Book Review: *Ethical Decision Making in School Administration: Leadership as Moral Architecture*

Kevin Badgett, EdD
Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership
Department of Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Counseling
College of Education
University of Texas of the Permian Basin
Odessa, TX

Abstract

Those in school leadership and others who prepare them must identify resources which support the mentoring process in order to ensure aspiring and practicing school leaders are prepared to plan and make decisions from a consistent framework. *Ethical Decision Making in School Leadership: Leadership as Moral Architecture*, by Wagner and Simpson, is one such resource. Although this book was published in 2009, it is important for its unique contribution to leadership theory and behavior. Readers are introduced to multiple lenses supportive of strategic decision making for practicing leaders and for training both aspiring leaders and those in advanced leadership programs. This review highlights the authors' central themes and illustrates how the book can support the school leader's application of a consistent lens for decision making in school leadership.

Keywords: ethical school leadership, advanced leadership training, leadership theory and behavior, moral architecture, pragmatic idealism

PK-12 school administrators are constantly faced with the responsibility to make decisions. In their book *Ethical Decision Making in School Administration: Leadership as Moral Architecture*, Paul A. Wagner and Douglas J. Simpson offer a prescription designed to support school leaders' cultivation of reflective thinking and purposeful, consistent decision making. Paul Wagner is currently a Professor and Chair of Educational Foundations, Professor of Philosophy in the School of Human Sciences and Humanities, and Director of the Project in Professional Ethics at the University of Houston - Clear Lake. Douglas J. Simpson is Professor Emeritus at Texas Christian University and has served in tenured positions at the University of Louisville, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Tennessee State University, and Texas Christian University.

The authors' message is delivered in the framework of two new concepts. The first is the idea of leadership as moral architecture. This construct is based on the idea that school leaders are active, moral agents who are responsible for more than their own behavior. The leader's responsibility extends to organizational consequences that naturally accompany the environment those leaders foster.

According to Paul A. Wagner and Douglas J. Simpson, moral architecture is "created in large part by how senior-level administrators go about their daily tasks" (2009, p. xii.). By fostering an elevated moral architecture, the leader creates a participatory environment where individual stakeholders are given meaningful opportunities to make contributions to the creative process of defining organizational purpose and achieving goals. In this atmosphere, each contributor has a personal stake in systemic success or failure; consequently, formal authority secures stakeholder investment in a shared effort rather than simple buy-in for an individual's plan. The ability to forge this type of architecture is consistent with the skill set of the transformational leader (Hoy & Miskel, 2005). By contrast, the flat moral architecture that is "accidental" and evolves in the absence of one that is "democratic (and) deliberatively derived" (Wagner & Simpson, 2009, p.13), focuses on efficient management of the mechanical aspects of the organization through the lens of one person's priorities without adequate regard for the organization's organic context.

The second new idea is Pragmatic Idealism. This idea suggests that while the pursuit of ultimate truth may be unfruitful, it is possible to move toward ultimate truth by "fits and starts" (Wagner & Simpson, 2009, p. 77). The authors fuel readers' reflective application of this concept through an extended and operational review of ethical theorists through history. In reviewing the core tenants of almost 20 different philosophers, the reader has the opportunity to reflect in a self-assessing way on their value system and the basis for that system. Without prescribing one philosopher's ethical system over another's, the authors assert an effective organizational leader is one who has a clearly defined and consistent value system that informs their decision making habits and processes. In eight chapters, four appendices, and a glossary, the book proceeds to systematically discuss how school leaders can make decisions that are ethically consistent despite the constantly changing and increasingly diverse needs of the communities they serve.

Badgett-Kritsonis Supervision Leadership Model

The *Badgett/Kritsonis Supervision Leadership Model* has application to this book. This model focuses on six fundamental principles of effective supervision. Step One: Expectations must be reasonable. Step Two: Expectations clearly communicated. Step Three: Expectations consistently enforced. Once these foundational steps are established, the supervisor advances to the fourth, fifth, and sixth steps. Step Four: Results monitored. Step Five: Results monitored for effectiveness. Step Six: Expectations reinforced or revised in a systematic, measured, and safe manner. This idea is predicated on the necessary presence of effective and ethical decision making.

Practical Application and Unique Contribution

With consideration for the new concepts, Leadership as Moral Architecture and Pragmatic Idealism and with Chapter Two's review of ethical theorists throughout time to support practical application, this book makes a valuable contribution to our knowledge base. According to Davis and Jazzar (2005), reflection is an important leadership activity. This book is

a valuable resource that supports introspection into a leader's own philosophy and can be used as a tool for practicing school leaders as they identify and assess their decision making compass.

In addition to supporting individual reflection, this book can effectively support mentoring in advanced leadership training. Equipped with real world leadership experience, the student in an advanced leadership preparation program can exercise thoughtful reflection on their experiences and decisions and consider whether and to what degree their behaviors have been consistent. This book can then support practicing leaders' strategic consideration of their future behavior.

This book can also be a valuable resource to support the development of aspirant leaders in their thinking about leadership behavior and priorities. Specific elements of the text, such as chapter eight's discussion related to the conflicts between law, policy, and moral systems, will allow the future leader to wrestle with their own beliefs and experiences in a reflective and theoretical way. Learning activities that help the aspiring leader plan actions and reflection will help in developing instincts and habits for when that individual is in a position of organizational authority.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this book fills a demonstrated gap in school leadership training. According to Hess and Kelly (2005), school leadership programs suffer from an under exposure to leadership work and theory that originates outside education circles. As a consequence of this gap, there is a failure to broaden the aspiring leader's exploration into management and leadership knowledge offered by thinkers in other fields. In addressing this gap, *Ethical Decision Making in School Administration: Leadership as Moral Architecture* (2009) sharpens leadership tools with time-tested principles by introducing the aspiring or experienced leader to the thinking and knowledge of those outside the field of education. Because the leader's perspective is broadened, they are better equipped to more effectively meet the evolving challenges they will face as they work to improve teaching and learning.

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