

Teaching note: Ethical Leadership Concept Maps¹

The purpose of the Ethical Leadership Concept Maps exercise is to prompt students to think about and discuss what they think ethical leadership entails. This exercise is a great way to begin a course because it highlights to students the breadth of what ethical leadership encompasses and also enables them to see the relevance of ethical leadership to the workplace and many other aspects of life including families, civic organizations and religious organizations, to name a few. The exercise requires no advance preparation, so it can be used on the first day of class.

The instructor can begin by explaining that a concept map is a way to capture thoughts and bring them to life visually. It links and groups ideas together through natural association. The end product is a spiderweb diagram with nodes and connections such as the examples below. Note that the overall point of the exercise is for students to have a meaningful discussion rather than create a perfect concept map.

Groups of three to five students will be given a large piece of flip chart paper and asked to write “Ethical Leadership” in the center of the page.² Their assignment will be to create a concept map in response to the following prompt: ***What does ethical leadership entail? You may discuss concepts, behaviors, people, organizations or other ideas or examples.***

Note that instructors could ask a more specific question such as, “What does ethical leadership in newsrooms entail?” If the broader question “What does ethical leadership entail?” is used, instructors can follow up after the students present their concept maps with a discussion more specific to ethical leadership in newsrooms. The exercise can also be used with a prompt such as, “What does ethics entail?”

Typically, student groups spend about 20 minutes discussing the prompt and creating their concept maps. Afterward, the concept maps can be taped to the classroom walls. A representative from each group or from some of the groups can be called on to explain the map to the class.

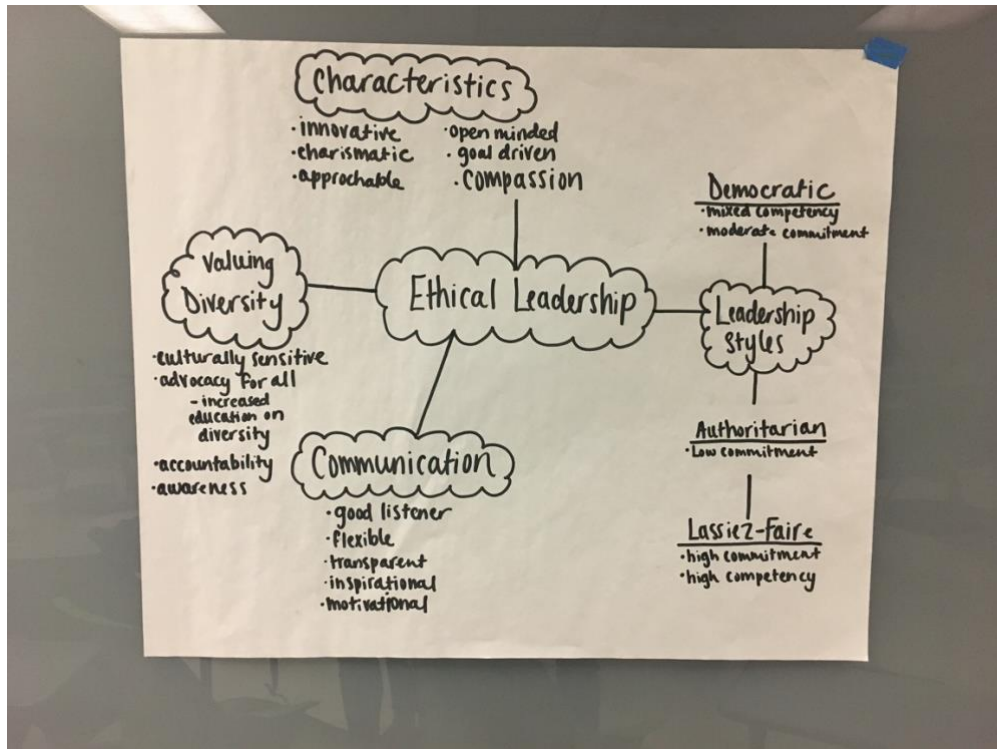
After the groups have presented, the instructor can prompt reflection and more discussion by asking questions such as, “What is missing? What have we left out?” The instructor can also make general observations about the maps and the related discussion. For example, often the content of “ethical leadership” on the maps and in the discussion falls into several categories: 1) characteristics of leaders (such as honest, empathetic, integrity) 2) leadership roles (such as editor, executive editor, publisher) and 3) leadership processes (such as leading change, managing conflict, empowering others).

Instructors can highlight some of the issues in the module readings on leadership such as the diversity gap such as how many of the characteristics typically associated with leadership are ones often associated with masculinity such as assertiveness or competitiveness. They can also begin dispelling some of the myths that are often associated with leadership (for example, the myth that leaders are born, not made, or the myth that leaders must be extroverts).

Instructors can point out that leadership processes encompass personal skills such as managing stress, interpersonal skills such as communicating supportively and group skills such as leading teams.

Some scholars such as John P. Kotter have made the distinction between leadership skills such as responding to change and management skills such as exercising control in times of stability, but Kotter and other leadership scholars such as

David A. Whetten and Kim S. Cameron have argued that effective leaders need both types of skill sets. As noted above, if a broader prompt about “ethical leadership” is used, instructors can follow up with a discussion of what ethical leadership in the context of a newsroom would entail.



¹This in-class exercise and teaching note was created by Dr. Minette E. Drumwright with guidance from Anne Braseby and Mary Crawford.

² Note that one can buy large pieces of flip chart that already have a strip of adhesive on the back. Alternatively, one can use pieces of butcher paper and tape them to the wall with masking tape.