

Long Abstract

Creating Emergent Ethical Leadership in a University-Wide Setting

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The Challenge

Our cultural perspective in the United States regarding institutions of higher education as “ivory towers” often leaves the impression that the academy should operate under the highest ethical standards. Yet scandal is not new to the academy. There have been incidences of presidential misconduct (Chronicle, September 26, 2005) student misconduct, and faculty improprieties. The question is not whether the academy should be held to a higher standard than any other institution, the question becomes who is responsible for anticipating and responding to ethical breaches on campus?

This raises the issue of leadership culpability. Can we hold only designated “leaders” culpable for not anticipating and responding to ethical breaches which occur well below or above their level of their reporting? Are academic leaders (e.g., presidents, deans) responsible for the ethical conduct of individuals? Are academic leaders responsible for creating a culture of shared ethical leadership?

These are important and complex questions. Ethical standards, guidelines, monitoring systems are usually in place but unfortunately often fail. We could continue to focus our attention on “leadership by compliance” or we could find another way to redefine ethical leadership so as to create a culture of shared responsibility where the locus of accountability of “being ethical” rests with individuals at all levels within the academy; where the challenge of ethical leadership is shared by all and the responsibility

is placed “...back to the people who need to take responsibility” (Heifetz and Linsky, 2002, pg. 13).

The challenge becomes how to create a climate in higher education that promotes a culture of shared ethical leadership amongst all constituents; one that is grounded in a culture of shared ethical responsibility.

The Call

Our call is for a different approach to ethical leadership within the academy, for a new culture of shared ethical leadership that does not have “easy answers” (Heifetz, 1994) for identifying, meeting, and solving ethical challenges. We propose a leadership model that empowers community members to make on-going ethical decisions based on a process of reflective ethical inquiry, to become “ethical practitioners”.

Ethical practitioners define anyone who reflectively inquires into ethical concerns for self or others in either an individual or collaborative fashion. Ethical practitioners have a heightened sense of awareness of their own gut reactions to situations as well as being alert to those instances around them that prompt unease. Ethical practitioners use reflective inquiry and collaboration to delve deeper into a situation and to examine it before responding. Most importantly, ethical practitioners use adaptive methods rather than quickly adopting a technical solution or quick fix to anticipated or unanticipated ethical challenges (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

In this paper, we discuss the AIRsm Model of Reflective Ethical Inquiry as a mechanism for cultivating shared, reflective ethical leadership. Such leadership is expressed by individual practitioners and groups of ethical practitioners who come

together either as members of an established unit (e.g. a department, course training) or from diverse units for a common purpose.

Expressions of Reflective Ethical Leadership

The practitioner model (described below) allows for four types of reflective ethical leadership (Table 1). Leadership can be *directly* (Gardner, 1995) practiced by an individual or collaboratively as reflective forums, personal narratives, etc. It also can be *indirectly* (Gardner, 1995) practiced by an individual or collaboratively as outcomes (e.g., innovations, teaching) of that reflective practice. The diverse examples in Table 1 indicate that reflective ethical leadership can be practiced by faculty, staff, administrators, and students in a variety of academic and non-academic settings both on (e.g., classroom, lab, residence halls, offices) and off campus (e.g., workplace, internships, service learning).

The AIR Modelsm: A Mechanism for Cultivating Reflective Ethical Leadership

The organizing framework for cultivating these four types of reflective ethical leadership is the AIR model of reflective ethical inquiry (Cohen, McDaniels & Qualters, 2005). As indicated in Figure 1, this is a practitioner model in which the acronym AIR refers to the three elements of reflective ethical inquiry practice: Awareness, Investigation and Response. The practitioner(s) uses the model to clarify and refine ethical thinking and decision making about a particular ethical issue experienced on or off campus. The model is intended to help the practitioner take actions that are more caring, compassionate and respectful of him/herself as well as others.

The model provides a bottom up approach, beginning with the practitioner reflectively acknowledging and identifying personal and shared ethical concerns that arise in the lab,

workplace, and so forth. This initial “welcoming” of an ethical issue is particularly critical for initiating the inquiry process. It is accompanied by reflection on the underlying ethical concern(s), as well as on one’s assumptions, beliefs, and biases regarding it. This initial identification and acknowledgement (A) is followed by a reflective investigative (I) phase in which the practitioner(s) researches the issue in an interdisciplinary way. This investigative phase leads to refined ethical thinking and decision making which in turn leads the practitioner to think about how to convert that thinking and decision making into practical action. We refer to this third element of inquiry as Response(R).

As indicated by the circle of safety in Figure 1, all three elements (A, I &R) of reflective ethical inquiry process must occur in a safe space in which the practitioner feels an ease to reflectively share with others without being personally judged or criticized. Within that “safe” space established with agreed-upon ground rules, the practitioner learns to move from reacting to ethical uneasiness to reflecting on it. Rather than reacting with annoyance, helplessness, irritation, arrogance, jumping to conclusions, etc. within the confines of one’s comfort zone, the AIR practitioner confidently “welcomes” the concern with reflective questions such as “what is the underlying ethical issue here?” “what are my assumptions and beliefs about that” “who is impacted by this issue”? This A phase naturally leads to the I and R phases, all of which engender multiple expressions of ethical leadership(Table 1) as well as other benefits including protection of reputation and increased productivity. In contrast, staying within a reactive mode of blaming, avoidance and rationalizing reaps many costly mistakes including damage to reputation. When the AIR model is used, the ethical practitioner, who ironically often does not think

of him/herself as a leader, emerges as an effective reflective ethical leader in ways shown in Table 1.

Practical Expressions of Reflective Ethical Leadership

To instill and value reflective ethical leadership in academic life, the AIRsm model must be practiced as a vital part of faculty, staff, and student life. Below is a guide and brief description of sample activities in which AIR practitioners at Northeastern University have collaborated to express shared reflective ethical leadership in direct and indirect ways.

Ethics Forum:

Creation of a University-wide Ethics Forum in which faculty and staff met to reflectively inquire into “real life” ethical dis-ease experienced in the work environment. The AIRsm Model served as a framework for confidential discussions that often generated ideas outside the box.

Faculty and Teaching Assistant Development:

Workshops have used AIRsm as the framework to solve hypothetical (but based on very real) teaching cases. Teachers are guided through the process of heightened awareness of the issues in a case study and then generate lists of potential resources to reflectively investigate and respond the defined ethical areas.

Classroom application:

AIRsm has also been presented as a practitioner model that faculty can use in their classrooms to help students begin to understand how they can emerge as ethical leaders in their field. Authentic case studies from the discipline are discussed within the AIR framework.

Experiential Learning:

The AIRsm framework has become the foundation of a training course for cooperative education faculty who then run sessions for students who are facing difficult or uneasy ethical situations in their cooperative education placement. This has proven to be very effective in bolstering student confidence and competence in handling some very difficult ethical situations (Cohen, McDaniels, and Qualters, 2005).

Interdisciplinary Collaborations Using the AIRsm model in this manner created a web of ethical inquiry (see figure 2) at our institution. A climate of shared ethical inquiry was established which engendered a culture of shared ethical leadership.

The Story Continues:

We have outlined a model that has great potential for creating a culture of shared ethical leadership in institutions of higher education. The AIRsm Model of Ethical Inquiry has allowed a web of reflective ethical inquiry to be constructed on our campus. With this common framework, faculty, students, administrators and staff have had multiple opportunities to reflectively interact together over difficult issues in a shared collegial environment. This practitioner approach is a pro-active one that allows everyone on campus to be an ethical leader by focusing on individual and collective efforts.

Table 1

Expressions of Reflective Ethical Leadership

	<u>Collaborative Practice</u>	<u>Individual Practice</u>
<u>Direct Practice</u>	<p>Shared Reflective Inquiry reflective forums, discussions, shared investigation etc.</p>	<p>Personal Reflective Inquiry sharing inquiries & narratives, identify/acknowledge ethical concerns</p>
<u>Indirect Products of Practice</u>	<p>Collaborative Outcomes joint publications, curricular innovations, workshops, trainings, interdisciplinary projects promote public venues, etc. more effective ethical choices (e.g., workplace, lab, classroom)</p>	<p>Personal Outcomes teaching, consultation research, writings, curricular innovation public talks, publications promote public venues, create interdisciplinary projects, more effective ethical choices (e.g., workplace, lab, classroom) creative works (e.g., art, music)</p>

Figure 1
**AIR MODEL of Reflective
 ETHICAL INQUIRY**

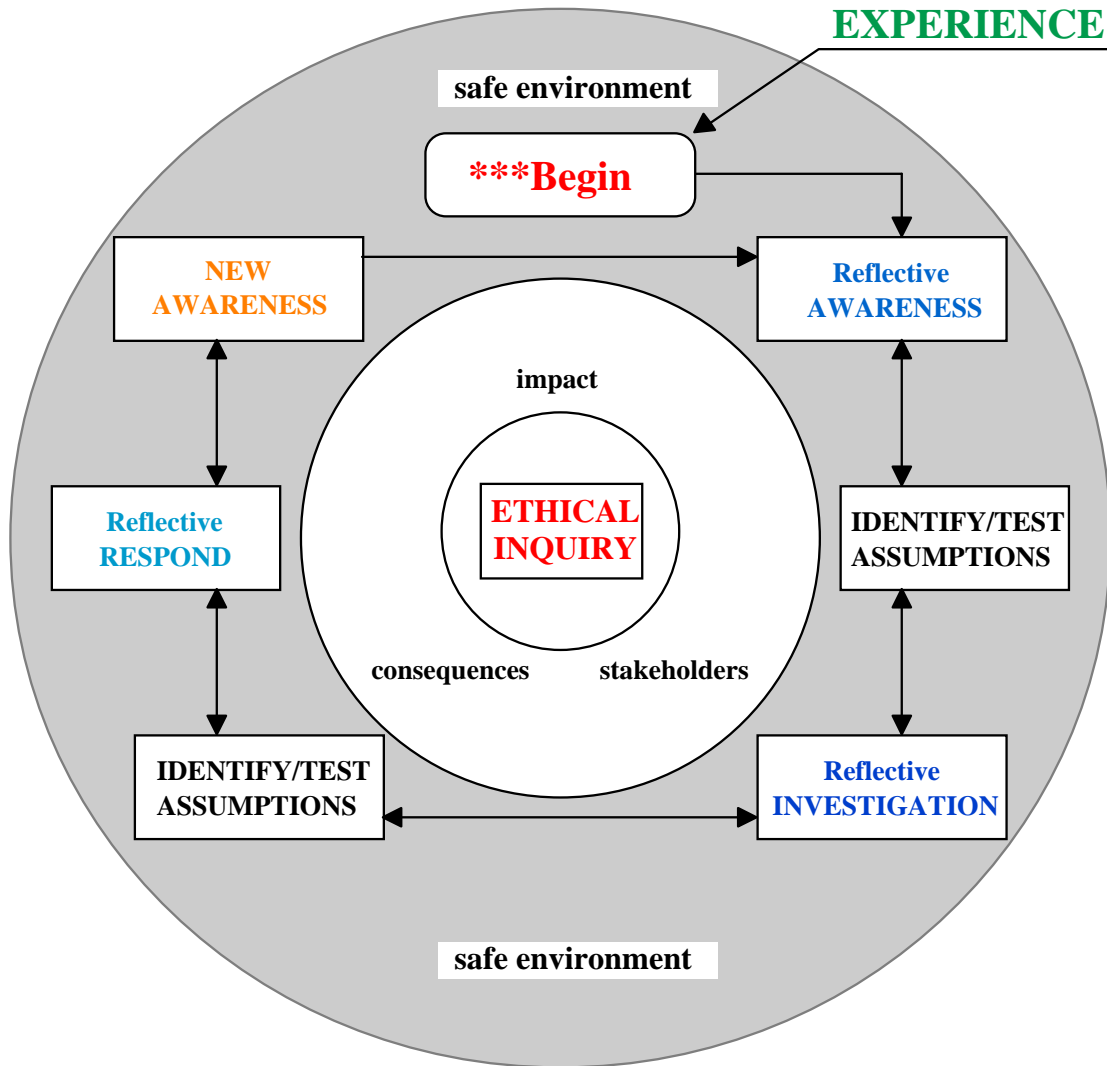
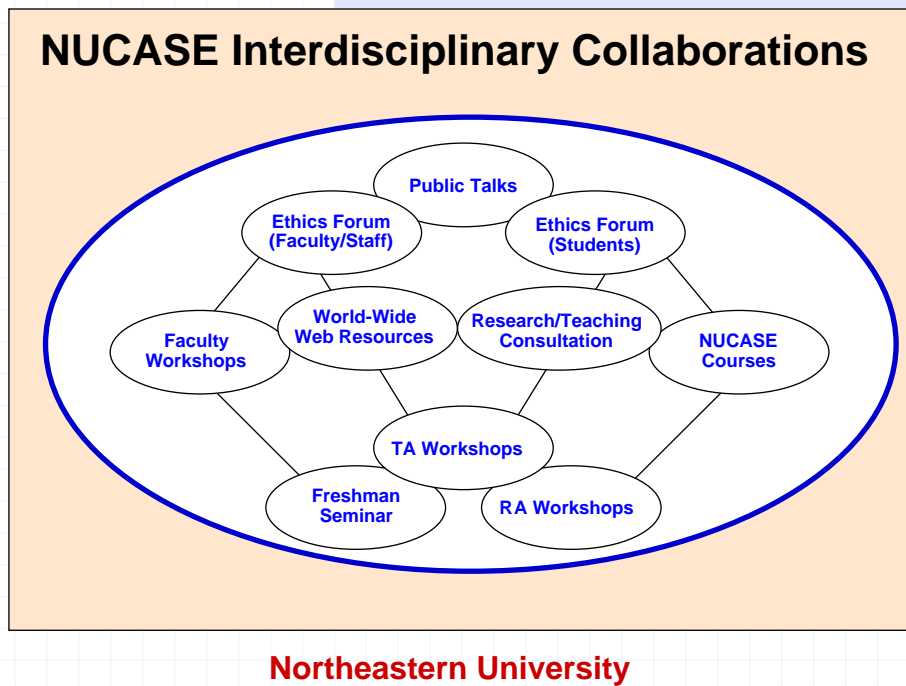


Figure 2



Northeastern University

References:

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