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## **Ethical Leaders and Unethical Leadership**

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### **Ethical Leaders and Unethical Leadership**

Leaders do not need a code of conduct or examine lessons learned by probing other cases of unethical leadership to become ethical leaders. They also do not need the philosophical understanding of Kant, Aristotle, or Plato regarding ethical conduct. According to Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016), ethical leadership, in its nature, is about what is right or wrong. It is about making tough choices. That is why I do not agree with the statement that we can become leaders with ethics through examining unethical leadership cases. Admittedly, these cases are numerous, but still, leaders find themselves behaving unethically for various reasons, despite the lessons learned from others.

As a leader, it is important to behave ethically and have the appearance of ethical conduct. Many actions of a leader can appear unethical, yet they are within the parenthesis of ethical conduct. That explains why what is considered unethical in the public realm can be ethical to a leader. It explains that not all cases of unethical leadership are truly unethical. For example, a manager who, after a serious economic analysis, discovers that it is cheaper to fly the staff to the Bahamas for a convention than to engage in the traditional company conference. In such a case, it is ethical and morally right to fly the staff to the Bahamas, even though others might judge him as unethical in using the company resources for an outside trip instead of having the conference held in-house. In addition, ethical conduct is about a personal dilemma (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). One can learn a lot from reading and examining the field cases of ethical leadership, but that will not guide their approach to ethical leadership in practice. Ethical leadership is a dilemma, despite the lessons learned from external sources, especially where the decisions to be made grey. For instance, in many organizations, people enjoy the freedom of speech championed by the leadership. However, freedom of speech does not encourage hurtful

remarks by the employees. A leader is responsible for providing feedback to the employees regarding their performance. Most of the time, the feedback is canvassed in a manner that does not hurt the employees' feelings; hence the desired impact of the feedback is not met. Leaders fear that there might be hurtful repercussions if the feedback was delivered as it is and are less honest with the employees. Is this not cheating? In my opinion, examining cases of unethical leadership cannot aid us in becoming ethical leaders since many ethical decisions require us to make judgment calls, despite the lessons we learn.

As suggested earlier, there is a thin line between ethical leadership and unethical leadership, based on the circumstances. We can become good leaders by embracing inherent attributes like respect for others, communicating openly, evolving, and leading by example (Hegarty & Moccia, 2018). It is about honesty in interactions with others. Though cases of unethical leadership abound, we must appreciate that everyone is human and thus prone to making mistakes. By the time one is elevated to a leadership position, they have gone through training and have the necessary experience to lead others. In addition to that, they have the support from the people and have the necessary resources to execute their mandate and responsibility. However, Gan (2018) argues that even after studying the case of unethical behavior, a leader will still find themselves engage in unethical behavior due to the pressures of meeting the set goals, or the leadership goals might be conflicting with existing processes. A leader can be extra vigilant on their intentions personally, but others might still interpret their conduct as unethical. Their position, when faced with a difficult decision, may be viewed as political hence unethical.

To sum it up, ethical leadership is not about probing other cases of unethical conduct. At the core of ethical leadership is personal choices. A leader can have all the necessary training, knowledge, experience, and examples from other failed cases, but nothing will stop

them if they are determined to behave unethically. In addition to that, there is a thin line leader's face when making decisions. In such instances, their decisions can be ethical yet are perceived as unethical. In essence, a decision that is ethical to one leader can be unethical to others. In this regard, it becomes difficult to determine if the leader is right or wrong. Leadership is about personal and difficult choices that others might interpret differently.

## **References**

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