Chapter 2

Ethical theory
What is the right thing to do and who is to say so?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter you should:

■ appreciate the usefulness of ethical theory by exploring the link between theory and practice
■ understand different ethical theories and their impact upon the decisions of managers
■ appreciate the distinctive ethics that professionals in the public service adopt
■ be able to contrast ethics with values and show how the two are not necessarily the same.

KEY POINTS IN THIS CHAPTER

■ Different ethical theories are available to us to guide, explain or justify ethical actions.
■ For public officials, ethics becomes manifest in the decisions that they make; those decisions are bound by organizational constraints.
■ Organizational ethics brings together individual, organizational and societal interpretations of ethics and these interpretations sometimes compete with each other.
KEY TERMS

- **Ethical decisions** – decisions made by public officials involving ethical judgment and having ethical consequences.
- **Consequentialist ethics** – focus on the consequences of an action such that an action is deemed ethical if there are more good consequences than bad.
- **Deontology** – the morality of an action is based on adherence to a rule and the right action to pursue is independent of the consequences of that action.
- **Rights** – cannot be overridden no matter what the consequences; entitled by morality, law, equity or duty.
- **Virtues** – dispositions to act, not just to think or feel in a certain way; for example, exhibit qualities of goodness, uprightness and morality.

INTRODUCTION

The theorizing of ethics clearly has a long history, from the Ancient Greeks through the Middle Ages to modern times. Its history has reflected different concerns, and with different relationships; between the individual and the city-State, between the individual and a Supreme Deity, between the individual and the community; and between the individual and the modern State. More recent relationships are between the individual and the organization. Two immediate questions arise: first, is there anything that we can learn from over 2,000 years of theorizing about ethics or are, for example, the issues raised by the Ancient Greeks too far removed to claim our attention? Second, are solutions generated to fit one context appropriate for another context? For example, can we use a model of personal relationships with family and friends, based on special obligations, to understand our relationship with the State that might be based upon more general obligations? We might wonder if there is a third kind of obligation that binds us to the organizations we work for, particularly as, for many of us, the organization may claim more from us in terms of time or commitments than family or friends.

We also raise the question of what kind of theory is ethical theory and what is the relationship between theory and practice? In the first instance, is ethical theory the kind of theory that can be tested empirically as true or false, or are our ethics a matter of personal taste? (Stewart 1991). In the second instance, how does theorizing about ethics inform our practice? Do we work it out as we go along or do we have a wardrobe full of ethical theories that we can call upon to wear depending upon the occasion? We discuss these issues below.

Much of traditional theorizing about ethics has predicated some view of human nature. Thus, one view argues that people are basically out for themselves and have to be constrained from pursuing their own self-interests at the expense of others. If not, in the graphic words of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1968), then life would be ‘nasty, brutish and short’. Hobbes was writing in the context of the English Civil War. Nevertheless, we can legitimately ponder the extent to which
there is a balance between the individual, society and the State, and also the organizations that they work for.

Finally, individuals might act in accordance with rules, or out of a sense of justice, or equality or freedom, or a sense of duty, or to satisfy individual conscience, or to benefit the most people. They might also act out of desire or need, because they are told to do so, out of fear, out of greed, selfishness or laziness. Equally they may act out of passion or love.

For our public officials, faced with making decisions on a daily basis, we are interested in the extent to which ethics informs those decisions. It is in the decisions that are made that we can judge the integrity of those officials. Sometimes, the decisions are routine, at other times they indicate a major switch in public policy; yet all decisions impact someone’s life – that is the nature of the public services.

**ETHICAL DECISIONS**

How do individuals make decisions that have ethical implications and how do managers make decisions in their organizations that have ethical implications? Indeed what do we mean by ethical implications, what do they consist of, and implications for whom? Let us, first, discuss the concept of a decision as a way into answering these questions. Public officials make decisions all day and every day, and these decisions affect individuals as citizens, as taxpayers or as users of public services. Some decisions may be more important than others insofar as they impact more widely and more deeply; decisions on levels of taxation, on large-scale infrastructure projects or public health policies affect large sections of the population. In contrast a decision over whether to grant a planning application to an individual dwelling may affect only one family and their neighbours. Nevertheless that does not make the decision any less important for that small group of people. There are different types of decisions that public officials make − different in scale and impact. Should we use the same kinds of justifications for these different decisions? See Box 2.1 for suggested criteria such justifications may include.

**BOX 2.1 JUSTIFICATIONS**

- Are they based on an authoritative set of rules?
- Are they made by a legitimate authority?
- Do they demonstrate the efficient and effective use of taxpayers’ money?
- Are decisions taken in the public interest and not the interests of an individual or small group?
- Are decisions taken according to the principle of fairness?
- Will more good than harm come out of the policy?
- Are decisions taken after appropriate consultations?
At the same time we may not accept justifications of a decision that demonstrate hypocrisy and double standards, dishonesty or lying; that are made on the basis of personal whim; that privileges private interests over public interests or that privileges pressure group interests; or does not fulfil promises or obligations. Similarly, we would expect the same general criteria to be applied when viewing policy decisions from an ethical point of view as from any other point of view (i.e. have all alternatives been considered; is the decision based on relevant and available evidence; have implementation issues been considered; are appropriate resources available, and so on).

Often the discretionary space that individual public officials have in making decisions is more limited than may be imagined. Decisions involving large-scale infrastructure projects, initiated by one government, are very difficult to change even by a new incoming government. Sunk costs invested in the project mean that it is extremely difficult to pull out of, say, building a new generation of attack vehicles for the armed forces, even though a new government may be less committed to military expenditure and despite the fact that a different perspective of the public interest may now prevail. We discuss the public interest in detail in Chapter 3.

We are interested in whether or not those working in public services take ethics into consideration when making decisions, what concept of ethics they hold, and whether the same concept is held by all types of individuals working in the public services. Recall that in the public services we can find members of the medical profession, the legal profession, engineers, architects, social workers, teachers, accountants and general managers. Is it likely that they will all share the same ethics as individuals? Does it really matter if they hold different ethical values as long as they share the same organizational ethos?

**ETHICAL JUDGEMENT**

The exercise of moral judgement has claimed the attention of scholars and has led to the development of measures to test it. Bringing together developments in the fields of psychology and philosophy, a number of studies have built upon original work by Kohlberg (1976) in refining and developing these measures. One useful definition is that of Rest, Thoma and Edwards (1997: 5):

*Moral judgement* is a psychological construct that characterises the process by which people determine that one course of action in a particular situation is morally right and another course of action is morally wrong.

Kohlberg (1976) developed a schema for the moral development of individuals and this is shown in Box 2.2.

The implications of Kohlberg’s work are that those lower down the stages are less ethical. In organizational terms does this mean that only those at the top of
organizations can reach stage 6? Now this may be stretching Kohlberg’s thinking further than was intended, but the hierarchical framework has received much criticism (see Rest et al. 2000). The research has also been criticized for undervaluing the ethics of care (Gilligan 1982) and for offering little evidence that it is relevant for non-Western societies. We might also question the idea of moral development itself. Is there some ethical ideal that individuals strive for or do ethics result from the interplay of different values and negotiation between different groups in a particular society? A pragmatic approach to ethics might focus upon what is useful, rather than what is ideal (Rorty 1999).

Nonetheless, Kohlberg’s schema has been refined, developed and revisited not just by Kohlberg himself but by subsequent researchers, and has led to other frameworks to assess moral judgement empirically (see, for example, Lovinsky, Treviño and Jacobs 2007; Rest et al. 1997; Rest 1979, 1986).

Two measures, the Defining Issues Test and the Managerial Moral Judgement Test, rely on hypothetical scenarios to elicit what respondents would do in a particular situation. The measures can be used for both the exercise of judgement by individuals in their managerial capacity and in their personal lives. The development of different measures suggests that individuals make different kinds of

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**BOX 2.2 KOHLBERG’S SCHEMA**

**Level I Preconventional**

Stage 1 Based upon rules and authority and driven by the fear of punishment

Stage 2 Based upon the notion of fair and equal exchange and driven by individual instrumental purpose

**Level II Conventional**

Stage 3 Based upon mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships and the need to conform and driven by social expectations

Stage 4 Based upon conscience and to maintain the welfare of the group through carrying out one’s duties

**Level III Postconventional or principled**

Stage 5 Based upon values and rights and recognizing the importance of the social contract

Stage 6 Based upon universal ethical principles and representing full moral maturity

N.B. Kohlberg considered Stage 6 reasoning to be rare.
decisions, not just different decisions, depending upon the roles that we play. There are claims that managerial moral judgement involves lower levels of judgement compared to life outside of the organization. Yet there is an argument that the kinds of decisions we make reflect the kind of person that we are rather than the situation we find ourselves in. If this is the case then we can see how individuals may rebel when asked to do something by their organization that they disapprove of.

Rest (1994) identifies judgement as one of the four components of his schema of moral behaviour. See Box 2.3.

One concern for organizations is, can we foster judgement through ethical codes, through ethics training, through ethical culture? We return to ethical decision-making in Chapter 7 and build upon the introductory remarks expressed above.

**ETHICAL THEORIZING**

Within the constraints of this book we offer a general introduction to the key issues that have engaged researchers, and we point the way towards a more sophisticated discussion elsewhere. We cannot do justice to the subtleties of theorizing about ethics that have engaged scholars for so long, although a good place to continue is with Rachels and Rachels (2007) and, from the perspective of public administration, Garofalo and Geuras (2007). We recognize that at the same time, the definition of ethics and morality is contested. One minimum definition argues that

Morality is, at the very least, the effort to guide one’s conduct by reason – that is, to do what there are the best reasons for doing – while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual who will be affected by what one does.

(Rachels and Rachels 2007: 15)
In their examination of professional ethics, Banks and Gallagher (2009: 16) choose to use ethics and morality interchangeably and define ethics:

Broadly speaking, we include within ‘ethics’ matters relating to the norms of right and wrong action, good and bad dispositions or ‘character’ traits and the nature of the good life.

We will endeavour to show the implications of different theories for our public officials.

Theorizing about ethics reflects developments in the philosophy of the social sciences more generally, with positivist and interpretive approaches evident. Does ethical theory involve the application and testing of hypotheses about human nature based upon some set of universal principles? Or do ethics reflect the context within which they are being practised, subject to competing interpretations and accommodated by different groups within a particular society? Thus, our basic questions will be concerned with whether we believe that the moral order required of us is derived from some sort of external source, perhaps laid down in an authoritative code or book, or whether it derives from human nature as a result of living with others in a society. Following on from this, are we motivated to act morally by something inside of us, such as a conscience, or are we compelled to act by an external force which might be fear of punishment, or desire for rewards? Not only that, but are there individuals or groups that have access to, as it were, moral wisdom, and to whom should we defer in our decisions?

**Subjectivism**

This is the view that it is for individuals to decide what is ethically right or wrong according to their chosen ethical principles, such that ethics are a purely personal matter. There is no guarantee that the chosen principles will be agreed to by anybody else. The advocates of subjectivism are wary of authoritarian pronouncements on ethics. Clearly the importance of moral autonomy cannot be over-stated, but should ethics be a matter of personal preference? If we claim that something is wrong, from this perspective, then are we merely expressing our feelings towards the act rather than judging the qualities of the act against some standard? There is no objective right and wrong, ethics is based upon sentiments and emotions and there is no way of choosing between disagreements. From this perspective ethics is used to express approval or disapproval, not right or wrong.

For some writers, part of the post-modern malaise is this focus on individualism, and for such writers how we relate to others is the key to understanding ethics (see Taylor 1991; Bauman 1993).

Given our discussion of public service motivation and the argument that public officials take on responsibilities for others and are committed to the welfare of others then subjectivism seems an unlikely basis for public service ethics.
Relativism

It is right for each society or social group to decide what is ethically right or wrong such that there are no universal ethical principles. There is no one best way so we cannot judge the ethics of another society or group for we have nothing to judge them by. Any attempt to impose our ethics on another society might be deemed ethical imperialism. Who are we to criticize the ethical practices of others? This line of argument is at the heart of discussions in business ethics concerning when does a gift, a traditional way of doing business in some countries, become a bribe? This is a problem in a world of international co-operation and agreements – how do we agree in basic values?

However, while accepting that there are different cultural outlooks, does that mean that there are no agreements in ethics? All societies seem to have, for example, some concept of justice, or obligations or equity or truth telling, or welfare even though they mean different things and take different forms in different locations. At least there is the possibility of a conversation, and we may overestimate the differences. Toleration of differences is important, but clearly it is a fine balance and we recognize that we should not be tolerant of everything. Many regimes do carry out grave injustices.

Consequentialist theories

These theories focus on the consequences of an action such that an action is deemed ethical if there are more good consequences than bad. There are various criteria for determining the balance. Utilitarianism is the best known of the consequentialist theories where an action is said to be morally justifiable if it leads to the greatest happiness of the greatest number. It is most closely associated with the work of the English philosophers Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–73). The first problem is to define happiness and to consider whether the same things make us happy. There has been a revival of interest in the concept of happiness as Box 2.4 indicates.

A version of utilitarianism is to be found in the techniques of cost–benefit analysis where it is argued that it is possible to weigh up all the consequences and benefits of a particular policy option through assigning a numerical weighting to all factors involved. In planning, for example, a new airport, a cost–benefit analysis will weigh up the costs and benefits of noise pollution, road congestion, threats to life and wildlife, threats to the environment, threats to the quality of life, the benefits of different forms of transportation and so on in as comprehensive a manner as possible. The concept of measurement is at the heart of the utilitarian approach. One immediate objection to this approach is how do you measure, for example, the quality of life? Utilitarianism is concerned with the maximization of good and the minimization of harm, howsoever defined. The good may be defined
by utilitarians as pleasure or happiness. From this perspective the ends justify the means, and this is one of its problems because it seems to accept that individual rights can be ridden over as long as the benefits of so doing outweigh the costs. Thus, in a world of limited resources, it becomes possible to argue that rather than one patient receiving expensive, if life-saving care, that the resources are better spent treating many others with, perhaps, less expensive care even though they may not be suffering from life-threatening illnesses. Others argue that individual rights cannot be overridden no matter what the consequences.

Another problem is the difficulty in calculating all the consequences. Public policies have a nasty habit of throwing up unintended consequences and it is rare that we can predict the full impact of public policy. Not only that, but policies in the area of public health reform or education may take years to take effect and politicians, notoriously, work to a much shorter time frame.

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**BOX 2.4 MEASURING SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN THE UK**

The UK Office of National Statistics (ONS) carried out a survey to measure national well-being in the UK in 2011. The four questions and the results were:

1. When asked, ‘Overall how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?’ 76% of respondents were estimated to have a rating of 7 out of 10 where ‘0’ is not at all and ‘10’ is completely.
2. When asked, ‘Overall, to what extent do you think the things you do in life are worthwhile?’ 78% of respondents rated this at 7 or more out of 10.
3. When asked, ‘Overall, how did you feel yesterday?’ 73% responded with scores of 7 or more out of 10.
4. When asked, ‘Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?’ the ratings were more evenly spread, although 57% had ratings of less than 4 out of 10.

Given that the survey was undertaken at a time of recession, growing unemployment and debt it is surprising that not more people were experiencing anxiety.

Younger and older adults reported higher levels of satisfaction than those in their middle years and those with better health reported higher levels. Having a partner is also positively associated with ‘life satisfaction’, ‘worthwhile’, and ‘happiness yesterday’.

All in all a fascinating study that will be extended in 2012.

Source: UK Office of National Statistics 2011
Due to the problems associated with focusing on individual acts, a second version of utilitarianism focuses upon what general rules of conduct tend to promote general happiness, but this still suffers from the same problems of overriding individual rights and the difficulty of assessing consequences.

We also need to ask, is it reasonable for individuals to consider all the consequences of their actions before they act? Our moral acts are often spontaneous with no thought of consequences; clearly when making public policies, more time is available for considered decisions, and collective decision-making may lend itself to a fuller understanding of the consequences and requires an understanding of public interest, which we address in Chapter 3.

Deontological theories

From this perspective the right action to pursue is independent of the consequences of that action. The right action would be to keep a promise, repay a debt, abide by a contract irrespective of the consequences. There are many non-consequentialist relationships such as friendship or parent–child relationships where special obligations arise in virtue of that relationship. Much of the thinking in this perspective is indebted to the work of German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) who believed that an act is morally praiseworthy only if done neither for self-interested reasons nor as a result of natural disposition but rather from duty, much like our public official. Moral credit is given not just because someone performs the morally correct action but because it rests on duty. It is based on reason, not intuition, conscience or utility.

‘I ought never to act in such a way except that I can also will that my maxim should be a universal law.’ This is the famous categorical imperative. It is categorical because it admits of no exception and is absolutely binding. Reason is the same for all. It is imperative because it gives instructions on how to act; ‘help others in distress’, ‘treat people fairly’ or ‘pay people equally’. Individuals and organizations cannot make an exception for themselves!

People can be treated as ends, for example, in order to achieve organizational goals but they should be treated with respect and dignity at all times so that they do not merely become servants or objects and are not used exclusively for the ends of others. It is about treating people as we would like to be treated ourselves – with respect and dignity. Some actions are wrong for reasons other than their consequences. For Kant, the features of an action that make it right are not dependent upon any particular outcome. There are many special relationships that depend upon commitment, trust and duty and these are non-consequentialist. Professional relationships are often seen in these terms. The doctor has a duty of care towards the patient, the teacher towards the student. Indeed the public service ethos involves a duty to act on behalf of the public. And yet a deontological
approach, with an emphasis on procedures means that the wider concept of doing good is taken out of the equation altogether (Bauman 1993).

Of course such duties are, in practice, overridden. They can come into conflict with one another; we do break promises if we believe that to do so will do more good than harm, or to prevent suffering.

**Virtues**

Character-based theories have informed discussions of the ethics of public administration where the person rather than the action is the object of moral evaluation (see Cooper 1998). Distinct from focusing upon what kinds of action we perform is the question of what kind of person we are, a focus on ‘being, not doing’. The reason why individuals perform good acts is because they are good people. For Aristotle (McKeon 1947: 1103a, 1–10), virtue is an excellence (arête) that can be divided into two types – intellectual and moral – reflecting the twin elements that make a person specifically human. Virtue is the means by which we become fully human because it allows us to fulfil our particular human end, generally taken to be the good life. This concept relates to Aristotle’s belief that something can only be understood and fulfilled once it has reached its natural end, has fulfilled its purpose. The good life can thus be recognized, understood and, most importantly, attained. Aristotle’s virtue theory, therefore, necessarily prioritizes the good over the right, a distinction that remains crucial to virtue ethics today (Mangini 2000; Oakley and Cocking 2001). Moreover, Macaulay and Lawton (2006) hold that not only is virtue necessary for good governance, it is also political in a broader sense, as it cannot be cultivated or practised outside of the polis. A person can only achieve eudemonia inside the polis because it is only this particular form of association that facilitates the development of a person’s human self. Thus, the individual achieves the good life within an association, and we return to this below when we examine the concept of organizational ethics.

Virtues are inclinations or dispositions to act, not just to think or feel in a certain way. They are not innate and must be cultivated and become habitual. A key question then is what are the virtues that might be relevant to public officials and do they change over time? Scholars have come up with a long list of virtues and these include benevolence, courage, rationality, fair-mindedness, prudence, respect for law, honesty, civility, self-discipline, trustworthiness and so on. Which ones of these might be relevant for our public official? Macaulay and Lawton (2006) identified a number of virtues of Monitoring Officers (ethics officers) in English local government to include ethical awareness, self-motivation, personal resilience, fearlessness, perseverance, political sensitivity, leadership skills and interpersonal skills.
Yet it is not always clear why some virtues should be more highly regarded than others as it depends upon the context and it becomes difficult to separate the person from the role. Thus, the qualities we look for in our teachers may be different from the qualities we look for in our police officers or our policy advisers. Not only that but our public officials may play different roles and different qualities might be required. Virtues may also take different forms. The courage of a policy adviser to stand up to a bullying politician is different to the courage that a frontline worker may face in the emergency services. And yet, it can be argued that some virtues are needed for any kind of human flourishing and these will include courage, sympathy, empathy, etc. (Gray 2009). At the same time,

The moral courage required to hold a different view . . . remains everywhere in short supply.  

(Judt 2010: 160)

Justice and rights-based approaches

Recent debates on justice have focused upon the work of American scholar John Rawls and his masterpiece *A Theory of Justice* (1972). Rawls argues that a fair system of arrangements is one that the parties can agree to without knowing if it will benefit them personally. He posits a hypothetical original position where we make choices behind a ‘veil of ignorance’. Individuals would choose two principles to govern moral action:

- Equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties.
- Social and economic inequalities are just only if they result in compensating benefits for everyone, particularly the least advantaged members of society.

Rawls argues that a rational person would not seek to maximize his or her gain based upon self-interest, but would choose a position that provided for the least advantaged. After all, the person making the choice might be a member of the least advantaged group.

Other approaches have focused upon rights and duties, particularly those of citizens, often expressed in terms of some kind of charter or constitution. A good example is the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948) which argues in Article 22 that:

Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international cooperation, and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.
It is a moot point how practical or enforceable such statements are and how universalistic the concept of rights proclaimed is.

In the rush to award rights and entitlements it is sometimes easy to forget duties. In universities students have the rights to representation on academic committees, rights of appeal and rights with respect to transparency of assessment procedures, and are entitled to receive feedback on their work. It is sometimes forgotten, not least by students themselves, that they may have duties to attend lectures, treat fellow students and tutors with respect, not to plagiarize and so on. Box 2.5 illustrates how one university department has drawn up its own charter of student rights and responsibilities.

And yet, according to Judt (2010: 88):

> However legitimate the claims of individuals and their rights, emphasizing these carries an unavoidable cost: the decline of a shared sense of purpose.

**An ethics of care**

One of the challenges to traditional ethics has come from the ethics of care that focuses upon relationships, rather than principles of duties. Dissatisfaction with Kohlberg’s approach, as indicated above, led to the development of an ethics of care (Gilligan 1982). Interestingly, Gilligan’s critique of Kohlberg is that it involves a gender bias, as women seemed to score significantly lower than men. The ethics of care is about moral development in terms of understanding our responsibilities and relationships. It consists of: flexible and trusting attitudes towards clients; a preference for oral communication; and no sanctions on clients (Stensöta 2010).

An ethics of care is interested in the quality of the relationships between, in our case, the public official and those that they engage with on a day-to-day basis. It is an interesting point that as the public services in many countries move closer to adopting business practices, does an ethics of care apply to the, now, customer, as it did to the, then, client or patient?

Notwithstanding that, the extent to which the feminist critique of ethics has conclusively shown that women are more likely than men to demonstrate an ethics of care is a moot point. Gender, race, education and age have all been studied as antecedents of an ethics of care but the research evidence is mixed (see Stensöta 2010).

**ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS**

Can the organization, like the polis, be the place for human flourishing? Now our public officials work in organizations that consist of authority structures and hierarchies and where power is exercised. Within these organizations individuals have specific roles to perform and have duties that arise from their office. Thus, individual ethics are situated within an organizational context. Clearly individuals
do not enter organizations as moral blank sheets of paper, as it were, on which the organization then writes its own values and ethics. At the same time, the ethics and values of the organization make them, more or less, attractive to potential employees. We explore this in more detail when we look at public service ethos in Chapter 4 and public service culture in Chapter 5.

### BOX 2.5 STUDENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Students and staff at Everywhere University have a number of rights and responsibilities, including the right to be treated with respect and the right to be treated equitably.

Students’ rights also include the right to equal learning opportunities, the right to access your teachers and the right to feedback on your work.

As an Everywhere Student you are expected to:

- be independent and self-motivated, accepting joint responsibility for your own learning
- be organized – know the dates and times of scheduled classes and attend accordingly
- be willing to work with others and to participate in discussions either in class or online
- take responsibility for all of your assessed work, ensuring it is submitted on time and ensuring it is free from plagiarism or cheating
- retain a copy of all assignment work submitted for assessment and hold it until a grade for the unit is published
- take the initiative and consult appropriately should any problems arise that may affect your academic performance
- respect the request from your lecturers and tutors regarding the use of mobile technology in class.

To ensure that there is a constructive learning environment for ALL students, lecturers and tutors may:

- exclude late arrivals to classes
- exclude students who are not prepared for their classes
- ask students to leave lectures or other classes if they are disrupting the learning experience of others.

Rude or aggressive behaviour is not acceptable from either students or staff.
We might also wonder at the extent to which the good citizen or person is also the good manager and do we have different criteria for deciding upon ‘goodness’. In the first instance those criteria might include loyalty to friends, generosity, kindness, even-temperedness and so on. In the second instance criteria might include reaching targets, being efficient, making effective use of limited resources or facilitating maximum performance from staff.

At the same time individuals will also belong to certain professions and these professions will have their own values and ethical considerations. It is easy to see how different loyalties will emerge, leading to possible conflicts. Similarly, different kinds of obligations will emerge for our public officials, from general obligations to obey the law and promote the public interest, to specific obligations to individual clients or citizens. So in looking at individuals within an organization or a profession we need to reflect upon the extent to which that organization or profession itself is ethical. To clarify: there might exist a code of honour amongst thieves that include loyalty, trust, honesty with each other, fair distribution of rewards and so on. All very laudable; but at the same time we might not think that thieving as a profession or a practice is very worthy. MacIntyre (1984) argues that justification of a practice is different to justification from within a practice. An organizational culture may encourage certain values and actions that are perfectly acceptable to those within the practice but when looked at from outside may not be acceptable to an external point of view. We touched upon a related issue earlier when we discussed ethical relativism (see also Box 2.6).

It is in organizations that a number of approaches discussed above are played out.

1. Organizational justice: organizations, particularly public service ones, rely upon procedural justice to ensure that individuals are treated equitably. Rules are formulated to guarantee equitable treatment such that public officials treat their clients impartially. Procedural justice involves fair processes, and distributive justice guarantees that rewards are fair. One issue that the public services seem to have avoided, to date, is outcry against executive pay that has bedevilled many private sector organizations.

In practice, however, as Banks (2008) argues, there is often a focus on the individual practitioner making difficult decisions in cases that are constructed in ways that are decontextualized both from the character and the motives of the individuals involved, and the organizational, policy, political and social context. She argues that we are often presented with a picture of professional ethics as a rational process involving the application of ethical principles to practice, tackling difficult cases and making decisions. There may be inequalities built into the very structures of public organizations. Critiques of bureaucracy argue that bureaucratic ideals may be instrumental in approach, seeking the most rational and efficient ways of delivering on public service goals. In this
sense public policy is about ends rather than means. And yet much of the public services is about engaging in relationships with a whole host of others whether they be students, clients, patients or whatever, and the quality of those relationships is crucial to the performance of those services. Ends and means are inextricably linked.

2. In terms of rights, organizations then are bound, in law, to pay heed to the rights of their employees in terms of health and safety regulations, employment law, anti-discrimination and so on. Given the full panoply of employment rights is there any guarantee that organizations will be ‘good’ employers?

3. In terms of principles, put simply, a deontological approach argues that we assess policy not on the basis of its consequences but whether or not it is consistent with certain agreed ethical principles. Ethical principles to guide policy analysis might include integrity, competence, responsibility, respect and concern for all stakeholders (see Box 2.7).

**BOX 2.6  PRACTICES MAY HAVE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS**

1. Exhibit coherence and complexity
2. Socially established
3. Carried out through human co-operation
4. Involve technical skills which are exercised within evolving traditions of values and principles
5. Organised to achieve certain standards of excellence
6. Certain internal goods are produced in the pursuit of excellence
7. Engaging in human activity increases human power to achieve the standards of excellence and internal goods
8. Engaging in the activity systematically extends human conception of its internal goods

The internal goods are acquired by participating in the practice itself and may be unique to that practice. Thus, if beneficence is one of the internal goods of a practice of public administration then benevolence on the part of public officials will be required. The external goods are, for example, money, prestige or status and are the subject of competition with winners and losers.

‘Organizations do tend to corrupt the practices which they support as a result of their focus on external goods.’

(MacIntyre 1984: 322)
Our interest is in public officials working in, and for, public service organizations and making decisions that affect citizens individually or the public interest in general. Often they are guided by rules, because making decisions on a case-by-case basis would be too time-consuming and too complicated. Different functional areas require the exercise of different ethical considerations. Policy advisers at the top of government will need to exercise courage in ‘seeking truth to power’ to politicians who may not wish to hear views counter to their own. Front-line professionals will need to attend to individual rights and welfare and to be clear of the boundaries of their professional role (Banks 2008).

Our unit of analysis is not just the individual qua individual but the individual as part of a profession, performing certain duties within an organizational context. In this sense, ethical understanding needs a dimension of social explanation (Williams 1985). We also need to work out what is the nature of the activity that we are engaged in and is there an ultimate foundation to judge these activities against (i.e. the public interest)? As Vickers (1965: 33) states:

To explain all human activity in terms of ‘goal-seeking’, though good enough for the behaviour of hungry rats in mazes, raises insoluble pseudo-conflicts between means and ends (which are thus made incommensurable) and leave the most important aspect of our activities, the ongoing maintenance of our ongoing activities and their ongoing satisfactions, hanging in the air as a psychological anomaly called ‘action done for its own sake’.

Is public service its own reward, as an ongoing enjoyment of relationships with others both as colleagues, or as clients where making a difference to peoples’ lives is important, or is there an ultimate purpose to it, in an Aristotelian sense?
REFERENCES


