

# Module II: Ethical Decision Making for School Leaders

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## Contents

Goal/Objectives/Essential Questions/Timeframe	3
Pre-readings	3
Materials Instructional Process	4
References and Additional Resources/Links	11

## Goal

The purpose for this module is for school leaders to demonstrate the relationship between applied ethics and decision making.

## Objectives

- To ensure school leaders demonstrate values that are inclusive for all students, especially students with disabilities and those placed at-risk.
- To prepare school leaders with ethical decision making skills;
- To study and apply the major normative ethical theories to educational situations; and
- To provide school leaders with a “moral compass” that guides complex decision making.

## Essential Questions

1. *What is applied ethics?*
2. *What are the major normative ethical theories?*
3. *What is the framework for ethical problem solving and decision making?*

## Time Frame

Module delivered in 60-90 minutes

## Pre-Readings

Josephson, M. (2002). *Making ethical decisions: The basic primer on using the six pillars of character to make better decisions and a better life*. Wes Hanson (Ed.) with Dan McNeill. Marina Del Rey, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics.

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## Materials Instructional Process

### Steps to Take Prior to Class Meeting

Readings, noted above, are read the week prior to class using the module.

In a web-enhanced classroom using a listserv, pose the online course question (see page 3 “Question to pose” in the box) to class with responses read by the class prior to the class meeting.

In a non-web-enhanced classroom approach, pose this question on the syllabus one week prior to doing the module as an activity to be emailed into the instructor.

#### *Online Course Assignment*

Context: Models of ethical decision making help inform the practice of successful leadership (Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992). Leaders strive to make *ethical and good decisions* in reaching the short term and long term goals of the organization. Sometimes “good” decisions are not ethical; sometimes ethical decisions are not very good, depending on a host of factors.

Assignment: Provide a case example of a situation involving a leadership decision that may be one or the other. Identify the ethics terms from your readings (ethic of justice, critique, care, community; utilitarian, rights, fairness, common-good, virtue approaches; golden rule; and, the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship). This exercise is limited to 100 words.

This assignment is due the day prior to the class meeting, posted by 5 p.m.

Gather the student responses (suggest that you merge them into one document) and be ready to discuss them in class.

#### *In Class Instruction*

(Slide 1) First block of 20-30 minutes: Begin class with a discussion of their case examples assignment. Drawing upon your experience and knowledge base in educational leadership, use power point slide 2.

(Slide 2) Rationalizing v. Ethical Decision Making

1. If it's necessary, it's ethical
2. The false necessity trap
3. If it's legal and permissible, it's proper
4. It's just part of the job
5. It's all for a good cause
6. I was just doing it for you
7. I'm just fighting fire with fire

8. It doesn't hurt anyone
9. Everyone's doing it
10. It's ok if I don't gain personally
11. I've got it coming
12. I can still be objective

Write on the blackboard/whiteboard the 12 rationalizations. Ask the students to read their brief case they wrote before coming to class. After each student reads their case aloud, ask the whole class to categorize the case by the rationalization(s). Put a mark next to each rationalization. This activity is meant to both share others' case examples and for the students to reflect on the nature of rationales commonly provided for significant decisions. [Sample cases are attached on the last page of this module.]

Following this activity, they should be ready to discuss, in detail, the readings assigned.

Second block of 20-30 minutes:

Discuss the readings following the outline below. Take questions throughout the lecture/seminar discussion.

*(Slide 3) Essential Questions*

1. What is applied ethics?
2. What are the major normative ethical theories?
3. What is the framework for ethical problem solving and decision making?

*What is Ethics?*

Standards of right and wrong = obligations, benefits to society, fairness

Development of one's ethical standards

Value = the goodness of things

Ethical Relativism = cultures differ widely in their moral practices

Therefore, there are no universal moral standards.

*(Slide 4) Applied Ethics*

- Ethical theories applied to particular problems usually in public policy arena: business ethics, medical ethics, legal ethics, etc.
1. Ethical Codes = A profession's own self-regulation
  2. Moral Code = legal code (Ten Commandments, Golden Rule)
  3. Informal theories of etiquette = acceptable behavior (culture)
  4. Practices in arbitration and law

Normative theories in applied ethics focus on five basic approaches that apply to certain practices.

*(Slides 5 & 6) Normative Theories Applied to Practices*

1. Utilitarian = ethical merit of an act is judged by immediate consequences  
Can be manipulated to ends justifies the means.
2. Rights Approach = Kant and the individuals' right to choose yourself: right to truth; right of privacy; right not to be injured; right to what is agreed (promised)  
Kant gives us no way to choose between ethical values
3. Fairness or Justice Approach = Aristotle said, "Equals should be treated equally & unequals unequally." Does an action treat everyone the same or does it show favoritism/discrimination?
4. Common-good Approach = good of the community = affordable health care, effective public safety, peace among nations, just legal system, unpolluted environment, etc.
5. Virtue Approach = ideals we strive for = honesty, courage, compassion, generosity, fidelity, integrity, fairness, self-control, etc. What kind of person should I be? What promotes character and my community?

Normative approaches are tied to moral or ethical decision making practices which frame specific questions one should ask.

*(Slide 7) A framework for Moral Decision Making = Ethical Problem solving*

1. What benefits and what harms will each course of action produce, and which alternative will lead to the best overall consequences?
2. What moral rights do the affected parties have and which course of action best respects those rights?
3. Which course of action treats everyone the same, except where there is a morally justifiable reason not to and does not show favoritism or discrimination?
4. Which course of action advances the common good?
5. Which course of action develops moral virtues?

Moral decision making requires a commitment to moral leadership.

Note: Review the Student Assessment and Rubrics

Third block of 20 minutes:

Following the discussion of the readings, this case study is presented for all to comment on with the professor leading the discussion. The background to this case study is that there are two categories (deaf and hearing impaired) that may require different services, such as, interpreters, etc. Deafness is defined as a hearing impairment so severe that the child cannot understand what is being said even with a hearing aid. Hearing impairment is an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness as listed above.

*(Handout)* A copy of the Case Study should be handed out to each student.

*(Slide 8)* Case Study: Budget Woes and Serving All Students

Case:

A small district is experiencing financial difficulties that have produced cuts in faculty, staff and curriculum materials. Among the student population, a small number of students have been identified as deaf and/or hearing impaired. Given budget constraints, the hiring of certified Interpreters for the deaf and/or hearing impaired is questioned, as the cost is prohibitive. It is decided that since the state does not require certification among interpreters, that finding someone with “experience” in signing will be fine.

(Slide 9) Case Study Questions and (Slide 10) Ethical Leadership:

- As a principal in one of the schools with students identified as deaf and/or hearing impaired, should you agree to this decision? What are the implications for you to disagree?
- What moral value arguments can you make for your superintendent to reconsider his/her decision?

Consider further the issues:

- Because there are currently no national professional standards for educational interpreters, does the moral obligation to provide students identified as deaf and/or hearing impaired with supplementary supports and services from “highly qualified” (NCLB) providers mean overriding the decision?
- Since the law is silent, does that mean it is both legal and therefore ethical to hire non-certified interpreters for the deaf and/or hearing impaired?
- Does the moral obligation to provide reasonable accommodations to support the unique learning needs of students identified as deaf and/or hearing impaired, regardless of the cost of qualified interpreters, mean overriding the decision?

(Slide 11) During the discussion use the following tenets of ethical leadership:

Ethic of Justice

Rule of law, fairness, equity, justice

Ethic of Critique

Social class inequities; Who benefits? Who has power? Who is silenced?

Ethic of Care

Who is hurt by my actions?

What are the long-term effects of my decision today?

Ethic of Community

Commit to share our stories, respect views and values of others

## Ethic of Profession

Commit to ethical leadership. Are you walking the talk? Are you inspiring to others?

### (Slide 12) In Reflection...Activity

Following a brief whole group discussion wrapping up the module content, ask them to take out a piece of paper and describe a general pattern of decision making steps that the students individually believe will effectively guide them.

Connect their response to the ethical principles and decision making steps that *they feel they would use to make ethical decisions*.

#### *Always Ask*

Who benefits?

Who is hurt?

What are the long-term implications?

Am I walking the talk with my values? How are my interests advantaged?

Disadvantaged?

Am I inspiring to students/colleagues?

Collect their responses.

### ***Student Assessment & Rubric***

Assessment for this module is as follows:

1. The pre-class meeting case example writing assignment should be focused on a specific single incident that they experienced or witnessed. It may be already decided or still needing resolution. It must be tied to the specific readings as identified by the ethics terminology.

Single incident

Tied to specific readings

Use of ethics terminology

100 words

Detailed single incident described

Note specific reading, 2 or more

Note terminology listed, 2 or more

Note focus in number of words used

Exceptional, Admirable, Acceptable

2. The participation during the Obstacle Activity should come from everyone since all responded to the assignment. If students need to go into depth, that the issue has not been decided yet, allow them time to do that.

Each wrote a case example

Participation with their case

Participation with others' cases

Participation in activity

Identifies characteristics to compare

Identifies similarities/differences

Develops conclusions among examples

All enthusiastic,  $\frac{3}{4}$  participate,  $\frac{1}{2}$  ...



3. The final writing assignment is to help them describe their ethical framework:  
Using the case, as an example, that identifies their ethical decision making steps prior to making decisions.

Was their insight tied to the readings?

Selected important tenets that provide insight.

Selected tenets for a meaningful comparison.

Selected tenets for a partial comparison

Was their insight tied to decision making strategies?

Insightful and thoughtful strategies

Thoughtful strategies

Clear about the significance of strategies.

### ***Sample Student Cases for the Rationalizing Obstacles Assignment***

Models of ethical decision making help inform the practice of successful leadership (Wilcox & Ebbs, 1992). Leaders strive to make *ethical and good decisions* in reaching the short term and long term goals of the organization. Often ethical and good decisions may be in conflict with a decision that is good/legal for the organization and yet may not be as ethical as another decision.

Provide a case example of a situation involving a leadership decision that may be one or the other. Identify the ethics terms from your readings (ethic of justice, critique, care, community; utilitarian, rights, fairness, common-good, virtue approaches; golden rule; and, the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship). This exercise [is limited to 100 words](#).

This assignment is due [give due date and your email/listserv address]

### **Sample cases that your students can follow for format**

1. A manager uses work time to complete his doctoral program assignments and employees to gather his statistical data. He rationalizes that, "He has it coming," since his employer doesn't pay enough and that, "It really doesn't hurt anyone else" (Josephson, 2002) because his Ph.D. will ultimately benefit the organization. Using the utilitarian approach, this manager believes he is justified in his actions because, in the future, more will benefit than are currently harmed.

\*Graduate Student Tanya Whitlow, Fall 2004

2. Ethical decisions aren't always the acceptable thing. When a supervisor chooses to tell an employee about an inevitable termination by breaching managerial confidentiality, that individual is utilizing a component within Josephson's pillar Caring. Caring is the heart of ethics, and ethical decision making. It is scarcely possible to be truly ethical and

yet unconcerned with the welfare of others. That is because ethics is ultimately about good relations with other people (Josephson, 2002). However, the pendulum swings from this one-dimensional (Situational) approach and has the potential to destroy all that the Common-Good approach strives for, by betraying corporate or personal Trust.

\*Graduate Student Evan Robinson, Fall 2004

3. In a recent story by the Toronto Star, campuses across Canada are profiting from marketing tobacco to students. The article says, "Instead of protecting students from tobacco industry marketing, our colleges and universities are profiting from it" ([www.thestar.com](http://www.thestar.com)). For monetary gain, campuses in Canada are putting their students at a health risk. If "caring is the heart of ethics and ethical decision making" (Josephson, 2002), then these campuses don't seem to care about the health of their students. The decision of these campuses to market tobacco is a business ethical decision.

\*Graduate Student Amber Carrere, Fall 2004

4. Hiring certified Interpreters for the Deaf is more expensive, so a small district near the one I worked for did not require certification or an Interpreting degree and only "experience" signing was needed. While this may be "good" for the budget, it is a huge disservice to the students. The "common good" approach wasn't applied. "Does it treat everyone in the same way?"

(<http://www.scu.edu/ethics/practicing/decision.thinking.html>) We would not want to hire teachers without a degree or certification, nor should we with interpreters. They utilized a utilitarian approach "judged by the immediate and direct consequences of the action" (Josephson, 2002, 24), that of saving money.

\*Graduate Student Dawn Siracusa, Fall 2004

\*permission was granted by these four students

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