the development areas of PMA. They take charge of deliberating on violations of the Honor Code and rules and regulations.

The researcher borrowed an open-sourced standardized tool by Shaver and Scott (1991). This tool, modified for the Philippine Military Academy context, examines social cognitive decision-making processes to identify the presence of risky-shift. It determines the significant difference in the shifts in decisions from the pre- to post-Honor Code/disciplinary hearings. The instrument consists of four sections, each addressing the variables 1) nature of the problem, 2) nature of the offender, 3) nature of the victim, and 4) nature of the PMA context. The nature of the disciplinary issue, or more specifically, whether the issue was deemed serious enough to warrant disciplining the offender. For instance, whether or not the disciplinary behavior complies with the norms and regulations of the Academy, whether or not the behavior is what the cadets are supposed to do, or whether the behavior is bearable. On the other hand, the nature of the offender, or, more specifically, pertains to the position, rank, or identity of the reported erring individual. For instance, whether the disciplined behavior complies with PMA rules and regulations, whether the behavior is appropriate for the cadets, and whether the behavior is manageable. The nature of the victim, such as if his/her rights were violated, whether the victim was injured, whether s/he was reckless and might have provoked the inappropriate behavior, or whether the victim usually exhibits good behavior. Finally, the nature of PMA's context, or the Academy's reputation. Regarding this factor, the respondents gave choices based on whether or not the behavior problem was the kind that would have a detrimental influence on PMA's tone of discipline or if it could shame the Academy given its effects on its image.

For example, "A cadet brought before the Council of Commanders and is said to have committed an offense such as cheating. In your view of the problem, would you consider by the nature of the problem that the said cadet is worth disciplining? Choose one of the options indicating the levels of probability that the cadet is worth disciplining?" The responses range from 1 – 5 shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Response Option and Description

Response	Description
1	The chances are 1 in 10 that the cadet is worth disciplining and perfecting moral character
2	The chances are 3 in 10 that the cadet is worth disciplining and perfecting moral character
3	The chances are 5 in 10 that the cadet is worth disciplining and perfecting moral character
4	The chances are 7 in 10 that the cadet is worth disciplining and perfecting moral character
5	The chances are 9 in 10 that the cadet is worth disciplining and perfecting moral character

To assess the instrument's reliability, it was administered to a pilot group of 10 Honor Code Committee and Cadet Conduct Policy Board members. Subsequently, upon achieving a Cronbach's alpha of 0.870, indicating strong internal consistency, the survey was distributed to the entire Philippine Military Academy Cadet Corps. This aimed to investigate whether cadets' decisions regarding Honor Code violations shifted significantly from pre-deliberation to post-deliberation/disciplinary hearing (the intervention).

A paired sample t-test was conducted at a 95% level of confidence to assess the significance of pre- versus post-intervention decisions. The null hypothesis is that there are no significant different shifts in decisions by military cadets, before and after the disciplinary hearings. This hypothesis sought to determine whether the respondents' initial decisions about the issues they had raised individually before the deliberation had changed by the time the discussion was concluded.

The qualitative portion covers the use of phenomenography which aims at the description, analysis, and understanding of experiences directed towards experiential description. Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted among the 10 cadets based on the selection criteria of being members of the Honor Code Committee and Cadet Conduct Policy Board. These cadets experienced first-hand decision-making in these groups and would be the best fit for understanding the dynamics of risky shifts in their decision-making processes. The participants were questioned about

their perceptions of the interactions that took place during the disciplinary sessions. They discussed the interpretations they made of their experiences and the numerous circumstances that played a role in their dynamic interactions throughout the disciplinary hearings. Additionally, they were asked to particularly name any elements of the disciplinary hearing group processes that might have changed the course of their pre-disciplinary hearing individual decisions and the group decisions made following the disciplinary hearing.

Discussions in the FGDs were transcribed verbatim. Since the communication was both in English and the vernacular, the researcher transcribed the recorded discussions manually. Other important concepts/phrases that are seen to lose their essence if translated were retained in their Filipino language form. After the transcription was completed and the accuracy of data were ensured, the manuscript was uploaded to the MAXQDA which is a software useful in analyzing qualitative data. Thematic analysis was performed in two levels which are the Cool and Warm Analyses. Cool Analysis was conducted in which data yielded from the pattern coding was translated into analytical units such as themes, causes, explanations, relationships, and even emerging concepts. By doing so, the researcher can achieve familiarity and holistic understanding of the research subject (Walliman, 2011). Dendrograms or text maps were then generated. This comprised the Warm Analysis phase where patterns and linkages were merged into domains. Three complementing theories served as useful in further understanding the phenomenon of study. The Negotiation Theory

argues that competing interests will eventually reach agreements through interaction (Aryan, 2019). This highlights the ethical considerations present in balancing personal values with external demands. This theory is closely linked with the Social Comparison Theory by Isenberg (1986) which explores how the cadets evaluate their ethical stance by comparing themselves to peers and superiors (upperclass cadets), prompting a reflection on group norms and potential pressure to compromise. Finally, Sikolohiyang Pilipino (Enriquez, 1994) provides a culturally specific lens, emphasizing values like *kapwa* (shared identity) and *pakikipagkapwa-tao* (interpersonal harmony), which can influence ethical choices within a Filipino military context.

Member check was performed to ensure that the data were accurate and trustworthy. The results were presented to all participants who were asked to verify the correctness of transcription and interpretation. From discussions, inter-raters reviewed and refined the themes and sub-themes

to achieve accuracy and validity.

In the entire process, the privacy of the participants was protected by masking their identity. The database that contained their responses or recordings of the FGD is kept in a secured repository. Moreover, the minimum health protocols were observed concerning the COVID-19 situation.

Results and Discussion

Presence of risky-shift among the military cadets

From the results shown (Table 2), the researcher performed a paired sample t-test on the responses of the cadets. Results revealed that the pre-group response scores are 4.25, 3.25, 3.40, and 4.21 for the four areas of concern, respective to the four variables measured which are the nature of offense, nature of offender, nature of victim, and the nature of PMA environment. On the other hand, the post-group response scores are 3.63, 4.21, 4.11, and 3.83 after deliberation or group interaction.

Table 2. Results of paired samples t-test performed on pre- and post-response scores on Modified Choice Dilemma Questionnaire (MCDQ)

Factors associated with the problem	Pre- and Post-Mean response score (N =1,209)	Estimated differences between Pre- and Post-Mean response scores (N =1,209)	Std Error Mean	t-value	Df	Sig.
The type of disciplinary problem	Pre: 4.25	0.620	.119	3.298	51	.002
	Post: 3.63		.174			
The behavior characteristics of the offender	Pre: 3.25	-.940	.180	-4.833	51	.000
	Post: 4.19		.140			
The effects of the disciplinary problem on the victim	Pre: 3.40	-.720	.124	-5.554	51	.000
	Post: 4.21		.092			
The effect /of the problem on the disciplinary tone of the Academy	Pre: 3.98	.15	.139	.904	51	.370
	Post: 3.83		.134			

*p<0.05

The pre-group response scores for the variables “nature of the problem” and “PMA context” are greater than the post-group response scores, meaning, the respondents made risky decisions before the disciplinary hearing/deliberation. However, at the end of the interaction among the respondents, cautious decisions were made which involved the variables “nature of the offender” and nature of the victim”. This is evidence that group polarization may have influenced the shifts in decisions in all four considerations. Therefore, this study rejects the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the shift in decisions made by the respondents pre- and post-deliberation, significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ or 95% level of confidence. This could mean that the members of the military cadets might not have been willing to compromise on the credibility, reputation, or tone of the Academy’s discipline system. On the

other hand, the scores involving the variable “PMA context” show that the difference between the pre- and post-deliberation scores is not statistically significant, $\alpha = 0.05$. This could mean that the respondents may have reservations in deciding when it comes to considering the PMA environment or how the PMA leadership might view and/or decide upon a case.

Factors affecting individual decision-making of the military cadets

Individual decision-making of the military cadets generated four themes which are: 1) need to prudently discern, 2) need to strictly perform, 3) need to objectively decide, and 4) need to effectively communicate. These are captured in Figure 1 based on the analysis using the MAXQDA software.

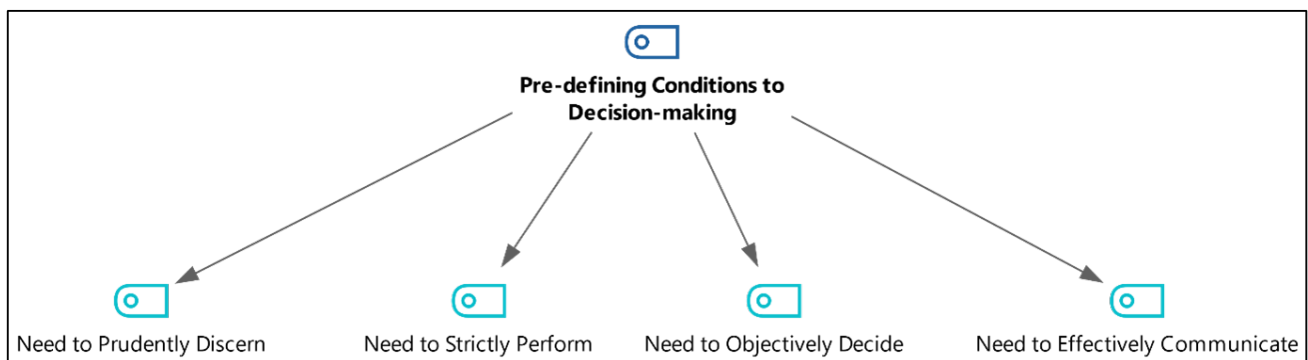


Figure 1. Pre-defining Conditions for Decision-making (Decisions done individually)

Need to Prudently Discern: All virtues are born from prudent behavior (Jena & Kar, 2023). When faced with difficulties, wisdom enables us to understand our moral obligation to behave with goodness and sound judgment and to decide how to best fulfill that obligation. Other common insights raised are the opportunities to widen their perspective, gain a deeper understanding of the situation, and discover underlying reasons behind actions that help them come up with a prudent decision.

This is validated in the claims of Tesser (1978) in which the person’s judgment affects the “value for risk.” The more time people spend thinking about a subject, the more likely they are to develop extreme views on it, on either side of the issue. The polarization becomes greater the longer the person is tuned in to that topic without receiving fresh information from social interactions. This study implies that a person’s attitude toward a subject can be reinterpreted and re-evaluated since people are capable of having many thought processes and creating different cognitive schemas of their

reality. Moreover, in-group pressure is diluted in the exchanges of ideas. Accordingly, the Honor Committee and Cadet Conduct Policy Board practice secret voting which reduces the pressure to conform. This occurs when there are no normative standards in place and the group is allowed to make their own decisions.

Need to Strictly Perform: Everyone’s grasp of their duties and responsibilities is essential to the smooth functioning of any organization. They can efficiently carry out their tasks if they are aware of what is expected of them. For teamwork to be successful, each team member must perform their duties to the best of their abilities. In this portion, the Filipino value of *pakikipagkapwa* emerges in how the members of the Honor Committee and CCPB handle the aftermath of their decision. It resounds the Filipino way of life which requires and incorporates the idea of treating one another as fellow human beings (*kapwa-tao*), even though the group members may not all have the same job or rank. *Pakikiisa* is also evident as interventions in

which precautions are intended to prevent one from harming/damaging oneself and others vis-à-vis the Honor Code/regulations. This implies that what is beneficial and good for one is shared, and what is detrimental to the other is acknowledged as such. A person who is one with another will never act or make a decision that would violate the dignity of another person because s/he has complete regard for the other person's being as though it was an extension of his/her own. Finally, the "*pakiramdam*" is a fundamental value of shared inner perception. It alludes to increased sensitivity and alertness. A person employs this *pakiramdam* to clarify a difficult-to-understand but crucial problem to get a favorable response. In this case, the respondents explain to their fellow cadets the procedures of investigating to box out the idea that their mere presence would mean "*pangangatay*" (punishment until one gets attrited from cadetship).

Need to Objectively Decide: This refers to a form of decision-making that is grounded in reason and impersonal data. People who enjoy making decisions objectively look for clarity and have a genuine desire to assess and advance. Making decisions with objectivity is crucial in maximizing benefits while minimizing cost vis-a-vis adhering to the standards and principles of the organization. The said decision may aim to ensure that no one is left worst off while another individual is better off (the same principle as achieving Pareto optimality). Wanting an unbiased decision is, on the other hand, exhibited by a decision made uninfluenced by emotions, self-interest, or biases.

This is corroborated by the Metaethics of Negotiation Theory in which one's reasoning or any other cognitive or affective process cannot be used to discover or develop moral facts or moral beliefs that are properly based on moral principles (Aryan, 2019). Rather, a negotiated settlement is reached

through rational argumentation that is created through multilateral and interpersonal moral conversation.

Need to Effectively Communicate: To effectively communicate, you must choose a language that is appropriate for your audience and that provides all the relevant information. Delivering messages eliminates the possibility of misinterpretation or message modification, reducing the likelihood of conflict. Effective communication is essential for ensuring that conflicts are resolved in a courteous way when they do occur. On the other hand, resolution oftentimes evades the discussion. This is evident during a disciplinary hearing in which maximum participation is given to each member of the Committee or Board. Upon presentation of the case, the members will be allowed to raise counterarguments for them to come up with an objective verdict.

The Moral Belief Formation of Negotiation Theory (Haidt, 2001) validates this narrative which opines that moral conviction results from negotiating compromises and final agreements with the maximum amount of mutual and little to no forced cooperation. All forms of interpersonal human conduct, such as discussion, voting, etc. about a particular moral issue in question are negotiated. Moreover, when one plays the devil's advocate, group polarization is guaranteed as explained by Strandberg et al. (2019).

Factors affecting group decision-making of the military cadets

Group decision-making of the military cadets generated four themes which are 1) nature of the disciplinary issue, 2) the nature of the offender, 3) the nature of the victim, and 4) the nature of the PMA environment. These are captured in Figure 2 based on the analysis using the MAXQDA software.

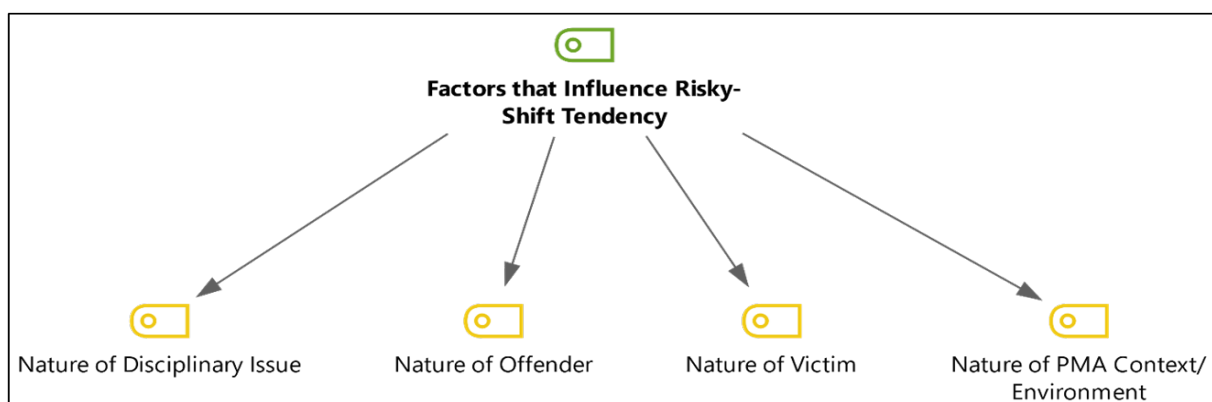


Figure 2. Factors that Influence Risky-shift Tendency (Decisions after Group Interaction)

Nature of Disciplinary Issue: When an individual leans toward a risky decision, their propensity to shift stance is stronger. This knee-jerk impression is common for Honor Code violations compared with the cases handled by the CCPB. When dealing with cases, all the respondents are quick to answer that they dig deeper into the circumstances behind every violation. As they explore information to complete the narration of the violation, they can better comprehend the situation.

This is explained by the Social Comparison Theory (Isenberg, 1986) which posits that a person aspires to show themselves in a socially acceptable way. As a result, they are always looking for options or choices and modifying their posture to make a conclusion that will be acceptable to others. If there is a lack of knowledge on the subject where a discussion will lead to conformity, this self-censoring is intensified.

Nature of Offender: It was believed that the out-group influence, is ineffective at changing one's attitude, even when the source of the opinion is seen as having similar status; i.e. mistah (classmate). Additionally, it has been found that reputation heuristics (emotional attachments/closeness), which people use to make judgments, have an impact on whether people collaborate or dissemble during deliberation. Another mechanism that the Honor Committee and CCPB devised is the inhibition to vote when they have an emotional attachment with the reported cadet. The other respondents also agreed to disregard the offender's background to ensure a fair and impartial decision. This corroborates the literature that individuals continuously redesign group-based cooperation to undermine the influence of reputation heuristics in the decision-making of the group (Baliga & Sin, 2023).

Nature of Victim: Similar to the pattern seen as regards the effect of the nature of the offender in affecting group polarization, the nature of the victim is also ineffective at changing one's beliefs and attitudes in Honor Committee deliberations. It cannot be avoided that a member of the Honor Committee or CCPB will be faced with an instance of deliberating the Honor Case where his/her mistah (classmate) is the victim of the reported case. In these instances, especially when a member of the Honor Committee or CCPB is emotionally attached to the victim, he/she is inhibited from voting. However, in instances where even the victim is a mistah (classmate) but has no emotional proximity to the member of the Honor Committee or the CCPB, the process and voting protocol stand.

If an act damages a victim's reputation or hinders their ability to do their job effectively within the Corps, this will be considered as an additional factor in the case. From here, voting members decide whether the act is indeed an Honor violation or a violation of a policy. On the other hand, the Board recalled a previous case where the accused cadet attempted to appeal to their emotions. However, the Board emphasized that they base their decisions on the actions and intentions of the cadet, not on their personal background. This result is in corroboration with the study of Doucet and Pratt (2023) which discusses the importance of fairness and procedural justice in disciplinary processes. This aligns with the concept of considering additional factors like the victim's well-being, but emphasizes the need for objective decision-making.

Nature of PMA Context/Environment: Decisions of the respondents rely heavily on the CCPB Pamphlet, Cadet Regulations, and Honor Code by which verdicts are given. All judgments made by the Honor Committee and CCPB are based on the Cadet Honor Code, which serves as their foundation. It is not acceptable for cadets to disobey any of these rules, and those who do so automatically commit an offense against the Honor Code.

During preliminary deliberations, a leveling is arrived at in which each Honor Committee member per company for each class will present the pros and cons of their investigation. This event aimed at capturing the same information from which the body will clarify loopholes through cross-examination. In cases when some members who have different votes would be called to explain further their position to the entire committee before arriving at a unanimous decision – guilty or move for further investigation.

When they found that their verdict had been overturned, they expressed anger and disappointment. Moreover, on the level of the cadets, the Honor Code and the Academy's rules and regulations are opined to be an absolute reference with corresponding consequences. However, the PMA environment may not necessarily reflect this stance in which the call for justice and fairness echoed in the sentiments. Despite knowing the policy on the creation of the Board of Officers to safeguard the cadets from litigation, the cadets during the FGD expressed dismay about instances when erring cadets could escape penalty if they have "*kapit*" (backer).

This result is supported by the findings of Prasad & Prasad (2023) which highlight the dissonance between formal rules and lived experiences within an organization. While cadets theoretically view the Honor Code and regulations as absolute with clear consequences, the reality may be more nuanced. The sentiment of disappointment and anger at overturned verdicts suggests a perceived gap between expectations of fairness and the perceived outcomes. Furthermore, the concern regarding “kapit” (backers) influencing disciplinary outcomes resonates with research on power dynamics and favoritism within organizational justice (Brock & Carsten, 2023). These findings highlight the

importance of not only establishing clear policies but also ensuring their consistent and impartial application to maintain cadet trust in the system’s fairness.

Organizational implications of group polarization among the military cadets

Group polarization manifested in the ethical decision-making of the military cadets generated three themes using the MAXQDA software which are 1) data-driven decisions, 2) strict adherence to code, policies, and regulations, and 3) deliberation aftermath leaked to cadet life (Figure 3).

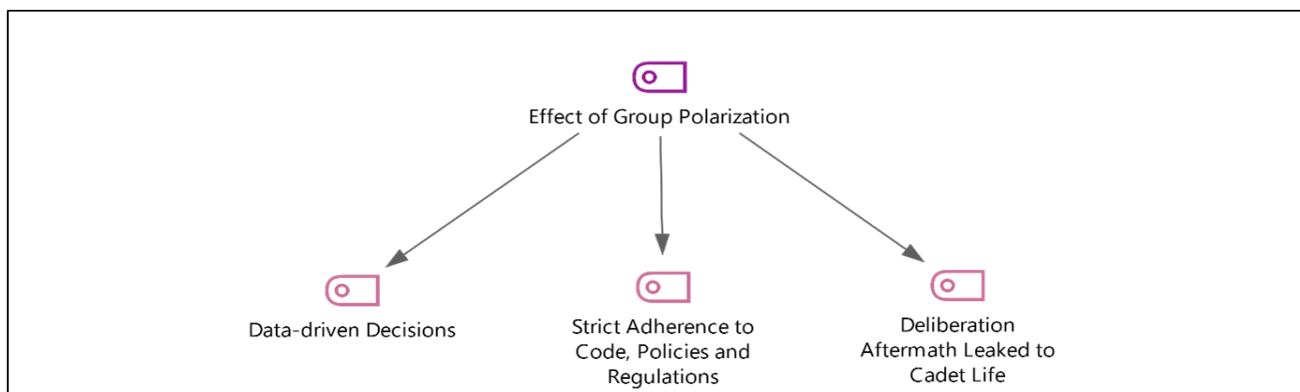


Figure 3. Effects of Group Polarization (From Risky to Cautious)

Data-driven Decisions: Group polarization is an inevitable aspect of all groups’ and organizations’ decision-making processes. Discussions within the Honor Committee and CCPB have revealed a shift in judgment. Initially, some decisions seemed hasty manifested by a pre-judgment of guilty without due process. However, group interactions have led to a more cautious approach, focusing on the cadet’s actions and intentions. This phenomenon is a manifestation that the cadets exert effort to observe the Honor Code and the Academy’s rules and regulations. Therefore, they ensure that their decision-making process is based on information corroborated by multiple sources of evidence, i.e. involved individuals and sworn statements. Consequently, the influence under position to the Cadet Conduct Policy Board or Honor Committee, the nature of the offender, the nature of the victim, and the PMA Environment bear no weight in determining their judgment. On the other hand, the Board/Committee highly recognizes the nature of the offense as the determinant of the verdict – recommend guilty or refer for further investigation.

polarization (Niemeyer et al., 2024) in which there is an initial tendency towards hasty judgments. However, group interactions appear to have facilitated a shift towards a more balanced approach, focusing on the cadet’s actions and intentions alongside corroborated evidence (Ofem & Wang, 2023). This highlights the potential for group discussion to foster critical thinking and a focus on objective information within decision-making processes.

Strict Adherence to Code, Policies, and Regulations:

Due process is something that the members of the Cadet Conduct Policy Board and Honor Committee uphold as part of their commitment to the Honor Code. This is achieved by adhering to strict protocols, making unbiased decisions, exercising prudent discernment of the case and its facts, and ensuring effective communication. The risky shift happens in this process wherein, based on the facts presented about the case, the members are expected to decide. This, consequently, triggers a shift from risky to cautious.

This finding aligns with the concept of group deliberation mitigating the effects of group

Such findings are in corroboration with the book of Van den Boss (2023) which discovered that

due process guarantees fairness and unbiased decisions. However, a shift from risky to cautious decision-making might be explained by the emphasis on prudent discernment mentioned in the research. This focus on careful evaluation aligns with the concept of rational decision-making, where individuals weigh risks and benefits before making choices (Ofem & Wang, 2023).

The Aftermath of Deliberation Leaked to Cadet Life: Group polarization is not only a mere process evident in Honor Case and cadet conduct deliberations. It also affects how the members uphold the Honor Code outside of these deliberation sessions. Cadet members of the Honor Committee and the CCPB have shared that the risky shifts that they have experienced in these deliberation sessions also affected how they interact with cadets outside the courtroom. Conforming to the in-group decision and having more information about a certain case has allowed them to be more conscientious of the Honor Code and how this should be reinforced in everything a cadet thinks, speaks, and does. The violations of cadets that are detrimental to the Honor Code and other cadet policies and regulations reaffirm the members' stance to uphold these rules and regulations, therefore, affecting how they indoctrinate other cadets and live up to the expectations of the Honor Code. They practice *pakikiramdam* or deep sense of empathy, *pakikitungo* or respectful interaction, and *pakikipagkapwa* or shared identity with a more grounded approach, given the information they have shared within the in-group.

These findings resonate the concept of *pagkatao* or the whole person concept (Enriquez, 1992) in which the risky-shift experienced translates into a more holistic approach to upholding the Honor Code. Through group discussions, cadets may develop a stronger sense of how their actions and decisions impact not just individuals, but the cadet corps as a whole. This emphasizes also the concept of *kapwa* or shared self and the interconnectedness between individuals (Enriquez, 1994). Through their interactions with other cadets, there is reflection that fosters a deeper understanding about the impact of their behavior has on the collective good which is the manifestation of *pakikipagkapwa* or shared humanity.

Conclusion

This study investigated the presence of risky shifts in the ethical decision-making of the PMA's Cadet Corps. It examined the formal Honor Code system

and the informal "Buhayan" practice to understand how individual and group dynamics within these systems influence cadets' ethical decision-making. Additionally, it explored the potential consequences of group polarization within the organization. This study revealed that various factors affect the ethical decision-making of military cadets both at the individual level such as the need to prudently discern, the need to strictly perform, the need to objectively decide, and the need to effectively communicate. On the other hand, group interaction influences their risky shift manifested by the consideration of the factors specifically the nature of the offense, the nature of the offender, the nature of the victim, and the Academy's context. When faced with an Honor infraction, the individual notion of right is superseded by the group's norm. However, if it runs counter to the policy implemented in the Academy, it can corrupt the cadet development and foster a culture that undermines the organization's core values.

Recommendations

While there is so much more to explore to bring to the fore unanswered concepts on risky shifts about ethical decision-making among military cadets, the following are critical areas that need to be addressed or further explored:

- Organizational Environment Scanning – As a sub-unit of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, PMA must prioritize fostering a strong ethical climate within the organization. On the other hand, character development has to be an organizational thrust in which the message is clear, understood, shared, and observed as a way of life. Hence, ethical organizational culture is yet another area that can be explored.
- Documentation of Best Practices - Learning what is good and acceptable in an organization is subject to the bearer of the message. Traditionally, codes and regulations are passed down by word-of-mouth. This method, however, is susceptible to the spread of bad practices. Since there is no filtering mechanism, these practices can become wrongly justified. Therefore, there is a need to document best practices in the indoctrination of decorum and acceptable behaviors. This can serve as an institutionalized reference for generations of cadets to improve, correct, and add. Moreover, this can also be an impetus for the organization to create footprints in world rankings and recognitions.

- Future research – This study adopted a borrowed tool that can be enhanced by incorporating emerging themes from the qualitative exploration of the mental schema of the cadets in their ethical decision-making. Hence, further studies can devise a standardized tool that can be utilized in gauging the ethical decision-making of military cadets. This can also be elevated to cover an in-depth exploration of the ethical decision-making of public servants in the country.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares that she has no conflict of interest.

Ethics Review, Human Rights Statements, and Informed Consent

All procedures followed were based on the ethical standards of the University of Bohol Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study.

Data Access/Privacy

The data was accessed upon the approval of the Superintendent of the Philippine Military Academy. The researcher recognizes her responsibilities under the Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, concerning the data that they collected, recorded, organized, used, and consolidated from the participants. The personal data obtained through the FGDs and surveys were entered and stored in a secured drive that is only accessible by the researcher for this study which included probable presentation and publication. Finally, the privacy of the participants was respected by maintaining confidentiality and masking any identifying features.

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