

Ethical Dilemmas in Leadership

Excellence in Leadership Program

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Exercise:

What Do Ethics Mean to You?

- **In your table groups, introduce yourselves and discuss this question**
- **Note some answers**
- **Identify a person to report out**

What do ethics mean to you?

Some typical answers:

- **Ethics have to do with what my feelings tell me is right or wrong**
- **Ethics have to do with my religious beliefs**
- **Being ethical is doing what the law requires**
- **Ethics consist of the standards of behavior our society accepts**
- **I guess I don't really know what the word means**

What are Ethics?

Simply stated:

“Ethics refer to **standards of behavior** that tell us how **human beings ought to act** in the many situations in which they find themselves—as friends, parents, children, citizens, businesspeople, teachers, professionals, and so on.” (Markkula Center for Applied Ethics)



What Ethics are Not

- **Ethics are not the same as feelings**
- **Ethics are not religion**
- **Ethics are not simply following the law**
- **Ethics are not the same as following culturally accepted norms**
- **Ethics are not science**

Identifying Ethical Standards is Hard

- **If our ethics are not based on feelings, religion, law, accepted social practice, or science, what are they based on?**
- **How do those standards get applied to specific situations we face?**

Can Philosophers Help?

- **Thinkers have sought answers to the question “what should our ethical standards be?” for thousands of years**
- **Five approaches have stood the test of time and offer a foundation or criteria for making ethical decisions**

Sources of Ethical Standards

- **The Utilitarian Approach**
- **The Rights Approach**
- **The Justice and Fairness Approach**
- **The Common Good Approach**
- **The Virtue Approach**

Applying the Five Approaches

- **Does this action produce the most good and do the least harm? (The Utilitarian Approach)**
- **Does this action respect the rights of all who have a stake? (The Rights Approach)**
- **Does this action treat people equally or proportionately? (The Justice Approach)**
- **Does this action best serve the community as a whole, not just some members? (The Common Good Approach)**
- **Does this action lead me to act as the sort of person I want to be? (The Virtue Approach)**

Still Not Easy!

- **Each approach has something to offer, but...**
- **We may not agree on what is a good and what is a harm**
- **We may not be aligned on the same set of human and civil rights**
- **We may have different views of what is just**
- **We may have different ideas about what constitutes the good life for human beings**
- **We may debate which virtues are most important**
- **And it's possible these approaches yield different answers to a given dilemma**

What is an Ethical Dilemma?

- **When different approaches yield different decisions but we still must choose**
- **When the alternatives all seem wrong in some way but we still must choose**
- **Note: if what is right is clear to you, it is not a dilemma, though it may require courage to follow through!**

Exercise:

Identify an Ethical Dilemma

- **Think of an ethical dilemma you have faced in your work life**
- **Identify why it was a dilemma for you**
- **How did you resolve it?**
- **Share with your table group**
- **Choose one from your group and prepare to report out**

Ethical Dilemmas and Leadership

- **Leaders, by definition, seek to bring about change**
- **This means their decisions will affect people**
- **So most of their decisions have an ethical component, even if a small one**
- **Also, other people's ethical dilemmas are often kicked up to the leader to decide**

Exercise:

Which Approach Do You Use?

- **Review slide on the Five Approaches**
- **In your table groups share which approach you are most attracted to and tend to use the most**
- **And the one you use the least**
- **Identify a person to report out**

Applying the Five Approaches

- **Does this action produce the most good and do the least harm? (The Utilitarian Approach)**
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Using the Five Approaches

- **Each has a unique perspective to offer**
- **Each can help us evaluate potential actions in response to an ethical dilemma**



A Framework for Ethical Decision Making

- **Recognize an ethical issue**
- **Get the facts**
- **Evaluate alternative actions using the five approaches**
- **Make a decision and test it**
- **Implement with “skillful means”**
- **Act and reflect on the outcome**

Evaluating Alternatives with the Five Approaches

- **Which option will produce the most good and do the least harm? (The Utilitarian Approach)**
- **Which option best respects the rights of all who have a stake? (The Rights Approach)**
- **Which option treats people equally or proportionately? (The Justice Approach)**
- **Which option best serves the community as a whole, not just some members? (The Common Good Approach)**
- **Which option leads me to act as the sort of person I want to be? (The Virtue Approach)**

Ethical Decisions Are Not Enough

- **Implement decisions with “skillful means”**
- **How can my decision be implemented with care and attention to everyone’s concerns?**
- **How should I communicate the decision and with what support?**

How We Go Astray

- **No clarity about our own values – what do we care about**
- **No recognition of the role of our emotions in our decision making**
- **Not being aware of our own blind spots**
- **Wanting to justify our decisions so we look good, e.g. not acknowledging mistakes**

Insights

- **What had you not considered before?**
- **What were you reminded of?**
- **How can you make this useful?**



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