Ethical Leadership

Lesson Objective: This lesson seeks to introduce the concept of ethical leadership, its value, and its potential for CAP.

Desired Learning Outcomes (DLO):

1. Understand the concept of ethical leadership.
2. Apply the traits of ethical leadership.
3. Explain the benefits of ethical leadership and the impact of influence of leaders on the organization.
4. Understand how CAP can create an ethical culture.
5. Apply methods for improving ethical leadership skills and organizational culture.

Reading: Student Guide and articles

Scheduled Lesson Time: 60 minutes

Introduction

Ethical leadership is an important concept for CAP leaders. Understanding and being able to apply the traits of ethical leadership can help CAP build better leaders and a better organization. Ethical leadership benefits organizations. Unethical leadership has negative consequences. This lesson seeks to explore ethical leadership, provide tools to help you assess and improve your leadership, and tools to help you improve your organization.

1. Understand the concept of ethical leadership.

According to the Center for Ethical Leadership, “Ethical leadership is knowing your core values and having the courage to live them in all parts of your life in service of the common good.” Ethical leadership might be described as leading in a manner that respects the rights and dignity of others; a concept that can conflict with some more traditional leadership models. Some leaders focus on increasing profits or productivity. Good leaders focus on people. Ethical leadership can transform n organization and the lives of others. Ethical leaders model their expectations and ensure that ethical practices are carried out in their organizations. Leaders naturally influence others as role models and this is the root of their power. The power of a leader can be used to influence followers, complete tasks, and move the organization forward.

The Center for Ethical Leadership recommends a 4-V Model of Ethical Leadership as a framework that aligns leaders’ internal beliefs and values with his or her external behaviors and actions for the purpose of advancing the common good of employees, leaders, organizations and beyond. The model was created and based on research by Center founder Dr. Bill Grace. A quick overview of the 4-V Model is as follows:

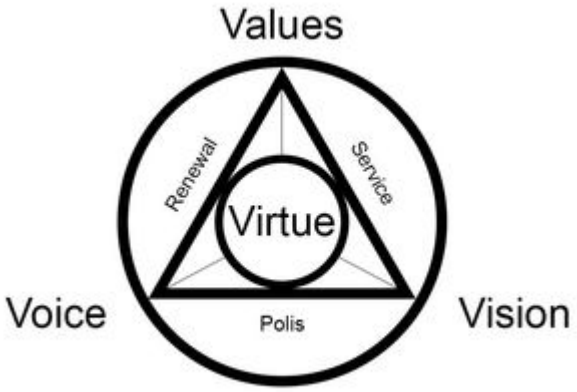
- **Values** – Ethical leadership begins with an understanding of and commitment to a leader’s core values. By discovering the values which make up the core of our identities

and motivators, we begin the process of integrating our unique values with our choices in our personal, professional, and civic lives.

- **Vision** – Ethical leadership requires the ability to frame our actions within a picture of what ought to be – particularly in the area of service to others.
- **Voice** – Ethical leaders must be able to articulate their vision to others in an authentic way that enlivens them into action.
- **Virtue** – Ethical leaders strive to do what is right and good. They practice virtuous behavior by asking "How are my values, vision and voice in alignment with and supporting the common good?"

Some might add a fifth "V" to this list: **VALIDATE** – increase the ethical know-how of everyone in the organization by hiring for ethics and values as well as capabilities, including ethical behavior in appraisals and firing people who fall short of ethical standards.

To summarize ***Values* and *vision*** identify the group. They give the group purpose and direction. Keeping the values and vision is the most essential dimension of leadership. Giving ***voice*** to values and vision brings any group its dynamic. Any concerted, effective movement by a group toward the realization of its vision requires the articulation of vision and values in practical, understandable terms. Effective leadership requires the ability to give voice to the values and vision. ***Virtue*** is a blend of principle, sensitivity to relationships, and commitment to the common good. Virtue distinguishes Gandhi from Hitler, Martin Luther King, Jr., from Stalin. Virtue distinguishes *ethical* leadership, which will transform society, from leadership which is merely *effective*.



Leaders are not always ethical. According to a study by the Institute of Leadership and Management, leaders are not always ethical. Results of the study indicated that 63% of managers had been asked to do something that violated their moral code. Similarly, 43% were told to do something that violated the organization's values statement and 9% were asked to break a law.

2. Apply the traits of ethical leadership.

Ethical leaders have the following traits:

- Dignity and respectfulness. Ethical leaders respect the feelings, decisions, and values of others. Ethical leaders help others feel their worth and value as individuals. Ethical leaders listen to what others say and are compassionate. Ethical leaders listen to opposing views. Respect is another foundation of relationships. Relationships built on respect are lasting.
- Serving others. An ethical leader places the needs of others before his or her own interests. Ethical leaders think about how decisions impact others.
- Justice. An ethical leader treats all followers equally. Bias and favoritism are not allowed. An ethical leader is transparent in why people might be treated differently.
- Community building. Ethical leaders consider the needs of their communities and followers. Ethical leaders ensure that the needs of the followers and the organization are kept in balance. Both benefit the other but neither "uses" the other. Ethical leaders use tools like team building, mentoring, and empowerment exercises to build community.
- Honesty. Honesty or integrity is an important foundation for relationships. Ethical leaders must be honest and act with integrity. Followers respect leaders who have integrity and do the right thing even when nobody is watching. A leader who has integrity presents facts and circumstances completely. Ethical leaders do not hide things that might be negative or misrepresent facts.

3. Explain the benefits of ethical leadership and the impact of influence of leaders on the organization.

Scandals obviously harm the organizations that are faced with them. Scandals can harm an organization's reputation and even cause an organization to cease to exist. Public trust is hard earned and easily lost. Think of the impact that an ethical scandal might have on CAP. What if Congress stopped funding CAP because of a scandal? The impact would be devastating.

Ethical leadership has benefits for organizations. A study conducted by Cornell University found a relationship between ethical leadership and employee performance. A study done by Science Direct showed retention benefits based on ethical leadership. Ethical leaders treat members right, and as a result, members in turn have more respect for each other. Ethical leaders are also good stewards and influence followers to do the same. Ethical leaders better engage their followers productively.

Ethical leaders often have a better feeling of wellbeing from their positive interactions. They also have teams with higher morale. Teams with higher morale are often part of a positive workplace environment that extends beyond the professional and includes friendships.

Leaders can have a positive or negative impact on the organization's ethical culture. Several behaviors can harm the culture. These include:

- Failing to link incentives to ethical practices. Don't tell people to reach the goal as quickly as possible. Tell them to reach it safely and ethically.
- Focusing too much on compliance. Too heavy a focus on compliance can take attention from people and other things that matter.
- Setting unrealistic expectations. Ask for what is possible.

- Blaming team members inappropriately. Not every failure is due to a person. Process and circumstance also have a role. We don't want to encourage excuses but we must respect reasons.

Conversely, some positive practices leaders can embrace include:

- Demonstrating professionalism and responsibility.
- Demonstrating respect and consideration.
- Maintaining poise and composure.
- Being honest.
- Treating everyone fairly.
- Following through on promises and commitments.
- Exercising self-control

4. Understand how CAP can create an ethical culture.

An ethical culture begins with a focus on core values of an organization. In this regard, CAP is ahead of other organizations. We have our Core Values of Integrity, Respect, Volunteer Service, and Excellence that we share with every member. We weave these Core Values into our culture and speak openly about them. We communicate them to our seniors and our cadets. We show that these values are meaningful to our organization.

Creating an ethical culture means taking a look at the ethics or your organization. How are we complying with our stated values? What are some areas in which we could improve? Do you embrace diversity? Is your organization inclusive? How would a new member in your organization define your culture? A veteran? Observe how individuals interact with each other.

Define appropriate conduct. What do you expect from those you lead? What do you expect from yourself? Think about the ethical dilemmas that face your members. How do you handle common ethical dilemmas that might come up? What can you do to be more open? Thinking about your safety culture might be a good approach.

Lead by example. Show everyone what you value. Be honest and transparent about decisions. Share information openly. Admit mistakes. Don't cut corners or break rules. Ensure others know that you won't allow them to cut corners or break rules. There is an important distinction in the rules. Ethical leaders follow rules because the rules benefit people. We don't do it for the sake of compliance. We do it because it is the right thing. You might even want to organize a discussion of ethical decision making. The Core Values for Senior Members pamphlet has many scenarios in it you can u se to discuss ethical decision making. Reinforce the fact that you support ethical culture by talking about it. Incorporate what you value into what you communicate. Be aware of your bias. We all have beliefs that impact us. Some of our beliefs might be based on wrong information.

The people you associate with have an impact on your reputation and that of the organization. Bring the right people on board for your team. They not only need to have the right experiences and knowledge but also the right attitudes. When you on board staff, ask them about ethical situations and how they would react. Choose your teammates wisely. They also impact the organization. Once you have good people on the team, listen to them and allow them to provide

input. Open discussion improves organizations. Involve others in decision making processes. Value different belief systems and perspectives.

Finally, be accountable and hold others accountable. You can't just talk the talk. You have to show others you are an ethical leader and you value ethical leadership. When people make mistakes, it is okay to hold them accountable. Do so with fairness and compassion. Don't excuse yourself when you make mistakes. Hold yourself to a higher standard than those you lead. Don't just talk about the negative. Embrace celebrating the positive as well. Too often leaders focus on compliance and negative aspects. There is power in positivity. Don't embrace fake optimism. People will recognize fake responses. Praise genuinely and publicly. It's important!

5. Apply methods for improving ethical leadership skills and organizational culture.

The behaviors of the leader have a big impact on the organization and followers. What leaders give their attention to and measure becomes valued. How leaders react to situations becomes the accepted standard. How leaders allocate resources is observed by followers. The commitment leaders make to coaching, mentoring, and growing others is noticed. The behaviors that are rewarded are noted. Who we recruit, select, and promote, retire, and ignore sends a message.

Like other skills, ethical leadership can improve with time, effort, and practice. It is important to understand your strengths and weaknesses before beginning your self-improvement journey. Ethical leaders who hope to improve their skills practice risk management. They look for situations that might cause ethical dilemmas and work to embrace those situations as learning opportunities. Evaluate situations with an eye on ethical leadership. Look at the potential actions you might take in difficult situations and what might influence you to choose different solutions. Work to avoid letting things like emotion rule your decisions by evaluating your options with an ethical leadership mindset. Listen to your inner voice. Our conscience often tells us when something is not right. It can make us easy, for example. If you feel uneasy, stop and think about why.

One way to improve your ethical leadership is to quality check your decision making. To quality check your decision making, follow these steps:

- Do I have all the important facts relevant to the decision?
- Have I involved everyone who should be a part of this decision?
- Does the decision reflect our organizational, professional, and social values?
- Do the likely benefits of the decision outweigh any potential harms?
- Will this decision keep the problem from recurring or establish a good precedent?
- How would this decision look to someone outside of the organization?

There are many ethics quizzes on the internet. You can try a few and see how you score. One is attached to this lesson. You can find another at https://theethicsguy.com/whats-your-ethics-iq/ There is also an Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment Tool included with this lesson. It is a product of the Department of Veteran's Affairs. While the assessment was written for health care improvement, much of what it asks is applicable to leadership in CAP.

Lesson Summary and Closure

Ethical leadership benefits leaders and organizations. Ethical leaders have some common traits. Good leaders continue to focus on their ethical development and make sure their organizations have a positive, ethical culture.

EXERCISE:

Take the Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment. Use the results to make an ethical leadership action plan to improve your skills. Share the action plan with your instructor and mentor for feedback. The action plan should be in the form of a background paper using the template on the publications page.

Observe your organizational culture. What positive ethical leadership qualities and indicators do you see? What areas of concern do you see? Make an action plan to improve your organization/team/etc. Share the action plan with your instructor and mentor for feedback. The action plan should be in the form of a background paper using the template on the publications page.

RESOURCES:

National Center for Ethics in Health Care 10E1E. (2013, August 15). *VA.gov: Veterans Affairs*. Ethical Leadership Self-Assessment. https://www.ethics.va.gov/.