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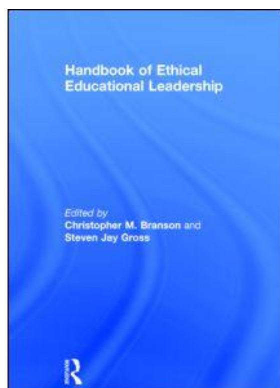

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Managing Ethical Dilemmas

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MANAGING ETHICAL DILEMMAS

NEIL CRANSTON, LISA C. EHRICH, AND MEGAN KIMBER

Over the past decade there has been considerable growth in the literature pertaining to ethics, ethical decision making, and ethical dilemmas. While this attention has, to some extent, been a consequence of scandals within both the public sector and the private sector, it also needs to be recognized that with organizational changes based on globalization and neoliberalism, more leaders at more levels in a variety of contexts are experiencing ethical dilemmas. As one of our interview respondents asserted, ethical dilemmas are the "bread and butter" of leaders' work. In this chapter, we review a decade of research and writing we have undertaken to investigate the ethical dilemmas experienced by organizational leaders. We draw out the differences and similarities in the ethical dilemmas faced by leaders in schools, universities, and the public service, highlighting the complexities and challenges inherent in them. This discussion leads us to a conceptual model for identifying and resolving ethical dilemmas. We then introduce a scenario similar to those we have work-shopped with principals across Australia. Use of this scenario by practitioners and researchers enables them to experience the complex web of ethical dilemmas that leaders confront. A set of recommendations is posited. These recommendations are drawn from the ideas of leaders who have worked with us on this and similar dilemmas. Such recommendations provide a practical, albeit still challenging, means to better understand and resolve the ethical dilemmas that are prevalent in schools today. To provide a context for this review, we begin by discussing several theoretical approaches to ethics, ethical decision making, and ethical dilemmas.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO ETHICS AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Ethics

The term "ethics" comes from the Greek *ethos*, which means "character"; therefore, an ethical person is someone who has character. Defining the nature of character is likely to be difficult and highly contextually based. Not surprisingly, the meaning of ethics has been, and continues to be, a subject of debate. Plato is attributed as saying that ethics is what we ought to do or how we ought to live our lives. Similarly, Hosmer (1987, p. 91) maintains that ethics is "the study of proper thought and conduct." Yet what constitutes "ought" and "proper conduct" is a value-laden question. Because of the considerable differences in cultures and societies across the world, it is understandable that there is a "plurality of ethical views" (Robinson, 2010, p. 178), and what is considered proper in one context may not be in another.

Ethics can be understood in terms of what it is not. For instance, corruption, fraud, illegal behavior, and abuse of power are deemed unethical practices (Hunter, 2012), in contrast to practices such as honesty, integrity, and professionalism (Kuther, 2003). Francis and Armstrong (2003) put forward a set of ethical principles for organizations to help minimize the risk of litigation. These include dignity, equitability, prudence, honesty, openness, goodwill, and avoidance of suffering. While principles such as the aforementioned have been codified by professional bodies to provide guidance on acceptable practice for members of those respective professions (Ehrich, Kimber, Cranston, & Starr, 2011), principles are limiting, as they do not make any allowance for competing priorities or contextual constraints (Sumsion, 2000).

Ethics and Leadership

In recent decades, ethics has emerged as an important field of inquiry for leaders in a variety of contexts such as schools, the public sector, universities, and other organizations (Ciulla, 2006; Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2006; Cranston, Ehrich, Kimber, & Starr, 2012; Kane & Patapan, 2006; Preston, Samford, & Connors, 2002; Robinson, 2010). The reason for its emergence can be explained in two key ways. First, there has been heightened media and public awareness of unethical behaviors such as corruption and fraud among organizational leaders (Trevino, 1986). This awareness has led to stronger calls for accountability and transparency, leading to the establishment of university programs in applied ethics, widespread use of professional codes of conduct in private and public sectors, and the establishment of anti-corruption committees or bodies (Kimber, Carrington, Mercer, & Bland, 2011).

Second, writers and researchers in the field of leadership have begun to acknowledge that leadership is not a technical or rational endeavor. Rather it consists of moral and ethical dimensions (Campbell, 1997; Duignan, 2006; Starratt, 1996), since leaders are actively engaged in decision making based on values (Robinson, 2010; Walker & Shakotko, 1999). Hodgkinson (1991, p. 11) supports this when he says, "values, morals and ethics are the very stuff of leadership and administrative life."

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The realization that ethics lies at the heart of leadership (Ciulla, 2006) has enabled a more humanistic understanding of leadership and a wider appreciation of the complexity facing leaders as they make values-based decisions.

Leaders often make decisions with little or no knowledge of theoretical approaches to ethics. Yet Ciulla (2006) maintains that an understanding of theory is important in understanding what ethics is all about. Freakley and Burgh (2000) concur when they state that an understanding of ethical theories is useful for helping leaders to organize their perspectives and beliefs in a more coherent manner. The next section considers a number of well-known theoretical approaches to ethics.

Ethical Theories

The first ethical theory considered here is "*consequentialism,* where ethical decisions are based primarily on calculating the *good* in terms of consequences" (Preston, 2007, p. 36, emphasis in original). A person who follows this type of perspective would make a decision after weighing up the likely consequences and then would choose an alternative that produced the best result (Freakley & Burgh, 2000). Utilitarianism is an example of a consequentialist approach (Preston, 2007; Preston, Samford, & Connors, 2002). Its advocates maintain that the best result would be one that maximized the good, or happiness, for the most people (Robinson, 2010). Identifying what constitutes this "good" is highly subjective and problematic.

In contrast to consequentialism is *non-consequentialism* or *deontology.* Those who adopt a non-consequentialist perspective refer to absolute or general principles that are said to be applicable in all situations (Robinson, 2010). For these theorists, it is rules rather than consequences that count (Stewart, 2000). Subscribers to this perspective would make ethical judgments based on duty, rights, laws, motive, intuition, or reason. The Golden Rule of "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" illustrates this understanding of ethics (Preston, 2007). There are two versions of non-consequentialism—divine command theory and Kantian moral theory (Preston, 2007; Stewart, 2000). In divine command theory, "the duty or right to obey is revealed by a divine authority," such as in the Bible or the Qur'an (Preston, 2007, p. 40). The Ten Commandments from Christianity is an example here (Preston, 2007; Robinson, 2010). In Kantian moral theory, the categorical imperative is important. Here right and wrong actions are determined through "*universalizing* the action's *maxim* and seeing if this can be done *consistently*" (Stewart, 2000, p. 36, emphasis in the original).

Another understanding of ethics is that of *justice.* From this perspective, social cohesiveness depends on a "shared understanding of, and commitment to" both the rights of members and the "just distribution of the society's resources" (Preston, 2007, p. 42). Social contract theory is one example here. However, Rawls's (1999) work might be seen as having Kantian overtones.

A fairly contemporary theory of ethics emanating from feminist writers such as Noddings (1992) and Gilligan (1982) is an *ethic of care,* where care is the foundation of an ethical approach (Robinson, 2010). This theoretical approach "emphasises the quality of relationships and contextual factors in an ethical life" (Preston et al.,

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2002, p. 24). Relationships with others are central and these are given predominance over other principles (Freakley & Burgh, 2000).

One of the oldest ethical theories is *virtue ethics.* This theory originates from Aristotle and is related to a person's good character, since its advocates hold that good character will lead to good ethical behavior and decision making (Robinson, 2010). Proponents of virtue ethics "argue in favour of a connection between character and reasoning[,] for without good character I may reason about what is right but still choose not to do so" (Freakley & Burgh, 2000, p. 125). Thus the key question is not necessarily "what ought we *do,* but who ought we *become*" (Preston, 2007, p. 49, emphasis in original). The proponents of this view of ethics see a relationship among people, society, and institutions in the pursuit of a common good (Preston et al., 2002). Virtues are "dispositions of the soul" that are "activated in actions towards the best or the most appropriate ends according to wise judgements of contingent necessities" (Kane & Patapan, 2006, p. 713). A key contemporary virtue ethicist, Alisdair MacIntyre, distinguishes between the internal goods of practices, as it is through the pursuit of these that we develop virtues, and the external goods of institutions. External goods such as the pursuit of power, money, or fame are considered unethical (Higgins, 2010a; MacIntyre, 1984; Overeem & Tholen, 2011; Preston, 2007).

A central element of virtue ethics is phronesis, which means practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is the highest virtue, as it involves intellectual capacity and virtue. It encompasses:

> *all* the virtues: courage, temperance, generosity, magnamity, mildness, humour, and truthfulness. [For Aristotle, p]ractical wisdom was, in other words, a matter of personal character—specifically a character that had been habituated to virtue tempered by long and experience.
>
> (Kane & Patapan, 2006, p. 713, emphasis in original)

The final ethical theory, sometimes referred to as an "applied theory," is *institutional ethics.* Institutional ethicists focus on individuals within institutions and ask that they be accountable to their institutions and to the wider community (Preston et al., 2002). As discussed by Preston and colleagues (2002), it builds ethics "into the operations and decision-making of the institution" (p. 50) so that ethics becomes part of the "ethos, policies and practices" (ibid). Thus all individuals have a role to play in upholding institutional ethics, not least, the leaders.

Ethical Dilemmas

Given the complex sociocultural milieu in which leaders operate, it is not surprising that they would find themselves, from time to time, faced with ethical dilemmas. Ethical dilemmas are decisions "that require a choice among competing sets of principles, often in complex and value laden contexts" (Ehrich, Cranston, & Kimber, 2005, p. 137). These competing choices have been described as pulling leaders in different directions (Badaracco, 1992) and have been found to cause leaders great stress and anxiety (Cranston et al., 2006). Difficulties are said to arise when leaders

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are faced with choices that are considered "right." For example, Kidder (1995) states that many ethical dilemmas facing professionals do not concern right versus wrong options but right versus right. In other words, the choices could all be seen as right. Alternatively, when all of the options are deemed "wrong," it would also potentially cause angst for leaders. How leaders interpret, respond to, and resolve ethical dilemmas is likely to depend on a variety of factors and forces both internal and external to the leader. Some of these factors and forces are discussed later in the chapter.

RESULTS FROM THREE CONTEXTS

Our research with school leaders, university middle-level leaders, and public sector leaders indicates that leaders at various organizational levels are experiencing ethical dilemmas (Kane & Patapan, 2006). Indeed, a number of the ethical dilemmas discussed by middle-level leaders in universities in 2011 had similar dimensions to, and were as equally complex as, the dilemmas discussed by senior public service leaders in 2004 and school principals in 2006. Our research points to the pervasiveness of ethical dilemmas experienced by leaders in their work lives. School leaders and senior public sector leaders, whom we interviewed, saw addressing ethical dilemmas as "core business" of their practice. As much as one of the school principals argued that ethical dilemmas were "the bread and butter of school leaders' lives" (Cranston et al., 2006), a university middle-level leader argued that much of the work of their position has required them "to act ethically, in dealing with matters related to students, staff and in teaching and research." This leader considered it essential that they were "informed about being ethical and to be alert for occasions when this might be challenged" (Ehrich et al., 2012, p. 99).

Interestingly, university middle level-leaders indicated that generally, the workplace culture of their organization was ethical. Yet, only a third of them had viewed colleagues acting ethically in the workplace. One explanation for this incongruence is the centrality of personal values and of relationships to the ethical decision-making practices of these leaders (Cranston et al., 2012; Ehrich, Cranston, & Kimber, 2004). In another study we conducted, a middle-level public sector leader noted that ethical dilemmas kept him awake at night (Cranston, Ehrich, & Kimber, 2005). This leader also stated that he was the person who had "to make that ethical decision, do I do anything about it or do I just let it go and let somebody else worry about it when it all blows up?" (Cranston et al., 2005, p. 4). It could be argued, therefore, that ethical dilemmas are common, complex, and challenging for leaders across different organizational settings.

While, not surprisingly, some of the critical incidents that sparked the ethical dilemmas experienced by these leaders varied according to their particular context and organizational position (e.g., student issues were important for school leaders and university middle-level leaders but not for public servants, while the misuse of money concerned senior public servants and school leaders), many of the dilemmas were similar across all three contexts. Essentially, these dilemmas were about:

- student/staff welfare or behavior;
- responsibility and accountability (including blurred accountability);
- supervisor directive and supervisor issues (such as inaction over serious issues);

- staff (under)performance;
- the misuse of funds; and
- conflicts of interest.

These dilemmas concerned conflict or choice between:

- personal values and professional ethics;
- personal values and professional ethics and organizational culture;
- the "best interest" of an individual or a subgroup and the "best interest" of the community (whether that be the polity, the school, or the university);
- the immediate community and the wider community;
- the public interest and supervisor directive;
- professional ethics and the law; and
- ethical principles (justice and mercy, justice and care, or efficiency and equity).

Thus, as noted earlier, ethical dilemmas are not simply between right and wrong. They can be challenging and complex because they can involve choice between right and right or wrong and wrong (Kidder, 1995).

In resolving ethical dilemmas, leaders often encounter multiple (and at times competing) factors or forces. These factors include political and public interest imperatives, financial issues, impact of globalization, community concerns, and workplace culture. Survey respondents from the public sector and from universities identified personal ethics and values, professional ethics, and organizational culture as the most significant (greater than 80%) factors in the ethical dilemmas that they faced. The next most important factors identified by respondents were supervisor directive and the public interest or public good. Following from these, community and societal, legal, and political issues were stressed. Respondents also referred to economic and financial factors and global factors (Cranston et al., 2005, 2012; Ehrich et al., 2012). It might be argued that such findings are unsurprising because it is in these arenas "that contestation of values across individuals and institutions come into play" (Cranston et al., 2012, p. 9). Recent research by Hanhimäki and Tirri (2009), in respect to teachers in Finland, confirms both the types and classification of critical incidents and ethical dilemmas that we have identified in our research in Australia.

Quotations from interviewees and survey respondents across the three contexts we have examined also draw attention to the ways in which leaders are mindful of the implications their decisions have, not only for themselves but also for their organizations and their communities. For instance, one school principal had anxiety over being able to "sleep at night" if responsible for a particular decision. This principal continued:

> Do I feel good in myself? It's deeply very personal. I have difficulty making an unethical decision and living with it unless someone can point out that my values that underpin that decision were a bit skewed.
>
> (Cranston et al., 2006, p. 114)

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This response again highlights the centrality of personal values in resolving ethical dilemmas.

Some respondents referred to asking themselves the question of how their proposed decision would look to a member of the community or to their family members. This was, in essence, one of their "value tests." This attention to community perception was used by senior public servants and by university middle-level leaders in particular, which might be due to the view that public administration or education is a public good that was articulated by some of these leaders (Cranston et al., 2012). For instance, in a survey response, one university leader stated:

> At the end of the day, I always ask the question: What would I want someone to do if the action they took or did not take would have an effect on my family members. . . . the most important elements to me are personal ethics and values and serving the public good.
>
> (Cranston et al., 2012, p. 12)

It can be suggested that many of the university middle-level leaders who responded to the survey, like many of the senior public servants and school leaders who were interviewed, viewed personal values and professional ethics as being "at the core of these dilemmas and complex decision-making processes. . . . Ethical dilemmas are conflicts that involve values or moral principles" (Cranston et al., 2012, p. 12).

As suggested from the quotations above, one of our research findings has been that ethical leaders appear to engage in reflection around ethics and ethical dilemmas in their workplaces. While such reflection might be attributed to the interview and survey questions, it is also possible that reflection is an important way in which these leaders evaluate their ethical decision making and adjust their decision-making processes or responses, if necessary. Additionally, the ability to justify one's decisions and to reflect on those decisions might be seen as aspects of professional ethics.

In respect to justification, one school principal commented, "The leadership team worked through the dilemma to ensure that they fully justified [it] to the school community" (Cranston et al., 2006, p. 114). Thus, leaders considered the impact or outcome of their decision not only on themselves but also on other individuals, their institution, and their community. School leaders, for example, were most cognizant of the implications of their decisions on others, with several "continually reflecting on their actions . . . [such that] one participant knew that further decisions would be necessary. Another indicated that he would act differently in future" (ibid). Indeed, one principal was clear "that leadership was about 'coming back' to a core set of beliefs you have about education and about what the school is about. . . . [Another principal stated that] school leaders must 'walk the talk.' They needed to 'practice what they preached'" (ibid). Respondents in the other contexts that we have examined made comments that implied a similar moral understanding of leadership and the expected behavior of those in leadership positions.

Such comments remind us of Samier's (2008) discussion of "moral mute managers," who adhere to rules, codes, and formalized goals rather than exercise what might be viewed as "higher order moral principles" (Kimber & Ehrich, 2011). It could be

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argued, therefore, that good character rather than institutional codes is critical to good leadership. Such a position resonates with the work of Preston and colleagues (2002), MacIntyre (1984), and Uhr (2005). Indeed, MacIntyre (also see Higgins, 2010a, 2010b) distinguishes between "internal goods" and "external goods." Those who focus primarily on external goods are viewed as unethical. For MacIntyre, "the moral problem of management . . . is that it is mainly occupied with the attainment of external goods at the cost of internal goods and with the development of institutions at the cost of practices" (Overeem & Tholen, 2011, p. 731). For institutions to support practices, therefore, ethics should be "built into the ethos, policies and practices of an institution" (Preston et al., p. 50). If leaders reflect in this manner, then it might be suggested that development of the virtue of practical wisdom is a necessary attribute for ethical leadership.

A MODEL FOR IDENTIFYING AND RESOLVING AN ETHICAL DILEMMA

We now turn our attention to a conceptual model of ethical dilemmas we have been using for some time derived initially from the literature but refined through various iterations from empirical research with leaders across three organizational contexts: schools, universities, and the public sector (Cranston et al., 2003; Ehrich et al., 2004, 2012).

As can be seen from Figure 15.1, the model consists of five core components. The first component is the critical incident that generates the ethical dilemma for the decision maker. Critical incidents are "issues or situations in [leaders'] work that produce ethical reflection and moral emotions" (Hanhimäki & Tirri, 2009, p. 107). The leaders who have participated in our research have identified a variety of critical incidents, including:

- dealing with staff underperformance or behavior such as different interpretations of institutional policies;
- observing student actions such as breaking school rules or plagiarizing sources;
- being given a directive from a supervisor that conflicts with their personal values and professional ethics or with their notions of wider accountability;
- confronting institutional changes that conflict with the ethos of the organization, such as the managerial imperative to make money versus maintaining standards of academic excellence; and
- uncovering the misuse of public money.

A variety of factors (or forces) can highlight the critical incident and influence the choices a decision maker sees open to him or her (second component of the model). These factors are:

- The public interest or public good—what a community decides is in the best interest of its members as a whole as "expressed through the ballot box, interest groups and ongoing debate and discussion" (Ehrich et al., 2004, p. 31). It entails ensuring that public officials are accountable to the community for making and

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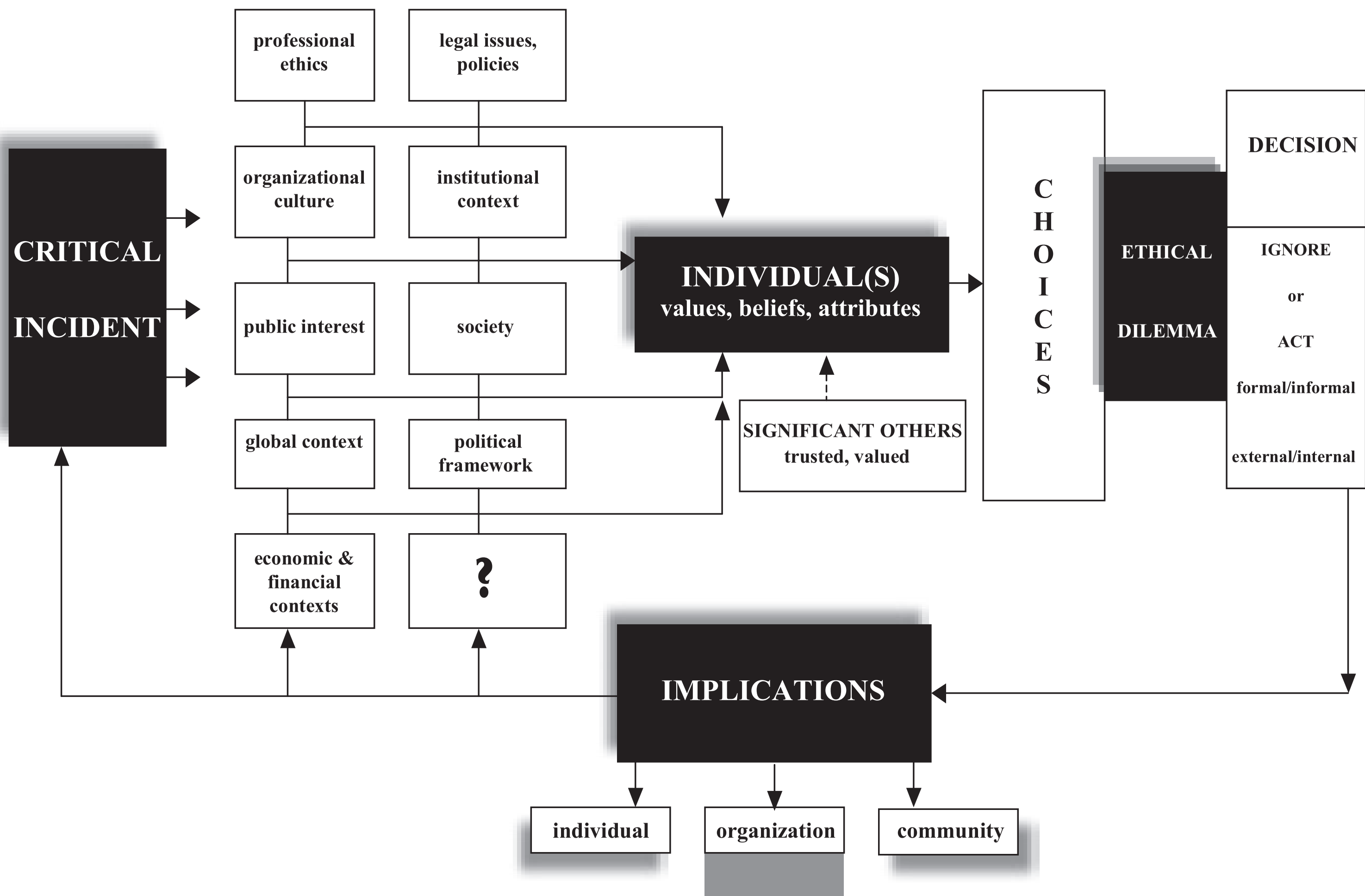

Figure 15.1 A model for examining and understanding ethical dilemmas (Cranston et al., 2003; Ehrich et al., 2004, 2012).

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administering policies. Any organization that receives public money (money collected through the taxation system) is accountable to the community for the use of that money. Thus public officials must act in the public interest or for the public good.

- The political framework—the political ideology, system, and structure of a jurisdiction socializes people and enhances or constrains the decisions and actions they take.
- The community or society—the multiple and competing stakeholders (individuals and groups) that impact on and react to leaders' decisions.
- Professional ethics—the ethical standards and values held by members of a particular profession that guide their actions and that the community expects of a member of that profession (Ehrich et al., 2004, 2012; Kimber et al., 2011; Uhr, 2005).
- Legal institutions are required to comply with legislation and judicial rulings.
- Economic and financial contexts could develop from the impact of the dominant economic paradigm on the policies and actions of an organization such the impact of a preference for neoliberal economic thinking leads to policies that result in the privatization of public sector goods and services.
- International or global social, political, cultural, and economic trends impact on institutions.
- The institutional context and factors beyond the immediate workplace—the operational milieu within which leaders work, which includes policies, procedures, and accountabilities.
- The organizational or workplace culture—the ethos of an organization can be ethical or unethical, and can be strong or weak.
- The unknown—represented as "?" and might be identified as duty of care in educational contexts.

As discussed in the previous section, leaders' personal values can be critical to how they identify, determine, and consider the choices available to them (third component of the model). These personal values stem from the ideology and beliefs that they have been socialized into and connect with the theoretical perspectives on ethics discussed in the first section of this chapter—e.g., consequentialist, Kantian, religious, care, character. The ethical dilemma that leaders find themselves in can arise as they contemplate the choices that they believe are open to them. Here, leaders might consult with a "significant other" in their lives, such as a partner or a trusted deputy in the institution. These choices are dilemmas because they might entail choosing between right and right or wrong and wrong (Kidder, 1995).

The action (or non-action) taken to resolve the dilemma might be formal or it might be informal. A formal action could entail following institutional procedures in re-marking a student's work or issuing a staff member with a warning notice. An informal action might involve meetings with staff members to resolve a dispute. These actions are internal to institutions. However, actions can be external to institutions, such as leaking information to the media to raise awareness of an issue of public concern. From the discussion in the previous section, it is clear that this action or

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non-action is likely to have implications for the individual—the decision maker and the person the decision is made about; the institution, such as through either setting a precedent or maintaining the status quo; and the community, such as affecting the reputation of the institution.

ETHICAL DILEMMA SCENARIO

This section provides some practical ideas to stimulate thinking and responses to the more theoretical ideas raised earlier in the chapter. In particular, it presents an ethical dilemma scenario located in a school setting with related stimulus questions. These can be used in workshop situations with school leaders to exemplify some of the key learnings of the chapter. The workshop scenario is followed by some practical suggestions for school leaders to think carefully about, both in preparation for meeting ethical dilemmas in their schools and in practical matters to consider as they work their way through such dilemmas as they unfold.

Ethical Dilemma: "To Expel or Not!"

"Only the Best College" is a large well-established preparatory to year 12 college in inner Bloomtown, a thriving city of almost a million people. The college is located near two other schools—one a government school and the other a nongovernment school. All three schools are competing for local students, as well as for those students who are serviced by good public transportation to and from the area. The principal (Peter Perfect) has been at the school for 5 years and has worked hard to turn the school around from one with an undesirable reputation to one that is strong on discipline; indeed, the school has the highest student exclusion numbers in the area. Many parents are attracted to this tough discipline approach, and student numbers are increasing. The two deputy principals (Mary Soft and Barry Firm) work hard to support the principal in this regard, although Mary often reflects on the negative impact such a tough line has on some students, some of whom eventually completely drop out of school as a result.

One of the very able academic senior students in Mary's year 12 pastoral care group, Cathy Future, has just been to Mary's office to tell her she has been "kicked out of" home and is now living with her boyfriend. Cathy knows that the school will not look kindly on this situation because of its potential negative impact with some members of the school community and she expects that the principal, if he knew, would remove her from the school. This is a critical time for Cathy, as the final exams for her schooling are less than a month away and she is striving to achieve sufficiently high scores to enter law at the local university. Mary knows that Cathy is at the breaking point given her family situation and that she needs support and stability if she is to make the best of the remaining days at school and achieve her goal of university entry.

When Mary arrives at school the next day, she is met by Peter in a highly agitated state. He has just been confronted by a group of parents who claim that one of the senior girls is living with her boyfriend. They demand she be removed from the school, as she is clearly a bad influence on others and her actions will damage the reputation of the school. Mary begins to brief Peter about the full background to the situation, arguing

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that the school needs to support the student. Peter knows that the parents are likely to make a real issue of the matter and that one of them who met him earlier is linked to the local newspaper. Potentially, the school's reputation stands to be seriously damaged. The subsequent impact on enrollments could be significant. Peter knows that he must make the decision about the future of Cathy at "Only the Best College" as quickly as possible because some students and teachers are talking about the situation.

What follows is a series of steps that could be taken in thinking about this scenario and the ethical dilemma that emerges from it.

First, it is essential to put yourself in the middle of the scenario (try to be Peter, then Mary, then Cathy, then a parent, etc.) and to think about what the school might be like, its culture, its parent body, the views about the school the wider community might hold, and so on.

Second, spend about 10 minutes thinking about the questions below and any others that come to mind.

1. What are the key issues that need to be considered in trying to understand the dilemma?
    a. Think about: the key forces at play; the actual ethical dilemma; what might be Peter's values, beliefs . . . what might be Mary's?; and what about the choices and decisions available to Peter?
    b. What are the implications of the various choices and decisions—for Cathy, for Peter, for the school, for the school community?
2. How do you think the scenario plays out?
3. What would *you* have done if you were in Peter's shoes? In Mary's shoes?

Finally, thinking about these questions and any others that come to mind, share your ideas with others in your group (again for about 10 minutes). You might want to consider:

4. Were there differences and similarities in group members' responses?
5. Why might there be these similarities and differences?
6. Who are the "winners" and "losers" as a result of the various decisions taken?
7. Is there a "right" answer?
8. What are some key learnings from this ethical dilemma for the future?

WAYS FORWARD FOR LEADERS TO "MANAGE" ETHICAL DILEMMAS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Extending the scenario presented in the previous section, in this section we offer some practical suggestions for leaders to consider as they manage the "bread and butter" (Cranston et al., 2006) ethical dilemmas so prevalent in organizations today. In large part, the suggestions have been drawn from informal feedback from school leaders during workshops using scenarios such as the one presented in the

previous section. While discussed here in the context of ethical dilemmas, not surprisingly they are matters for school leaders to consider and respond to in more general ways as they undertake their complex roles and responsibilities (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2011; Cranston & Ehrich, 2009; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012; Gurr & Drysdale, 2012).

The recommendations are categorized under the following subheadings:

- *Precursors*—these are matters that need to be clear for school leaders *before* they are confronted by an ethical dilemma. While they are likely to be dynamic due to personal and professional growth of individuals, as well the operational contexts within which leadership is being enacted, they are the "fundamentals" on which, and against which, determinations in ethical dilemmas are founded. In a sense, these are the strategic issues that will drive how an individual school leader responds to the dilemma.
- *Practical*—these are matters that need careful consideration when the ethical dilemma arises. In the model presented earlier in this chapter, they are relevant once the *critical incident* occurs. Such matters play out during the (successful or otherwise) resolution of the ethical dilemma.

In thinking through the issues raised below, it is helpful to revisit the model discussed earlier in this chapter.

Precursors

Because ethical dilemmas are so value laden, it is essential that school leaders understand their *own* values and value positions. They need to be able to articulate, and defend if necessary, what they, as school leaders, really stand for. Consequently, school leaders should make clear what their non-negotiables are in circumstances where rules and precedents may be vigorously tested. Noteworthy is that these values are located as central in the model.

Connected to these personal values is an understanding of the values of the school. Most importantly here is that the espoused *and* the enacted values may not be fully aligned. That is, the rhetoric of "this is what we believe in and practice in this school" might be different from what parents, students, and teachers see in their everyday experiences and interactions in the school.

Thus a related concern is a need for school leaders to understand the values of the parent community. While it might be expected that these values should be consistent with that of the school—and they may be in some cases—it is more likely that the parents will not hold homogenous views. Nor should it be expected that teachers, and other school community members, would hold similar values. Rather, there is likely to be a diversity of value positions across different community members. Thus there is a need for school leaders to try to understand and manage the values of *all* in the school community, not just those of the powerful and vocal few.

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Practical

It is essential that the school leader gather the relevant and full "facts" specific to the ethical dilemma. Such fact gathering is necessary because, in the first instance, the issue that arises may not, on the surface, seem to be of an ethical nature. By gathering and understanding the full "facts," a school leader can avoid what might be termed a knee-jerk reaction where the first response or reaction to an issue might not be the most appropriate one in the longer term once the situation is better understood.

The model provides some useful reminders in understanding the issues at play in the dilemma, as well as some of the outcomes likely to result. Importantly, it is essential to think through the implications, consequences, and precedents various alternative decisions flowing from the dilemma will create—for individuals, for the school, and for the community. Critically, it is rare that there will be one "right" answer or response; often more than one equally attractive alternative may emerge. It is also important to remember that decisions often create precedents; if the decision maker(s) make this decision this time, they will need to make the same decision next time, otherwise they are potentially demonstrating inconsistency and bias.

If a student or students are involved, a key question is: What are the duty-of-care issues that need to be considered? This question might also be relevant if a teacher is involved. We raise the duty-of-care question because ethical dilemmas involve people, and it is necessary to ensure that individuals are safe, both in the short term and in the long term. Moreover, a duty of care closely resonates with the idea of the moral accountability of leadership, which maintains that leaders act and work in the best interests of staff and students.

Given the central nature of values in ethical dilemmas, as discussed earlier in this chapter, it will be essential to revisit (and possibly clarify) the value positions of the school leader, the school, and the community. A key question here is, how does the intended decision align with these? And further, how will they be seen to align by students, teachers, parents, and the wider community? One stark way to quickly revisit the value issues is for school leaders to put *themselves* in the position of the individual(s) at the center of the ethical dilemma. That is, *all* the individuals involved: the final decision maker (the school leader), the person(s) at the center of the dilemma, and others who might be impacted by the decision that is made. A focusing questions here is: "How would I like my child (myself, my friend, . . .) to be treated in this situation?"

Once a decision has been made, it is then important to "manage" the outcomes, although typically it is likely that these will have been considered, at least in some part, already. The notion here is that the decision will, inevitably, not be the endpoint to the matter, as often there will be significant implications, consequences, and precedents flowing from the initial decision. It may be that a communication strategy, whether that be small (e.g., within the student body) or large (e.g., dealing with the media), is required because the ability to justify one's decision—in terms of values and in terms of the good—is a necessary skill in ethical leadership. If this is not carefully and thoughtfully done, a range of impressions as to what has transpired may arise among the student, teacher, parent, and wider community groups. The "truth"

may be lost in the rush by some to make judgments as to the voracity, or otherwise, of the decision—and hence the decision maker, the school leader, needs to ensure that clarity (and often confidentiality) is respected in any wider communication.

Most importantly is the need to *learn* from the experience. The learnings from critical reflection as to what happened, how it happened, and how it was managed and resolved will be vital in seeking to avoid such dilemmas arising again. As a final exercise, it might be instructive to think back over the earlier scenario (and reactions to this) and see if there are other matters that could be added to the ideas above, at both the precursor and practical stages.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have presented some ethical theories that leaders might use to help them frame their understanding of ethical dilemmas. Our discussion was operationalized through summarizing results of our research into ethical dilemmas experienced by leaders in schools, universities, and the public sector. Following from this discussion, we presented a model to assist leaders to identify and resolve ethical dilemmas. The model contained five parts—the critical incident, individual decision makers, and their personal values; the factors or forces that illuminate the ethical dilemma; the choices available in resolving the dilemma; the action that is taken; and the implications of the decision or action for the individual, the organization, and the community. This model was further explicated through an ethical dilemma scenario and recommendations to assist school leaders in using the model in their decision making. Key themes in this chapter have been the pervasive, complex, and challenging nature of ethical dilemmas; the importance of personal values and of relationships; professional ethics; and practical wisdom as expressed through wise judgments, critical reflection, and justification of decisions.

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