



# Ethics & Leadership in Public Life

- ◆ Class Introductions
- ◆ Definition of Ethics
- ◆ Link between Ethics & Leadership
- ◆ Student Examples
- ◆ Concept of Role and Responsibility
- ◆ Key Elements in Ethical Decision Making



# Definition of Ethics

- ◆ “Ethics is concerned about what is right, fair just, or good; about what we ought to do, not just about what is the case or what is most acceptable or expedient.” (Preston)
- ◆ Relationship between ethics and morality (clear moral beliefs do not always tell us what is ethical in a given situation).
- ◆ Link between ethics and leadership (the ability to lead is not enough!).



# Relevance of Ethics

- ◆ “The most important quality I want in a new employee is integrity.” (Allen O’Neil, former New Hanover County Manager)
- ◆ Examples abound in everyday life (news, personal experiences)



# Role & Responsibility

- ◆ To be ethical means to act responsibly. The concept of *responsibility* has become increasingly significant as a way of defining a common set of values among people of divergent cultures and traditions.
- ◆ Responsibility may depend on the situation, and a key aspect of a situation is *role* or the package of expectations and obligations associated with accepting and carrying out life's duties.



# Key Elements of Ethical Decision Making

- ◆ Begin with a consideration of the uncertainties involved in any ethical problem.
- ◆ Defining the problem properly is fundamental and is distinct from the generation of alternative solutions to the ethical problem.
- ◆ One is always acting under time pressure.
- ◆ Ethical problems are dynamic.



# Levels of Ethical Reflection

## ◆ The Expressive Level

- “gut” feeling of discomfort
- pay attention and attempt to resolve

## ◆ Level of Moral Rules

- we consider courses of actions and their outcomes in light of certain rules, maxims and proverbs developed over years from multiple sources (family, religion, schooling) that we hold as moral guides



# Levels of Ethical Reflection

## ◆ Level of Ethical Analysis

-- Higher level application of principles that provide a guide for action given a particular work setting or role. Examples relevant to public service:

- Absolutism
- Utilitarianism
- Public Duty vs. Private Beliefs
- Role Conflict
- Conflict of Interest



# Levels of Ethical Reflection

## ◆ Level of Ethical Analysis (cont'd)

- Public Interest
- Neutral Competence
- Codes of Ethics
- Serving Multiple Masters
- Law as the Moral Minimum



# Ethical Decision-Making Model

1. Perception of an Ethical Problem

2. Describing the Situation

3. Defining the Ethical Issue

-- what is the source of tension or competing values?

4. Identifying Alternatives

-- avoid the tendency to think in terms of “either this or that”...use your moral imagination!



# Ethical Decision-Making Model

## 5. Projecting Probable Consequences of Each Alternative

- Moral Rules
- Ethical Principles
- Rehearsal of Defenses (“the 60 Minutes test”)
- Anticipatory Self-Appraisal (“will I be able to look at myself in the mirror”)

## 6. Selecting an Alternative

## 7. A State of Resolution

- or ethical hangover?



# The Context of Ethics in Modern and Postmodern Society

- ◆ The Attempt to Apply Scientific Principles to Much of Life
- ◆ Multiplicity & Differentiation of Roles
- ◆ From Separation to Co-Mingling Work and Private Life
- ◆ Relativism
- ◆ Pluralization of Society



# The Context of Administrative Ethics

- ◆ The Political Nature of Public Administration
- ◆ Separation of Administrative & Citizen Roles
- ◆ Managers of Diversity
- ◆ Representation
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Implementation



# Administrative Responsibility

## ◆ Objective Responsibility

-- has to do with expectations imposed from outside ourselves and has two dimensions: *accountability* to someone or some collective body and *imposed obligation* for certain tasks or goals.

-- responsibility to elected officials

-- responsibility to superiors and for subordinates

-- responsibility to the citizenry



# Administrative Responsibility

## ◆ Key ethical principles

-- “*the buck stops here*”: exercising responsibility when you are authorized and obligated to make a given decision

-- *neutral competence* (complicating the life of your superiors)

-- “*loyalty that argues back*”

-- “*original position*” or “*veil of ignorance*”



# Administrative Responsibility

## ◆ Subjective Responsibility

-- has to do with expectations of ourselves (internally imposed) based on values, beliefs and attitudes we acquire from family, school, religion, professional training

-- the attitudes we exhibit are a product of deeper held beliefs and core values about the world...achieving a state of ethical resolution requires an understanding of what may be referred to as our inner “*moral compass*”



# Administrative Responsibility

- ◆ A common source of ethical dilemmas in public life is conflict between objective and subjective sources of responsibility
- ◆ Case Example: “What to do about Mrs. Carmichael?”



# Conflicts of Responsibility

- ◆ Conflicts of Authority

- conflicts between two or more objective responsibilities imposed by two or more sources of authority

- ◆ Case example: “The Major, the Captain, and Corporal Montague”



# Conflicts of Responsibility

## ◆ Role Conflict

-- a public administrator experiences values associated with particular roles as incompatible or mutually exclusive in a given situation

## ◆ Case examples:

-- “Politics & Toilets” (inside vs. outside roles)

-- “Raising Salaries or Raising Hell” (inside vs. inside roles or the dilemma of the middle manager)



# Conflicts of Responsibility

## ◆ Conflicts of Interest

-- our own personal interests are at odds with our obligations as a public official or our professional values; commonly experienced as an opportunity to use our public office for the sake of private gain

-- “tragedy of the commons” provides an understanding of the tension between private and public interest



# Conflicts of Responsibility

## ◆ Examples of conflicts of interest:

- bribery
- influence peddling
- information peddling
- financial transactions
- gifts and entertainment
- outside employment
- future employment
- dealings with relatives



# Organizational Perspective

- ◆ So far the focus has been on developing your individual capacity to think about ethics in a systematic, reflective manner.
- ◆ However, the organizational management and policy dimensions must not be neglected...



# Organizational Perspective

- ◆ Designing and managing an organizational environment that is supportive of ethical conduct is a central ethical obligation of managers, one that becomes increasingly important with movement up the organizational hierarchy.



# Organizational Perspective

- ◆ Two perspectives on maintaining responsible conduct in organizations are represented by Carl Friedrich and Herman Finer.
- ◆ Friedrich asserted the importance of internal controls through training and education in order to cultivate the values and standards of each public servant...ethical conduct should be encouraged in the absence of rules monitoring systems.



# Organizational Perspective

- ◆ Finer, in contrast, insisted on the essential nature of external political and institutional controls (e.g. legislation, penalties).
- ◆ Which perspective would you emphasize as a manager and why?



# External Controls

## ◆ Ethics Legislation

- conflict of interest laws
- Hatch Act
- travel guidelines!
- post-employment rules

## ◆ Codes of Ethics

- general (ASPA, ICMA) and specific (lawyers, doctors, social workers, researchers)



# External Controls

## ◆ Pros & Cons of Ethics Legislation

- emphasizes that the public's business is rooted in law and discretion has limits
- laws provide sanctions such as fines and prison sentences that reinforce the seriousness of ethics
- enforcement of laws provide negative examples

however....

- may lack specificity to particular conditions
- difficult to enforce
- too many laws & restrictions erode morale



# External Controls

## ◆ Pros & Cons of Codes of Ethics

- project ideals, norms and obligations for particular professions; can help socialize members
- can be tailored better to the typical situations of a profession

however...

- often too vague, abstract and lofty
- difficult to monitor and enforce compliance
- may stifle needed discretion and creativity



# Internal Controls

- ◆ Development of an internal sense of responsibility among individual administrators through:
  - formal education programs (MPA!)
  - on the job training
  - involvement with professional associations such as ASPA, ICMA, APPAM (attendance at conferences and workshops, educational newsletters and journals)
  - role modeling



# Internal Controls

## ◆ Pros & Cons

- internalized values are always present regardless of existence of relevant (or moral) external guidance
- create a more responsive and creative bureaucracy by encouraging application of rules to unique situations

however...

- no agreement on which values to adopt in a pluralistic society
- history shows that people can be driven by self-interest or an array of other vices



# External and Internal Controls

- ◆ Case example: “Much Ado About Something”



# Organizational Perspective

- ◆ Conflicts Among Internal & External Controls

-- Case examples:

“Sexual Orientation in Law Enforcement”

“Natural Death”



# Components of Responsible Conduct

## ◆ Organizational Structure

- clear accountability
- collaborative arrangements
- dissent channels

## ◆ Organizational Culture

- exemplars
- norms for conduct
- symbols



# Components of Responsible Conduct

## ◆ Societal Expectations

- public participation
- laws and policies (e.g., sunshine laws)

## ◆ Individual Attributes

- ethical decision-making skill
- mental attitude
- virtues
- professional values



# Safeguarding Ethical Autonomy

## ◆ The Agentic Shift

-- an alteration of attitude in which we shift from acting out our own purposes to an attitude of acting as an agent who executes the wishes of another person or the organization

-- the most far reaching consequence is that a person feels responsible to the authority directing him but feels no responsibility for the content of the actions that the authority prescribes

## ◆ “Many Hands” Phenomenon

-- tendency in large organizations for people to lose a strong sense of individual accountability or responsibility



# Safeguarding Ethical Autonomy

## ◆ Sources of Organizational Pressure

- the team play ethic
- political pressure
- anti-tattling
- bureaucratic norms of subservience to hierarchy



# Remedies

- ◆ Ensure Organizational Delimitation and Transcendence by developing:
  - a professional identity (e.g., ASPA, ARNOVA)
  - a political identity (be politically involved)
  - a community identity (be involved in neighborhood, religious, or other volunteer organizations)

# Remedies

## ◆ The Nuremberg Principle

-- the official position of person does not free them from responsibility for their actions

-- the fact that a person is following orders from a superior does not free them from responsibility for their actions



# Remedies

## ◆ Public Interest Standards

- Legality-morality
- Political responsiveness
- Political consensus
- Concern for logic
- Concern for effects
- Agenda awareness





# Final Thoughts from Cooper

- ◆ Begin with an assumption of uncertainty, and acknowledge the ambiguities.
- ◆ Defining the problem too narrowly may miss important fundamental factors.
- ◆ Be careful of the time factor and sequencing of your actions.