Introduction

In 2006 a young captain is deployed to the Darfur region of northwestern Sudan for the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). Within this mandate, the captain and four of his colleagues are appointed to escort six American journalists to visit a number of small villages in the Darfur region. His orders are to be back at the military base before six p.m. In the late afternoon, after driving through several villages that have been completely destroyed, the group stops at a village. The civilians speak to the journalists about mass executions, rape, and other atrocities conducted by a militia group referred to as the Janjaweed. On the way back to the military base, the captain spots a group of militia who seem to be heading towards this village. What is he supposed to do? What does his mandate say? What is the right action from a moral perspective? Leave the villagers and continue to escort the journalist back to the safety of the military base? Or risk the lives of the journalists, his own life as well as the lives of his colleagues, and return to the village in the hope of averting a slaughter? What would you do if you were in his shoes?

In 2003 the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) as well as the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel groups began fighting the government of Sudan, which they accused of oppressing Darfur’s non-Arab population. While the Sudanese government signed the Darfur Peace Agreement in early 2006, July and August 2006 saw renewed fighting (Flint & de Waal 2005). An African Union (AU) peacekeeping force operated primarily in the country’s western region of Darfur with the aim of performing peacekeeping operations related to the Darfur conflict.

The mandate of AMIS included: monitoring, investigating and reporting ceasefire violations as well as to ‘protect civilians whom it encounters under imminent threat and in the immediate vicinity, within resources and capability’ (African Union 2004: paras 65, 67). The mandate and the rules of engagement do not describe what civilian protection means as a mission task (Badescu & Bergholm 2009). A seemingly problematic mandate due to several elements, including the fact that the parties did not respect the ceasefire as well as due to a mismatch between resources and tasks (Ekengard 2008).

While this example is taken from the movie Attack on Darfur (Boll & Clarke 2009), it also represents a real life example that international military personnel experienced during their deployment in Sudan. It is also an example that is easily recognized by Dutch military personnel who have worked with similar mandates in equally challenging situations.

In this example the captain is faced with a complex moral dilemma. The officer is responsible for the safety of both his team (including the journalists) and for villagers, yet it seems that he cannot guarantee both at the same time. In Darfur there have been cases of military personnel returning and successfully protecting villagers. However, there have also been numerous attacks on AMIS by the Janjaweed. Hampered by a lack of intelligence and resources, the captain is left with a difficult choice. Ultimately, to be accountable (to others
as well as himself), the officer must be able to explain why he prioritized certain values at the expense of others.

This is an example of the many difficult moral dilemmas that military personnel face during military missions. During missions soldiers can be faced with conflicting norms and values, situated on the individual, organizational, political level, or on all these levels at the same time. In operational environments, the stakes are high. Military personnel are often confronted with cultural differences and a necessity to act. Interpretations of situations, subsequent reactions and actions may have far-reaching consequences (Kramer 2007; de Graaff 2017). In moral dilemmas values collide. There are conflicting beliefs about, for instance, soldier-hood, mission goals and right or wrong (cf. van Baarle et al. 2015). It is in the nature of these moral dilemmas that they cannot always be dealt with on the basis of regular routines or rules (cf. Thompson & Jetly 2014). At the same time actions may have far-reaching consequences, since the stakes are high.

Within the military organization itself military personnel may also face difficult moral dilemmas during peacetime. How to react when your commanding officer consciously makes jokes that you deem inappropriate? How to act when one witnesses a colleague committing actions that go against the code of conduct? One can imagine that such situations pose a dilemma for people in many different organizations. However, in a hierarchical organization, in which loyalty is one of the key values, it may be particularly difficult to deal with such situations. Moral dilemmas during peacetime may include situations of bullying, humiliating, intimidation, discrimination, alcohol or drug abuse, theft or corruption and sexual harassment. The moral dilemmas and moral questions that follow from these situations may differ (and present different consequences), but they can be just as complex as dilemmas faced during military operations.

Military ethics education aims at fostering the ability to recognize the moral dimension of situations, to analyze a moral dilemma (or question) and justify a choice, and to communicate and act on this judgment. As such, it prepares military personnel to deal with the complex moral dilemmas and moral questions they face in daily practice, both during military missions and during peacetime.

In this introductory chapter, we will first present a short background of ethics training courses in a military context and different strategies to these ethics training courses. Next, we present the central research question and sub-questions. This is followed by a description of the research context, namely ethics education in the Netherlands armed forces and the train-the-trainer course on military ethics. As one of the researchers (Eva van Baarle) has more than ten years’ experience delivering these courses, the case provides an opportunity to reflect and learn from experiences acquired delivering these courses. In the final part of this introduction we present the methodology and conclude with an overview of the chapters.
The importance of ethics training courses in a military context

There is a growing awareness of the need to address ethics during training in the armed forces. Today, it is common for most (Western) armed forces to pay attention to this topic in education and training programs. In fact, ethics is regarded as foundational to the military profession:

> It sets the environment of trust between a nation’s military, the government and the people it serves that allows military members to serve as true professionals. When this trust fails, the military is reduced to bureaucratic status or worse: an institution to be feared and a treat to civilian government (Cook 2015, p. 104).

Ethics education includes empowering military personnel to say ‘no’ when it is legally and/or ethically appropriate (Robinson 2008; Coleman 2013). Military personnel of all ranks are morally and legally responsible for their actions in warfare and during peacetime. Therefore, military ethics scholars argue that ethics in the armed forces should be of service to all professionals to enable them to carry out their tasks ‘as honorably and correctly as possible’ (Cook & Syse 2010, p. 119). Military tasks are often performed in dynamically complex environments in which there is a necessity to act (Kramer 2007). This involves situations in which the rules and laws are ‘insufficiently clear, silent or even contradictory’ (van Baarda & Verweij 2006, p. 1). Dealing with this complexity requires autonomous critical thinking (Kramer 2007). The military organization has a (moral) responsibility to prepare military personnel thoroughly for a wide range of situations, and to consider the ethical aspects that are in play (Wakin 2000; van Baarda & Verweij 2006; Robinson, De Lee, & Carrick 2008; Lucas Jr 2015).

Different strategies to military ethics training courses

Military institutions act upon their responsibility to prepare military personnel for dealing with moral questions and dilemmas by providing various forms of ethics training and education courses, each with different explicit or implicit theoretical underpinnings.

In this thesis we distinguish between compliance strategies and virtue strategies (Paine 1994, 1996) to ethics education in organizations. In other words, we distinguish between courses focusing on a set of moral rules (codes of conduct) and interdictions on the one hand, and courses that do not attempt to provide universal rules or principles for ethical decision-making (Robinson 2007; Moore 2005) but rather try to stimulate reflection, ethical decision-making and accountability (Birden et al. 2013; Knights et al. 2008; Mueller 2015). The latter are referred to as ‘learning-based’ approaches.

Compliance strategies can be viewed as concretely normative. There is a given set of moral rules and interdictions, which one has to comply with. Conversely virtue strategies...
are normative in a more general sense and more process-oriented. They are focused on developing virtues and actively reflecting on practices and moral dilemmas.

While virtue ethics as a single category of ethics theory can be viewed as an oversimplification (Nussbaum 1999), compared to compliance strategies focused on compliance to duties and obligations it plays a critical role highlighting the importance of deliberation, reflection and dialogue with the aim of achieving ethical decision-making and accountability. It is important to stress that these aims involve neither a break with Kantian ethics nor a rejection of guidance or rules. Rules and guidance are valuable in any agents’ deliberation. We often cannot assess particular circumstances well enough, on account of time or because of insufficient information. To depart from well-thought-through rules we need to be very sure we are not ‘engaging in special pleading’ (Nussbaum 1999, p. 547).

In his study on ethics education in a military context, Paul Robinson (et al.) finds that in most countries military ethics programs ‘more or less follow the principle of virtue ethics’ (Robinson 2008, p.4). It is shown that within military organizations, as within many organizational contexts, a shift from a compliance-based (or rule-oriented) culture towards a virtue approach took place (Robinson 2008; Olsthoorn 2010; Verhezen 2010). What does this virtue approach look like in practice? It appears that a certain methodological and terminological confusion persists regarding this virtue ethics approach (Robinson 2008). Most military institutions produce lists of prime military virtues, such as for instance, ‘integrity, moral courage, duty and ‘a can do mentality’ (Robinson 2008, p. 7), which are regarded as desirable characteristics of military personnel. Some of these pre-described virtues can be at odds with a virtue ethics approach to moral issues. For instance, a ‘can do mentality’ focusses on the willingness to take on the challenges that are set to be implemented without hesitation, doubt or discussion (Soeters 2016).

Moreover, strategy to dislodge these virtues in personnel can be interpreted as heading in the direction of compliance strategies. For instance, in the British armed forces:

‘ethics are caught not taught; the sheer force of the institution, via its traditions and examples of commissioned and non-commissioned officers, shapes soldiers in the desired directions through unseen, but nonetheless powerful processes’ (Robinson 2008, p. 9).

It is crucial that military personnel understand what is expected of them as professionals, and which norms they have to understand. The question remains as to the extent to which this strategy fosters the ability of individuals to engage in autonomous, critical thinking, to recognize, and to actively reflect on practices and moral dilemmas. The ability to recognize ethical aspects worthy of consideration in the situation before us (referred to as ‘ethical sensitivity’) may seem obvious, but rarely do moral issues come ‘with waving red flags that say, ‘Hey, I’m an ethical issue, think about me in moral terms’ (Treviño & Brown 2004, p. 70).

The ability to recognize ethical aspects in situations is particularly important in a military environment where there is much reliance on Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s), and a
strong pressure toward conformity. As Martin Cook highlights this stating ‘Ethical sensitivity may be an aspect of moral development we should perhaps reflect on more deeply’ (Cook 2013).

In most armed forces, the attitude with regard to ethics training strategies for officers and non-commissioned officers is different. While officers are often encouraged to develop virtues and to engage in autonomous, critical thinking, to recognize, and to actively reflect on practices and moral dilemmas, lower-ranking personnel are mainly trained to obey the institutional rules and legitimate orders of their superiors (Wolfendale 2008). This bifurcation may be regarded as problematic. Military personnel of all ranks are morally and legally responsible for their actions in warfare and in the institutional setting. In combat situations it is often the ‘strategic corporal’ – a noncommissioned officer – who is faced with the most immediate and pressing ethical issues (Krulak 1999; Whetham 2010). Non-commissioned officers have to find the courage to uphold the laws of war when external pressures of time and threat might tempt them to break these laws. As such, one may question the difference regarding the strategy to ethics education for senior and less senior military personnel (Wolfendale 2008).

**Moral competence**

In this thesis we use a specific notion of moral competence that includes six different elements, which are assumed to be relevant in developing virtues and reflecting on moral questions and dilemmas. Relying upon literature on fostering moral competence in organizations (Karssing 2000; Sherblom 2012; Verweij 2005), and on our experience of developing ethics education in the Netherlands armed forces, we use the term moral competence that includes the following six elements:

1. The awareness of one’s own personal values and the values of others;
2. The recognition of the moral dimension of a situation and identify which values are at stake or are at risk of violation;
3. The ability to adequately judge a moral question or dilemma;
4. The ability to communicate this judgment;
5. The willingness and ability to act in accordance with this judgment in a morally responsible manner;
6. The willingness and ability to be accountable to yourself and to others.
Research questions

The aim of this thesis is to understand how moral competence in a military organization can be further reinforced by means of ethics education in order to assist military personnel in dealing with the complex moral dilemmas they face in their daily practice. We aim to continuously learn from experiences with a train-the-trainer course on military ethics and improve ethics training courses in a military context. We do so by reflecting on relevant theoretical foundations of ethics education, by reflecting on challenges in ethics education in a military context, by putting forward ideas on how these challenges with regard to ethics education can be met, and finally by exploring the effects of ethics training and identifying several aspects that remain challenging. The following question encapsulates the focus of this dissertation:

*How to foster moral competence by means of a train-the-trainer course on military ethics?*

The subsequent sub-questions will be examined:

a. **What are relevant foundations for ethics education and training aimed at fostering moral competence?**
   - What are potential theoretical starting points for ethics education and training aimed at fostering moral competence? *(Chapter 2)*
   - What is the relevance of Foucauldian ‘art-of-living’ for ethics education? *(Chapter 3)*

b. **What are challenges in fostering moral competence by means of ethics training in a military context, and how can these challenges be met?**
   - What are challenges in dealing with concrete moral dilemmas in a military context? *(Chapter 4)*
   - What aspects of military culture may influence ethics education in a military context? *(Chapter 5)*
   - What is the relevance of safety during ethics training and how can an atmosphere of safety be fostered during ethics education? *(Chapter 6)*

c. **What are perceived outcomes of the train-the-trainer course?**
   - How do participants perceive the development of their moral competence? *(Chapter 7)*
   - How do participants perceive the impact of the training on their own training practice? *(Chapter 7)*
Research context

The research presented in this dissertation focusses on ethics education in the Netherlands armed forces. The shift towards attention for ‘moral competence,’ the ‘thinking soldier’ and ‘moral professionalism’ is present in the armed forces of the Netherlands (e.g. de Graaff & van den Berg 2010). Likewise, ethics training and education in the Netherlands armed forces is aimed at contributing to the ‘moral competence’ of individual military personnel (van Baarda & Verweij 2006; Olsthoorn 2008).

Within the Dutch armed forces, military ethics courses are provided to military personnel at different levels. For instance, officers trained at the Netherlands Defense Academy can opt for a short one year curriculum or for a four-year Bachelor’s degree program containing both military training and academic training. In doing so they can obtain a degree in Management, War Studies or Military Systems and Technology. All students attend several courses in military ethics and leadership. Several years later, during officer-career programs, officers reflect on their experiences and their own moral competence, and they formulate personal learning objectives in this respect.

A number of non-commissioned officers and officers who are trainers or instructors in military ethics, or will be in the near future, receive training aimed at fostering their moral competence. At the same time they are trained to teach or train military ethics themselves. In the studies presented in this dissertation we focus on this train-the-trainer course on military ethics.

The train-the-trainer course on military ethics

The train-the-trainer course on military ethics is organized four times per year by the Faculty of Military Sciences of the Netherlands Defense Academy. It was launched in 2006 by means of a five-day pilot. Since then, it has developed into a nine-day course consisting of three non-consecutive blocks of three days that provide participants the opportunity to put their newly acquired theory and tools into practice in between the blocks. This is subsequently reflected on during the course.

The course participants are mainly non-commissioned officers, who already teach military ethics to military personnel or plan to do so in the near future. In some courses officers participate as well. The participants work within the four Dutch armed forces Services (i.e. the Army; the Navy; the Air Force and the Military Police Corps).

The training can be characterized as an in-company training: the two trainers and participants of each group work within the Netherlands armed forces. Initially, Jolanda Bosch and Eva van Baarle (both civilian employees working for the Netherlands Defense Academy) were the trainers of this course. In order to guarantee four training courses a year, at present, there are 17 trainers (both civilian and military personnel) who, on a voluntary
base, act as trainers during this course. All trainers are selected from the participants of the course, potential trainers are identified and recommended by at least two trainers from the ‘trainers group.’

For the majority of the participants this course has become a formal requirement for teaching military ethics at their respective military education establishments within the Netherlands armed forces. Generally, more than half of the group has been asked by their superiors to attend the course. The other participants apply for the course themselves. Participants who successfully complete the course receive a certificate.

The aim of the course is to train participants to become ethics trainers in their own military work environment and at the same time foster their own moral competence. We assume that everyone who is engaged in military ethics education is an example to others. As such, trainers who have experienced working through the various elements of moral competence themselves will become better ethics trainers.

Each group consists of between 11 and 16 participants. Before the start of the training, individual intake interviews are held with all participants. Participants are invited to have an open attitude during the training and to put forward personal moral dilemmas in order to subsequently reflect on those dilemmas. This creates a learning environment that offers an opportunity to link theory, one’s own actions in the group, day-to-day practice and reflection on all of these elements.

The training comprises several modules including: a general introduction to ethics and several ethics theories (utilitarianism, deontology and virtue ethics); ethics and the law of armed conflict; integrity; Socratic dialogue; dilemma training; ethics and emotions; power and ethics; moral disengagement; and sexuality in the organization.

Trainers take as didactical methods the four-factor model from Theme Centered Interaction (TCI) (Cohn 1976; Jaques & Salmon 2007; Stollberg 2008; van de Braak 2011). Trainers seek to create a dynamic balance among four factors that arise in groups in learning situations: the task, the course objective or theory which is presented (the IT), the group (the WE), the individual (the I), and the context (the CONTEXT). In this approach, participants connect theory with their own point of view and their experiences in practice (Cohn, 1976; Schneider-Landolf, Spielmann & Zitterbarth 2009).

Methodology

In this thesis we use a qualitative research approach to explore how moral competence can be fostered during ethics education. This qualitative approach allows us to evaluate experiences and learning processes as well as to develop and improve the theory and practice of ethics training. We draw on the case study method (Yin 2003), in which theoretical notions are applied and analyzed in practice.
Within this case study, in each chapter, we use different sources of data: semi-structured interviews, participant observation (detailed notes by trainers) and documents (for instance documents including guidelines and codes of conduct). Table 1 provides an overview of the data collection used in every chapter.

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<th>Chapter focus</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
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<td>Detailed notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. The relevance of Foucauldian ‘art-of-living’ for ethics education in a military context; theory and practice</td>
<td>Detailed notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Dancing Boys and the Moral Dilemmas of Military Missions; The Practice of Bacha Bazi in Afghanistan</td>
<td>Semi-structured, in-depth interviews, documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Moral dilemmas in a military context. A case study of a train the trainer course on military ethics.</td>
<td>Detailed notes and thick descriptions</td>
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<td>4. Safety dynamics during ethics training. A case study on safety within a military ethics train-the-trainer course</td>
<td>Semi-structured in-depth interviews, detailed notes, thick descriptions</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. What sticks? The evaluation of a train-the-trainer course on military ethics and its perceived outcomes</td>
<td>Semi-structured, in-depth interviews</td>
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As the different research strategies are separately discussed in-depth within each chapter, in this section we focus on the selection of the case study and on the trustworthiness of the research.

**Case selection**

The train-the-trainer course on military ethics was selected as a case for this research. Within this course trainers work with a virtue approach aimed at fostering moral competence. This course is rather unique as it mainly aims at fostering moral competence of non-commissioned officers who are themselves trainers or instructors in military ethics or will be in the near future. As stated above, international comparative research shows that most ethics training courses that empower personnel to develop virtues and engage in autonomous, critical thinking, to recognize, and to actively reflect on practices and moral dilemmas aims at officers rather than at non-commissioned officers (Robinson et al. 2008). This case provided us with the opportunity to explore the relevance of a virtue strategy, by means of evaluative research, for less senior military personnel.

Within the train-the-trainer course we are able to experiment with different methods and strategies, over a longer period of time. As stated above, one of the researchers (Eva van Baarle) is also a trainer in this course. As two trainers are present throughout the course, this created opportunities for both trainers to write down experiences and responses.
Trustworthiness

In contrast to research in which the researcher is assumed to be an objective or detached outsider to the study context, in this study, one of the researchers is part of the practice that is studied, and as such an insider. Following Bartunek and Louis (1996, p.62), the insider and outsiders (i.e. Laura Hartman, Ineke van de Braak, Bert Molewijk and Guy Widdershoven) in this study keep each other honest - or at least more conscious than a single party working alone may easily achieve.' Given the double function of one of the researchers - being a developer, trainer and researcher - bias is a risk. This double role requires transparency and trustworthiness.

The goal of this interpretive qualitative research is not to aim for generalizability, but to seek depth, detail, and the perspective of experiences with regard to the development of moral competence of military personnel during ethics education. Lincoln and Guba argue that interpretive research is based on a different set of ontological and epistemological assumptions than positivist research. The traditional notions of validity and reliability do not apply in the same fashion. They provide an alternative notion by which to judge the rigor of interpretative qualitative research: trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Trustworthiness in this research is ensured by paying attention to four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Erlandson et al. 1993). These quality criteria entail the following questions: are our results believable or truthful?; Are they consistent over time?; Are the results applicable to similar settings?; And: did we use different data sources to produce greater depth and understanding?

Several steps were taken to guarantee that these criteria were met: 1) the researcher has a long-term involvement in this particular ethics training course and had first-hand observations 3) multiple sources of data were used (semi-structured interviews, participant observation and documents) 4) detailed first-order thick descriptions of the setting are provided so that others can judge the plausibility of the findings and their applicability to other settings 5) member checks and 6) peer-debriefing sessions were regularly organized with ‘outsider’ researchers, to uncover taken for granted biases, perspectives and assumptions on the researcher’s part (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Outline of dissertation

In Chapter 2 three theoretical foundations of the train-the-trainer course on military ethics are introduced. To enable participants to work on their moral competence, three basic requirements are identified for ethics education: virtue ethics; the Socratic attitude; and creating a process of ‘living learning’.

In Chapter 3 we rethink the foundations mentioned in chapter two. Based on insights from this study and our experiences with the train-the-trainer course over the past years: How
can ethical decision making in organization be further reinforced? This chapter explores the relevance of Michel Foucault’s ideas on ‘art-of-living’ for ethics education in organizations. First, we present a theoretical analysis of ‘art-of-living’ in the work of Foucault as well as in the work of two philosophers who greatly influenced his work, Friedrich Nietzsche and Pierre Hadot. Next, we illustrate how ‘art-of-living’ can be applied in ethics education. In order to examine some of the benefits and challenges of applying the ‘art-of-living’ in the practice of ethics education, we discuss an example of how the ‘art-of-living’ has been used in the train-the-trainer course on military ethics. We suggest that ‘art-of-living’ may be an appropriate theoretical foundation for a virtue strategy to ethics education and training. Foucauldian ‘art-of-living’ may foster awareness of power dynamics that are in play when military personnel face moral dilemmas. We argue that this can be regarded as a pre-condition for ethical decision making.

Chapter 4 examines the moral dimension of the military context by reflecting on a specific moral dilemma faced by military personnel deployed to Afghanistan. This dilemma is also often mentioned by participants during the train-the-trainer course, and is known as the Afghan ‘dancing boys’ phenomenon. The practice of dancing boys often entails patronage and sexual relations between young boys and privileged, powerful men. This chapter illustrates that the moral dimensions (and the related values) of situations are not always recognized, which seems to make it even more difficult for soldiers to come to a conscious choice on how to act. It appears that military personnel often avoid taking action because they do not want to offend their Afghan colleagues or local leaders, who are the main perpetrators of sexual acts against the ‘dancing boys.’ The non-recognition of bacha bazi as a moral issue or the normalization of bacha bazi through the blurring of moral standards or keeping a moral distance could be seen as a way of coping with the bacha bazi. However, the danger of moral blindness lurks.

In Chapter 5, several challenges and tensions are identified that are at play during ethics education in a military context. Tensions between military and personal values, and challenges related to fostering moral competence. These tensions and challenges are explored by elaborating on various aspects of the military organization during the training (i.e. being a soldier, group bonding, uniformity, hierarchy, lack of privacy and masculinity). Furthermore, it is demonstrated how moral competence can be addressed and fostered during the training by introducing specific interventions.

Chapter 6 deals with a specific challenge in fostering moral competence during ethics training courses, namely safety dynamics during ethics training. There is considerable support for the idea that an atmosphere of safety and trust can mitigate the interpersonal risks inherent in learning. Safety and trust take time to build in groups, but may be destroyed in an instant. In order to assess these dynamics, we introduce a four factor analysis model. Finally, we discuss a number of practical implications with regard to how trainers can foster safety during ethics training courses.
Chapter 7 focusses on the question of how participating in ethics training courses assist military personnel in dealing with the complex moral dilemmas they face in their daily practice. Through qualitative inductive analysis, it is shown how participants evaluate the training, how they view the development of their moral competence, and how they see the impact of the training on their own training practice. We show what sticks and what works well during ethics training. Moreover, we identify several aspects that remain challenges, such as diversity and safety within groups.

The discussion chapter, Chapter 8, brings together the insights of the earlier chapters. Thereafter the central research question and its sub-questions are answered. We reflect upon the findings and discuss the question of whether training soldiers to be reflective soldiers, to engage in autonomous, critical thinking and to foster active reflection on practices and moral dilemmas is feasible in a military context. How exactly does this attitude relate to the military’s ‘can do’ mentality?

References


Chapter 2