This book, although targeting educational leaders, teachers, school-based administrators, school superintendents, school board members, policy makers and education students, is also addressed to those interested in the topic of professional ethics as well as those who seek the development of both ethical awareness and appropriate intellectual processes when facing ethical issues.

In particular, this book uses both deductive and inductive methods to provide the reader with a progressive experience of ethical discernment and analysis in order to deal with and prepare the reader to address ethical issues in the public square - a task which requires that such decisions are rational, defensible, and clearly articulated. Indeed, institutional leaders' diligence and integrity requires no less in attaining and sustaining the support of those they lead in and through the institutional decisions and policies which effect constituents' lives.

Through the use of clearly stated definitions, the presentation of ethical schools of thought, cases, original plays - within which readers are encouraged to engage while in a safe learning environment - references to original and secondary academic sources, poems, movies, and video clips, this book provides a lively and challenging approach to studying the topic of ethics.

David, Jacques Louis (1748-1825)
Working Through Ethics in Education and Leadership
Working Through Ethics in Education and Leadership

Theory, Analysis, Plays, Cases, Poems, Prose, and Speeches

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THE RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

INTRODUCTION

We have been involved in education for many years as elementary and high school teachers, school administrators, and university professors. Through those experiences, it became clear to us that many education students saw their professional decision-making as guided by professional codes of conduct and their personal decision-making being subject only to their personal, subjective assessment. Moreover, such assessments were, in their opinion, ethically unassailable by others as “after all, such things are relative to the individual’s personal beliefs or the lack thereof”. The common refrain was that if a professional code did not prohibit an action, or if the action was not during school time, then “no one is right and no one is wrong in what they choose to do or not to do – it is all a personal decision!” Relativism and nihilism seemed the perspectives of the day for many students in education courses. The irony is that despite these perspectives, the people you meet as educators are, on the whole, incredibly value driven persons.

We are certainly not the first professors to note this phenomenon and not the first to be chagrined at students’ under use of their skills of synthesis and analysis in looking at ethical issues. Indeed, some former colleagues suggested that classical ethical analysis is pointless as the Cartesian divide makes such analysis impossible (Dewey, 1988; 2003) and even dangerous (Bauman, 1993; Rorty, 1991). Their argument was that classical ethics was dangerous as it “lets people off the hook” as one gives up the responsibility to act with personal responsibility for one’s actions, shifting responsibility to a code or system of belief established and promulgated by others for their own purposes. It is said that such choices display a lack of authentic freedom and autonomy and that these engender irresponsibility in ethical decision-making. Moreover, with every situation and context being different it seems impossible to provide guides to ethical action.

Our belief is that even if one accepts that there are no universal ethical values, which we do not, there is a great deal of intellectual benefit in students exercising their minds using synthesis, analysis, and critical reflection when considering ethical scenarios. Further, such a determinative process is crucial to being able to explain and defend professional decisions to others in the public square. To those who say that “the ethical” is wholly the personal, we answer that we live in relationships and as teachers, administrators, trustees – and others who hold public office – we are answerable to others for our actions which affect them. We have accepted the benefits of public service and we have a public responsibility to explain and defend our decisions in the public square with cogent, considered, rational, and persuasive argumentation. Therefore, our responses to ethical challenges must be, amongst other things, articulately defended as thoughtful and reasonable and in the interests of the common good. Those reasons alone should make the study of classical ethics a worthwhile task.
It is our hope that ethical analysis through both reading various schools of thought and vicariously living in this book’s high school and elementary scenarios will assist teachers, students, school administrators, district administrators, as well as others involved in ethical analysis, to sharpen their abilities to synthesize and analyze data, and to critically reflect upon contentious ethical matters. In turn that will assist in the development of their ability to perceive, understand, address, and to publically defend their decisions as having been made in an ethical fashion as well as being consistent with ethical values and principles in pursuit of the common good.

The significance of this book is several-fold. First, although there are many books containing ethical cases for study by those involved in education; none of these offer plays which allow the participants to engage in scripted dialogue which is authentic, entertaining, and tells a relevant story involving characters in an educational setting. These plays have been written to provide the foundation for the terms utilized in ethical analysis, for example, ethical values and ethical principles. Second, the contents of this book have been tested and found to be valuable. The authors have, for several years, used these plays in courses with school administrators in the province of Saskatchewan and in education students’ B.Ed. courses at the University of Calgary and University of Saskatchewan. In their use we have noted that the level of engagement by participants with the plays and the ethical scenarios has been high.

Third, using the plays in the classroom and having them read by students who assume various characters in the plays has resulted in the participants both becoming attuned to the fact that their ethical assumptions are not necessarily the same as others and further that there is significant ambiguity inherent in real life ethical decision-making due in part to multiple perspectives.

This book is not intended as an academic treatise on ethics nor classical ethics; but rather as a tool to be used by instructors and students of ethics who are concerned with having a firm grounding of the main concepts and processes involved with ethical discernment. It will be apparent to the reader that this book is intended for use by those in education as the plays and the cases take place in educational settings. Indeed, as will be noted later in this book, some of the issues which will be considered relate specifically to the duty of care owed to children in schools and fundamental fairness owed to those in the educational community. However, ethical analysis – that is the process by which one arrives at an ethical decision which is at the core of this book – may be applied to any ethical issue facing an individual, a group, or an institution. One can argue whether or not there are universal ethical values but one cannot argue that it is possible to avoid making ethical decisions, that is, decisions between what one considers good and bad, and at times, bad and bad. Further, institutional decisions produce consequences for the decision-maker which she or he must live with both in the private and in the public square.
Therefore, although this book has been primarily written for school teachers and school administrators, it will be found useful by many others should they wish to know more of how one can utilize ethical reasoning in dealing with ethical decision-making in their personal and public lives.
In general and very simplistically, a classical definition of philosophy is a field comprised of Metaphysics (which studies the nature of existence), Epistemology (which studies how one knows what exists), and Axiology (studying the quality of value which includes the category of ethics). Ethics asks, “How one ought to act in relation to that which exists – humans and things?” In other words what, given the nature of the entity asking the question and that which is being engaged in the relationship, is the correct type of relationship where “correct” means contributory to life or continued existence within the nature of the entity regarding the nature of those in the relationship. This been said, Boss (1998) is correct when she suggests that ethics is like air, all around but only noticed in its absence (p. 5). Ethics is not about rhetoric, what we say, what we intend, what is written, or what has been framed into a credo, but rather ethics is about actions and attitudes, who we are to people, how we treat people, who we are when no one seems to be looking … it is about choosing to do more than the law requires and less than the law allows. Ethics is not about compliance but is about doing what is right, good, just, virtuous, and proper. Ethics is not about the way things are but about the way things ought to be. Rather, when rightly understood, ethics is a set of principles that guide our attitudes, choices, and actions. These principles determine the purpose, destiny, and course of our lives. Ethics are the principles of obligation, ends, motive, and virtue that distinguish for us how we should determine right from wrong, good from bad, proper from improper, and virtuous from vicious. Living ethically is about being, in reality, the kind of person I want others to think I am when I am at my best. The Oxford Canadian Dictionary of Current English (2005) defines ethics as, “moral principles that govern a person’s behaviour,” and morals as, “principles of right and wrong behaviour” and is “concerned with, based on, or adhering to a coded behaviour that is considered right or acceptable in a particular society rather than legal rights and duties”. We think it is helpful to consider the root word from which “ethics” is derived: “ethos”. In ancient days, this once described the atmosphere within a cave; an atmosphere that was quite stable (didn’t change much). So it is with stability of ethical principle. There are at least two dimensions of ethics: 1. The ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil, virtuous from vicious, and propriety from impropriety; and 2. The commitment and courage to do what is right, good, virtuous, and proper and to decline not doing the unethical act.

Can Ethics Be Taught?

Meno. Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way? (Plato, 380 B.C.E.)
It may be said that ethics cannot be taught as the impulse to act ethically precedes thought. And further, ethical formulas or systems of thought are mere mechanisms which at best inadvertently cause people to avoid the fundamental, innate, human pull of ethical behaviour and at worst produce an inability in people to act with authentic autonomy within their sphere of human freedom. Moreover, it has been said that even if one could teach ethics that task would only be fruitful with the young and impressionable, not with adults who have already established through experience their level of ethical awareness and accepted a process of ethical decision making, or lack thereof.

In our view, ethics can be taught to young and old to inform thought and impact wisdom in action. As humans we learn in many ways and develop our moral capacities in predictable but idiosyncratic patterns. Parks (1993) stated,

Empirical evidence demonstrating the importance of moral education in the young adult years has been charted … by researchers such as Conry and Nelson (1989), Gandz and Hayes (1988), Bebeau (1991), and Rest…. (1988; 1986). Surely adult moral and ethical development occurs in a variety of settings, both formal and informal, but there is now ample evidence that ethical consciousness and commitment can continue to undergo transformation at least throughout formal education. (p. 13)

Rest (1982) made the convincing point that “it is useful to think of morality as an ensemble of processes” (p. 29). He suggested that,

four major components must be considered in developing a moral framework. (1) how does the person interpret the situation and how does he or she view any possible action as affecting people’s welfare; (2) how does the person figure out what the morally ideal course of action would be; (3) how does he or she decide what to do; and (4) does the person implement what he or she intends to do. (p. 29)

The general thesis of the above, which we agree with, is that in so far as an academic study of the components or any combination of them contributes to a participant’s understanding of them, that activity contributes to an individual’s moral education. As Rest (1982) said, “this psychological model assumes that moral behaviour is defined not solely by its external consequences … but by the internal processes that govern it” (p. 29).

Component One can be addressed in class by raising the awareness of students to multiple possible responses to an ethical conundrum and to heighten students’ awareness of the multi-layered social and person ramifications of ethical decision-making. Component Two can be enhanced by students studying the works of Kohlberg (1981), Erickson (1950), Gilligan (1982), and others which echo in part the statement that “research studies … clearly link changes in moral judgment with changes in cognitive capacity… 100 studies … link moral judgment test scores with real-life decision making and behaviour” (Rest, 1982, p. 32). Research into Component Three, and common experience, shows that believing what one should do does not mean that a person will choose a particular course of action. However, there are studies which indicate that being morally motivated to act in a particular way is associated with cognitive development (Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1965). Therefore, it seems
reasonable that the possibility of an individual choosing a moral outcome, at least as defined by her or him, is arguably increased when the decision-maker has an understanding and appreciation of the domains of implications and consequences of those choices to others as well as herself or himself. Component four is summed up by Rest (1982),

an educational program may increase students’ ability to carry through on their moral commitments by strengthening and sharpening the skills of Components I, II, and III. A helpful technique might be role-playing simulations in which the student goes through actual motions of putting a plan into effect and works out exactly what to say and how to say it. (p. 34)

The idea of role playing figures prominently in this book as we provide two plays for the reader in Chapter 4. We recommend that the plays in this book be processed within a group setting.

We have occasionally explained to people that there are four Cs for moral development: Consciousness (ethical sensitivity), competence (ethical literacy and dialogic competence), commitment (pre-situational determinations to be and act ethically), and courage (ethical action aligned to ethical consideration and decision). The four Cs are complementary expressions to Rest’s four component perspective.

In summation, the student has of course free will to decide not only what is in her or his opinion the right or wrong action or inaction when faced with an ethical decision making problem. However, the cognitive processes which provides for a deep understanding of the circumstances surrounding the situation, the consequences of making a decision, alternative paths if one chooses a resolution, and being able to articulate an intelligent rationale for such a decision, which is so crucial for teachers and others holding public office, are all matters which can be taught and practiced in a classroom using a variety of teaching techniques. As in all professional schools, whether that be medicine, law, nursing, or education, the process of ethics education can provide tools of thought for synthesis, analysis, and critical reflection. Although such activities do not guarantee a particular result, such an education can provide the tools and thereby arguably increase the likelihood of reaching a moral decision, at least as defined by the decision-maker, which the decision-maker can then accept and articulate as ethical in nature to others.

We acknowledge and agree with Goodpaster’s (1982) statement that “the teacher seeks to foster a certain kind of growth, but more as a leader of active inquiry than as a therapist or physician” (p. 38). In that respect, this book espouses the thesis that by assisting students cognitively and socially in the classroom to clarify their own sense of ethical principles and by employing analytical processes and encouraging critical reflection on ethical matters students of ethics will be better prepared to make, articulate, and hence defend their decisions in the ethically charged public arena.

THE GENESIS OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

There are several sources for the ethical values which we individually or as a society use to assist us in deciding if an action or inaction is right or wrong, morally good or
moral bad. Among those included are: a) religion (revelational text and sacred tradition); b) society (laws, customs, and moral norms); c) organizations (culture, embedded values and practices); and d) family (generational tradition and education). Religion can provide a source of ethical principles, the validity of which is deemed divinely given or inspired, universal and immutable, or unchanging from society to society and throughout all time. It is usually enforced by social opprobrium and severe spiritual penalties. Society can provide a collective definition of what is morally good and bad and provide legal and social penalties for enforcement. Some societies may claim that their ethical values, their morality, are superior expressions of morality and should be universal for all societies. Organizations, to which a person belongs, may provide a set of ethical values. Lawyers, accountants, teachers, and doctors and other professional groups all have codes of conduct, some of which are statutory in nature, that clearly state the ethical expectations of their members. Each family has its own unwritten code of ethical conduct that defines acceptable and unacceptable moral behaviour within the family group. In addition to the above, some claim that by the very fact of being human individuals know what is ethical in an organic, innate fashion which precedes thought and supersedes socialization in a particular community. Notwithstanding the variation and differences above, one point seems certain, being human means that we choose between what we believe to be the good and the bad, or the least of the bad and the worst, in many situations in life and we all seek a reason or reasons for making the choices we make – if only to be able to personally live with them or to explain to others the reasons for those choices.

A DEFINITION AND EXAMPLES OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Having defined ethics generally, for the purposes of this book, the next definition required is of ethical values and it is here that some become confused as the term values can refer to non-ethical and ethical matters. I may value Fords over Chryslers and that is simply a preference. A value is merely a preference for one thing over another. As a noun, value is the worth of something. Intrinsic value means that the “thing” has value, in and of itself. Instrumental value refers to the worth a thing has as a means to an end. Ethical values are a particular set of values which are different from all the rest. Ethical values speak to what I hold to be right or wrong in human action. These values encapsulate what is good and bad for humans given their nature in the actions or inactions which they choose. Examples of ethical values might be professionalism, friendliness, hospitality, equity, efficiency, community, and liberty.

Using an ethical analysis may be as simple as saying, for example, that some act or a failure to act is not professional, or efficient. The High School and Elementary School plays in this book, which are in Chapter Four, allow the reader to move through identification and clarification of the ethical values at play.

Once having utilized the Plays, the reader will have clarified and be able to identify a myriad of ethical values and have a familiarity with the process of ethical discernment. As the plays are intended to be taken up in a class, the participants
will have an opportunity to challenge each other’s assumptions which underlie the articulation and application in particular situations of their ethical values. During the class discussion of the plays, it will quickly become evident the identification and acceptance of certain ethical values amongst the participants will differ. Clashes will occur when the choice facing a decision maker is between two positive ethical values, such as, friendship and professionalism, or two negative values, such as, lack of respect and unprofessionalism. In such cases, the ability to identify ethical values and to contemplate them in a practical case are not sufficient to make a determination for resolution in what may require a publically defensible decision in the public square. In that case, what are required are ethical principles. The purpose of the plays is to provide an opportunity for the readers to identify their own ethical values reflected in the scenarios and to articulate the meaning and genesis of those values in a public yet safe space where they will be subject to challenge and hence further clarification and considered application. In Chapter Six of this book, the matter of ethical dilemmas will be addressed but prior to that time it is likely that readers of the plays will require some knowledge of ethical principles in order to better understand the ethical value conflicts faced by the characters in the plays. Therefore what follows is a brief explanation of the term ethical principles used for the purposes of this book.

TOOLS FOR ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND THEIR USE IN ETHICAL ANALYSIS

Ethical principles are real, unchanging, self-evident, self-validating, external, eternal, and universal human values that pertain to our relations with others. The ethical principles call us to habitually think and behave in a manner consistent with what is right, good, and virtuous and to avoid the opposite.

Ethical principles provide the decision-maker with particular ethical content for analysis. As an example, imagine that you are an administrator in an institution that has a written policy that compels you to report any and all theft to your superior. The policy is simple, one strike and the employee guilty of theft is fired. Now imagine that it has come to your attention that a very hard working employee in your department has taken $100.00 from petty cash, without your permission. The employee’s purpose was to buy her secretary flowers for secretary’s day. You have every reason to believe that the funds will be returned as this has happened in the past with other employees. What do you do? There are several ethical values in play, a) professionalism, b) your responsibility to be faithful to the policy (law abidingness), c) equity of treatment amongst employees, etc. What do you do? Here you may look to ethical principles to resolve the conflict. Principles such as, a) do unto others as you would have them do unto you (the Golden Rule), or b) what action would you be proud of if your child knew of your decision? (The “kid on the shoulder” principle), or c) one’s duty should be the deciding factor in ethical decision-making (Deontology), or d) do what is best for the greatest number of people involved (Utilitarianism).

As seen above, ethical principles help the decision-maker to adjudicate through ethical complexity and conflicts.
How could an instructor develop a lesson plan which would demonstrate many of the above matters raised in this Chapter? We provide a sample lesson plan in Appendix A which uses an inductive method to bring the ethical discussion alive in the classroom with adults. It had been used by us many times over the past few years with great success in raising ethical awareness and sensitivity among education students.

THE OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK

This book has seven chapters with references and Appendixes.

Chapter One has presented working definitions of ethics, ethical values, ethical principles, an example of ethical analysis, and this outline of this book.

Chapter Two provides a way of considering the place of ethics in the work of leadership, with a focus on ethical discernment, determination, deliberation, and diligence.

Chapter Three looks at the various schools of ethics utilizing five titles, Virtue Ethics, Deontology, Teleology, Relativism, and Postmodernism.

Chapter Four provides two plays, the High School Story and the Elementary School Story, which may be read out loud by participants and are intended to allow the participants to clarify their own sense of ethics and to confront their unstated, and sometimes stated, ethical values, principles, and assumptions in the public yet safe space of the classroom, seminar, or workshop.

Chapter Five provides the authors’ method of ethical analysis – entitled the Five Commitments – which uses a matrix of various ethical values and ethical principles to assist a decision-maker in her or his ethical analysis.

Chapter Six goes beyond the ethical identification and ethical clarification of Chapter Three to the application of ethical analysis when faced with ten difficult case studies specifically designed to produce ethical dilemmas facing decision makers.

Chapter Seven provides a very brief conclusion to this book which summarizes its key elements and reflects upon various aspects of study which may be used with students in junior and senior high school and adults in order to maximize the impact of the study of ethics.

The Appendices are very important for the use of this book – depending upon the age and purposes of the reader. We have referenced the reader to primary sources in texts, articles, and in some cases video clips with original authors. The original readings will undoubtedly be used by some readers to delve more deeply into the key ideas in this book. That would be good! Appendix A provides a Sample Lesson Plan for teaching an ethics class. Appendix B offers the Ethics Aptitude Survey (Brady, 1990), for the reader to discern her or his own ethical tendencies. Appendix C provides the readings and video sites noted above. Appendix D gives the site for an important article, by Rushworth (1994), Universal Human Values: Finding An Ethical Common Ground as well as other useful references dealing with universal
values. Appendix E offers a selection of prose, speeches, poetry, and plays, with references to video clips where appropriate, for use by students or instructors in ethics courses. Appendix F suggests several movies for use with an ethics course. Appendix G offers several simplistic decision-making ethical considerations.

The References are fairly extensive with web links to make deeper study of the references easy to access.
The topic of making ethical decisions is important to each one of us who value and take seriously institutional leadership and the challenges entailed in sustaining organizational and personal integrity. It is especially important for leaders in their formative first five years in a new profession. For the neophyte leader, moral habits and ethical decision patterns are formed for an entire professional tenure during these years. This is not to say we become hard-wired, but we do habituate ethical interactions, responses, and choices in subtle, incremental patterns. At a minimum, aspiring to be or “professing” to be ethical leaders builds on the platform of integrity and is mediated by one’s character and competence. This topic is also important for those who through their personal experience the importance of ethical keen-ness, and the critical capacity to say “no” to what is unethical and “yes” to what is ethical. Such knowledge and the determination to be diligent are the essential benefits of constant ethical renewal and vigilance. For those who have sought to exercise ethical leadership for many years the challenge is to examine their practice, reaffirm their principles, filter through the myriad of cultural and contextual demands and influence those around them to think, do, and dare with ethical integrity. Based on the findings from a reliable research project (Josephson Institute for Advancement of Ethics), certain things are predictable:

1. That every reader of this book would say that they want, in his or her heart of hearts, to be an ethical person;
2. That each of us also wants to be thought of as highly ethical;
3. That most of us would say, if asked, that we believe others are not quite as ethical as they should be;
4. That most people believe that their personal ethical standards are higher than those generally found in society; and
5. That most believe that their occupation, say as a leader with business, social or public sector responsibilities, is more ethical than other professions or occupations.

The research would also suggest that in an organization of good people (such as the one you work in), most would believe themselves to be personally and professionally more ethical than the other members of the organization, working under the same auspices and with similar super-ordinate purposes.

We want to affirm our readers - as well intentioned and typically upright people. At the same time we would like to affirm the desire held by all of us to sustain our uprightness when the situational winds of pressure confront and threaten to tip us. Likewise, the organizations that you work with make many efforts to sustain their earned and deserved reputations of integrity and ethical practice. It is an appropriate beginning to think the best of each other. In the main, these positive self perspectives
help to sustain our ethical ‘tonus’. On the other hand, we would invite you to join us in admitting that while we aspire to be good, right, virtuous, and proper; we sometimes struggle with what may be called an “internal civil war”. We know what is right, good, virtuous and proper but sometimes fail to live up to my own standards. We are sometimes surprised that there is an inner battle for things that ought to be pre-decided.

We would like to suggest that there are good reasons not to leave the matters of ethical leadership with no more than this said. We would like to explore the area under four headings:

– Ethical Discernment;
– Ethical Determination;
– Ethical Deliberation; and
– Ethical Diligence.

Each of these could easily constitute the topic for the whole book, or for a one-day workshop, but our purpose here is to do no more than raise and consider some basic ideas.

Let us put some personal relevance and substance into these ideas before discussing them more fully. Pause for a moment from your reading and bring to your mind someone for whom you have a tremendous amount of ethical respect. We all know somebody fitting that description. These people often personify your tangible images of servant leadership. If we think about them, we can probably ‘see’ or ‘hear’ them quite clearly, even if they are not with us. Ask yourself, “what is it about that person that singled them out for you, that brought them to mind?” What are the features of their ethicality? What characterizes their leader-likeness and integrity? We all seem to have an in-built ability to know what it takes to be an ethical person – we do not think this is just a subjective thing. Throughout our lives we learn from experience and build pictures of what it means to be ethical. That picture helps us with our discernment and our ability to help those in our organization who look to us for ethical leadership.

Ethical leadership involves reflecting on ethicality in a very conscious way. Ethics pervades everything we do. As educational or public leaders we are in the people business, and ethics is embedded in that. Are there any people decisions that we make as leaders which do not have some possible positive or negative ethical ramifications? If you can think of one, let us know. However, in the field where we work with undergraduate and postgraduate students in educational administration, leadership, and public administration – the emphasis tends to be on subjects such as the politics of education; organizational theory; human resources management; financial management; organizational development and public relations. These are undeniably important to the work that we do, but what of ethics? Far from being dealt with in a way that reflects our need to be explicitly and discernibly ethical in our professional orientation and practice, ethics tends to have been implicit and assumed in our pre-service and in-service courses. We need to become more explicit about ethicality in our training, practice, and personal behaviour, if we are to provide suitable ethical models and lead by example. This idea was one of the reasons this book as written.
ETHICAL DISCERNMENT

What we do not know about each other is how satisfied we are with our present state of ethical fitness (personally, professionally, and organizationally). We also do not know exactly what will be required of us tomorrow. These internal and external variables warrant our thinking about ethics in a discrete fashion.

Through experience and wisdom, there are some who have come to a state of what might be called “authentic ethical humility” – knowing that there is always room to grow in the ethical realm and wanting to be better today than yesterday, and better still tomorrow than you are today. When at their best, these people realize that they don’t have to be ethically sick or corrupt to get ethically better.

Experience teaches us a great deal. We often get our ethical consciousness or moral sensitivity through events or circumstances along life’s way. Displacement of “ethical muteness,” moral complacency or even ethical mediocrity, is best achieved in a proactive fashion rather than in response to difficult circumstances. Be assured, if you are new in the exercise of leadership, that difficult situations and challenging issues will visit you! It only takes one or two of these to appreciate one’s own frailties, fragilities and the precarious days in which we live.

We are reminded of Darley and Batson’s (1973) work in moral psychology. These two researchers worked in the mid-1970s with the seminarians (people training to be ministers) at Princeton Theological Seminary. The seminarians were asked to prepare and deliver a short talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan, and then to deliver their talks in another building, requiring a short walk between campus buildings. Darley and Batson used the walk as an analogy of the famous road between Jerusalem and Jericho, and to complete the scenario, positioned a student confederate along the way, who was slumped over, shabbily dressed, coughing and groaning. Darley and Batson wanted to see how each of the subjects would respond to the ‘victim.’

The factor that made a large difference in helping behaviour was the time pressure put on the subjects. Those seminarians who were placed under great pressure tended to help less than the seminarians who were given a more leisurely pace to compose and deliver their short talks. The seminarians under pressure seemed not to have processed the new situation (the ‘victim’) since they were so absorbed with fulfilling their first duty – preparing the talk and getting to the place where they were to do their talk. Indeed, we read their account that on seminary students on their way to give their talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan literally stepped over the victims as they hurried on their way to speak of doing good to one’s fellows.

When we think about this study, it reminds us that we too can fail to meet ethical obligations on our way to doing good. We intend to serve but have not left sufficient margins in our lives to do so. We do not think there is room to be sanguine when it comes to ethics in leadership. Busy lifestyles, pressured lives and even enthusiasm to do good can distract us from discerning the first order needs of those around us and our call to direct ethical behaviour.

Ethical Discernment and Servant Leadership

As aspiring leaders of integrity, we are a good, well-intentioned bunch of people, are we not? Is that not how we see ourselves? And are not the people who work for
and with us similarly well intentioned? We are a good cadre, on our way to doing good, but there are so many things along the way that we need to beware of, to be discerning about.

Step outside your reading again for a moment and personalize this: Imagine several of the people you know from your workplace who might be reading this same text. Ask yourself how many of these people would have thought of you as an ethical person and leader, for whom they have great respect. If they know you, they will have been able to make an assessment on the basis of decisions they have seen you make, together with their images of the ethical attitudes you have made explicit.

When we ask ourselves this question, all of a sudden we understand the meaning of “ethical humility”. We would like to be thought of in this way, but we are not confident that we have yet reached this in the eyes of the colleagues who know us best. A key characteristic of servanthood is humility. Without humility there is no grace; without grace there is no authenticity nor is there consistency in one’s service to others.

Frequently others are involved with our decision making even if we do not consciously include them. We do not, and should not, operate in isolation. We need to pace ourselves, and recognize that there are many times when we cannot do it all on our own. We all require the help of others. Other people have different sets of ‘antennae’, beyond those that we have built into our personal ethical ‘handbook’. Collaborative ethical decision-making is so important. A “lone leader” is a contradiction in terms. There needs to be somebody on hand to ask questions like “Is anybody going to be hurt by this decision?” or, perhaps more pragmatically, “How will this look if it is covered in the newspapers?” We need more than just ourselves to be involved in the discernment process.

Ethical Discernment in a Broader Context

Where a state is based on the consent of the governed, every citizen or stakeholder is entitled to have complete confidence in the integrity of those who purport to serve them. Each agent of the state, parents, police, employing board, and the general public must help to earn that trust, and must honour it, by his or her integrity and conduct in all private and official action.

The challenges associated with working as an ethical leader requires a great sense of discernment. Not only do we need knowledge of laws, rules and standards applicable to our organizational-community settings, but we need to be able to access the best and most reliable information and data upon which to base our decision. We are living in the so-called “Knowledge Age”. Not everything out there is true, reliable, good, and beautiful. We need to be discerning.

We need to link up with people who are especially able at detecting trends and issues that enable us to be proactive – people who can help us to understand and interpret our world. We need to build discerning professional learning communities, with people of conscience and critique, commitment and covenant. Leaders make space for the discerning. They foster organizational cultures that make room for
ethical sensitivities without pandering to petty idiosyncrasies. It is pre-supposed that leaders must develop or affirm (personally, professionally, and organizationally) explicit ethical frameworks in order to proceed, with integrity, in the stewardship of their tasks and relationships.

It is our contention that in some ways we need more ‘ethical fanatics’ in the organizational world. Let us explain. In the negative sense, ethical fanatics might be described as leaders who, having lost their sense of direction and purpose, cope by doubling their speed. We would want to stay clear of such an individual. On the other hand, we think that we need thoughtful and conscience-driven servant leaders who are willing to take some “personal hits” for the sake of their own and their organization’s integrity. Such people are fanatics in the sense that others may muse about or even belittle the energy that this person puts into ethical thinking and acting. But this is the kind of person we would like to serve with. Ethical heroes are needed every day in our organizations and institutions.

If it is true that most of us think that doing the right thing is more costly than it really is, and that we often under-estimate the cost of failing to do the right thing. This should give us pause. Remember that we typically judge others’ worst actions by our own best intentions. Obviously this is not a fair comparison. Only the ethically discerning person can see the ethical imperative of an authentic ethical do-gooder.

It is true that bad ethics is always bad leadership. Poor ethics tends to perpetuate more bad ethics and generates more policy and regulations. Should not we work to be more discerning? All of us will have experience that helps us affirm the notion that poor ethics creates suspicion, anxiety, and loss of control – and causes the degeneration of trust. Trust is an extremely important leader concept – a complex and fragile condition in any organization.

Accounting for these conditions argues for giving much importance – perhaps even being fanatical – about one’s own and one’s organization’s ethics. Discernment sees this larger picture but also consists of the capacity to pick up the ethical nuances of situations and circumstances. Discernment will not allow a blind eye to be turned to situations that threaten ethical integrity.

ETHICAL DETERMINATION

These are precarious and perilous times indeed. One only needs to open a newspaper in today’s cynical environment to see that leaders’ conduct is commonly construed in the worst possible light. In general, public leaders are often presumed guilty of ethical offence by consensual validation that has no resemblance to fair process or substantive grounds. There are some “bad egg” leaders in recent times; ones who make it difficult (reputation-wise) for all of us.

At an extreme, all officials within private, public, and social sectors tend to be considered unfairly as being no better than the worst of their number. The same is true of at least some professions - for example accountancy and law. The ungracious brunt of jokes and tarring by broad-brush generalizations has transformed the noble into the scorned. Undeserved imputations and unjust malignment must be counted by servant leaders to show a scoundrel-weary age that for the most part the skeptics
skeptics are in error. Much of this cynicism has understandable roots. We recall for you the dialogue in John Grisham’s terrific novel The Rainmaker (many of you will have read this, or seen it in the form of the movie a good number of years ago).

There is a scene where Deck Shifflet (Danny Devito in the film) is mentoring the hero Rudy in the fine art of ambulance chasing. In the context of the issues raised in this article, it is worth wading through a conversation between these two characters (see Extract 1, Chapter 4).

**Extract 1:
Extract from The Rainmaker by John Grisham**

We say our good-byes as we backtrack and make a quick exit [from the hospital room of a Dan Van Landel fellow who has been injured and lies in a hospital bed].

Once in the hallway, Deck proudly says “And that’s how it’s done, Rudy. Piece of cake”.

We dodge a woman in a wheelchair and we stop for a patient being taken away on a gurney. The hall is crawling with people. “What if the guy had a lawyer?” I ask, beginning to breathe normally again.

“There’s nothing to lose, Rudy. That’s what you must remember. We came here with nothing. If he ran us out of his room, for whatever reason, what have we lost? A little dignity, some self-respect”.

His reasoning is completely logical. I say nothing- My stride is long and quick, and I try not to watch him jerk and shuffle. “You see, Rudy, in law school they don’t teach you what you need to know. It’s all books and theories and these lofty notions of the law as a profession, like between gentlemen, you know. It’s an honourable calling, governed by pages of written ethics”.

“What’s wrong with ethics?”

“Oh, nothing. I guess. I mean, I believe a lawyer should fight for his client, refrain from stealing money, try not to lie, you know, the basics”.

Deck on ethics. We spent hours probing ethical and moral dilemmas, and wham, just like that, Deck has reduced the Canons of Ethics to the Big Three: Fight for your client; don’t steal; try not to lie.

We take a sudden left and enter a newer hallway. St. Peter’s is a maze of additions and annexes. Deck is in a lecturing mood. “But what they don’t teach you in law school can get you hurt. Take that guy back there, Van Landel. I get the feeling you were nervous about being in his room”.

“I was. Yes”.

“You shouldn’t be”.

“But it’s unethical to solicit cases. It’s blatant ambulance chasing”.

“Right. But who cares? Better us than the next guy. I promise you that within the next twenty-four hours another lawyer will contact Van Landel and try to sign him up. It’s simply the way it’s done, Rudy. It’s competition, the marketplace. There are lots of lawyers out there”.
Ethics in the Marketplace

The marketplace for professional services, whether legal, public service, health care or education, need not be so crude as the “fictional” picture drawn by Grisham. However, as economies, technologies, systems, and structures change, and as opportunism comes to characterize many attitudes throughout society and within these fields, we need to be aware and wary of the reductionist ethics of those around us who may talk and think like Grisham’s character, Deck Shifflet.

Most of us are associated with organizations, businesses, moments, institutions, or groups who have been seen as ‘great arenas of ethical excitement.’ We all appreciate the pervasive nature of ethics in the work we do as leaders. As we suggested earlier, virtually every significant decision made by leaders has some ethical qualities associated with it. Perhaps all decisions related to people and relationships are inherently ethical decisions. They are not just ethical decisions in isolation – they may be organizational, administrative, political, legal, social, or spiritual - but we can be certain that there are ethical implications and ramifications with each of these decisions in terms of motivation, action, obligations, and consequences.

We think the determination of ethical pathways is made more difficult with some conceptual mistakes or myths that need to be corrected. For example:
– Some say that ethics and the law are the same thing. I think we can do better than Deck Shifflet in that arena.
– Some are convinced that ethics are a personal thing.
– We have all heard people perpetuate the myth that ethical character is fixed at an early age.
– We have heard speakers who think that people who do no moral wrong are ethical.
– There are even some who believe that acting and being ethical are easy for us.
The well-armed and reflective leader needs to challenge each of these statements, recognizing how subtly they make their ways into the minds and hearts of women and men in their organizational settings. Such unfounded statements need to be displaced with more rigorous and balanced understandings.

Ethics and Values

As we have indicated earlier, ethics and values are not the same. Nor are they interchangeable terms. They need to be seen as two sides of the same coin:
– Values are the important beliefs, desires, and preferences that shape our attitudes and motivate our actions.
– Ethics are a sub-set of values, but refer to core principles which determine right and wrong, good and bad, virtuous and vicious, righteous and sinful (i.e., honesty, promise keeping, respect, caring, etc.)
We are all different, and values vary greatly between people. In this sense diversity and “different strokes for different folks” maybe fine; but when it comes to ethics, the content is more stable, and consensus is much more achievable. It may be said that true servant leaders manage or mediate values but affirm, stand for/by and influence others with ethics. Ethical principles are universal and, when not in
conflict with other ethical principles, should “trump,” or over-ride, neutral, religious or cultural values.

ETHICAL DELIBERATION

As leaders, we must work consciously for continuous improvement in our ethical behaviour and be examples to others. Within all the diversity that surrounds us, we must have, prescribe, and live by a clear set of ethics – the tools which will allow us to mediate and manage values, processes, and content – for ourselves and those who look to us for leadership.

This is a path which we must tread with great sensitivity. The story has been recounted of a meeting of college educators at Harvard University about 20 years ago. At one of the open forums associated with this meeting Frank Rhodes, the President of Cornell University, suggested to his audience that it was time for educational institutions to pay “real and sustained attention to students’ intellectual and moral well-being,” as these institutions work to reform themselves. There were gasps from the audience, according to reports, with one angry student standing to demand indignantly “Who is going to do the instructing? Whose morality are we going to follow?” The audience apparently affirmed the interrupter with loud applause, as if to suggest that he had posed an unanswerable question. President Rhodes, we are told, sat down, either unable or perhaps unwilling to respond. The question seems a most appropriate one to ask of leaders: “Whose morality are we going to espouse?”

Perhaps every person who would be a leader, whether a human services professional, business person, educator, politician, or public administrator ought to put him or herself in President Rhodes’ position, by asking “What would my response have been?”

Inhibiting Factors in Ethical Leadership

We join with others in our view that there are a number of rationalizations that keep us from our best ethical thinking. If a rationalization is an attempt of the human mind to persuade the human spirit or heart to change its position on a given issues or issues, then most of us will be able to relate to the understanding that we are sometimes “walking civil wars”. The contests of head and heart in ethical deliberation can be significant for us. This is especially so in a pluralistic society. However, it is not necessary to ‘ship one’s mind to the Arctic’ in order to work out some of these conflicts. In fact rationalizations are rarely grounded in substantive arguments. Typically, Pascal was right in suggesting that “the heart has reasons that reason knows not of”.

Below we suggest a few examples of rationalizations which get in the way of cleaner and clearer ethical deliberation. These are rationalizations that we should recognize and avoid:

1. Ethical agnosticism. This says to us that we can never know what the ethical action or attitude is—so why bother to be deliberate?
2. Ethical cynicism. This asks us the question, “what does it matter—do you really think it is going to make any difference—doing right or wrong?”

3. The doctrine of “relative filth”. This tells us that a particular policy or decision may be wrong but it is justified by the possibility that others are doing worse;

4. The jam of “false necessity”. This explains to our hearts that we have no other choice—that there is no escaping the tragic dilemma we are facing; and

5. Statistical morality. This tells us that it may be unethical to do something but it is legitimated by the fact that everybody else is doing it—or may be soon—so why be last?

Of course there are many other forms of ethical rationalization, but these examples serve to demonstrate how commonplace and subtle they are. We would all agree that obvious wrongdoing such as violating laws - except where some laws are wicked as in Nazi Germany -, rules or acts involving dishonesty, or disregard for ethical standards will get us into trouble. We may be somewhat less convinced that the appearance of wrongdoing is unethical – where we engage in conduct that is likely to generate or reinforce cynical attitudes and suspicions about our organizations and the people who lead and manage these enterprises.

These general rationalizations can be accompanied by other subtle enemies of integrity, such as: careerism; naive relativism, short-term thinking; the arrogance of power; independence; misplaced loyalty; egoism; carelessness; neglect; a lack of forgiveness, obduracy; and otherwise crooked thinking.

We must not weary along the way. Again, we live in a precarious age. It is an uphill battle, right from the start, to be, and to be seen as, an ethical leader – somebody who serves others with integrity. Metaphors for standing strong in the wind or storms abound: roots, foundations, and anchors come to mind. Simply on the basis of the fact of your leadership position, unthinking people will brand you as “unethical”. “How did that person get there?” they will say, or “They must have done something wrong to get through the system to this position”. As we know leadership is first about serving and helping move towards the fulfilment of a worthy cause not about positionality.

As we have said, people are judged by their worst acts, with no regard to their best intentions, much less their most noble acts. Often we are judged by our last, worst act. Inconsistency in ethics can defined in a moment by one thoughtless gesture, word, or action. This is why we must diligently work to be ethical, act ethically, and appear to be ethical.

ETHICAL DILIGENCE

Robert Coles (1995), the eminent Harvard psychiatrist who has given us books such as the Pulitzer Prize winning Children in Crisis, The Moral Life of Children, and so many other worthwhile writings, tells the story of a woman of colour, the mother of Ruby Bridges, who was one of the children in a study he was conducting. Coles says that

she pointed out that ‘there’s a lot of people who talk about doing good, and a lot of people who always worry about whether they’re doing right or
doing wrong.’ Finally there are some other folks, ‘They just put their lives on the line for what’s right, and they may not be the ones who talk a lot or argue a lot or worry a lot; they just do a lot!’ (n.p.)

Readers of this book article may have read Peter Drucker’s (1997) preface to the excellent book, *Leaders of the Future*. Drucker used as a title the phrase “Too Few Generals Were Killed”. This captures some of the same ideas, intelligence, and wisdom expressed by Ruby Bridges’ mother. Leaders need to be diligent, relentless, and courageous doers of ethics.

We all know the clichés about walking one’s talk, but ‘ethics is easier said than done.’ Drucker was recalling that it is too often the case that we have everything worked out in our minds as leaders, but don’t get into the trenches, roll up our sleeves and do the work (the work of ethical exercise, or wrestling with ethical issues and problems that confront us). This is our call to due diligence as servant leaders.

We must recall that ethics is not just “doing no wrong;” but it is also about “doing right”. There are lots of reasons why we are not ethically active. We are constrained at different levels of concern (individual, organizational, professional, organization level, community level, societal level) and the further constraints of uncertainty, lack of ability, inadequate information, or analysis, legal conflicts, structural or procedural barriers and so forth are not insignificant.

Many ethical problems are messy. Timing is important. There is a need to build our ethical acumen to sort through ethical conflicts: right versus wrong; good versus good; right versus bad; right versus inefficient, etc. As Peter Vaill (1991) once suggested, we need to be diligent in working through these tough decisions, reflectively, collectively, holistically and spiritually. In organizations or institutions, we need to develop a team of people who can give attention to systemic and large problems through public discourse and the various instruments of dialogical and diagnostic competencies. These are not small problems – there are no quick fixes; no three-step decision triages or templates to put the complex and sacred activities of your leadership through, to come up with actionable answers. In tough times, ethical are complex and the pressures to be merely technically sophisticated and instrumental, rather than fundamentally ethical, exert powerful influence on us.

The people with whom we work, those who work for us, and those for whom we work, are walking civil wars, like us. We know what is right and what is wrong from an ethical perspective, and sometimes we lose the internal struggle to choose right. We know that happens, and we know it is going to happen. Pre-commitment to ethical principles is a great help to sustained ethical integrity. We recommend that people make the decision to be honest, promise keeping, caring, respectful, ahead of time - then they don’t have to make the decision every time. Diligent leaders do not grow weary in all their well-doing. They insist on the resolution of ethical issues and problems in a manner and fashion worthy of their professional and leadership callings.

Much of our research is of an empirical-design to generate descriptions from ethical leaders (including trustees, chief executives, middle managers, *superintendents* and public administrators) about what is ethical to them, what the problems are and what the pressures, basis, grounds and rationale for their decision making might be.
This has created a huge pool of data, with hundreds of interviews and thousands of survey pieces. It is likely that we have never personally worked the specific organization where you do your working and leading. However, on the evidence of our experience in several other English-speaking countries, we know that almost all the leaders we have connected with are up to their ears in sensitive ethical issues, as a significant part of their day-to-day work. Those who say they are not often seem to be in state of obdurate denial. Most want to deal with the issues; to be, do and achieve the best that they can. They realize this will not happen unless they maintain their own integrity - the elements over which they have most control - and they work consciously to foster an ethical environment within their organizational settings.

Harking to a guru in the leadership field, Warren Bennis (1997) says that if leaders fail, it is by virtue of their loss of character, or competence in the eyes of those they serve – there is a loss of trust in the integrity of these fallen or failing leaders. For our international and national-level leaders, many issues and challenges are management ones; they have dollar signs attached to them. This is where they often feel the greatest threat with regard to their ethical decision-making. Beyond economic and efficiency issues they list a range of interpersonal issues - everything from “I am dealing with incompetence,” through significant human questions of equity, community and individual liberty. My concern in this short essay has not been so much for these larger issues but rather in the issues and situations where we do exercise personal and professional choice and influence.

You need to know what the “best interests of the people” you serve is all about – a deep understanding of purposes, missions, core values and processes that goes beyond rhetoric, and abiding commitment to making it happen. Decisions are made by the hundreds in your work as a leader. All of the roles you assume as a leader need to be founded or rooted in some solid commitments: to common ethical values; to the voice of professional convictions; to your personal conscience; and to your professional and social constraints (codes). From this core of ethical commitments you can sustain the integral core of who you are (a person who has chosen to be ethical) through and into these roles, where conflicts are going to come. Integrity is consistency in displaying all these core commitments in each of the roles you take on as a leader.

In part, leadership is about making sure your ethical core permeates all you do, all you are and all you dare to be as a person of integrity. We could say much more about all this but let us leave it there, as you continue to use this book and encounter the challenges of ethical decision-making in leadership.

SUMMARY

Based on our view that there ought to be conscious and concerted efforts made by leaders to enhance and continually develop their ethical acumen, we have suggested four aspects of that development: ethical discernment, ethical determination, ethical deliberation, and ethical diligence. Concerning ethical discernment, we have emphasized that ethical humility, consciousness or ethical sensitivity; together with working in concert with the ethical sensitivities of others. These are key qualities for the
leader who wishes to serve with integrity. With respect to ethical determination, readers are reminded of the forces at work in our environments to shrink the efficacy of ethical consideration and we point to the necessity of disaggregating notions of ethical from the larger arena of what matters to us (our values, beliefs and preferences). Here we’ve advocated privileging ethical principles over non-ethical or neutral values to help our determination of right/wrong, good/bad, and virtuous/vicious. Third, we address the crooked thinking, fallacious considerations, myths and rationalizations that can (and often do) inhibit our ethical deliberations. Ethical decision making can be complex and subject to all sorts of forces that distort or mute our “right and righteous thinking”. Of course, our point is that if, at the outset, deliberative content is off track, even by a few degrees, then the trajectory of our behaviour and actions will suffer the consequence of taking us where we really do not want to go and do harm (by commission or omission) in ways that we can ill afford. Finally, in this chapter we have reminded the reader of the importance of ethical diligence. Timing, courage, wisdom, attention to the subtle and ethical mindfulness are crucial in the exercise of leadership that lives up to claims of integrity. In this chapter there is an argument made for a fundamental commitment to be made by leaders to resist the tendency to passive ethical determinism (“whatever” will be will be); instead, we suggest leaders seek to be active, competent and fully alive to ethical world around them; vigorously assert the place of warranted ethical decision making in all circumstances, engage the complexities and make every effort to be the worthy of their calling as leaders.