ETHICS AND INTEGRITY IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Issues and Challenges

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Public administration as a professional field of study and practice is firmly grounded on understanding and applying ethical behavior and practices in public service. This chapter explores the core values that define ethics and integrity in public service, inventories the research literature regarding ethical issues in public administration, identifies obstacles and challenges that confront public administrators who want to lead with integrity, and offers recommendations for becoming ethically competent.

ETHICS AND INTEGRITY DEFINED

There are endless ethics moments throughout life, those occasions when one just does not know what to do in a "right" and "wrong" situation and sometimes in a "right" and "right" situation. They occur in private life and the workplace. And it is much easier to stumble into an ethics quandary than it is to find a way out. Humans err—sometimes with maliciousness in mind, but most of the time bad judgment and misjudgments are made out of ignorance, intolerance, plain stupidity, or the inability to reason through a complicated ethical situation. While the vast majority of government employees try to do the right thing most of the time, even a handful of employees can cause much devastation in the work of government.

If most public employees are ethically motivated, what is the problem? The answer: It is not always easy to figure out what the right thing to do is, especially in complex organizations that have come to dominate modern governance. Rules and regulations, even laws, are helpful, but doing the right thing often means doing more than just following the rules.

Ethics is a term invoked with considerable frequency in the professions, government, and the corporate world. But how might it be defined? Some define ethics as "morality in action"; others assert that ethics involves "a consensus of moral principles." James Norden (2009) offers this definition: "Ethics are the internal rules that drive one to follow or not to follow external rules. Of course, this definition works best when morals are the external rules. Simply being law-abiding begs the ethical question." The definition used in this chapter is as follows: "Ethics are values and principles that guide right and wrong behavior." The key elements of this definition are (1) values and principles, (2) behavior, and (3) right and wrong.

Values and Principles

A value can be an idea, object, practice, or most anything else to which worth is attached. Of course, ethics does not encompass all values. Consider money or status as a value. Most

people attach worth to money and status, but we do not call them values that are essential to a definition of ethics. A value that is translated into an ethic can be thrift (remember Benjamin Franklin), cleanliness (remember the startup of McDonald's), piety (remember the Puritan ethic), work (the Protestant ethic), justice, prudence, compassion, charity, courage, benevolence, and so on.

Principles can be considered values in action. That is, a principle is a prescription for determining how to act in a given situation. Consider the Golden Rule, or treating people with dignity, or telling the truth, or treating others with fairness. These principles prescribe appropriate behavior defined in terms of right and wrong. Violating the principle becomes unethical behavior.

Values and principles are also defined by the professions—medicine, law, clergy, accounting, engineering, and others. Professional associations such as the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), the American Planning Association, and the American Society for Public Administration set forth many values and principles that their members are expected to embrace. These values and principles can be classified broadly as public service values and principles. All call for their members to respect the law, promote the public interest, and serve with integrity. At the same time, more specific behaviors can be proscribed. The ICMA, for example, requires its city managers to serve a community for a minimum of two years unless there are mitigating circumstances (e.g., unexpected illness, family crisis, and so forth). Service of shorter tenure is viewed as harmful to the community. Nor can city managers endorse products that might be used in their city government. Endorsements can lead to both the reality and the appearance of a conflict of interest, which would erode public trust and confidence in the governing body as well as the manager.

Behavior

Ethics is not a spectator sport; it is a contact sport as Carol Lewis (1991) so astutely notes. Ethics is about behavior and consequences. Thinking unethical thoughts is possible, but until those thoughts are translated into behavior, there are no consequences to define "right" or "wrong." Ethics shares with law the notion that it is behavior that matters foremost. Ethics is sometimes equated with morality, as the above definitions suggest. However, the act of thinking immoral thoughts can be defined as immoral itself. Consider the case of former president Jimmy Carter. As a presidential candidate in 1976, he was interviewed by *Playboy* magazine. "The reporter asked me if I had ever been guilty of adultery, and his next question was predictable. I replied truthfully. I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times" (Scheer 1976). To Jimmy Carter, lusting was an immoral act though it was not a behavioral act.

Right and Wrong

The final perhaps most important component in defining ethics is "right and wrong" behavior. In years past right and wrong was typically the province of custom, tradition, and religion. Indeed, one essential reason why ethics has become increasingly important in the modern age is the waning influence of custom, tradition, and religion. Right and wrong are now firmly woven into the fabric of professional occupations and individual choice. Thus right and wrong can be viewed as residing within the individual (some would even contend it is innate) or outside his or her being such as prescribed by codes of ethics or law. Indeed, insanity is commonly defined as the

inability to differentiate between right and wrong behavior. Ethical values and principles such as the Golden Rule or the admonishment to treat others with respect share with law and morality a common denominator—prescriptions and proscriptions for right and wrong.

Integrity

Integrity goes hand in hand with ethics but yet has some qualities that differentiate it from ethics. Consider how the ICMA approaches it. The ICMA (2008) identifies three dimensions of integrity: personal, professional, and organizational.

> Integrity: Demonstrating fairness, honesty, and ethical and legal awareness in personal and professional relationships and activities (requires knowledge of business and personal ethics; ability to understand issues of ethics and integrity in specific situations). Practices that contribute to this core content area are:

- *Personal Integrity*   Demonstrating accountability for personal actions; conducting personal relationships and activities fairly and honestly
- *Professional Integrity*   Conducting professional relationships and activities fairly, honestly, legally, and in conformance with the ICMA Code of Ethics—requires knowledge of administrative ethics and specifically the ICMA Code of Ethics
- *Organizational Integrity*   Fostering ethical behavior throughout the organization through personal example, management practices, and training (requires knowledge of administrative ethics; ability to instill accountability into operations; and ability to communicate ethical standards and guidelines to others)

Professor J. Patrick Dobel (1999) has written extensively about public integrity. At the personal level, he asserts "integrity covers the wholeness of our life . . . integrity flows from the process through which individuals balance beliefs, decide on the right action, and then summon the courage and self-control to act upon those decisions" (2009, 10). Administrators, of course, are individuals who hold appointed offices in public, including government and nonprofit, organizations. Consequently, one is not simply a "free agent." Rather, personal integrity must be coupled with the obligations of office. Dobel (1999, 21–22) regards public integrity as a set of commitments. He identifies seven:

1. Be truthfully accountable to relevant authorities and publics.
2. Address the public values of the political regime.
3. Build institutions and procedures to achieve goals.
4. Ensure fair and adequate participation of the relevant stakeholders.
5. Demand competent performance effectiveness in the execution of policy.
6. Work for efficiency in the operation of government.
7. Connect policy and program with the self-interest of the pubic and stakeholders in such a way that the purposes are not subverted.

These seven commitments are substantial and demanding for even the most well-intentioned public administrator.

In the next section, the ethics literature is inventoried, with a focus on five issue areas that have attracted scholarly inquiry and often bedevil public administrators: (1) ethical decision making

and moral development, (2) ethics laws and regulatory agencies, (3) ethics and organizational performance, (4) ethics management, and (5) the ethical environment.

THE ETHICS LITERATURE

Ethics as a subject has been the topic of study and prescription by philosophers for many centuries, with Western roots dating to the age of antiquity and the pronouncements of Socrates, Plato, and, most notably, Aristotle. Indeed, ethics is often identified as the fount from which knowledge first flowed, as humankind's search for knowing the difference between right and wrong was a fundamental tenet of civilization. These important and enduring philosophies are not the primary focus of the literature reviewed here. Rather, attention is directed at contemporary empirical theory and research published over the past several decades.

Ethical Decision Making and Moral Development

Central to deontological (principle-based reasoning) and teleological (consequences-based reasoning) approaches to ethics, regardless of whether one is examining Kantian ethics or utilitarianism (as espoused by Jeremy Bentham or John Stuart Mill) or Aristotle's treatises on virtue ethics, are ethical decision making and moral development.

These issues are also central to Lawrence Kohlberg's (1980) six stages of moral development that he contends describe an individual's moral reasoning for better or worse. At what he calls the preconventional stage, one responds to obedience and punishment much as a child responds. At the most developed stage, stage 6, one is acting according to universal principles such as justice and fairness. Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. are often held out as examples of stage 6 moral development. Of course different values and behaviors are anticipated for the in-between stages. Kohlberg's theory does not presume that there is a natural evolution; in other words, one's moral development does not always advance. Rather, it presumes that one's moral development can reach one stage (2, 3, 4, 5) and never move beyond it.

A growing number of investigators have been drawn to Kohlberg's theory to test relevant hypotheses. Pamela A. Gibson (2009) launched an investigation of the moral reasoning employed by designated ethics officers in federal agencies. After all, would not one expect those who advise others to "practice what they preach"? Her study involved a questionnaire mailed to 231 ethics officials (100 responded). She found that federal ethics officials operate at the "law and order" reasoning stage as defined by the Kohlbergian model. Principled reasoning is a close second. The dominant reasoning of law and order, she speculates, is likely to be the result of the organizational culture.

Another study based on Kohlberg's theory was conducted by Jurkiewicz and Brown (2000). They examined the link between leadership defined as the effective exercise of power in an organization and ethics. They hypothesized that a positive relationship exists between one's level of ethical reasoning and effective leadership. Forty-two chief executive officers of nonprofit organizations in a large metropolitan community formed their database. Using a sophisticated screening process involving academic and practitioner judges who identified a sample of executives as highly effective, they surveyed two equal-size samples of those judged highly effective and those judged noneffective. Rest's Defining Issues Test was the measurement instrument. Their findings support the primary hypothesis that effective executives are more likely than noneffective executives to evaluate moral decisions on the basis of calculated rights, values, or principles (2000, 205).

The reader may be inclined to think that research on ethical decision making and moral devel-

opment is driven by Kohlbergian theory and Rest's Defining Issues Test (Rest 1986). This is not so. Other investigators have employed case studies to gain insight into the ethical reasoning and moral development of officeholders. For example, Frederickson and Newman (2001) explored the decision by a high-ranking manager in the U.S. Forest Service to resign her position. She "exited with voice" and, according to the investigators, is a moral exemplar. Their theoretical framework was based on Hart's (1992) notion of a moral episode. The episode had to do with Gloria Flora's judgment that, as the supervisor of a national forest in Nevada, she could no longer carry out her stewardship duties in the face of powerful economic and political pressures to exploit protected federal lands from mining, timber production, and livestock grazing. Gloria Flora's more than twenty years of service with the U.S. Forest Service was terminated with less than three years left before vestment in the civil service retirement system. She paid a high price, emotionally and financially, for her moral courage. Frederickson and Newman then ask, Why would she do this? The answer—because she could not compromise her strong belief to do the "right" thing. "She was motivated to act as she did out of a sense of responsibility" (Newman 2001, 360).

Studies of whistle-blowing also typically focus on ethical decision making. Alan Lovell (2003) investigated the behavior of what might be called "near whistle-blowers" among certified accountants and human resources professionals in seven accounting firms in the United Kingdom. Using an interview methodology, he sought answers to three questions: What types of issues produce "ethical twinges" (i.e., some level of ethical discomfort)? Why were these issues ethically problematic? How were they handled or coped with? Nine case examples of suppressed whistle-blowing were reported. The cases paint a picture of organizational life in which "the fear of impairing one's future career prospects was a significant factor shaping the muteness of many of the managers about their respective ethical dilemmas" (201). Lovell's research points to the often compelling and suppressing influence that organizational imperatives can have on an employee's moral agency. Suppressed whistle-blowing (moral muteness), Lovell contends, is an enduring and troubling phenomenon in modern organizations. What to do about it remains a perplexing problem and a challenge to future researchers.

Rosemary O'Leary, in *The Ethics of Dissent* (2006), presents insightful and compelling accounts of public administrators in federal, state, and county governments who often found themselves caught between the proverbial "rock and a hard place." Should they go along to get along? Or should they resist? If so, what form of resistance should they assume? Blow the whistle, leak information to the media, engage in principled dissent, file a lawsuit, or hunker down in guerrilla warfare? O'Leary's foray into the ethics of dissent led her to conclude that what she describes as "guerrilla government" is here to stay and must be recognized and managed. Left unmanaged, she suggests, it can be devastating to both guerrillas and government.

Ethics Laws and Regulatory Agencies

Ethics statutes and laws are commonplace in governments of all descriptions. American states, for example, have ethics offices, boards, or commissions that are authorized to investigate alleged cases of unethical behavior. Many cities and counties (e.g., Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami–Dade County) have ethics commissions to investigate real and alleged wrongdoing. The U.S. government acted following the Watergate scandal and resignation of President Nixon in 1975. In 1978, Congress passed the Ethics in Government Act, establishing the U.S. Office of Government Ethics.

A number of studies describe and assess ethics regulatory bodies. Smith (2003b) has studied the practices of the Florida Ethics Commission along with those of Connecticut and New York. His comparative case study was based on anonymous interviews with sixty ethics officials and an exami-

nation of laws, rules, and regulations employed in these states. The central paradigm that emerged from his study was enforcement (286). By this he means that "complaint making, investigations, and adjudicative proceedings all were geared toward, and products of, this enforcement function" (287). His study primarily compares and contrasts the practices of the state agencies; it does not allow the reader to reach conclusions regarding "best practices" or which state ethics commission is more or less effective than another, nor why this might be the case.

Ethics agencies and practices at the local level of government have also been scrutinized. The city of Houston's zero-gift policy has been assessed by Herbert Fain (2002). He contends that it has deterred unethical behavior by city employees. This policy has also improved the effectiveness of two investigation and enforcement agencies—the Houston Office of Inspector General and the Harris County district attorney. Fain notes that Houston has suffered no further embarrassment due to questionable acceptance of gifts since this policy was put into effect (67).

A contrarian perspective on the zero-gift policy is offered by Denhardt and Gilman (2002, 75). They suggest that while "such a policy leaves no room for doubt abut expectations, it also leaves no room for participating in basic social graces." Public employees sometimes receive unsolicited flowers, cakes, even a basket of apples from aggrieved citizens in appreciation for a deed well done by a competent, caring worker. A zero-gift policy, with its absolutist approach, Denhardt and Gilman contend, can create unnecessarily awkward situations that "defy commonsense standards of reasonableness and propriety" (77). A better solution, in their judgment, is simply to require disclosure of all gifts.

The legal and constitutional aspects of ethics issues have also received considerable attention. John Rohr (2002) offers a constitutional analysis of the ethical aftermath of privatization and contracting out. He explores the arguments developed by the justices of the U.S. Supreme Court and concludes that the "link between ethics and constitutional law is forged by the oath many public servants take to uphold the Constitution of the United States" (1). Robert Gray (2002) reviewed the legal history and justifications for affirmative action with attention to state and federal judiciary decision making.

Comparative international studies have also been launched. Robert Schwartz (2007–8) investigated ethical regulatory failures in Canada and Israel. The Canadian case focused on the drinking-water tragedy in Walkerton, Ontario, in May 2000 when water became infected with E. coli that was discharged from farmers' fields into the town's water supply after a heavy rainstorm. More than twenty-three hundred people among the forty-eight hundred in the town fell ill, some with many long-lasting effects. The Israeli case dealt with building safety: In June 2001 the dance floor in the Versailles Banquet Hall in Jerusalem collapsed, killing twenty-three people and injuring more than four hundred. Both cases involved, in Schwartz's view, breaches in oversight ethics. While the Canadian case resulted in policy changes to strengthen regulatory vigilance, the Israeli case did not. Schwartz puzzled over these contrasting outcomes and concluded that the difference was not due to regulatory capture by industry but was more likely the result of different political circumstances.

These studies add significant insight into ethics laws and the practices of regulatory agencies and, when taken into consideration by reflective public administrators, offer practical guidance in managing the work of their organizations.

Ethics and Organizational Performance

Efficiency, economy, and effectiveness have been the hallmark values of modern public administration ever since Woodrow Wilson declared that "the field of administration is a field of

business" (1887, 20). Public officeholders, so presumed Wilson and his intellectual successors, were expected to be men and women of high moral character. Thus there was little reason to be concerned about the need to add a fourth *e*—ethics—to this holy trilogy. Times change, though, and ethics has become academic talk and shop talk.

One might well think that this trend is a result of increasing incidents of wrongdoing. Upon closer examination, however, a more compelling explanation is plausible—the growing recognition that productive, high-performing units can add value to their organization by adhering to practices and behaviors that promote ethics and integrity. Both practicing public managers and public affairs scholars are devoting greater energy to understanding and building ethical workplaces. They are also gaining greater appreciation of the role that professional associations and ethics codes play in fostering organizational integrity.

Still, scandal and well-publicized ethical failings in public agencies are newsworthy and can bring about organizational change. Sadly, there is evidence that even what might be regarded as minor incidents of wrongdoing can breed an organizational climate of deceit, incompetence, and corruption. Taking a case study approach based on fifteen years of experience in federal and state agencies, David W. Haines (2003–4) describes how deceit, incompetence, and corruption became so routinized through minor human failings that the organizations he worked for became the antithesis of the rational, productive, efficient agencies they were designed to be.

In summary, there is a substantial and growing interest in probing the relationship between ethics and organizational performance. On the one hand, the literature suggests that this subject has been thoroughly examined. On the other hand, this is not so evident, because many studies rely on perceptions and attitudes and therefore take only a partial step toward closing the gap in explicating the relationship between ethical behavior and organizational performance.

Ethics Management

Can agency leaders and public officials manage ethics in the workplace in a manner similar to managing budgets, policies, or people? Does ethics management imply controlling the hearts and minds of employees? Perhaps. Yet even simply developing and adopting a code of ethics or a statement of principles is "managing ethics in the workplace." Ethics management is not a new enterprise. What is new is how it is thought about. If it is viewed as the systematic and conscious effort to foster organizational integrity, as article 4 of the American Society for Public Administration's code of ethics declares, then there is such a thing as ethics management. If it is viewed only as control, then it may be disingenuous to contend that there can be effective ethics management.

A number of inquiries have focused on this subject. Among the more resourceful are several conducted by West and Berman. Their research, published in 2003, reports the results of survey of city managers in all 338 U.S. cities with populations over sixty-five thousand. This study focused on the use and effectiveness of municipal audit committees, including an analysis of how audit committees promote accountability and help resolve ethical issues related to financial management. They report that there is a positive relationship between audit committee activities and the presence of ethics training in a municipality and that audit committees actively seek to detect ethical wrongdoing (2003, 356).

Their study was followed by another (West and Berman 2004) that describes and assesses the state of ethics training in U.S. cities. Three questions were investigated: (1) What are the stated purposes of ethics training? (2) What topics are covered and what are the pedagogical and delivery approaches? (3) What are the correlates of ethics training? A related questions asks, Why do some

jurisdictions engage in more—or less—training than other jurisdictions? Also, are those cities that invest more heavily in ethics training more likely to enjoy higher levels of organizational productivity? The first question probes the fit between ethics training and important organizational practices such as hiring and promotion. The second question deals directly with the how-to of training employees. The third explores the factors associated with the use and impact of training such as the ethical leadership of top management, municipal resources and capabilities, and how ethics training influences productivity and the culture of the workplace.

Another investigator who has examined ethics management approaches and strategies is Robert Smith (2003a). His study focused on ethics administrators in government agencies and corporate ethics officers in the private sector. Who and what are ethics administrators and officers? Why are they needed? Are they effective? What difference do they make? His research answers the who, what, and why questions but, as he acknowledges, does not answer the effectiveness questions. He asserts that his inquiry raises more questions than answers. Still, Smith's study offers helpful insight into initiatives that contribute to organizational integrity.

These studies take important steps toward improving our understanding and knowledge of what it means to manage ethics, how it can be done, and what outcomes agency managers can expect. Nonetheless, there remains a need for systematic information about the variation in ethics management strategies and their consequences. While much has been learned about these matters in U.S. local, state, and federal agencies and nonprofit organizations, there is much more to learn about similar practices in countries worldwide.

The Ethical Environment

Studies of the ethical environment are wide-ranging in theory, methodology, and geography. Some question how the ethical environment of one city or community is interwoven with the ethical conduct of public officials (Eimicke, Cohen, and Salazar 2000; Ghere 1996, 1999). Others examine the relationship between ethics and building trust in one's agency and community (De Vries 2002). Still others explore how public managers, elected officials, and citizens view one another ethically and do or do not hold common outlooks that may influence private-public partnerships in their communities.

Privatization, contracting out, and commitment to competition are viewed by some scholars as the tools of entrepreneurial behavior and decision making in the public sector. But are there significant ethical risks associated with employing these tools? Eimicke, Cohen, and Salazar (2000) investigated this question through case studies of Orange County, California; Indianapolis, Indiana; San Diego, California; and Bogota, Columbia. These cases, they contend, are typical of privatization and contracting out in cities and, "although many decisions are carried out without controversy and with beneficial results, ethical questions abound" (240). In other words, public sector entrepreneurialism involves high-level ethical risk taking.

Studies of ethics, leadership, and public trust can also be found in the literature. Justin Marlowe (2004) draws on data from the 1996 General Social Survey to explore public perceptions of the trust placed in public administrators. He observes that it is very difficult to determine whether or not public administrators are part of the problem (declining trust in government) or part of the solution. Indeed, he concludes that they could be both and calls for future investigators to "explore whether citizens are in fact aware of the constraints that shape public administrators' work environments, and whether knowledge of the constraints affects public trust in the same administrators" (108–109). Similar research by Feldheim and Wang (2003–4), who employed survey data of U.S. city officials, examined the relationship between the ethical behavior of public

employees and public trust. A key research question was, Does ethical behavior by civil servants influence public trust? They concluded that it does, as they found a positive relationship between the chief administrators' views of the trust placed by the citizens in their city governments and the ethical behaviors of employees. That is, managers who viewed their citizens as placing high levels of trust in city government also viewed their employees as having high levels of ethical behavior. Feldheim and Wang believe that their research findings provide evidence that public trust is increased through the demonstration of "integrity, openness, loyalty, ethical competency," among public employees (73).

It is widely presumed that politicians and administrators find it challenging to act with integrity in carrying out their duties. Systematic research documenting this presumption is, however, uncommon. One rare study is Michiel S. De Vries's (2002) investigation of the honesty of local government politicians and administrators in seventeen countries. His study is also an example of the effort to link traditional ethics theory with empirical research. Four philosophical views—teleological and deontological ethics theories, virtue ethics, and dialogic ethics—are used to frame the work. Nearly ten thousand respondents were asked "questions about their valuation of honesty in general and more specific questions about their opinions on the disclosure of facts and the presentation of one-sided facts" (313). Subsets of fifteen politicians and administrators in each of 408 communities in thirteen countries enabled DeVries and his colleagues to analyze community as well as individual proclivities toward being honest. At the individual level, his statistical model could explain only 5 percent of the variance. However, at the community level, his statistical model performed much better, explaining 26 percent of the variance in the politicians' responses and 13 percent among administrators. These findings, he concludes, suggest that "opinions on ethical behavior are foremost socially-culturally determined" (330). Furthermore, "public officials will tell the truth when they can afford it, and when they are dishonest, this can be explained by the circumstances that do not allow them to tell the truth" (332). How well does ethical theory explain these outcomes? Not very well at all, concludes DeVries. Rather, as suggested above, social-cultural influences appear to make the more significant difference in actual behaviors. Perplexing? So it would seem.

Do ethical communities and cultures beget ethical governments and governance? Or is it the converse? It is, of course, rather difficult to develop a meaningful measure of either an ethical community or an ethical government. Still, the argument is persuasive that one is not likely to find ethical governance in a community rife with an unethical culture. It also seems persuasive to assert that no matter how difficult the challenge might be, managers and public officials that promote and embrace strong ethical values and practices can raise the ethical consciousness of their communities.

Studies of community, ethics, and trust building provide a foundation for further inquiry. There can be little disagreement, however, about the need to more fully understand what community leaders can and should do to foster ethical and trustworthy government, and, by the same measure, what government leaders need to do to build trustworthy relationships with members of their communities.

ETHICS AND INTEGRITY IN ACTION

There are many pitfalls that can ensnare even the most ethically well-intentioned person. A kaleidoscope of rules, regulations, and laws certainly help individuals stay on an ethical path, but no matter how complex an organizational situation might be, it is up to the individual to exercise moral agency. That is why ethical reasoning is so important. For without the ability to reason

through a situation, one is largely left to the moral agency of the organization to determine right from wrong. When taken to the dark side of organizational life, the individual's moral agency might be stripped away entirely. "What's good for the organization is good for me" might be the lament—a dangerous supposition, for sure.

Progressive leaders and managers understand the dangers that lurk in the "shadow of organization" and have instituted practices that ensure that an individual's moral agency is not sacrificed on the altar of organizational self-interest. What are those practices? First and foremost is exemplary leadership. Those who pronounce that their supervisors and street-level workers must adhere to the highest ethical standards in the conduct of their work must themselves adhere to those same standards. Leaders must be exemplars in their personal and professional lives. Is this more easily said than done? Certainly, but it is essential. Much the same can be said about peer leadership. Middle managers and even cops on the beat must demonstrate day in and day out their commitment to ethical behavior. Failure to do so can result only in organizations without integrity.

Second, ethics training in cities and counties across America and internationally is becoming more common than uncommon. A study (Berman 1996) of all 554 U.S. cities with populations over fifty thousand reported that there is a great deal of ethics training under way. Two of every three cities reported that they do training. New employees are the target of most training in six of ten cities, while four of ten cities reported that managers are also trained. A smaller number of cities said that ethics training is mandatory.

Third, while government employees are usually subject to state ethics laws, many governments have chosen to adopt a higher standard that is expressed in their own code of ethics. Elected and appointed public managers hold very positive attitudes toward codes of ethics. The conventional wisdom is that codes have a positive influence in governance, especially in deterring unethical acts by ethically motivated public servants. That is, unethical officials are likely to be unethical regardless of whether a code exists or not, but those who want to be ethical find a code helpful in guiding their behavior. Of course, the motivation for adopting a code is often a series of unethical behaviors or a scandal.

Fourth, recruiting and promoting employees based in part on their adherence to ethical standards is growing. Personnel decisions—hiring, evaluating, promoting, firing—are essential features of all organizations. Designing evaluation processes that incorporate an ethical element can be a challenging and complicated task.

Taken together, these practices—exemplary leadership, ethics training, codes, and personnel selection processes that incorporate a standard of conduct—represent a comprehensive approach toward strengthening the ethics culture in public organizations. This is not wishful thinking, as it is happening across America today. Ethics is in action, although the enterprise remains a work in progress. Consider the high-profile story of the impeached and ousted Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich, who is alleged to have offered to sell the Senate seat held by former senator and now President Obama in return for political contributions. At the local level there is yet much work to be done. Consider the recent sordid history of nearly 150 New Jersey state senators, mayors, county executives, and council members who have been arrested and charged with corruption over the past decade (Barbaro 2009).

Obstacles and Challenges

The obstacles and challenges facing those who preside over and administer government organizations are increasingly complex. Among other things, the boundary between those things public and those things private has largely disappeared, leaving in its wake much uncertainty about how

to do the right thing. The age of networking and privatization is here and, with it, a vast blur in the ability of citizens, elected officials, and organizational managers to distinguish between public and private organizations, public and private managers, and public and private ethics.

The ethical challenges ushered in by the fast-forward buttons of the Internet, the World Wide Web, electronic mail, direct TV beamed from orbiting satellites, and other breathtaking and powerful communication technologies of the information age are no less daunting. The future is here; it is now. It is both a virtual "now" and a very real "now." Elected officials and public managers, like their private sector counterparts, must not only understand how to harness information technology within their organizations; they must be able to understand and manage the human-technical-organizational dynamics that information technology brings to the workplace.

The knowledge explosion wrought by the electronic age of computers and high-speed, space-age communication has truly transformed the world, giving meaning to the global village and citizen in ways unimaginable a mere decade ago. The globalization of economies, communication, education, commerce, and even warfare and peace is redefining the nation-state and presenting innumerable challenges to public officials in the United States and abroad. Public organizations must add value to their products and services in order to withstand the ever-increasing pressures of worldwide competition. Responsive, high-performing organizations are a necessity, not a luxury. Government agencies are not immune to these pressures, and political executives and career public managers know this. They also know that the forces of globalization can tempt governments to devalue the ethical overhead that is part and parcel of getting things done. Getting things done and staying competitive can be—but are not necessarily—compatible with high ethical standards.

Ethics are involved in all manner of public activities, such as protecting the community from criminals, ensuring that confidential information does not get in the wrong hands, keeping people safe from human-created and environmental hazards, and much more. Ethical behavior, which includes respect for citizens, the promotion of democratic values such as citizen participation in governance, and commitment to the rule of law, is of paramount importance. The citizenry expects those who occupy elected and appointed offices in federal, state, and local governments to be ethical in carrying out their duties. In fact, Washington and state and local governments have gone to considerable length to ensure that the public's business is conducted properly. How? They have created ethics oversight commissions and adopted ethics laws, ordinances, rules, and codes to encourage ethical behavior. While these measures are useful and have a proper place, they are frequently insufficient. Following rules, regulations, and the law to stay out of trouble is important, but it is the moral minimum.

Perhaps the most important and largest challenge, however, is learning how to become ethically competent.

Becoming Ethically Competent

What knowledge, skills, and abilities does one need to be ethically competent? This is not an easy question to answer, as there is considerable debate about the matter. It is, of course, difficult to imagine that a public manager would be regarded as ethically competent if he had no knowledge of the profession's code of ethics, relevant ethics ordinances, or state ethics laws. Nor is it imaginable that one could become ethically competent without having the skills and ability to recognize an ethical issue and act appropriately to resolve it.

Another view of ethical competency is offered by James S. Bowman and his colleagues (2004). They contend that ethically competent administrators must understand and practice moral reasoning, be able to sort through competing values, and engage in prudent decision

making. More specifically, they note that four abilities are needed: (a) principled moral reasoning, (b) recognition of ethics-related conflicts, (c) refusal to do something unethical, and (d) application of ethical theory.

As might be surmised, becoming ethically competent is not a simple or straightforward task. Yet, it is doable. And, it is imperative that men and women entering public service become ethically competent managers. An ethically competent manager must have an awareness of and sensitivity to ethical concerns in the organizational environment and must be able to differentiate between ethical and other management issues when circumstances warrant a distinction.

High on any list of competencies is the mandate to *serve the public interest.* In short, serving the public interest requires a government manager to place the public interest above his or her self-interests or the organization's self-interests. This is not an easy thing to do. As Kenneth Ashworth, an experienced public servant, puts it, "Working inside organizations, you will feel pressures to carry out orders you feel uneasy about, and, to get ahead, there will be temptations to compromise yourself and your principles or instincts" (2001, 162). This is not serving the public interest, is it? Of course, defining the public interest from the vantage point of government management is not always a straightforward matter. Still, it is incumbent on the ethically competent manager to make every effort to carry out his or her duties in a manner that is consistent with the public interest. The ethically competent manager must draw on his or her knowledge of the public interest and must possess the necessary skills and abilities to ensure that the public interest prevails.

Intertwined with serving the public interest is *respect for the law.* The rule of law is critical to democratic governance, and it is expected that those sworn to uphold the law will do just that, although there can be a place for legitimate, principled dissent. Public managers may not be elected officials who are charged with the responsibility to enact laws that govern the land. However, they are vital actors in energizing the law. The ethically competent public manager understands his or her role in a democracy and must act in a manner that is lawful and respectful of his or her elected bosses.

Other competencies place an emphasis on skills and abilities. One is the skill and ability to *recognize and differentiate between ethical issues and day-to-day management issues.* This is no trivial matter, as it can be difficult at times to discern which is which, and sometimes the two are undistinguishable. However, to mistake a management issue as an ethical issue or vice versa can result in mismanagement or improper intervention. Although it was asserted in a previous section that ethics can be managed from an organizational perspective, one should not conclude that all ethics issues can be subsumed as a type of management issue. Consider the matter of solicitations in the workplace. While this might be viewed as unethical issue, it can also be viewed as a management issue. Consider fund-raising efforts to support nonprofit organizations such as United Way. How employees are solicited can make the difference in determining whether it is an ethical issue or a management issue. Should employees feel pressured to "go along to get along," there would most likely be considerable anxiety and ethical angst.

Another competency, to *embrace ethical practices and behavior in the workplace,* also places an emphasis on skills and abilities. While most managers would find this meritorious, it is also the case that few managers actually do it. Why? Too often supervisors and top management fail to recognize the value in emphasizing ethical behavior until there is a serious issue or problem. There is a tendency to be reactive rather than proactive. Moreover, there is the possibility that higher-level managers may be unaware of misconduct at work. If employees do not report ethical problems, organizational managers may not recognize problems until a crisis is at hand.

Becoming an ethically competent manager also means having the ability to engage in *ethical reasoning,* an approach to resolving issues and dilemmas that can be taught and learned.

Ethical Reasoning

Public managers often approach "doing the right thing" from a utilitarian perspective. That is, they make decisions that benefit the greatest number of residents (or employees, when decisions apply only to the government workforce) while minimizing the potential harm. This "do no harm" approach is attractive because it is straightforward and on many occasions easy to understand. Still, there are times when these qualities are not sufficient. So what do administrators do when faced with especially difficult ethics moments? Some apply a blend of normative philosophies—utilitarianism, principles, and virtues—in what James H. Svara (1997) calls the "ethical triangle." Debra Stewart (1984, 20) adds that "most managers are neither pure deontologists, nor pure utilitarians, but rather operate according to a kind of ethical pluralism." Others apply ethical reasoning, which incorporates some aspects of the classic normative approaches but also emphasizes a decision-making logic and process. Carol W. Lewis (1991, 101–2) describes ethical reasoning as "a form of specialized problem solving . . . [that] . . . includes public service values, a systematic perspective, fact-finding, screening tools, and feedback devices and assessment tools."

Terry L. Cooper (2006) places ethical reasoning at the center of choice intended to resolve an ethical problem. Cooper's model "does not assume that ethical decisions are, can, or should be purely rational and principled" (29). Rather, human feelings are an inseparable part of our ethical life, he asserts. Values and judgments are at the crucible of the decision-making process to resolve an ethical problem. The individual must learn how to draw upon his or her moral imagination—acquire the ability to produce a movie in his or her mind, with realistic characters, a believable script, and clear imagery—to project probable consequences of the ethical choices the individual makes in given situation. Ethical reasoning emphasizes the dynamics and interplay between alternatives, values that might be derived from principles or virtues, and commonsense judgment to resolve a challenging ethical dilemma.

This section has discussed what it means to become ethically competent. In summary, it can be asserted that an ethically competent public manager is (1) committed to high standards of personal and professional behavior, (2) has knowledge of relevant ethics codes and laws, (3) has the ability to engage in ethical reasoning when confronted with challenging situations, (4) is able to identify and act upon public service ethics and values, and (5) promotes ethical practices and behavior in public agencies and organizations (Menzel 2010, 18).

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Public service ethics and integrity are the topics of more than a half dozen new books. In 2005, H. George Frederickson and Richard K. Ghere edited the comprehensive review *Ethics in Public Management,* which covers topics such as leadership, organization, accountability, new managerialism, corruption, and globalization. Also appearing in 2005 was Carol W. Lewis and Stuart C. Gilman's second edition of Lewis's landmark book *The Ethics Challenge in Public Service,* appropriately subtitled *A Problem-Solving Guide.* In 2006, two additional books found their way into print. Jonathan P. West and Evan M. Berman in the edited volume *The Ethics Edge* (2006) focus attention on ethical issues in city management. The same year, Terry L. Cooper completed the fifth edition of *The Responsible Administrator,* underscoring once more the importance of responsibility and integrity in the management of administrative bodies. In 2007, three more books made their mark—Donald C. Menzel's *Ethics Management in Public Administration* offers guidance for those who not only want to more fully understand the dynamics of ethical and unethical behavior in the workplace but also are motivated to change the culture of their organization. James Svara added in *The Ethics Primer*

for Public Administrators in Government and Nonprofit Organizations (2007) that managers must place ethics at the center of their work and build strong ethical cultures in their organizations. William L. Richter and Fran Burke produced a second edition of *Combating Corruption/Encouraging Ethics,* which offers practical guidance to management ethics. Breaking new ground in 2010 was Menzel's latest work, *Ethics Moments in Government: Cases and Controversies.* This book provides a framework and guidance for administrators in their quest for ethical competency.

Europeans have moved to center stage in investigating ethics issues as well. Transatlantic dialogues involving the Study Group on Ethics and Integrity of Governance of the European Group of Public Administration and the Section on Ethics of the American Society for Public Administration have been convened, one in Europe and the other in the United States. The dialogue in 2005 yielded the edited volume *Ethics and Integrity of Governance: Perspectives Across Frontiers* (Huberts, Maesschalck, and Jurkiewicz 2008). This volume has chapters on public service ethos, values, rationality and effectiveness of governance, and integrity management and instruments. A second dialogue, in 2007, resulted in another edited volume, *Ethics and Integrity in Public Service* (Cox 2009), which contains chapters on ethical foundations, management, leadership, and competency. This spate of books certainly acknowledges the rapidly growing interest in and need for new information and knowledge on ethics and integrity in public service worldwide. All recognize the need to view organizations as organic, living, and learning enterprises while at the same time placing the moral agency of the manager at the forefront of public life.

Terry L. Cooper (2004, 404) calls on ethics scholars to collaborate and focus on the "big" questions in administrative ethics:

1. What are the normative foundations for public administration ethics?
2. How do American administrative ethical norms fit into a global context?
3. How can organizations be designed to be supportive of ethical conduct?
4. When should people be treated equally in order to treat them fairly, and when should they be treated unequally?

As suggested in this chapter, studies of ethical decision making and moral development certainly contribute to a discussion of normative foundations for public administration ethics in that they raise fundamental issues about the role of administrators in exercising moral reasoning in democratic polities and societies transitioning from authoritarian regimes to more democratic regimes. When should managers "go along to get along," and when shouldn't they? What is a citizen administrator? What are the administrator's obligations to protecting constitutional values? Advancing the public interest? These questions are part and parcel of understanding ethical decision making and moral development.

Cooper raises the question of whether or not a global ethic is emerging and, if so, what the American experience has to contribute to a global ethic. Scholarship on ethics laws and regulations contributes to the discussion of American administrative norms in a global context. The research literature on American experiences illustrates both the diversity and the value added by commitment to the rule of law. Diversity in ethics laws and regulations in the U.S. provides little evidence of the imminent arrival of a universal governance ethic in the United States, not to mention the possibility of the global ethic that Cooper ponders. At the same time, greater global interdependence resulting from trade, travel, and technological advances in communication in combination with a growing emphasis on the rule of law might well suggest that a global ethic will evolve. Commitment to the rule of law presages the evolution of what Rohr (1989) calls a minimalist compliance conception of ethical behavior; that is, behavior that is legal is also ethical.

Perhaps most notable is what scholars laboring in the fields of organizational performance and ethics management have to say about the question, What can be done to design organizations to support ethical conduct? The short answer is as follows: Organizations can do and are doing a great deal, ranging from the development of codes of acceptable behavior to providing ethics training to conducting ethics audits and more. Still to come, however, are the identification and diffusion of best ethics management strategies and practices.

As Cooper aptly observes, the Progressive Age formula of treating everyone the same meant treating everyone fairly, but this is no longer the nostrum it once was. The age of standardization and the decline of patronage government were well suited for the belief in and practice that equal treatment for all is fair treatment for all. Postmodern societies along with ethnic, racial, gender, and age diversity have challenged elected officials and administrators around the world to rethink how to treat people unequally and yet be fair. Ethics scholars have probably contributed less to this discussion topic than to the other topics suggested by Cooper. Still, the studies that explore the ramifications of privatization are helpful in that they point to who benefits and who loses from an ethical perspective. One might also contend that studies of trust building within and between communities add to this discussion. It is hard to imagine how one might treat some unequally and some fairly without a high degree of trust among all involved. These are, indeed, big questions.

Still, the quest for ethical governance writ large is without end and ever more important in the twenty-first century. In this postmodernism age, will the ethical standards and traditions of years past be sustainable? Or is a new, emerging postmodern ethics on the horizon? These questions beg for answers that lie in the path of future research.

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