

# Critical Analysis o Understanding Ethical Failures in Leadership

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Terry Price focus' on the ethical theories and practices of the cognitive account. The author argues that leaders that even put their own interests aside may not be ethically successful. Thus, volitional pressures take a smaller part in ethical failures by leaders. Leaders are particularly susceptible to ethical failures because of their commitment to the importance of the end result. This might be to achieve group, organizational, or societal goals even when goal achievement is in the interests of the followers. The extend of importance of the goal ads justification to making moral exceptions of themselves. Terry Price articulates "leaders should restrict the exceptions they make of themselves to the pursuit of inclusive ends and publicize their reasons for deviating from the requirements of morality".

## THE VOLITIONAL ACCOUNT

The volitional account is based on the theory that human motivation is based on self-interest and egoistic human behaviour. Compliance with moral principles depends on the extend of the expectation that an immoral behaviour will be found out and the unwanted consequences that will be faced for engaging in it. There is a lack of motivation to do what it morally right even though it is known what is morality required. Using the schematic interpretation of Kohlberg, Stage one focus's on ones self. The individual is focused only on their individual needs or fears. Although physical punishment may not be the "unwanted consequences" one would face there is a common theme or motivation with the volitional account. The person is selfish and motivated by self-interest. However, the individual has an idea of what is "right" which would also encompass stage four in the schematic of Kohlberg. The conventional level of stage four – the law & order orientation illustrates right behaviour as doing ones duty, showing respect for authority and maintaining the given social order for its own sake. This can parallel ethical failures in leaders due to ones motivation to maintaining the social order of being the leader in the leader-follower relationship. Social order would also suggest satisfying the interests of the followers and outsiders. In this sense leadership would be motivated by the group results and there is no attempt to satisfy the self-interest and its justified beliefs of the leader.

Ludwig and Longenecker suggest to create conditions where it is difficult to act on self-interest and have opportunities to be immoral. This would constitute some sort of monitoring or detection to prevent unethical behaviour. These types of mechanisms are used in Public Health. The drinking water quality program undergoes audits and as a result ombudsmen reports are generated. This determines if the Health Authority has acted fairly and reasonably and if their actions are consistent with relevant legislation, policies and procedures. In my current position our new leader is checking the number of facilities that are inspected per month to determine if we are reaching the set goal. Monitoring these figures and actions creates a sense of accountability and reliability in our job. In doing so those invested are motivated to achieve a common goal or fulfilling their role in the organization.

# Critical Analysis o Understanding Ethical Failures in Leadership

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## THE COGNITIVE ACCOUNT

Cognitive mistakes consist of mistakes about content and mistakes about scope. Content mistakes are “beliefs about what types of actions are morally permissible or right”. This has a similar note in the Kohlberg schematic that if everyone is looking at me or if you are worried about what everyone will think, then the person will more likely conform to what is satisfactory to the group. Actions will be based on what is socially acceptable. What the group deems acceptable will be the type of actions one would partake in and be deemed moral.

Scope mistakes are dependent on the individuals moral status and the extent to which they are a member of that group. As a member, the individual has moral obligations and are subject to the certain right and responsibilities based on their belief in their position or membership. The more invested they are, the more moral obligations they would have towards the group or organization. The fourth stage of Kohlberg, the law and order orientation uses the maintenance of social order through fixed rules however, a similar aspect to Price’s evaluation is that “this is the norm: this is the way we do things around here”. As a “member of the group your moral obligations are linked to what is expected as a member”. Leaders are more likely to fail ethically due to mistakes in cognitive scope.

A leaders certain behaviour that may not be held in high regard can be dismissed by excuses or justification of the circumstances. As a leader their actions can be justified by being acceptable based on the circumstances at hand. Even a moral requirement that is collective may not apply to a leader because an alternative is more suitable.

## Exceptions

The leaders distinctive role needs to be demonstrated in order for their behaviour to be justified. “He has reason to deviate from the requirement and has a greater reason to make an exception for himself than to do what is typically required by morality “. The sources of distinctiveness on which justifications are accepted are *Trait approaches*, *Situational approaches* and *Transactional approaches*.

*Trait approaches* can be classified as personal characteristics where leaders differ from followers. These characteristics can be talents, skills, abilities, motivation, knowledge, virtue and self-confidence. “These leaders need to understand their desires for achievement and their ambition as responses to the relative importance of their goals, work, and careers. This means that they will be inclined to believe that these aspects of their lives are greater relative importance than corresponding aspects of the lives of others, in which case these leaders will also be susceptible to mistakenly believing that they are justified in making exceptions of themselves”. These leaders would be working towards a goal out of self-interest and leading in the volitional account. They hold themselves in such high regard, that they feel that they are special and can make exceptions of themselves. The leader may disregard group consent or consensus based of their belief that they know more than the follower and can act on this knowledge. The confidence in a leaders character can put them at risk acting unethically.

# Critical Analysis o Understanding Ethical Failures in Leadership

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*Situational approaches* explain that the requirement of leaders vary just like the situations that leaders find themselves in. The leaders behaviour is determined by the situation and these behaviours are justified in acting differently than the moral requirements. *Transactional approaches* shows that the role of the leader and its distinction from followers is a special relationship. The leader can differentiate his behaviour from those of the followers based on the leaders distinction. Thus, group consent is essential to establish this distinction.

## Justifying Leadership

The reconciliation view shows that morality does not prohibit leaders of making justified exceptions. The realist view describes the exception as not having to be reconciled because the demands of “great leadership often requires that leaders do some moral wrong”.

Kant’s moral theory is against the “deceptive practice of using false promises for goal achievement and the duty to help others in need”. This ethical theory can not be used to reconcile the exception making behaviour of leaders. Leaders that do not follow through with the ethical demands of this moral theory would “disrespect for the very values that justify the ends of leadership”. There is a conflict between Kant’s moral theory and how leaders will behave on behalf of the collective ends. thus, “leadership is to some extent, manipulative”.

The exceptions that leaders make can be based on their commitment to their cause. The results can be justified using consequentialist ethics. Based on satisfying the leader and followers goal contributes to the “goods of happiness and well being”. However the goods of happiness and well being are usually those of the leader and followers and may not be of outsiders. Based on this conclusion that the results may be not deliver overall happiness every time they cannot be utilitarian.

As the author uses utilitarian and consequentialist ethics for exception making it brings to mind the post-conventional level of the Kohlberg schematic. Stage five is the social-contract, legalistic orientation. “Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and standards which have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society. There is a clear awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions and a corresponding emphasis upon procedural rules for reaching consensus”. Exception making of leaders is based on consent and consensus that they are distinct from followers. Based on this observation if the end result is for rights and standards that are agreed by society than the right action of the leader is based on obtaining this agreed goal or end result.

## The problem of dirty hands

The behaviour of leaders doesn’t always allow for justification. The right thing to do in utilitarian terms may leave the leader feeling guilty of being morally wrong. The leader may act badly in the efforts of doing something right such as “competing for resources or the collective end demands followers to be treated differently than what is warranted by generally applicable moral requirements”. The leaders action may treat outsider wrongly. In this theory leaders need to learn how to act badly. There is no exception to act this way where everyone else or the majority is acting in partiality to moral requirements. Since followers are usually those that benefit from leaders actions, leaders can feel justified in their actions in manipulating, deceiving or coercing

# Critical Analysis o Understanding Ethical Failures in Leadership

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followers because it is for their own good. Outsiders request for the moral requirement have a “stronger case than leaders because they did not consent to the distinction of the leader” which would allow them to justify their actions. Leadership justification can be applied as a communal exceptions, for example “what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles”. One communities moral requirements can serve as protection to other communities and members roles. Even if a leader feels guilty of his behaviour the fact they he has these feelings “does not prove that he has done something wrong it proves that he does not know that what he has done is right”.

## Moral correction

Feelings of sympathy sometimes opens one morality for revision. “The leader who questions his morality would need to know whether it is good or bad before he can know whether he should embrace his feelings of sympathy and accept the conclusion that a deviation from a generally applicable moral requirement would be justified”. In the case of civil disobedience people act outside of morality and the law in order to do what they believe they should do. They make exceptions of themselves. The results of protesting make the law inapplicable justifying their non-compliance. Willingness to accept punishment for disobeying an unjust law in an unjust system is a way to acknowledge their responsibility for the violation. However, it is “the discrepancy between law and morality that grounds the justification for civil disobedience in the first place. The costs of punishing leaders for their exceptions are part of the case for the injustice and, as such, force the public to consider the importance of changing the current system”.

In stage five Kohlberg schematic there is an emphasis beyond the legal point of view, an emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational considerations of social utility”. Leaders that act upon their belief that something is unjust and is in the interest of society can have the affect of changing laws based on the end result. Both Terry Price and the Kolhberg schematic illustrate the change of the law under considerations of social utility.

## Transforming Authentic leadership

Leadership needs to surpass everyday wants, needs and expectations. “Only when the desires and preferences of leadership competes with morality there is a concern for ethics of transformational leadership. By identifying our better selves not with desires and preferences but with values that lead to the satisfaction of real need, transforming leaders work from the perspective of these values to get us to act on our better selves”. This is the value based account. When leaders fail ethically it is because they selfishly choose to act in ways they know they should not. This rests on the acceptability of the volitional account of ethical failures in leadership.

Authentic leaders act on values that reflect the interests of others. The welfare of others may be more important than their own. The goal of this type of leadership is to “transform people so that they might accurately identify their real interests as members of a group, organization, or society and come to accept the values that would serve to advance these interests”. These types of leaders may fail ethical because they justify their behaviour due to the importance of the good of the groups achievement. The followers will accept the justification of the leaders because they

# Critical Analysis o Understanding Ethical Failures in Leadership

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share these values and the high commitment that is required. The leaders “distinctive understanding of the collective good and of the processes necessary to achieve it must be constrained by generally applicable moral requirements. Leader must be willing to sacrifice their other-regarding values when generally applicable moral requirements make legitimate demands that they do so”.

## Change and responsibility

“Leadership implies recognition to the possibility of doing things in a better way and recognition of the distinction between the way things are and the way things ought to be. Leadership inclines leaders to misjudge the importance of the goals they seek to achieve and because of the tendency of leaders to overvalue collective ends and the interests these ends typically reflect, generally applicable moral requirements are necessary to prevent ethical failures in leadership”. Terry Price proposes “a response that allows leaders in some circumstances to elude attributions of responsibility when their exception-making behaviour is unjustified and on the moral account “adopt a principle of inclusiveness at the margins of moral community”.

## Relevance and objectives

The direct value of this book to working in the field of Public Health is that leaders will make exceptions of themselves in moral application for many different reasons. The majority of their actions are based on the importance of achieving the group or organizations goal and is in the interests of their followers. Leaders also need to take responsibility for their actions if their behaviour is unjustified. The personal usefulness of this book can be represented in the parent-child relationship. Parents act as leaders and might make exceptions to their behaviour in the best interest of their child.

My responsibility in my career is to uphold the law that is applicable to certain types of facilities. Many times facilities are found to be non-compliant. As an inspector there is some exception making depending on the circumstance. As long as there is no immediate health risk time can be allotted to the operator to correct the deficiencies. This is based on a conversation with the operator as to what would be fair to them based on their current personal and/or financial situation.

The book helps with the course objective to reason ethically in the moment of leadership crisis through conversation and questioning of diverse leadership representatives. The examples, variability and reasons for ethical failure in leadership represented in the book helps to identify aspects that could alter the judgment of a leaders and their actions. In learning the ethical or cognitive challenges of other leaders helps to identify if the leader is falling victim to the same unethical behaviour and may find ways to justify or alter their actions.

Many role models could be used in this book but depending on the ethical challenges that are faced the assessment of their conclusions or action can be analysed to see if it fits with the same situation or challenges that are being face at the time. In this consideration leaders can look into the world to seek role models in their field that kept the generally accepted moral requirements and also those that challenged existing practices that could be considered unjust. This can also help leaders to pass on these examples to followers on how they should act.

## Critical Analysis o Understanding Ethical Failures in Leadership

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This book can provide significant guidance for moral dilemmas faced in public service. The book touches on all aspects of justification that would be reached as a leader and the consequences and how followers and outsider would be affected. This is important in my field because my job affects the general public.

The ethical terminology in this book was challenging at first. The author was very good at defining the ethical theory's and was very organized in structuring the contents of the book in the introduction. Each chapter also had some structure at the beginning and a good summary at the end. The examples that were given made the book more readable and helped to understand the ethical theories and the authors argument. The most interesting chapter I found was Chapter 6 – Change and Responsibility as it used examples in modern history to see the challenges that were faced. Overall the book was fairly easy to read.