

Session 4: Addressing Ethics in Leadership

Mentor Modules adapted from Dr. Peter G. Northouse's [Introduction to Leadership Concepts and Practice: 5th Ed.](#)

Many of your mentor meetings up to this point have focused on the strengths and ideas that make you an *effective* leader, but it is just as important to understand the moral dimensions of how you view leadership. The purpose of this meeting is to explore your understanding of ethics, and how you've encountered ethical (and unethical) leadership.

Discuss

Ethical leadership maintains a focus on the morals and values that guide the actions and decision-making of leaders. A leader's ethical framework involves six components:

Character: the qualities, disposition, and core values of a leader.

Actions: how a leader goes about achieving goals.

Goals: what a leader hopes to achieve through influencing others.

Honesty: the level at which a leader prioritizes transparency and open communication.

Power: the capacity to influence others and impact their beliefs and behaviors.

Values: the ideas, beliefs, and modes of action that guide a leader.

Questions to consider with your mentor/mentee:

- Ethical leadership stresses the importance of the moral dimension of leaders to use their position and power for good. Do you agree?
- What level of importance does ethical leadership hold in your field? What are some of the ethical challenges that have been faced by leaders in your field?

Discover

Take the "Ethical Leadership Styles Questionnaire." How did your results compare to your previous perception of your guiding ethics? Reflecting on life events, role models, and values, what factors could have played a role in developing your ethical framework?

Develop

Spend the next several weeks observing both your own leadership and the leadership of those around you, intentionally looking for how ethics may play a role in decision-making. As you identify ethical styles that differ from your own, reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of utilizing different ethical styles in decision-making and leadership.

12.3 Sample Items From the Ethical Leadership Style Questionnaire

Purpose

1. To develop an understanding of your ethical leadership style
2. To understand how your preferred ethical leadership style relates to other ethical leadership styles

Directions

1. Please read the following 10 hypothetical situations in which a leader is confronted with an ethical dilemma.
2. Place yourself in the role of the leader or manager in the situation.
3. For each situation, indicate with an “X” your *most preferred response*. Your most preferred response is the response that best describes why you would do what you would do in that particular situation. Choose only one response. There are no right or wrong answers.

Response alternatives explained:

- *I would do what is right*: This option means you follow a set of moral rules and do what is expected of you when facing an ethical dilemma. You focus on fulfilling your moral obligations and doing your duty.
- *I would do what benefits the most people*: This option means you try to do what is best for the most people overall when facing an ethical dilemma. You focus on what will result in happiness for the largest number of individuals.
- *I would do what a good person would do*: This option means that you pull from who you are (your character) when facing an ethical dilemma. You act out of integrity, and you are faithful to your own principles.
- *I would do what shows that I care about my close relationships*: This option means that you give attention to your relationships when facing an ethical dilemma. You may give special consideration to those with whom you share a personal bond or commitment.
- *I would do what benefits me the most*: This option means that you do what is best for accomplishing your personal goals and objectives when facing an ethical dilemma. You are not afraid to assert your own interests when resolving problems.
- *I would do what is fair*: This option means that you focus on treating others fairly when facing an ethical dilemma. You try to make sure the benefits and burdens of decisions are shared equitably between everyone concerned.

Situations

1. You are the leader of a manufacturing team and learn that your employees are falsifying product quality results to sell more products. If you report the matter, most of them will lose their jobs, you may lose yours, and your company will take a significant hit to its reputation. What would you do in this situation?
 - A. I would do what is right.
 - B. I would do what benefits the most people.
 - C. I would do what a good person would do.
 - D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
 - E. I would do what benefits me the most.
 - F. I would do what is fair.
2. You have an employee who has been having performance problems, which is making it hard for your group to meet its work quota. This person was recommended to you as a solid performer. You now believe the person's former manager had problems with the employee and just wanted to get rid of the person. If you give the underperforming employee a good recommendation, leaving out the performance problems, you will have an opportunity to pass the employee off to another group. What would you do in this situation?
 - A. I would do what is right.
 - B. I would do what benefits the most people.
 - C. I would do what a good person would do.
 - D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
 - E. I would do what benefits me the most.
 - F. I would do what is fair.
3. Your team is hard-pressed to complete a critical project. You hear about a job opening that would be much better for one of your key employees' career. If this individual leaves the team, it would put the project in danger. What would you do in this situation?
 - A. I would do what is right.
 - B. I would do what benefits the most people.
 - C. I would do what a good person would do.
 - D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
 - E. I would do what benefits me the most.
 - F. I would do what is fair.
4. An employee of yours has a child with a serious illness and is having trouble fulfilling obligations at work. You learn from your administrative assistant that this employee claimed

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40 hours on a timesheet for a week when the employee actually only worked 30 hours. What would you do in this situation?

- A. I would do what is right.
- B. I would do what benefits the most people.
- C. I would do what a good person would do.
- D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
- E. I would do what benefits me the most.
- F. I would do what is fair.

5. You are a manager, and some of your employees can finish their quotas in much less than the allotted time to do so. If upper management becomes aware of this, they will want you to increase the quotas. Some of your employees are unable to meet their current quotas. What would you do in this situation?

- A. I would do what is right.
- B. I would do what benefits the most people.
- C. I would do what a good person would do.
- D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
- E. I would do what benefits me the most.
- F. I would do what is fair.

6. You are an organization's chief financial officer, and you are aware that the chief executive officer and other members of the senior leadership team want to provide exaggerated financial information to keep the company's stock price high. The entire senior management team holds significant stock positions. What would you do in this situation?

- A. I would do what is right.
- B. I would do what benefits the most people.
- C. I would do what a good person would do.
- D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
- E. I would do what benefits me the most.
- F. I would do what is fair.

7. Two new employees have joined your accounting team right out of school. They are regularly found surfing the internet or texting on their phones. Your accounting work regularly requires overtime at the end of the month to get the financial reports completed. These employees refuse to do any overtime, which shifts work to other team members. The other team members are getting resentful and upset. What would you do in this situation?

- A. I would do what is right.
- B. I would do what benefits the most people.

- C. I would do what a good person would do.
 - D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
 - E. I would do what benefits me the most.
 - F. I would do what is fair.
8. You are the director of a neighborhood food cooperative. A member—a single parent with four children—is caught shoplifting \$30 in groceries from the co-op. You suspect this person has been stealing for years. You consider pressing charges. What would you do in this situation?
- A. I would do what is right.
 - B. I would do what benefits the most people.
 - C. I would do what a good person would do.
 - D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
 - E. I would do what benefits me the most.
 - F. I would do what is fair.
9. You have been accused of discriminating against a particular gender in your hiring practices. A new position opens up, and you could hire a candidate of the gender you've been accused of discriminating against over a candidate of another gender, even though the latter candidate has slightly better qualifications. Hiring the former candidate would let you address this accusation and improve your reputation in the company. What would you do in this situation?
- A. I would do what is right.
 - B. I would do what benefits the most people.
 - C. I would do what a good person would do.
 - D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
 - E. I would do what benefits me the most.
 - F. I would do what is fair.
10. You are a professor. One of your best students buys an essay online and turns it in for a grade. Later in the term, the student begins to feel guilty and confesses to you that the paper was purchased. It is the norm at the university to fail a student guilty of plagiarism. You must decide if you will flunk the student. What would you do in this situation?
- A. I would do what is right.
 - B. I would do what benefits the most people.
 - C. I would do what a good person would do.
 - D. I would do what shows that I care about my relationships.
 - E. I would do what benefits me the most.
 - F. I would do what is fair.

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Scoring

To score the questionnaire, sum the number of times you selected each of the items A, B, C, D, E, and F. The sum of A responses represents your preference for *Duty Ethics*, the sum of B responses represents your preference for *Utilitarian Ethics*, the sum of C responses represents your preference for *Virtue Ethics*, the sum of D responses represents your preference for *Caring Ethics*, the sum of E responses represents your preference for *Egoism Ethics*, and the sum of F responses represents your preference for *Justice Ethics*. Place these sums in the Total Scores section that follows.

Total Scores

- A. Duty Ethics: _____
- B. Utilitarian Ethics: _____
- C. Virtue Ethics: _____
- D. Caring Ethics: _____
- E. Egoism Ethics: _____
- F. Justice Ethics: _____

Scoring Interpretation

The scores you received on this questionnaire provide information about your ethical leadership style; they represent your preferred way of addressing ethical dilemmas. Given a situation with an ethical dilemma, this questionnaire points to what ethical perspective is behind the choices you would make to resolve the dilemma. As you look at your total scores, your highest score represents your primary or dominant ethical leadership style, your second-highest score is the next most important, and so on. If you scored 0 for a category, it means that you put lower priority on that particular ethical approach to guide your decision making when facing ethical dilemmas.

- If you scored *higher on Duty Ethics*, it means you follow a set of moral rules and do what is expected of you when facing an ethical dilemma. You focus on fulfilling your moral obligations and doing your duty.
- If you scored *higher on Utilitarian Ethics*, it means that you try to do what is best for the most people overall when facing an ethical dilemma. You focus on what will result in happiness for the largest number of individuals.
- If you scored *higher on Virtue Ethics*, it means that you pull from who you are (your character) when facing an ethical dilemma. You act out of integrity, and you are faithful to your own principles.
- If you scored *higher on Caring Ethics*, it means that you give attention to your relationships when facing an ethical dilemma. You may give special consideration to those with whom you share a personal bond or commitment.

- If you scored higher on *Egoism Ethics*, it means that you do what is best for accomplishing your personal goals and objectives when facing an ethical dilemma. You are not afraid to assert your own interests when resolving problems.
- If you scored higher on *Justice Ethics*, it means that you focus on treating others fairly when facing an ethical dilemma. You try to make sure the benefits and burdens of decisions are shared equitably between everyone concerned.

By comparing your scores regarding each of these ethical perspectives, you can get a sense of what is important to you when addressing an ethical concern. Obviously, if you scored low on any of these categories, it suggests that you give less priority to that ethical perspective. All of the ethical perspectives have merit, so there is no “best” perspective to maintain.

This questionnaire is intended as a self-assessment exercise. Although each ethical approach is presented as a discrete category, it is possible that one category may overlap with another category. It is also possible that you may have an ethical leadership style that is not fully captured in this questionnaire. Since this questionnaire is an abridged version of an expanded questionnaire, you may wish to take the entire questionnaire to gain a more accurate reflection of your ethical approach. It can be taken at www.leaderdecisionmakingsurvey.com.