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***Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership: Casting Light or Shadow* (4th ed.) by Craig E. Johnson**

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As the title implies, the fourth edition (Johnson, 2011b) of *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership: Casting Light or Shadow* explores the moral/ethical realm of leadership and the leader's role in both beneficial (i.e., light) and harmful (i.e., shadow) results of actions taken. The author explores this theme over the 11 chapters and 536 pages in the book.

This book is primarily meant for a course in leadership ethics at the college/university level, but as suggested it can also be used for workshops. Resources for the book at <http://www.sagepub.com/johnsonmecl4e/main.htm> include an *Instructor Teaching Site* that is password-protected (Johnson, 2011a) and a *Student Study Site* that has open access (Johnson, 2011c). The *Instructor Teaching Site* includes ideas for teaching the course or leadership seminar. Resources include syllabi, teaching strategies, assignment ideas, PowerPoint slides, and chapter tests. The *Student Study Site* has journal articles and related discussion questions for each of the chapters in the book.

The 11 chapters in the book are divided into four sections. Part I, Chapters 1 and 2, deals with the result of mismanagement of power; Part II, Chapters 3 and 4, deals with building character; Part III, Chapters 5–7, deals with ethics and ethical leadership; and Part IV, Chapters 8–11, deals with implementing the ethical leadership role, including building a group, organizational climate, diversity issues, and crisis leadership. Each chapter includes related current events, case studies, self-assessments, and follower ethics information.

Since both *leadership* and *ethics* have various interpretations, it was helpful to find that the author immediately clarifies the meanings as used in the book. *Leadership* is defined as “exercise of influence in a group context” and *ethics* is defined as “judgments about whether human behavior is right or wrong.” Within the context of the book, *ethics* and *morals* are used interchangeably.

Another helpful clarification is that this is written as a multidisciplinary book. The author justifies this approach by

asserting that this makes the material accessible to individuals across disciplines and leadership positions.

Dr. Johnson states, in the online instructor materials, that he is an advocate for the “power of forgiveness, spirituality, and universal moral standards.” This statement would be helpful in the preface of the book as well, so the reader is better prepared for the author's stance on these issues. He does point out in the book preface that he brings his biases into his writing in order to create debate, which is helpful to know. For example, he makes the bold statement that “leaders often cause more harm than good,” although there is no evidence presented to support this generalization.

Chapter 1 of the book, “The Leader's Light or Shadow,” explores the misuse of leadership and power. The author makes the point that focusing only on leadership best practices, often done in leadership and management books, ignores the possible ethical abuses inherent in a leadership position. By first focusing on the potential pitfalls, the reader can better internalize the ideas.

While I agree that potential abuses need to be explored, I think one needs to be cautious about painting too bleak a picture, especially for those who are new to leadership. For example, the *2009 National Business Ethics Survey* (Ethics Resource Center, 2009) found that 71% of employees believe their leaders are honest with employees about business decisions in the company.

While Chapter 1 explores the behavior leaders exhibit when they are being unethical, Chapter 2 of the book, “Stepping Out of the Shadows,” explores the motivating factors, such as insecurity and fear, that result in these unethical behaviors. The author also discusses unintentional missteps that can be made, often due to poor decision-making skills, lack of expertise, and organizational culture. The chapter concludes with a suggested methodology for applying the principles.

Categorizing motivating factors is a good idea, but the author should be cautious about general statements that explain these motivations, such as, “Leaders often are deeply insecure people who mask their inner doubts through extroversion” (p. 43). This appears to be personal opinion, and there is some concern that the author may fall prey to *stereotyping*, a type of faulty decision making that is later discussed in the chapter.

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Based on personality measures such as the Myers–Briggs (Myers & Myers, 1980), levels of extraversion or introversion can simply be part of an individual's personality. Although extraversion/introversion can be controlled to a certain extent depending on circumstances, linking extraversion to masking inner doubts is likely an unfair characterization.

The last part of Chapter 2 is especially useful for students. The author points out that ethical knowledge and expertise require thought and practice, and the more we focus on this topic in our lives, and in classes, the more adept we are at making good ethical decisions. This should be very helpful to students, since understanding the rationale for ethics is an important key to increasing the likelihood that people are motivated to learn the subject matter.

Chapter 3, "The Leader's Character," continues the inside-out approach found in Chapter 2, that is, exploring the inner dimensions of an individual that result in their behavior. The author points to eight elements of character important for ethical leadership, namely, courage, prudence (the right action in a situation), optimism, integrity, humility, reverence, compassion, and justice. He then makes the case for blending these into a *moral identity*, although he does recognize that there may be uneven development across these elements, with examples being provided of public figures who are flawed in one area but have strengths in other areas. The chapter concludes with character-building tips such as finding role models, being aware of collective stories with an ethical theme and emulating these stories, learning via setbacks, developing habits as outlined in Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (2002), developing mission statements, and determining one's personal values.

Although it appears that the author has somewhat arbitrarily chosen the elements of character, I think a good case is made for the selection. The character-building methods, including learning from hardship, habit development, and visioning with values in mind, are useful techniques. The section on learning from hardship is especially important, and the author does a good job of exploring this concept and pointing out that important life lessons can come in the form of hardships.

Chapter 4, "Combating Evil," explores different forms of evil as well as forgiveness and spirituality as means for dealing with evil. Evil is described as a *dreadful pleasure* (overcoming boredom or morbid thoughts by victimizing others), a *deception* (covering up your true nature to deceive others), *bureaucracy* (government or administrative systems that are engaged in evil as a part of daily operations, such as Germany in World War II), sanctioned destruction (permission to victimize others, such as Native Americans), *choice* (decision-making strategies that result in evil), and *ordinary* (situational factors resulting in otherwise normal people becoming involved in evil; e.g., the abuse in Abu Ghraib prison). The author encourages the reader to reflect on how easily evil can become a part of the fabric of organizations and ourselves. He also provides some strategies

for forgiveness, which in his view is an important component of moving beyond evil while not condoning it.

Spirituality is presented as a tool many leaders and followers use to deal with evil. Spirituality is differentiated from religion, and defined as an important part of the inner life and values of people in the workplace. The author cites several studies that point to spirituality as a means to reinforcing ethical values in the workplace. He also warns that spirituality, if narrowly defined by a leader, can be used to force conformity, a practice that is unethical.

Since spirituality is being presented as a motivating factor for workplace behavior, another useful theory to present at this juncture might be Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1954). According to this simple but popular theory, people are motivated by unmet needs, and as basic needs are met then higher level ones, such as self-actualization, begin to motivate. This would be a useful addition when discussing higher order needs.

Although the author does a good job of explaining spirituality as the recognition of one's inner life and sense of purpose, and separating this term from religion, this may not be as easily separated in the reader's mind. This topic, and the placement in the same chapter with evil, should result in some healthy class debate, as well as insights into different views on spirituality and religion.

Chapter 5, "General Ethical Perspectives," covers different frames of reference for ethics, but the author does point out the practical need to combine perspectives, a type of *ethical pluralism*. Ethical perspectives covered are *utilitarianism* (doing the greatest good for the greatest number of people, such as in medical emergencies), *Kant's categorical imperative* (choosing the moral path no matter what the consequences, such as taking extra steps to ensure customer health, whether or not it is required), *justice as fairness* (ensuring all have equal liberties, but the least advantaged are benefited, such as admission criteria in colleges), *communitarianism* (a focus on the community and the common good, such as universal health care), and *altruism* (caring for others, not just oneself, such as Hospice volunteering).

This chapter is especially useful to the study of ethics, since it contrasts different philosophies, and provides examples of when each approach may be useful. Having knowledge of these different approaches should result in a more critical analysis of important ethical decisions.

Chapter 6, "Normative Leadership Theories," focuses on leadership theories that have an ethics focus. These include *transformational leadership* (highly persuasive, highly altruistic leadership that focuses on ethical values, as contrasted with pseudo-transformational leadership that focuses on taking advantage of others), *servant leadership* (placing the needs of followers above those of the leader, and treating followers as partners), *authentic leadership* (acting in harmony with one's true character, with a moral emphasis), *responsible leadership* (seeking the greatest good for followers and stakeholders alike,

and focusing on social justice), and *Taoism* (ethical leadership using mostly hands-off, minimalist, selfless approaches).

Just as in Chapter 5, the author points to the need to use lessons from all five leadership approaches in order to be ethical and effective. He contends that knowledge of these different approaches should result in a more critical analysis of one's leadership methods.

While Taoism can be used as a way to draw ethical leadership lessons from nature, including a hands-off approach to leadership, it is a very ambiguous philosophy with many interpretations. On the surface, it appears that a lack of rules is an important part of Taoism. However, branches of Taoism have very explicit rules, with specific requirements for entry. It is certainly helpful to draw loosely from this philosophy, and the *Tao Te Ching* certainly has useful metaphorical lessons to contemplate. However, since Taoism has many interpretations and branches, one must be careful of making broad generalizations about how this is applied to leadership.

Chapter 7, "Ethical Decision Making and Behavior," provides an understanding of how we make ethical choices, starting with James Rest's *four stages component model*. This model is centered around moral action, with four processes playing a role: moral sensitivity, recognizing a moral issue; moral judgment, taking a course of action based on the moral issue; moral focus, motivation to take the moral action; and moral character, those personal characteristics that result in follow-through with the moral action.

Four decision-making strategies, or problem-solving methods, are outlined in the chapter, including Kidder's *ethical checkpoints* (nine steps specifically focused on ethical issues), the *moral reasoning SAD formula* (defining and analyzing an ethical situation, and then making a decision), Nash's *12 questions* (a lengthy model used mainly to ensure a full discussion of moral issues), and the *case study method* (a method often used in medicine, which involves using narratives by all involved in the decision making to determine the best course of action in cases where there is not full agreement)

Chapter 7 does an excellent job of covering both how ethical choices are made by individuals, and problem-solving models that we can use to help us focus on ethical solutions. The models encourage delving deeper into the problem and solutions, simply by forcing one to follow a step-by-step approach.

Chapter 8, "Building an Effective, Ethical Small Group," focuses on group techniques that facilitate ethical outcomes. The group leader's role is explored, including the need to ensure all are engaged in group decision making. Group process pitfalls, such as *groupthink* and *false agreement*, are also explored. The last section of the chapter focuses on characteristics that can be fostered for good group communication, including listening and participation techniques, emotional intelligence, critical listening, conflict management, and making effective arguments.

Ensuring that teams function effectively is a crucial role for leaders. In my experience, leaders often do not take the time to

actually prepare teams for working together, and do not work with teams in the early stages to be sure effective group techniques are being implemented. This is an important first step for ensuring ethical group behavior. After all, it is better to be proactive via team rules that encourage moral behavior than to do this via warnings, when unethical behavior has already occurred.

Chapter 9, "Creating an Ethical Organizational Climate," is perhaps the most important topic in the book for a leader. Types of organizational climates are explored, as well as signs that identify ethical climates, such as an intolerance of destructive behaviors, treating others fairly, a concern for means as well as ends, organizational structure and rules, and being concerned with others outside the organization, with an example being civic engagement. Tools for creating the desired climate are identified in the chapter, including methods for discovering core values, developing a code of ethics, and applying continuous improvement techniques to organizational ethics so that it continues to be a focus of the organization.

The information on *codes of ethics* is especially useful in this chapter. These documents are often created and then forgotten, so they are not truly helpful in building an ethical workplace climate. As stated in the chapter, this problem can be reduced by obtaining broad input, using clear language, and being sure to address the issues of greatest importance to the group and its stakeholders.

Chapter 10, "Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Diversity," begins with the ethical justification for promoting diversity in the workplace, followed by the ethical challenges associated with globalization, cultural and related ethical differences, techniques for finding ethical commonalities across cultures, and making ethical choices across cultures.

The author points out the complexity of ethics in a global society, but also provides some helpful tools for dealing with these differences. For example, Rushworth Kidder's *Eight Global Values* identifies the eight values shared around the world, and the *Global Business Standards Codex* provides eight principles for creating a universal code of conduct. The guidelines for making ethical choices in culturally diverse organizations are also very useful.

Chapter 11, "Ethical Crisis Leadership," focuses on leadership skills in unanticipated, emergency situations. Approaches include having a contingency plan ahead of emergencies, being transparent and honest during and after an emergency situation, and demonstrating care and altruism for all who are affected.

This chapter is especially helpful as a reminder to plan ahead for crisis situations, and to be empathetic with all those impacted by an event. There are suggestions about how to be as transparent as possible in a crisis, as well as specific guidelines for communicating to stakeholders.

The author makes the case that *strategic ambiguity*, being vague in communication to appeal to multiple audiences, is often unethical. I wonder if this is too much of a generalization. It seems to me that strategic ambiguity is a very useful tool,

especially in the early stages of an emergency before all the facts are known. Inaccurate detail at this stage could actually exacerbate the situation. However, I do agree that this strategy is less useful at a later stage of crisis management. Whether or not this technique is employed, it is certainly important for the manager to employ both care and altruism throughout the process.

In summary, *Meeting the Ethical Challenges of Leadership* is a very creative and well-researched book on the topic of ethics and leadership. It is important to keep in mind that the author interjects his personal biases throughout the book. However, his biases are presented in a thoughtful manner, and these biases are useful for discussions. Readers will certainly find that they have a deeper understanding of ethics and leadership after focusing on the content in this book.

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