Organizational Ethics: Keeping It Simple and Real

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Frame of Reference

- Today’s presentation is anchored in public accountability concepts, but these apply broadly to organizations in all sectors.
- We will go quickly today, hitting the highlights, but relax – you have the material for later reflection.
- Be mindful of your first impressions on how these concepts apply to your organization and your work in it.
I. The Blueprint of Ethics

Personal Ethics and Morality

- “Ethics” Definitions:
  - “The branch of philosophy concerned with systematic thought about character, morals, and right action.” (Adams & Balfour)
  - “A branch of philosophy concerned with the study of moral principles and action.” (Denhardt)
  - “The branch of philosophy concerned with the intent, means, and consequences of moral behavior.” (Manning & Curtis)

- Philosophy ➔ Thinking ➔ Actions / Behavior
Personal Ethics and Morality

- "Morality" – “Is concerned with those practices and activities that are considered right or wrong; it is also concerned with the values those practices reflect and the rules through which they are carried out within a given setting.” (Denhardt)
- “Ethics” is a search for moral standards. It calls us to action – to reason, analyze, and seek guidance. (Denhardt)
- Ethics – more abstract; Morality – more concrete. (Cooper)

Two Major Schools within Ethics

1. **Teleological (Consequentialist)**
   - An action is right, compared to other courses of action, if it results in the greatest good for the greatest number of people (or at least minimum harm). Example: “Utilitarianism”
   - There are no universal principles that can guide action, but rather likely benefits and costs associated with any action must be calculated to judge the practice either moral or immoral.
   - Actions have no intrinsic values, only their ends.
Two Major Schools within Ethics

2. Deontological (Duty-Based)
   - *Broad principles* of rightness and wrongness *can be established* and these principles are *not dependent on the circumstances* of a particular action.
   - One’s duty is to do what is morally correct and to avoid doing what is morally wrong, *regardless of the circumstances*.

Which way does your *basic* thinking lean – Teleological or Deontological?

Which is the Way to Go?
It’s NOT so Easy!

- Public service and professional ethics in the technical-rational tradition *draw on both schools* and *focus on the individual’s decision-making process* in real world scenarios.
- “The good public servant should *avoid both the extremes* of rule-bound behavior and undermining the rule of law with individual judgments and interests.”

Adams & Balfour
II. Compliance with the Law

“Accountability” / “Compliance”: Broader than Ethics Alone

➢ To keep people accountable for their professional responsibilities in organizations, you must encourage personal ethics and individual ethical decision making as well as provide organizational accountability mechanisms.
### Accountability – Five Dimensions
(Dicke & Boonyarak, in Frederickson, 2005)

1. **Hierarchical/Bureaucratic – Answerability**
   - “To whom do I report?”

2. **Legal – Liability**
   - “Who sues who for what?”

3. **Professional – Role Based Expectations**
   - “It goes with the title!”

4. **Political – Perceived Status in Community**
   - “It goes with the territory!”

5. **Moral / Ethical – Doing the Right Thing**

### Public Accountability – Broadly
(Dicke & Boonyarak, in Frederickson, 2005)

- “Accountability suggests taking ‘into account’ the consequences of one’s actions for the welfare of others.”
- “It is a moral, professional and ethical construct that results when public officials serve with a commitment to do the right things.”
- “It must be an internal constraint or sense of duty as well as an externally imposed set of requirements.”
Public Accountability – Broadly
(Dicke & Boonyarak, in Frederickson, Ch. 9)

- “Organizational and professional behavior, political concerns, and the morality of administrative actions are equally important in the accountability domain.”

- **Implications for this training:**
  - Personal ethics, thinking and decision-making
  - Organizational accountability mechanisms
  - A broad view of accountability and compliance

Guiding Personal and Organizational Conduct

- Usually accomplished though laws:
  - Criminal Law
  - Civil Law
  - Administrative Law
  - Ethics Laws

- **Manifestation in Organizations:**
  - Ethics policies, Codes of Ethics
  - Codes of Conduct
  - External and Internal Accountability Mechanisms
III. Ethical Decision-Making & Teachable / Definable Moments

Terry L. Cooper’s Approach in *The Responsible Administrator, 5th Ed.*

- Ethical public administration requires a *theoretical* perspective on the role of the administrator, which must be developed through a combination of *experience*, *contemplation*, and *study*.
- Administrators must develop skill in *thinking about* ethical problems.
- **Goal**: A marriage of abstract thought and practical experience.
Cooper’s Approach – continued

Ethical Decision-Making Model

1. Perceive an ethical problem
2. Describe the situation / Define the ethical issue(s)
3. Identify alternatives
4. Project probable consequences
   - Moral rules, Rehearsal of defenses, Ethical principles, Anticipatory self-appraisal
5. Select an alternative
6. Implement – Resolve the problem

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Cooper’s Approach – continued

“A State of Resolution”

- Is reached when we discover an alternative that provides:
  - An acceptable balance of duty to principle and likely consequences; and
  - Satisfies our need to have sound reasons for our actions and feel satisfied with the decision.
- Is ordinarily an approximate state.
**Ethical Decision-Making Model**

- **O = Observe**
- **O = Orient** - using ERC’s “PLUS” filters
- **D = Decide**
- **A = Act**
  - Evaluate

**P = Policies**  
**L = Legal**  
**U = Universal**  
**S = Self**

**Ethical Decision Making Models – Key Common Themes**

- Recognize the presence of ethical issues.
- Get the facts. Don’t operate on assumptions.
- Think! – Deliberate thoughtfully, define issues & values, account for emotion as well.
- Posit many alternative courses of action.
- Choose from among the alternatives.
- Act! – Implement the chosen alternative.
- Monitor, evaluate, follow-through, learn!
But is it “Simple and Real”? Does it Work?

- Kahneman suggests that in the “heat of the moment” (like “on the spot” ethical dilemmas), we don’t typically think rationally at all – not at first, anyway.
- So what are we to do to get people in our organizations to act ethically?
- Engage them in on-going dialogue, appealing to multiple ways of thinking and diverse personalities, both more rationally and emotionally oriented. AND....

Look for Teachable / Definable Moments!

- Are usually small things and grey areas, that are easy to miss or pass over. Don’t!
- Create them through on-going, quality training and informal communication.
- Be sensitive to them as they arise – they do all the time! Harness them and talk.
- An open organizational culture encourages dialogue and makes it safe to recognize and discuss ethical issues as they arise.
Questions Suggested by the National Institute of Ethics

- Is it worth my job or career?
- Would my loved ones be proud or ashamed?
- Am I following the Golden Rule?
- Am I acting out of anger, lust, greed or peer pressure? (LE challenges)

ASK THEM: What will it take to keep you on the right side of ethical conduct?

Ethical Decision Making – Small Group Exercises

- Group broken into small groups.
- Groups provided brief written scenarios with ethical implications, requiring a decision and course of action.
- After time for deliberations, be ready to brief back to the group on your scenario, deliberation, decision and justification.
- Be mindful of the approach you took to arrive at your course of action. Why that course?
Wrapping Up

- Strengthening your organization’s ethics is a relatively simple task, but not an easy one!
- It takes constant reinforcement, open communication and sound systems.
- Stay the course; make it happen!
- For follow-up questions:
  
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