Module Overview: Understanding Leadership[1]

If you ask many managing editors or news directors what got them into journalism, you likely won't find many who answer, "because I wanted to be in management." Yet, becoming a manager or boss or leader is something that will happen for many journalists over the course of their careers. Often this progression is in recognition of good work done as a journalist. But the skills required of excellent journalism are not the same as the skills required of excellent management or leadership. And as the experiences of so many journalists in the workplace highlight, ethical, effective leadership has an impact on every facet of work, from organizational culture to the day-to-day experiences of employees to the actual production of news reporting. The good news is that, with focused practice, anyone can learn to be an excellent leader.

Moreover, effective, ethical leadership and management are inextricably tied to excellent journalism. In fact, they enable excellent journalism. Problems such as sexual harassment and racial tensions in newsrooms are symptoms of deeper problems related to ineffective or unethical leadership. The premise upon which this curriculum on ethical leadership in news organizations is based is that colleges can't wait for newsrooms to fix themselves. University educators must take an active role in preparing journalism students to be effective, ethical leaders and managers so they will create newsrooms that are safe, fair and equitable, and in which journalists can do their best work. The future of democracies depends on it.[2]

Most of us tend to think of ourselves as good people, and journalists are certainly serving the public good through their profession; however, we can all think of times when we did not act as ethically as we intended. Behavioral ethics examines the psychology of ethical decision making. It helps us understand the organizational and social pressures, the cognitive errors and the situational factors that often sabotage ethical decision making. Behavioral ethics is introduced in this module, and it is revisited in a number of other modules to provide insights into why unethical behavior occurs and how people can create safeguards to make sure they act on their values.

This module can be used as the introduction of a course on ethical leadership in news organizations, or it can be incorporated into existing courses. The purposes of this module are multiple:

- To introduce students to the concept of leadership as a learned practice; in other words, leaders are made, not born.

- To introduce students to the contemporary problem of leadership we face in our workplaces, and specifically to the problem of leadership in journalism.

- To introduce students to behavioral ethics concepts — social and organizational pressures, cognitive errors and situational factors — that often prevent people from acting as ethically as they intend.

- To prompt students to think about how they might begin to develop their own leadership skills and capabilities and to assess the leadership of others.

This module examines the concepts of leadership through a brief article describing the problem of leadership in general; another on the problem of leadership in journalism in particular; a video in which prominent journalists explain why ethical, effective leadership matters in journalism; and a variety of supplementary materials.

Center for Ethical Leadership in Media

Module Content

Readings

- "We Have a Leadership Problem" by Jennifer L. Jones Barbour discusses the challenges of identifying and supporting ethical, effective leadership today.

- "Building a Toolkit for Newsroom Leaders" by Kathleen McElroy discusses the challenges that newsrooms face in identifying and supporting ethical, effective leadership, and the very real consequences when leaders don't have the skills necessary to meet the responsibilities of leadership.

- "What Every Leader Needs to Know About Followers" by Barbara Kellerman introduces the important and often neglected topic of followership and provides a helpful typology for analyzing types of followers.

- "What Leaders Really Do" by John Kotter provides insights regarding the skills and tasks of leadership, which involve managing change, and management, which involve providing stability, and argues that organizations need both.

- "Colleges Can't Wait for Newsrooms to Fix Themselves: Newsrooms Must Treat Their People As Ethically As Their Sources and Their Copy," by Minette E. Drumwright, Kathleen McElroy and Carolyn McGourty Supple, Poynter Institute, Sept. 3, 2020, is an op-ed that explains the premises upon which the curriculum is based.

- "Shattering the glass screen" by Lucas Beard, Jonathan Dunn, Jess Huang and Alexis Krivokovich, 2020, uses data from McKinsey and LeanIn.org's 2019 Women in the Workplace Study to present the challenges that women working in media and entertainment face.

- "Decades of failure: 17% of U.S. newsroom staff is not white," by Gabriel Arana, Columbia Journalism Review, 2018, focuses on the challenges that non-white journalists face.

- "10 charts about America's Newsrooms," Pew Research Center, documents trends that create leadership and management challenges for news organization leaders.

In-class Exercise

- The Ethical Leadership Concept Map is designed to prompt students to identify and discuss the concepts that they associate with ethical leadership including characteristics, values and roles.

Videos

- "Why Ethical Leadership in Journalism Matters" in a custom-produced video in which Carolyn McGourty Supple interviews news leaders and experts who explain why they think ethical leadership matters and what they see as key leadership skills.

- A custom-produced video by Robert Prentice, "Introduction to Behavioral Ethics," discusses how the field of behavioral ethics can help us understand how social and organizational factors, cognitive errors and situational factors can prevent us from acting as ethically as we intend. This article explains many of the behavioral ethics concepts in Prentice's video: Minette E. Drumwright, Robert Prentice and Cara Biasucci, (2015), "Behavioral Ethics and Teaching Ethical Decision Making," Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education, 13 (3): 431-468.

- In a video, Kristie Gonzales, a KVUE journalist, explains how her past experiences with leaders has shaped her leadership style.

Supplemental Materials

There are a number of other resources that one could draw on when teaching this curriculum. In this module we have included a list of additional resources and organizations that can provide more information as well as support to journalists.

- This book focuses on women as leaders in newsrooms: Kristin Grady Gilger and Julia Wallace, "There's No Crying in Newsrooms: What Women Have Learned About What It Takes to Lead." Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

Center for Ethical Leadership in Media

- This book looks at how bad leadership is as common as it is dangerous: Barbara Kellerman, "Bad Leadership: What It Is.How It Happens. Why It Matters." Harvard Business School Press, 2004.

- This textbook defines leadership and frames it as an act of communication: Craig E. Johnson and Michael Z.Hackman, "Leadership: A Communication Perspective." Waveland Press, 2018.

- This textbook has chapters on skills and capabilities that leaders and managers need to develop such as communicating supportively, managing conflict, empowering others and leading positive change: David A. Whetten and Kim S. Cameron,"Developing Management Skills." Pearson Prentice Hall, 10th Edition, 2020.

Ethics Unwrapped provides a variety of short videos and glossary definitions of behavioral ethics concepts.

Introduction to Behavioral Ethics Video, Glossary Definition

Obedience to Authority Video, Glossary Definition

Conformity Bias (social proof) Video, Glossary Definition

Framing Video, Glossary Definition

Incrementalism Video, Glossary Definition

Loss Aversion Video, Glossary Definition

Role Morality Video, Glossary Definition

Tangible and Abstract Bias Video, Glossary Definition

Overconfidence Video, Glossary Definition

Self-serving Bias Video, Glossary Definition

Moral Myopia Video, Glossary Definition

Moral Muteness Video, Glossary Definition

---

[1]This module overview was written by Dr. Minette E. Drumwright and Dr. Jennifer L. Jones Barbour for the purposes of facilitating the teaching of the module Understanding Leadership.
[2]Minette Drumwright, Kathleen McElroy, and Carolyn McGourty Supple, "Colleges Can't Wait for Newsrooms to Fix Themselves: Newsrooms Must Treat Their People As Ethically As Their Sources and Their Copy," Poynter Institute, Sept. 3, 2020, https://www.poynter.org/ethics-trust/2020/colleges-cant-wait-for-newsrooms-to-fix-themselves/.
[3]Note that the 8th and 9th edition have basically the same content in terms of concepts and frameworks and are less expensive than the 10th edition.

Center for Ethical
Leadership in Media