When leaders lie. Integrating an understanding of deception and its ethical implications in the context of leadership education.

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Personal reflection

• Think about the last three days, and the interactions you have had with family, colleagues, friends, across all modalities (F-t-F, Teams, email)
• How many lies, equivocations, small fibs, exaggerations have you told?
• Be HONEST and think about your reasons
• Make a mental note of this number
Number of lies you told in the last three days

- Zero. I always told the truth: 12%
- One or two: 46%
- Three, half a dozen max: 35%
- Err I lost count: 8%
People lie every day.
Students lie every day.

Bad News

Good News
Think back to the last time you discovered someone had deceived you... what is a word that would capture your reaction at the time?
And if you had to choose your emotional reaction using this scale?
Mixed feelings and messages

Well-socialized people revere honesty and disapprove of lying and other forms of deception. At the same time, well socialized people engage in deception, regularly and skillfully, not only for altruistic reasons but also to gain advantages over others

(Alexander & Sherwin, 2003 at p.393)

Truthfulness as a principle

The consequences

- Decreased trust in institutions, leaders, experts, communities AND EACH OTHER

- [https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/trust-in-government/](https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/trust-in-government/)

Learning Goals

1. Clarity
2. Consequences
3. Courage
Scenario-based discussion

Clarity
Extreme examples are not always helpful
Deception and Theories of Moral Leadership

- Authentic leadership
- Servant leadership
- Ethical leadership
Linking moral leadership theories to ethical perspectives

Ethical Leadership

One of Drew’s employees gets fired after company leaders discover this employee has been planning to start his own business. Drew has been advised for legal reasons not to discuss the circumstances of the employee’s departure. Some of Drew’s team who worked closely with this employee are concerned and ask Drew about the situation. Drew says:

"I don’t know what happened."
Authentic Leadership

Jo’s company allows managers to give their employees professional development training as rewards for good performance. Jo instead believes that these opportunities should be used to motivate low performing employees. Jo nominates one of the lower performers for a professional development training opportunity. In the reasoning write-up, Jo states:

“This employee is doing very well and deserves this opportunity.”
Riley’s company is going through a business downturn. The CEO told Riley that the company is going to downsize and layoff 10-20% of employees within Riley’s department. In order to keep morale high, in the departmental meeting discussing company-related issues, Riley says:

“The company is having an excellent year and plans to grow going forward.”
Think about how you would approach ethical dilemmas that revolve around lying or telling the truth. Which of these best describe how you would think about such dilemmas?

A. I think about the ethical standards that I hold myself to and would hold others to. I would want to know my conduct complies with rules and policies.

B. I think about what course of action would be consistent with my core beliefs or values, even if others do not agree with them.

C. I think about how my behavior would affect the well-being of others. I would try and make sure I choose the action that increases well-being and minimize harm.
Consequences

Creating with Critical Thinking
Choose Your Own Adventure Story

• Much like interactive books or video games
• Students write scenarios to depict the consequences of each choice
Chris’ employee asks for a promotion. Chris has no intention of promoting this individual due to their performance issues. Chris says:

**Lie**

Management has put a ban on promotions for now.

**Truth**

Your performance does not warrant promotion.

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Poll locked. Responses not accepted.

What held you back from telling the truth?

“avoid conflict”

“didn't want to start a fight ”

“Excuse”

“protect other person ”
Courage

Imagining and Applying
We overestimate the negative consequences of truth-telling

“Focusing on honesty (but not kindness or communication-consciousness) is more pleasurable, socially connecting, and does less relational harm than individuals expect.”

Recap

• **Find clarity** in your principled approach to deception
• **Critically consider** the **consequences**
• **Courageously** approach the possibility of honesty.
Questions, Comments, Reactions, and Ideas