

PART I

Foundations of Public Service Ethics

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Pertinence, Practicality, and Poppycock

Always do right. This will gratify some people and astonish the rest.

—Mark Twain

This chapter—the first of three that explore the foundations of public service ethics—explores the multiple rationales for examining ethics as well as reasons behind the reluctance to discuss ethics in policy and administration. Knowing why one is undertaking an activity is the first step to understanding any situation. The chapter objectives are to

- appreciate personal reasons for studying ethics;
- recognize the pervasiveness of ethics;
- acknowledge that professional public service has never been solely a technical enterprise;
- understand that the exercise of power is immediate, real, and vital;
- distinguish the costs associated with ethical pitfalls; and
- evaluate credulous poppycock that claims ethics is impossible, unnecessary, and simple.

PERTINENCE: REASONS TO STUDY ETHICS

There is no guarantee that anyone will make more effective choices by studying ethics. But such study helps to contemplate them on your own and to speak intelligently about ethical matters with others. Reflecting on ethics issues encourages the recognition of moral duty and obligations. Ideally, it serves to make prudent judgments that can be publicly justified. This understanding is the basis for at least five reasons to explore ethics: it is personal, pervasive, professional, powerful, and full of pitfalls where the costs of ethical failure are high.

Personal

While the word *ethics* may provoke fear and loathing as a dull topic, or one that takes people out of their comfort zone, in fact, it stimulates

thinking people with life's most compelling questions—those that deal with what is right and wrong, good and bad. As Thomas Schelling (1984, 38) writes, “Often the question is not, ‘Do I want to do the right thing?’ but rather ‘What is the right thing to want to do?’” Humans are the only creatures that are struck by the difference between *is* and *ought*, and wonder about what sort of creatures they are and could be. *Homo sapiens* are, in other words, unique moral agents because they have the capacity to think about thinking, to ponder about what is “right” and “proper” and “fair” (Wilson, 1993).

In public service, the “what is” question seeks to discern what is actually occurring in a particular setting. This seemingly obvious factual or descriptive question aims to better understand or make judgments about ethical behavior. However, describing “what is” is complicated by the varying ethical perceptions, beliefs, values, and biases found at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. The “ought to be” question is normative and focuses on what should be done in a given situation (e.g., how to treat a long-time employee when downsizing). The issue for managers and leaders is how to get from “what is” to “what ought to be” in practice. It is challenging because it requires weighing what can be done with what ought to be done. This is where you come in.

You count, and can make a difference in the movement from what is to what ought to be by adding to—or subtracting from—excellence and joy in the workplace. What you do matters. This book is aimed squarely at readers, inviting everyone to actively engage ethics—to take it personally. It will help prepare for the day when you are called upon to juggle these considerations and then decide: “This is what should be done, this is why it should be done, and this is how it will be done.” When that time comes, it will be important to be confident that the action taken is ethically feasible and desirable.

This leads to a second observation: People unabashedly make decisions about what is best. Henry Ford said, “Believe in your best, think your best, study your best, have a goal for your best, never be satisfied with less than your best, try your best—and in the long run, things will work out for the best.” You need to know what is right, and that the choices you make are good. If an unexamined life is not worth living, following Socrates, then an examined life is lived for a good reason. Every act of every person is a moral act, to be tested by moral criteria; to study ethics is to learn not only how people make good judgments, but also why they make bad ones. Readers are bid to probe the empowering, if inherently controversial, choices about meaning and value in public service. Managers and employees without a carefully considered set of public service values are likely to be poor decision makers; they are inclined to dither when confronted with decisions presenting ethical implications.

The third observation of a personal nature is that individual values are the final standard, as there are many, sometimes conflicting, determinants of action. “To the question of your life,” wrote Jo Coudert in *Advice from a Failure*, “you are the only answer. To the problems of your life, you are the only solution.” Individual responsibility and accountability, therefore, are inescapable (notice the “i” in “ethical”). But note that people typically perceive themselves as more ethical than others and that consensus regarding proper behavior diminishes when proceeding from abstract to specific circumstances. Actual human contact can change

everything, clarifying some issues while confounding others. Indeed, black and white can look like two shades of gray.

The implications of the personal reason for studying ethics are that they can be both enabling (it is not mere sentimentality) and debilitating (being questioned about ethics can strike at the core of one's moral being). Either way, how you handle an ethical dilemma may be the only thing remembered about you ("The decision of a moment," it has been said, "lasts a lifetime"). The question, in short, is not whether we will die, but how we will live. Existence is defined by choices, as French philosopher Albert Camus asked, "Should I kill myself, or have a cup of coffee?"

Pervasiveness

Not only is ethics a highly personal concern, but it is also a pervasive one. It is part and parcel of the activities of everyday life, encompassing and affecting almost everything that happens. Indeed, as technology has further interconnected with others around the globe, it has also made us more ethically interdependent. Ethics is a fundamental, familiar component of all walks of life: business, government, religion, sports, academe, and nonprofit organizations. Newspaper headlines, television and radio broadcasts, and Internet coverage provide story after story of wrongdoing in business, government, and nonprofit sector organizations. Heroes and heroines plummet from their exalted status by making poor choices (e.g., see the compelling saga of the rise of New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer vs. the fall of Governor Spitzer in Eimicke, 2005, and Eimicke & Shacknai, 2008). Likewise, organizational brands are tarnished by immoral actions. In both, citizen trust is lost and financial resources squandered for short-term gain. Ethical leadership is lacking and sorely needed, particularly in the civil service where public-regarding ethics is so central to the core of democracy: government by, for, and of the people.

And ethical concern is probably greater than ever before as ethical issues have a tendency to be magnified and expanded today for three interrelated reasons:

- The *scale effect*: Modern technologies make it possible to do misdeeds on a massive scale.
- The *display effect*: Communications systems (particularly the advent of social media) can dramatically package, instantly distribute, and repeat incidents.
- The *PR effect*: Public communication has become professionalized public relations as a result of polling, focus group research, image management, news event "spin," "damage control," "spontaneous" grassroots mobilization, and related marketing techniques (adapted from Hecl, 2008, 26–28).

In addition, as the postindustrial service economy shifts emphasis from products to people, higher moral standards are expected. People have learned to become sensitive to the natural environment, and today they are also becoming sensitive to the ethical environment. Yet while a broader range of activities are seen as unethical today, conditions for employee abuse continue to grow, exacerbated by rapid societal change.

Professional

Public servants, accordingly, must not only do technical things right but also do ethically right things. Professional work is value intensive as it focuses on goals, synthesis, and priorities; leaders take responsibility for what is done as they serve as models and represent others. Someone without basic ethics skills is professionally illiterate. The classic definition—and often oath—of a *professional* is someone who shows leadership in technical competency and ethical character. A professional is not a professional merely because of her expertise, but also because of her adherence to ethical standards. The ability to contemplate, enhance, and act on these faculties is the essence of professional life. It is unthinkable for a professional not to do her best; it is her duty.

This is what makes scandals so devastating. Scandals result when professionals in a variety of fields have demonstrated a lack of understanding of this basic precept. Namely, the question “Management for what?” seems to have been misunderstood. Management is not an end; rather, it is a means to an end. Thus, while process and policy often overlap, the ethics of process—regardless of the policy issues involved—is key. If process is ably done, policy is likely to be ethical as well. A focus on “why” when making decisions may lead to recognition of ignorance, followed by the acquisition of knowledge, resulting in expansion of moral imagination. The aptitude for critical judgment is the *sine qua non* of a professional. Those who treat management and ethics apart will never understand either one.

One attempt to keep management focused on ethics is the appointment of a chief ethics and compliance officer in an organization. Criticized by some as window dressing, while praised by others as a way to highlight ethical issues and promote right behavior, these officials have become commonplace in large firms, nonprofit organizations, and governments (see Exhibit 1.1 on a week in the life of Marisol Lopez, an ethics and compliance officer). A critical question is whether these positions have the power and resources to make a difference (see Chapter 8).

Power

A fourth reason for interest in ethics is found in the capacity of government and its agents to exercise power. The study and practice of public administration has never been regarded as only a technical matter. Moral reform is the impetus of modern public administration as values are at its soul (Frederickson, 1996). Governance is both a democratic and a moral endeavor. The argument for democracy is not that it is efficient, but that it is the right form of government. If questions of right and wrong are answered by the state, those decisions are the immediate, real, and vital official allocation of values. When citizens, advocacy groups, and lobbyists demand government intervention, they seek an authoritative resolution of a conflict of values. This distribution of values—promoting particular values while minimizing others—is significant because it has far-reaching ethical consequences. The results range from human health to social and corporate welfare to government regulation. Democracy provides accountability mechanisms for such value allocations, which can permit careful consideration of competing interests by decision makers.

EXHIBIT 1.1**A Week in the Life of Ethics Officer Marisol Lopez**

Marisol Lopez is an ethics and compliance officer for XYZ, a large nonprofit organization in a big southeastern city. Like most nonprofit ethics officers, Lopez faces a thorny set of issues that creates challenges, threats, and opportunities for her and for her charitable organization. Her work is complicated by a downturn in the economy, declining charitable donations, a rapidly changing workforce, an increasingly cumbersome legal and regulatory environment, pressures for higher productivity, and pending layoffs. Lopez earned her MPA degree with a concentration in law and ethics more than 20 years ago. She has been working in the nonprofit arena since that time, progressing up the ranks to become the organization's first ethics and compliance officer, a position she has held since its creation 10 years ago. She is a strong communicator, politically savvy, and able to assimilate information quickly.

After arriving at the office on Monday morning, Marisol is told about a breaking news story on a financial scandal involving another major employer in the city. She is aware that any large organization, whether in business, a nonprofit, or government, can have its reputation tarnished by the unethical actions of managers or employees. She is grateful to be working for an organization that has long recognized the importance of ethics and proactively created her office to reduce the risk of any scandal or wrongdoing. Other nonprofits, such as the American Cancer Society, American Red Cross, and American Arbitration Association, have created ethics officer positions to supplement their ongoing ethics programs. She feels fortunate that she reports directly to the CEO and makes regular presentations to the board of directors, unlike some chief ethics officers in her professional association (the Ethics and Compliance Officer Association), who report indirectly through the general counsel. Her direct reporting channel helps her to be strategically relevant and independent, a key to her effectiveness.

As she reviews her schedule for the week, she notes several important matters that must be attended to:

- *Today*—She needs to put the finishing touches on an article for her organization's newsletter, a Q&A-style piece regarding hypothetical ethical situations and how to deal with them. Then she is giving a briefing to a small group of board members at lunch highlighting several good examples of ethical behavior by organization members. In the afternoon, she is meeting with staff to review final revisions of their "no-gifts" policy.
- *Tuesday*—She is working with staff to complete a risk assessment study of the organization's fund-raising effort; in the afternoon, she is overseeing with the HR director an internal investigation of charges involving unfair hiring practices; later that day, she intends to sit in on a new employee orientation where she will be speaking about standards of behavior and the code of ethics.
- *Wednesday*—She is briefing the CEO and his staff regarding the implications of a compliance initiative affecting international operations. That afternoon, she is scheduled to attend an outside consultant's briefing on an assessment of program effectiveness in the budget office.
- *Thursday*—She is planning to review revisions to the policies and procedures manual; later, she will convene an ethics committee composed of representatives

from human resources, finance, fund-raising, and operations. They will be discussing ways in which the organizational culture creates risks and how to mitigate them to stay out of trouble. The committee is trying to get away from the “one-and-done” checklist mentality for improving ethics, which simply tallies how many people certify that they’ve read the code of conduct or participated in mandatory ethics training.

- *Friday*—She is scheduled to examine ethics hotline messages that report misconduct to see if there are any red flags needing attention. After that, she is meeting with a group of mid-level supervisors to discuss how to make people feel comfortable in reporting problems. Marisol remembered how impressed she was by a recent article written by another ethics officer that said, “If employees believe reporting bad news equates to failure, that organization is building a toxic culture.” She wants to avoid spending all of her time and her staff’s “firefighting” in response to compliance problems, and instead focus on building a culture that promotes ethics. She will encourage the committee to benchmark their practices against peer group nonprofits with similar histories.

Lopez’s schedule shows the broad range of issues and events that might be encountered by ethics and compliance officers. In the corporate arena, chief ethics officers emerged in the early 1990s when the Federal Sentencing Guidelines for corporations were implemented. Under this legislation, firms with effective compliance and ethics programs receive preferential treatment during prosecutions for white-collar crime. The 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley Act and the 2010 Dodd-Frank Act further accelerated this trend to help identify potential problems. Nonprofit organizations and governments have taken a similar path by establishing ethics officer positions as part of their ethics program.

Social control of ethical behavior in public service can be assessed by considering the types of power being exercised, the source of the power within or outside the organization, and the locus of social control mechanisms applied to individuals and organizations. Table 1.1 shows social control exercised through three types of power: symbolic, economic, or coercive. Symbolic power is linked to values and beliefs and it invokes emotional reactions (e.g., internal: praise; external: publicity), which can be used by an organization to appeal to its members, the media, and other stakeholders, and to incentivize action on ethical issues. Economic power involves material rewards or sanctions to achieve ethical objectives. It is exercised by those inside or outside of the organization in the form of pay raises or adverse personnel actions, in the case of the former, and budget cuts, in the case of the latter. Coercive power entails the use of force or threat (e.g., incarceration) to control behavior. Internal social controls seek to generate behavior norms (e.g., mission statements); external social controls are applied by government regulations or stakeholders who seek to influence policy.

TABLE 1.1**Social Control of Ethical Behavior in Organizations: Type, Source, and Focus of Power**

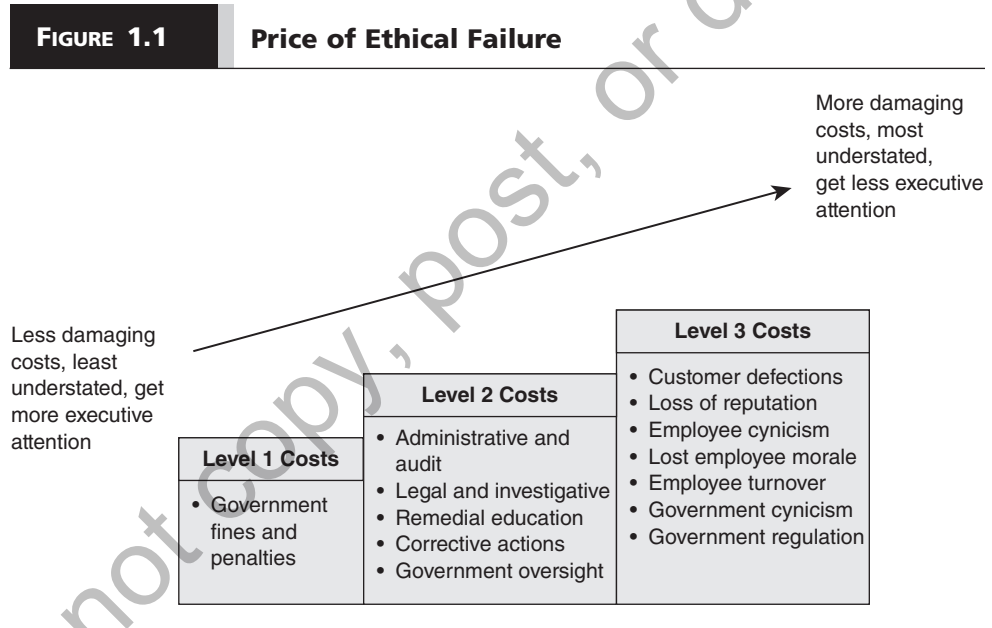
Source of Power	Type of Power Used	Applied to the Individual	Applied to the Organization
Internal to the Organization (Organization Culture and Structure)	• Symbolic Power	• Letter of commendation, award, praise, criticism, humiliation, storytelling	• Code of ethics, policies and processes that generate behavioral norms
	• Economic Power	• Bonus, raise, promotion, firing, pay freeze	• Mission, strategy
	• Coercive Power	• Not legally available (But: kidnapping, forceful threat, beating, forced exposure to toxins, etc.)	• Not relevant (unless organization is "suicidal")
External to the Organization (Nongovernmental Stakeholders)	• Symbolic Power	• Minority proxy resolution to remove firm's officers	• Publicity, news
	• Economic Power	• Bribe, kickback, award, reward	• Purchase, boycott, strike, slowdown
	• Coercive Power	• Not legally available (But: disruptive picketing of executive homes, terrorist attacks, vandalism)	• Not legally available (But: violence accompanying strike, vandalism, sabotage, terrorism)
External to the Organization (Legal and Government Pressures)	• Symbolic Power	• Jawboning, warning, use of social networks	• Warning, citation, testimony at congressional hearing
	• Economic Power	• Fine, tax	• Fine, tax, contract, quota, tax credit, tariff, regulatory barriers to entry
	• Coercive Power	• Jail, execution	• Forced shutdown

Source: Wood, Donna, *Business and Society*, 1st Edition, © 1994, p. 305. Reprinted by permission of Pearson Education, Inc., Upper Saddle River, NJ

Price of Ethical Pitfalls

A final consideration in studying ethics is the substantial costs that ethical problems can incur. It is difficult to put a dollar figure on the costs of such failures because they are not

reported on a balance sheet. However, the expenses can be considerable and, as Thomas, Schermerhorn, and Dienhart (2004, 58–59) demonstrate, they can occur at three levels (Figure 1.1). Level 1 costs are less problematic to calculate, and are often overemphasized by leaders. They include fines and penalties occurring as a consequence of ethical breakdown. These levies may be significant, but are often bearable, even nominal, notably for those organizations that are well insured. Level 2 costs are “clean-up” expenditures (audit, attorney, investigator fees) that are usually as high as, or higher than, Level 1 costs. Level 3 outlays are typically underappreciated by executives and harder to quantify, but often devastating. They can take the greatest toll because the costs include multiple adverse effects: loss of reputation and morale, and increase of cynicism and regulation. Given the high price of ethical failure, preventive strategies are a wise investment.



Source: Adapted from Thomas et al. (2004).

In short, all of these reasons—with their personal, pervasiveness, professional, power, and pitfall implications—account for the salience of issues such as business fraud, questionable Red Cross management and accounting practices, the FBI not heeding terrorist warnings, firefighters setting fires, clergymen and coaches abusing children (and their superiors covering up the problem), Olympic judges and school teachers rigging scores, ballplayers taking steroids, Wall Street insider trading, document shredding, off-shore tax havens, and hundreds of financial officers “restating” misleading company audits. Ethics and violations of ethics, in short, are based on the actions of people.

PRACTICALITY: COMMITMENT AS A PRIVILEGE AND OBLIGATION

Accordingly, ethics cannot be achieved unless all people in the organization practice it at a personal level. A personal commitment to honorable behavior is both a privilege and an obligation. Most of people want to be ethical and to follow through on personal and professional commitments. They intend to do the right thing but sometimes make wrong choices or remain uncertain about which course of action is the right one. Success ultimately depends on what we know, what we do, and what we become as a result. Excellence, as Aristotle saw, cannot be attained without studying and mastering the art of achievement. As a manager or future manager, you cannot delegate that responsibility; you must show the way by example. This requires careful thought, clarification of one's values, and a willingness to do what it takes to achieve ethical competency. An ounce of practice, Ghandi observed, is worth more than tons of preaching. It is in this spirit that we challenge readers to develop an "ethics journal" that includes the creation of an individualized checklist to help supply material for the journal. (See Exercise 4 at the end of the chapter.)

POPPYCOCK: MYTHS ABOUT ETHICS

Despite the compelling reasons to study ethics and its practicality, there is often a reluctance to discuss ethics in policy and administration. This hesitation—or outright rejection of ethics—rests on three contentions: that ethics is impossible, unnecessary, and simple.

Ethics as Impossible

It is contended that ethics is unattainable. Relativism maintains that all judgments are subjective and private, a matter of taste and opinion. Yet causal support for relativism, with the desire to be tolerant and respectful of others, is clearly deficient and misleading. Yes, different people have different codes and norms, but this truism proves little. There may be, for instance, different views about science (e.g., flat earth, evil spirits cause disease, global warming). Most people, however, do not therefore conclude that there is no truth in geography, medicine, or meteorology. Similarly, why assume that for an ethical truth to exist everyone must know it (Rachels & Rachels, 2011)? People are fallible and cultures change; making reasoned, ethical judgments is not only appropriate, but also morally responsible.

William J. Bennett (1978, 22), former U.S. Secretary of Education, tells of his visit to a classroom where his colleague encounters a student who is skeptical of a class on ethics. The dialogue illustrates that ethics is inescapable:

Student: Mr. Jones, I don't think you can teach ethics, because there really aren't any in any real sense. Each person's values are as good as anybody else's. Values are subjective.

Instructor: No, that's not true. Some people's values are better than others.

- Student:* No, they're subjective. No one can impose his values on somebody else.
- Instructor:* That's not true.
- Student:* Yes, it is.
- Instructor:* No, it isn't.
- Student:* Well, that's your opinion and I have mine and it's just like I'm saying we disagree and you can't impose your viewpoint on me.
- Instructor:* Well, I'm the teacher here and I say values are not subjective.
- Student:* So what? I'm a student and I say they are.
- Instructor:* Well, what do you think of this? I say values are not subjective and if you don't agree with me then I'll flunk you.
- Student:* (gasp) What? What? You can't do that! Are you crazy?
- Instructor:* No, I can do that. Why not?
- Student:* Well, (sputtering) because it's not fair.
- Instructor:* "Fair," "fair," what do you mean "fair"? Don't impose your values and sense of right and wrong on me.
- Student:* (pause, and eventually) I see your point.

The instructor was able to parry back and forth with his student effectively to make a point, namely, suggesting that all values are equally valid because they are personal is simply not tenable. Adolph Hitler and Martin Luther King are not moral equivalents.

It also may be that some values are relative to culture, but others are not. It is a mistake to say that if some values are relative, all must be. Why? It would mean that there are no cultural practices that are wrong (torture and slavery are widely accepted as wrong independent of culture). As Nietzsche famously wrote, "Nothing is true, all is permitted." To assert that no reasons need be given for one's beliefs is self-defeating—that is, to defend such a view requires giving reasons for it. If norms are impossible, then how does one defend her own standpoint (Rachels & Rachels, 2011)? If everything is relative, then, *reductio ad absurdum*, relativism has no foundation; everything loses meaning—including relativism.

Aristotle summarized the situation in this manner: Differences between traditions have enough in common—by virtue of shared humanity—to make achievement of common norms a realistic goal. With relativism, though, there is no basis to condemn evil, no hope that people can work together to address humanity's problems. The goal in thinking about ethics is to generate progress, tolerate diversity without moral recklessness, and encourage moral imagination to find common ground between disparate views. Nonetheless, the

relativity debate continues because rights are normative aims, not descriptive facts—a vision for a better world will always be contested.

It is, of course, true that many arguments—scientific and moral—cannot be definitively proved by logic or evidence. They can, however, be rational. Short of finality, there is ample scope for rationality in discussions. Decisions are objective in the sense that they can be defended and criticized by logical arguments. The irony today is that people often have strong convictions about minor issues (sports, fashions, weather), while holding weak convictions about major issues (what is right and wrong).

While personal preferences in food and drink may be the ultimate point as they require no public justification (“I like *nachos*” is inconsequential), an official’s attitude toward whistleblowers does matter. If an opinion has no basis in reason, then it is unlikely to be very persuasive. And if ethical arguments cannot be conclusively resolved, this only indicates how fundamental they are.

Ethics as Unnecessary

In addition to the claim that ethics is impossible, a second contention is that ethics is simply unnecessary. The proposition is that society is a market system in which participants have only to look out for themselves and let the “invisible hand” handle all conflicts. This self-operating, “automatic,” nonjudgmental approach explains the appeal of commercial reasoning. Even arch global capitalist George Soros, however, points out that “we can have a market economy, but we cannot have a market society” (Sandon, 2002). The embrace of the marketplace, along with the reluctance to engage moral issues, enfeebles discourse in the public square (Sandel, 2012, 14). Former U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert Reich (2012) provocatively recounts recent abuses of public trust seen on Wall Street and in corporate suites, concluding that these “are not matters of private morality. They’re violations of public morality. They undermine the integrity of our economy and democracy. They’ve led millions of Americans to conclude the game is rigged.” Markets, stated differently, are at least as susceptible to erratic performance and emotional reaction as those in politics and government. To combat declining trust and rising cynicism in all sectors of the economy, moral imperatives must not be obscured.

The market is an arena of antagonistic, autonomous, isolated, selfish figures. The idea of public life, in contrast, encourages citizens to see themselves as living with others in common purpose, and to see leading an ethical life as contribution to a just society. In a democratic society, value differences are resolved by the political process. The economy serves society; society does not serve the economy. Adam Smith, who after all was a professor of moral philosophy, knew this. Perhaps the contentions that ethics are impossible and unnecessary can best be countered in this way: Be bold in what you stand for and careful for what you fall for. The next justification to avoid ethics is that it is a clear-cut matter like the difference between day and night, so that discussing it is not worth the effort.

Ethics as Simple

Ethical decision making is difficult and multifaceted, not as obvious and easy as concluding that everything is either black or white. Such judgments are often

- troublesome (conflicting standards may apply when confronting situations),
- hard to recognize (crucial information may be unavailable or deliberately withheld), and
- submerged in everyday workplace behavior (harassment and intimidation).

Many moral problems in institutions involve individuals, groups, or organizations, some of whom will be helped and others hurt as a result of factors beyond their control. Some may have their rights recognized, respected and expanded; others may have their rights denied or ignored. Ethical resolution of issues related to benefits and harms, rights and wrongs for different stakeholders are complex and require careful deliberation.

There are five reasons why ethical decision making is not a straightforward process, as these decisions have

1. extended consequences—there is often a ripple effect, noted previously, as first-level consequences have multiple impacts both within and outside the organization (e.g., downsizing);
2. multiple alternatives—they are not usually just dichotomous options like A vs. B decisions (tell the truth or lie?), but involve more complex choices;
3. mixed outcomes—results are seldom clear, unambiguous, and “win-win,” but frequently knotty and murky, with winners and losers;
4. uncertain impacts—unanticipated outcomes (greater costs, lower benefits) are not unusual; and
5. personal implications—decision makers often face real disadvantages and advantages (job loss, reputation enhancement) (adapted from Hosmer, 1987, 12–14).

As suggested by the first two statements, leaders need to seriously ponder the possible second- and third-order consequences of all available alternatives. In doing so, they need to garner the advice from those who have relevant knowledge and experience to anticipate the likely differing reasons given the uncertain consequences. However, even the best-intentioned leaders often encounter two potentially dangerous pressures when facing decision deadlines: the need to craft timely solutions before all of the facts are in, and the temptation to be more confident than circumstances warrant (also see Chapters 5 and 10). In these situations, Jean Lipman-Blumen (2005, 95) suggests following the old dictum “make haste slowly” and cites Steven Sample’s recommendation to “think gray, see double, never completely trust an expert.”

Studies of well-regarded “high reliability” organizations have examined the concept of “mindfulness.” Weick, Sutcliff, and Obstfeld (1999), for example, refer to this as *enriched awareness* among those in an organization concerned about the potential for a catastrophe. This awareness results in heightened consciousness and a sense of personal responsibility to prevent its occurrence. Such *reflective conduct* linking ethical thinking with action should promote “right-doing” and avoid wrongdoing. It requires open lines of communication from

the bottom up, not just the top down. Sears, Roebuck & Company, for instance, has as part of its ethics program an employee survey called “My Opinion Counts.” Among the questions are “Do you believe unethical issues are tolerated or not tolerated here?” and “Do you know how to report an ethical issue?” The program may enable the reporting of problems without fear of reprisal (subsequent chapters, especially Chapter 5, describe some additional tools to use when confronting thorny ethical choices).

A final reason people mistake ethics as elementary is that they fail to distinguish between what ethics is and what it is not. Ethics is not only complying with the letter of the law, religious beliefs, our feelings, and prevailing social norms or scientific formulas. While ethics is related to each of these claims, it is not as simple as they suggest. If ethics is not derived solely from feelings, law, religion, social norms, or science, where do we derive standards of behavior to act in the many situations encountered in personal and professional lives? The chapters that follow explore this question as the many facets of ethics and ethical decision making are examined.

CONCLUSION

The observations on pertinence, practicality, and poppycock in this chapter can produce personal discomfort because ethics exists in the sphere of aspiration where one’s reach exceeds one’s grasp—the gap between the “is” and the “ought.” Ethical quandaries are both hauntingly unavoidable and maddeningly intractable. To create this awareness produces some anxiety, and thoughtful people already have plenty of that. Yet, for Aristotle, public service is not merely one calling among others, but rather essential for the good life, to form good character and cultivate responsible communities. Moral excellence does not consist of maximizing pleasure over pain, but rather is the result of taking pleasure and pain in the right things (Sandel, 2009).

Although ethical problems cannot be easily “solved” (Aristotle’s admonition not to demand greater clarity than a subject will allow is relevant here), their importance remains. The fact that decisions are hard to make does not stop them from being made. Striving for excellence, if not perfection, is essential. It is better to be aware of troubling arguments that bear on workplace issues than to act on simplistic generalizations and unexamined premises.

It should not go unnoticed that no definition of the term *ethics* has been offered in this chapter, a task deliberately delayed for later discussion. The goal here has been to engage, enrich, and elevate an essential inquiry into the self. “Goodness without knowledge is weak and feeble,” according to John Phillips, the founder of Exeter Academy, “but knowledge without goodness is dangerous.”

Since most of us spend our lives doing ordinary tasks, the most important thing is to carry them out extraordinarily well.

—Henry David Thoreau

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Critically examine the reasons for studying ethics discussed in this chapter, modify as needed, and offer additional ones.
2. Critique this statement: A technically incompetent manager is as unprofessional as an ethically incompetent one.
3. The chapter rebutted claims that ethics is impossible, unnecessary, and simple. Refute the rebuttal.
4. Identify a headline scandal or an incident in an organization you are personally familiar with. Discuss how the problem is being handled. Ensure that some context for the case is briefly provided, such as the type of organization and its size (the organization does not have to be named), when the problem occurred, and the exact nature of the issue.

EXERCISES

1. Complete at least two sentence stems. For instance,
 - "I disagree with___."
 - "I wonder about___."
 - "I was surprised by___."
 - "I re-learned that___."
 - "I did not understand___."

A completed stem, then, would be, "I think that there is at least one other reason to study this subject; this additional reason is___." Next, add a one- or two-sentence explanation to the stem so that others can ascertain your reasoning. Another example would be, "I doubt that the contention in the chapter about topic X is accurate. Instead,___"

2. There are a number of websites that attempt to verify the truth claims surrounding current event controversies, such as:
 - <http://www.factcheck.org>
 - <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter>
 - <http://snopes.com>;
 - <http://www.truthorfiction.com>

Identify at least one other site as well as two sites dedicated to the study of ethics. Be sure to provide the complete URL, the purpose of the organization, and the range of issues it covers.

3. The 21st century began with the 2001–2002 Enron/Arthur Andersen debacle that set off a wave of corporate scandals (AOL-Time Warner, Bristol-Myers-Squibb, Merck and Company, Centennial Technologies, Global Crossing Ltd., Salomon Smith Barney, Waste

Management, Kmart, Lucent Technologies, Qwest International Communications, General Electric Corporation, WorldCom, Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, Xerox, Tyco International Limited, Phar-Mor, Rite Aid, Sunbeam, Merrill-Lynch, Halliburton, Duke Energy, HealthSouth, Freddie Mac, Fannie Mae—and leading banks that facilitated the dubious transactions of these and many other less well-known businesses). The crisis deepened and spread to the mutual fund, financial services, and insurance sectors. In fact, many of the scandals tend to implicate not just individual firms, but entire industries. In 2006, the *New York Times* reported that Enron's shadow remained as change was slow in coming. A widening scandal involved illegal manipulation by executives of company stock options at the expense of investors (among the charges were racketeering, fraud, obstruction of justice, money laundering, tax evasion, insider trading, grand larceny, destruction of evidence, and misuse of company funds). For some commentators, the things that were done that were legal were just as troubling (Labaton, 2006).

By 2007, the worst home mortgage crisis since the Great Depression (the subprime debacle) emerged as a result of deregulation, predatory lending, and risky investments that undermined the housing sector and the nation's financial institutions. The shockwaves impacted the entire U.S. economy and the world banking system. Indeed, the \$65 billion involved in the Bernie Madoff Ponzi scheme would be dwarfed by the over \$2.5 trillion paid by citizens to bail out Wall Street firms deemed "too big to fail." As the nation entered the second decade of the new century, it experienced the deepest recession since the 1930s, which has yet to be resolved as the economy remains stagnant.

Nonprofits (such as the United Way and the Red Cross) as well as chronically understaffed government entities (e.g., the Securities and Exchange Commission) also have not gone uncriticized during these episodes. In fact, these sectors are often led by former business executives—some of whom engaged in dubious practices.

To prepare for class participation, include, as needed, information from the commentary immediately above and consider the claim that Americans are socialized to believe that their economic system is inherently superior, which leads to little consideration of its morality.

4. Ethics Checklist and Journal

Although at the start I thought the journal and checklist exercise was going to be a waste of time, I have found that they have proved to be one of the most useful tools I have ever used. They have taught me more about both the material and about myself than I ever could have hoped to learn just by reading.

When we were given the personal checklist and journal assignment, my first thought was, "How on earth is this supposed to help? I know how to stay on track with what I need to do; I don't need this checklist to help me do it." Oh, how wrong I was!

The checklist serves as a guide; I learned early on that procrastination decreases any time allotted to perform at my greatest ability. The journal served to assist in application of the material. Understanding the text became easier once I began to write in my journal and apply the literature to current events and personal experiences. Considering these tools, there is no reason why an individual should neglect to perform at his/her best.

The above comments demonstrate how past students, who may once have been skeptical, profited from the checklist and journal assignments. The checklist, once customized as desired, becomes a useful way to track activities that you identified as important. Accordingly, make the reading material personally meaningful by launching the ethics journal (Exhibit 1.2). An initial entry might be a challenging case you have experienced; it should identify the dilemma in one sentence, describe it in several paragraphs, analyze the outcome, and indicate what was learned. If the readings shed light on the case, then that might be noted.

Throughout the term, illustrate the journal with a current events file based on a search of ethics websites, newspaper stories, blog reports, magazine articles, scholarly publications, and television reports (this material likely will help inform your contributions to discussions with colleagues). As well, include your reactions to this book and emphasize interesting, surprising reflections about what you (dis)agreed with. Complete a copy of the Personal Checklist form (Appendix 1.1) as part of the journal each week. Note that the sample checklist should be modified as needed.

Journaling is straightforward: Simply put words on a page. Because this is your personal log, there is no right or wrong way to keep it. While there are no rules or limits in this assignment, you can seek a comfortable place for sketching your entries, talk about what was significant today, write from the heart, and, if you like, pretend you are scribbling a note to your best friend.

Write what you know, and think of your diary as an old buddy you are having coffee with. Just ask, "What's up?" and start recording your thoughts (<http://www.journaling-saves.com/how-to-journal/>). The value of this exercise is in the process, not necessarily the product. Frequent entries help gain perspective. Get to know yourself. There is power in the written word, sorting through the events, recognizing patterns, generating energy for change, and seeking control over your environment. A journal is a gift we give to ourselves.

EXHIBIT 1.2

Ethics Journal

In addition to reflections on current events, personal experiences, your work or school habits, course readings, and class discussions, here are more prompts that may be helpful as you journal:

- How did you plan your activities for today? What values underlie your plan?
- Draft a message that describes your favorite moral exemplar.
- Describe the way you solve problems.
- What is the most important thing you did today? Why?
- Develop and complete several sentence stems (see Exercise 1, above) and then supply a short explanation or commentary to elaborate on your stems.

Like a new physical exercise, keeping a journal and checklist may seem a bit awkward and uncomfortable at first; if so, this feeling is likely to diminish as you continue to practice and benefit from the activity. Remember the Rule of the Trumpet: You get out what you put in.

The positive outcomes of this exercise include

- ownership (taking responsibility for your own learning),
- enhanced awareness of personal growth,
- self-confidence,
- good study habits,
- focusing on the subject area as a whole, and
- “reflectivity” (digging deeper to examine meanings rather than taking things at face value).

If you are not having fun doing this project, then start anew!

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Appendix 1.1

Personal Checklist

The premises of this exercise include the following:

- People want to do a good job; one way to know if someone is doing a good job is *to find out* by keeping records (“the strongest memory is weaker than the palest ink”).
- Problems are opportunities to improve quality (check marks on the accompanying checklist are facts, and facts *are* friends).
- It is more effective to fix the process that is the cause of the problem rather than to fix blame on a person.

Benefits of the checklist:

- Its mere presence on your desk not only is a continuing reminder of your commitment, but also may actually prevent problems from arising in the first place.
- Properly constructed (see below), the list should have a “calming effect” as it is a way to bring order to personal activities, thereby harnessing initiative and motivation.

Tips for developing and using the list:

- Use the KISS principle (keep it sweet and simple), since a complex, lengthy list will likely lead to frustration.
- Seek a balance between new standards that may result in less time wasted and those that may expand time commitments.
- Recognize that not all specific problems can be dealt with by a checklist (e.g., a frustrating experience with a checklist may reveal for the first time an over-commitment to activities which may lead to a general cutback in responsibilities).
- Note that the list itself is subject to change and continuous improvement.
- Watch for synergy (e.g., being on time for activity [in]directly contributes to a state of mind that leads to improved participation).
- Know that analyzing “why” something happens leads to “how” to improve.
- Recall the Rule of the Trumpet: The more you put in, the more you get out.

Sample Checklist

Instructions: Modify the checklist as needed and use regularly.

Checklist, Week of _____

Problem Category	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su	Total
Complete reading on a timely basis								
Review notes at the end of the week								
Keep up with current events								
Study at least __ hours/day								
Devote significant time to projects								
Spend so much time improving own activities that none is left for griping or blaming others								
Exercise and maintain a balanced diet								
Refer to this checklist								
Customized entry here								
Customized entry here								