Exploring the Big 5:
Ethical Paradigms that Guide Ethical Decision-Making in Higher Education

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Our Time Together

- A little about me
- DFEI Ethics Fellow project
- Why paradigmatic possibilities in ethical decision-making?
- Review DFEI principles
- Overview of "the big 5" ethical paradigms
- Implementing paradigmatic possibilities into conversations about ethics
- Dialogue

About Me

- Professional background in student affairs in higher education (first year experience, college access and student success programs, leadership education, community engagement)
- Qualitative researcher
  - Interest in transforming postsecondary educational environments
  - Interest in positionality work (which implicates paradigmatic commitments), both empirically and practically
- Teaching philosophy grounded in three principles
  - We're all teachers, we're all learners
  - We'll collectively create and foster a brave space
  - We are committed to theory *and* practice

DFEI Ethics Fellow Project

- Student affairs profession guided by: ACPA & NASPA professional competencies (the first of which is Personal and Ethical Foundations); and the CAS Standards

  – These guiding documents greatly align with DFEI principles

- Generally, ethical decision-making occurs in four phases: 1) identifying the ethical problem, 2) gathering necessary data, **3) conceptualizing and evaluating alternative courses of action**, and 4) implementing the best course of action

  – Phase 3 offers an opportunity to engage various paradigmatic possibilities (Wood & Hilton, 2012)

DFEI Ethics Fellow Project

My project includes:
- Integrating DFEI and related professional ethical principles into LEAD 5010 (required course for the Master's in SAHE program; course offered each summer)
- Integrating DFEI and related professional ethical principles into a co-curricular experience in collaboration with the Student Affairs Association (the SAHE student organization)
- Offering at least one ethics "lunch and learn" experience for student affairs professionals at UCCS

Why "Paradigmatic Possibilities"

- Higher education administration is, in many ways, an ethical enterprise as leaders confront dynamic, multidimensional, and complex issues on their campuses and in their communities (Wood & Hilton, 2012)

  – Examples: responsible stewardship of resources; holding students accountable; conflict management; crisis leadership

- Higher education leaders must be responsive to changing campus environments *(e.g., increase in racially and ethnically diverse student populations; implementing new internal budget models)* evolving sociopolitical dynamics *(e.g., increase in community violence, including targeted violence towards marginalized populations)* and shifting policy circumstances *(e.g., declines in state appropriated dollars; legislation geared at controlling curricular choices)*.

Why "Paradigmatic Possibilities"

- Higher education leaders at all levels across an institution will engage in ethical decision-making
  - Thus, higher education leaders should be conscious of this reality. One way to do this is to be aware of ethical paradigmatic possibilities
- Ethical paradigms aid our ethical decision-making in many ways.
- Simply put, we can think of ethical paradigms as "frames" or "ways of thinking" that can inform the ways we engage in ethical decision-making, particularly as it relates to phase 3 of the ethical decision-making process: conceptualizing and evaluating alternative courses of action

DFEI Principles

- **Integrity** – act with honesty in all situations
- **Trust** – build trust in all stakeholder relationships
- **Accountability** – accept responsibility for all decisions
- **Transparency** – maintain open and truthful communications
- **Fairness** – engage in fair competition and create equitable and just relationships
- **Respect** – honor the rights, freedoms, views, and property of others
- **Rule of law** – comply with the spirit and intent of laws and regulations
- **Viability** – create long-term value for all relevant stakeholders

The "Big 5" Ethical Paradigms

Wood & Hilton (2012) posit that the big 5 ethical paradigms with which higher education leaders must be familiar include:

- Ethic of Justice
- Ethic of Critique
- Ethic of Care
- Ethic of the Profession
- Ethic of Local Community

Ethic of Justice

The ethic of justice is an ethical frame that conceptualizes issues, holds confidence in, and enacts decisions based upon the rule of law and more abstract concepts of fairness, equity, and justice (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005)

- Leaders' decisions are guided through extant laws, rules, policies, codes, and procedures
- Rule-based decision making (Beckner, 2004)
- Objective and nonconsequentialist in nature

Ethic of Justice in Practice

Higher education leaders are affected by rules emerging from the federal level *(e.g., judicial rulings; accreditation; federal aid policies)*, state level *(e.g., state legislatures; state education coordinating boards)*, and system level *(e.g., board of trustees)* as well as rules from local entities *(e.g., local government)* and campus entities *(e.g., shared governance entities; unions)*.

- From an ethic of justice perspective, higher education leaders have a responsibility to learn, understand, and abide by rules, codes, and procedures.

In an ethical dilemma, leaders may consider:

- What are the rules, codes, policies, and procedures relevant to this dilemma?
- Of these rules, are some more pertinent or important to an issue than others?
- What are the implications for this issue with respect to society?

Ethic of Critique

The ethic of critique, in many ways, is juxtaposed to the ethic of justice in that it critiques moral problems caused by the ethic of justice. Moreover, the ethic of critique views laws as historically (and today) providing advantages to certain social groups (Nevarez & Wood, 2010)

- Informed by critical theory which is concerned with issues of power, privilege, and inequities that are embedded within the social order
- "If the ethic of justice looks towards fairness, the ethic of critique looks toward barriers to fairness" (Starratt, 2004, p. 47)
- Ethic of critique is consequentialist in nature in that the consequences of actions are prioritized in decision-making
  - Concerned with how decisions will impact affect or disadvantage particular groups

Ethic of Critique in Practice

The ethic of critique can be employed by higher education leaders who are committed to creating parity for others who have been disadvantaged, particularly in higher education.

- Necessitates grappling with rules, laws, codes, etc.

In an ethical dilemma, leaders may consider:

- Does one group have certain advantages over others? If so, how are these advantages sustained?

- What are the ramifications of these advantages?

- Does one (or more) group(s) lack access and voice in the decision-making process?

- What assumptions are at play? And what are the known and unknown values within these assumptions?

Ethic of Care

The ethic of care is also juxtaposed to the ethic of justice in many ways as well in that ethic of care places its value primarily on people (Noddings, 2003). That is, the ethic of care is compassion-oriented and is concerned with how decisions, issues, and circumstances serve to hurt others (Gilligan, 1982).

- Characterized by virtues such as compassion, understanding, and trust
- Consequentialist in nature (Caldwell et al., 2007)

Ethic of Care in Practice

Higher education leaders employing an ethic of care are encouraged to foster understanding of multiple sociocultural realities

- Ethic of care reinforces the importance of students and their development as well as their attainment of educational and career goals; also emphasizes the development of employees (i.e., leaders) across an institution

In an ethical dilemma, leaders may consider:

- How will an issue or potential resolution affect all members of the institution?
- Will a decision cause harm (even if unintentionally) to any particular group/entity?
- In what way (if any) does this issue or potential resolution impact organizational morale?
- How will (or does) this issue affect the individual's personal goals and development?

Ethic of the Profession

The ethic of the profession acknowledges that there are guiding values (e.g., principles, codes, assumptions) within each profession. Thus, adhering to those values is an obligatory duty of a leader (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2005).

- Professional codes of ethics are paramount
- Nonconsequentialist in nature

Ethic of the Profession in Practice

Higher education leaders operating from an ethic of the profession should view and adhere to professional codes of ethics through the lens of their field (in this case, the codes of ethics that guide the field of higher education administration). Additionally, leaders should be mindful of their own beliefs, convictions, and values in relationship to those within the field.

- Additional ethical guidelines provided by associations focused on institutional contexts *(e.g., community colleges - the AACC)* and functional areas *(e.g., fraternity and sorority life - AFA)*

In an ethical dilemma, leaders may consider:

- What ethical guidance does my professional association provide?
- How would colleagues and peers in the field approach this ethical issue?

Ethic of Local Community

The ethic of local community is grounded in the notion that colleges and universities (particularly public institutions and especially community colleges) must serve the needs, interests, and public good of the local community (Wood & Hilton, 2012).

- Grounded in historical and contemporary understandings of public postsecondary institutions' role to their localities
- Situates the best interests of the local community as a "cardinal principle" in decision-making (Wood & Hilton, 2012)
- Ethical decisions prioritize societal outcomes over individual outcomes (Beckner, 2004)
- Consequentialist in nature

Ethic of Local Community in Practice

Higher education leaders operating with an ethic of local community adhere to community-based decision-making processes.

- Acknowledges that localized decision-making can better account for contextual challenges and opportunities

In an ethical dilemma, leaders may consider:

- What are the implications or ramifications for the local community with respect to this particular issue?
- What potential courses of action would promote the best interest or greatest good for the local community?
- How will the community perceive or react to the issues and potential courses of action?

Incorporating Paradigmatic Possibilities

- Generally, ethical decision-making occurs in four phases: 1) identifying the ethical problem, 2) gathering necessary data, **3) conceptualizing and evaluating alternative courses of action**, and 4) implementing the best course of action

  - Phase 3 offers an opportunity to engage various paradigmatic possibilities (Wood & Hilton, 2012)

- As we examine various ethical dilemmas (potentially through case studies or real-world examples), we can leverage the big 5 ethical paradigms to unpack, uncover, and interrogate various courses of action

Questions?
Reflections?
Curiosities?

Happy to chat more: ntapiafu@uccs.edu