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## Leading teams through espoused values

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Ethics and Business Leadership Category

Leading Teams through Espoused Values:

An Action Research Case Study

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### **Abstract**

In projects with evolving requirements and constrained resources, it is evident that the ethical treatment of stakeholders is usurped by results-driven behavior. A leadership team encourages ethically effective results through the alignment of espoused values and values in action by imposing consistent feedback and reflection on leadership behavior.

This action research study examined leadership team behavior while supervising the research behind an ethics in business awards program. The study's intention was to elevate the leadership practices to a higher ethical standard. Data gathered for this study included researcher's journal reflections, evaluation of critical incidents, interviews and surveys.

A tool was devised based on tenets of a global ethic (Dalla Costa, 1998) to identify the leadership teams' espoused values with regard to each stakeholder group. The tool was used as a compass for guiding a Kantian approach<sup>1</sup> to stakeholder treatment.

The Kantian intention held during the planning phase however, quickly transformed into a Utilitarian<sup>2</sup> approach due to constrained resources, scope modifications and time. The conclusions proved that good intentions may be overridden by realistic project goals while still maintaining high regard for all stakeholders. A business model integrating the dynamics of value based leadership with stakeholder interest is presented.

## Study Intentions

### *Introduction*

This study focused on how the Leadership Team's effectiveness could be elevated by the application of specific ethical practices. As thesis researchers<sup>3</sup>, we theorized that results-driven behavior used in aggressive team projects with evolving requirements and constrained resources, neglects the ethical treatment of stakeholders. A project plan is defined by milestones, deliverables and tasks, but is the execution of such a plan conducted in the most ethical manner without conscious intent? We further argued that ethically effective results may be realized through the alignment of espoused values and values in action where values such as honesty, respect and fair treatment of all stakeholders are practiced.

Our study adopted John Dalla Costa's global principles that define 'moral leadership as good business' (Dalla Costa, 1998). Dalla Costa offers students of business ethics a framework to assess ethical behavior on the basis of global tenets. Dalla Costa's framework for operating within a global ethic integrated business and ethical choices into a single decision stream (p. 148). Dalla Costa states, "A global ethic will have a global impact in the global economy only if it is practical enough to be of value (p. 143)." His global ethic framework is based upon the foundational dogma and moral teachings found in the predominant world religions. His framework is valid because it addresses basic human needs.

There is evidence suggesting that an effective approach to project management is through the stakeholder view. Archer Carroll defined a stakeholder as "any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organization (Carroll, 1996)."

Dalla Costa also suggests a relational equity model that ties the value of the stakeholder relationship to increased effectiveness of the organization. He claims the existence of positive relational equity among team members, employees, volunteers, suppliers, customers result from quality interactions that build loyalty over time (1998, p. 178-179). We believe that this premise integrates accountability with partnership and serves as a quality initiative that benefits every stakeholder. There is an assumption by this Leadership Team that relational equity given to the Project stakeholders will result in higher quality work and more meaningful learning experience.

We derived the espoused values of our Leadership Team from Dalla Costa's framework and combined the global tenets of *Respect Dignity* (adapted from "*Respect Life*"), *Be Fair, Be Honest, Strive for Justice*, and *Honor the Environment* with the stakeholder view to articulate values with which to guide ethically effective leadership practices.

### *Team Leadership*

The Leadership Team was a self-managed Leadership Team with independent oversight over the Project. Members of this team agreed to a shared leadership process where each member would assume leadership roles necessary to the achievement of our goals. This Leadership Team subscribed to the axiom that leadership is an attribute inherent in everyone. The self-management of this team is therefore complimented by the shared leadership aspect of the team dynamic. This premise required a team of equal voice, a process for reviewing ethical dilemmas, and required our team to be a learning organization.

Critical to any assessment of effectiveness is the underlying requisite that there is a strong interdependence among team members. Initial assignment of project tasks were jointly agreed upon and allocated based upon each team member's skills, supporting the shared responsibility of the project office<sup>4</sup>. Our Leadership Team's individual strengths complemented

the common training in ethical leadership offering a unique experience to practice ethical leadership in action.

### *Project Study*

The Ethics in Business awards program (The Project)<sup>5</sup> required a process of research and evaluation of publicly nominated candidates by students, alumni and faculty of a Catholic University. This process seeks to identify organizations and individuals that incorporate strong ethical practices into routine business activities. Completed research reports are delivered to an independent Selection Committee for its determination of the finalists.

A new Leadership Team must assemble each year in order to recruit and train individuals. The Leadership Team must manage and conduct the research with a high level of rigor and objectivity, provide candidate value, and afford students experiential learning within a compressed timeframe. The Project requires approximately 50 individuals to serve as researchers in the assessment of candidates. This pool of researchers is comprised of a few alumni that volunteer from year to year and current students who earn class credit for their efforts (teams).

The Project proved to be an ideal laboratory in which to study ethical leadership practices in a team environment. We had served as Project team members in prior years. As past team members, we believed in the value of recognizing ethical practices in business. It is imperative that the leadership practices of the Project Leadership Team lend credibility to the Ethics in Business award. The purpose of this study was to raise the level of ethically effective leadership practices of the Leadership Team and further validate an ethically-based and effectively-led research organization.

### *Idealistic Optimism – Defining Our Values*

It was with high intentions that the Leadership Team devised a tool to identify and define the espoused values and ethical practices of the leadership team. This tool, referred to as the “Guiding Rules Inspiring Direction” (GRID - Appendix A) was derived from Dalla Costa’s work with global principles (Dalla Costa, 1998, p. 153). This study utilized the GRID as a compass for seeking the deontological approach promulgated by Kant. It was our goal to respect the individuals affected by our decisions equally. The study dictated thoughtful identification of stakeholders and primary interests, such as:

1. Student researchers dedicated to each candidate (treating all researchers equitably, balance team selection by skills, respecting time commitment and honoring expectations of learning);
2. Candidates selected for the Project (thorough and fair research process, honesty regarding time commitment, protecting confidentiality, and full disclosure of the process);
3. Selection Committee (producing high quality reports with consistent rating of candidates, meeting timeline, respecting time commitment); and
4. Members of the Leadership Team (mutual respect, deference to life commitments, allowing equal voice, and honesty.)

We articulated the definition of our values and intended to modify our behavior to conform to those values. We intended to demonstrate that we were living our values and wanted accountability to those values. Our GRID was ratified and we began in earnest to evangelize our principles to our organization.

### **Action Research Case Study Methodology**

*Action Research Loops*

We utilized action research loops (Stringer, 1999) to study, to reflect and modify our future actions. We intended to observe behavioral patterns and to assess the need for modification. Feedback from the team and candidates along with reflection would support or negate our assumptions that we were meeting our espoused values.

The action research was structured into loops to align with the Project phases. Each action research loop would incorporate 1) a definition of the process, 2) a plan for action, 3) observation and consolidation of data points, 4) reflection, and 5) modification of the action loop to allow a learning loop to begin again. The Project phases overlapped with each other, resulting in soft beginnings and endings. Adjustments to the action loops were implemented dynamically to add interviews as events presented opportunity for reflection data. Consequently, the loops became iterative and fluid with continuous mid-course corrections throughout the life of the Project.

As the action research continued, we expected to have internalized our learning and that our reflections would be more natural and without hesitation (Senge, et. al, 1999), however, 'in the moment' reflection had faded early in the project. We did find new opportunities to promote deeper sharing on a personal level exposing our vulnerability to each other at a human level. This allowed deeper support and encouragement through the extremely stressful project moments.

Through action research we learned to design a repeatable process, evaluate ethical practices, and provide qualitative study as a baseline for the organization striving to improve its ethical practices.

### *Data Collection*

The data was collected during the Leadership Team meetings (held weekly for 7 months), through emails (over 100 per person weekly), phone calls (daily), and any critical incidents requiring further reflection, volunteer surveys (34), and interviews with the candidates (6) and Leadership Team members (2), specifically:

1. Reflections and dialogue of the Leadership Team allowed insight into our values in action. We wrote journals observing alignment of our values in action and espoused and reflected on these entries (75 entries were studied).
2. Critical incidents (approximately 18-21 events) involving the teams prompted opportunities for additional feedback on values in action. This feedback fostered additional mentoring, one-on-one conferences and team working sessions.
3. Parallel surveys were deployed for teams and the Leadership Team. This feedback allowed comparison of the values in action and espoused values (Appendix B).
4. Interviews with contacts from the candidate organizations allowed feedback of values in action.
5. Interviews with members of the Leadership Team were added to reflect on our assessment of our learning organization. The Leadership Team members were confidentially interviewed to comment on alignment of values and success towards the shared goal of ethically effective leadership. The feedback provided insight for continued improvement in leadership practices.

### *Reflection*

The intent of the Leadership Team was to honestly express our point of view, refrain from defensiveness when questioned, and when probing, gently inquiry to underlying beliefs.

Our reflection required examining our own uncertainties and raising these to the learning team (Schön, 1983, p.50) for open and honest discussion. Learning organizations not only review root cause analysis of issues, but also review underlying beliefs and assumptions<sup>6</sup> which cause symptoms to reoccur regardless of previously implemented controls.

We reviewed our journals and the data to uncover deeper meaning, assumptions, and uncover our frames. Charlotte Roberts recommends “balancing advocacy and inquiry and contends that inquiry requires genuine curiosity and openness to the perspectives of others (Roberts, 1998, p.24-29).” As a team, we found this useful in determining our stated values and while we espoused a commitment to this practice, we did not consistently perform this process, and often did not allow inquiry. We found behavioral change is difficult.

### **Outcomes**

We gained hands-on skills to organize and manage a team to meet a highly aggressive project schedule in an ethically effective manner. Surveys deployed to our stakeholders and members of the Leadership Team substantiated some alignment of values while illuminating other areas of deviation from the espoused values. Interviews with contacts from the candidate organizations supported our principled intentions to treat them fairly, with respect, and conducted a thorough and honest research process. Interviews with members of the Leadership Team provided the most valuable data in the assessment of our learning organization and sustainability as an ethically based organization.

We submit the experience of observing, reflecting, and acting consciously on an ethical leadership framework allowed us the opportunity to cultivate and harvest the principles of Dalla Costa’s ethical imperatives (Dalla Costa, 1999). We shall forever understand that *Be Honest* relates to openly dealing with difficult issues. *Be Fair* means to consistently view all

stakeholders in equal regard. *Respect Dignity* will represent the human issues at the core of every decision. *Strive for Justice* manifests itself through the voices of all stakeholders and *Honor the Environment* is more than a recycling program but a full life-cycle view and respect for our natural resources.

The Kantian intention behind our methodology (people should not be used as a means to an end) held during the planning phase however, quickly emerged into the unintended application of the Utilitarian approach (greatest good for greatest number). We believe that this was a result of constrained resources, minimal leadership time, and scope modifications. The static nature of the GRID--giving equal weight to all values and all stakeholders--gave way to the constraints of the Project execution.

#### *Idealistic Naivety*

We were idealistically naïve with our commitment to a shared leadership construct and believed this would allow equal participation and equal voice of all Leadership Team members. We did not anticipate the degree that organizational constructs would impede our efforts.

Additionally, as thesis researchers, we were aware of some of our biases and their potential impact on the project. However, awareness of the bias does not mandate it away, and biases like behaviors, are difficult to modify. One pre-existing assumption, results-driven individuals have difficulty in truly learning and valuing reflection time while driving to project completion, held true. During the early stages of the project, we began and ended each team meeting with reflection. However, as the project got fully underway, the reflection component of the meetings was held only occasionally. Most meeting agendas consisted of task and issue management. We augmented our journal data by adding Leadership Team interviews for reflection and perspective. The tension to complete the project was great and we were all

motivated and highly committed to execute according to our values, and yet we slipped into a 'get the job done' mantra.

Primarily, we believed that ethically effective teams examine their beliefs and assumptions and align their actions to their values. We had this premise as a core value under *Honesty* to each other. The Leadership Team members were educated in the practice of *Critical Thinking*, and prepared to follow Argyris' Model II (Argyris 1995, Argyris 1997, Argyris 1998) values in action aligned with our espoused values. Reflection-in-action required the Leadership Team to draw upon past experience, adapt to existing situations, to learn and extend present inquiry to new understanding and skillful practice (Schön, 1983, p. 51). Again, as the clock pressed on, we slipped into what Argyris refers to as Model I theory-in-use (Argyris, 1995), and at times, presented a defensive position of an idea, or shut down an inquiry, and this resulted in unequal voices at our shared leadership table, yielding to the organizationally accountable voice.

Finally, our research was intended to be a collaborative approach to inquiry with the other members of the Leadership Team. We sought to build positive working relationships and productive interactional communicative styles. The intention of the study was to participate in the leadership process and study an ethically effective leadership team in action. In this way, we feel we were idealistically naïve.

#### *Unconscious Application of Ethical Principles*

Our intention to apply the Kantian approach and assign equal consideration and regard to each stakeholder was noble. The ever-ticking clock usurped our intended application of the Kantian perspective and favored the Utilitarian view where limited resources (our time, effort, or energy) were applied to the greatest need (most critical candidate issue, most critical event, or unplanned task requirement). This unintended consequence illuminated those values critical to

the situational needs of the specific stakeholder. The reflection of the Leadership Team's conscious behavior proved consistent toward all stakeholders. We discovered, through the same introspection that intrinsic behavior operated with shared understanding among team members regarding values attributable to each stakeholder. In applying our unconscious Utilitarian view, we prioritized stakeholders and identified the greatest value that would meet their primary need.

For example, we knew that the governing requirements for our project mandated *Honesty* as the predominate value in generating the final research reports. Credibility of this project relied upon objectivity and rigor. There was no debate that confidentiality and fairness in evaluation of our candidates was imperative to the process. Through feedback mechanisms we ascertained that the fair treatment of teams was less than optimal. In response, coaching and mentoring practices were initiated. This effort was driven by an unspoken understanding of the need to compensate for the unfair structure that was playing out in the teams. This mentoring effort was positively viewed by the volunteers as evidenced in survey data where 100% of the respondents indicated that coaching sessions provided support mechanism in their research process.

The needs of *Be Honest* and *Be Fair* as applied to candidates and Selection Committee took conscious priority over the needs of the teams when resolving ethical dilemmas. The needs of *Be Fair* and *Respect Dignity* as applied to the teams trumped those of the Leadership Team. This prioritization explains the very positive survey responses by the teams while still recognizing sentiments of unfairness and lack of respect for life balance. The Leadership Team appeared successful in sustaining flexibility and responsiveness in meeting these primary needs; however, from the perspective of the teams, we failed in our objective to ensure fair treatment.

The trade off of higher priority stakeholder needs consistently encroached upon the espoused values assigned to the Leadership Team resulting in personal frustrations of the

Leadership Team members. Support for the whole person, however, came easily and without expectation of recompense or regard. This consideration for the whole person was fostered by our focus of *Respect Dignity* for each other. Open dialogue and mature responses to these issues resulted in achievement of the intended project objective while maintaining professional courtesy.

### *Evolving Requirements*

Our objective of holding the scope of the project constant was challenged and the Project amended to align with our espoused values. Initially resistant to change, we expected the candidates to meet our requirements. After reflection of our espoused values, changes were made to accommodate candidate needs. For example, the value of *Strive for Justice* manifests itself through the voices of all employees. The interview protocols designed for employees were oriented toward professional staff and neglected the voice of hourly employees. In recognizing this deficiency, a change in Project scope was accepted and new protocols for hourly employees were developed.

A comparable example of our value based approach was the deployment of surveys using internet technology to query for objective feedback. We found this prohibitive for stakeholders without access to this technology. Consequently, we devised a confidential process to distribute and collect paper surveys respecting the clients' confidentiality and dignity.

Additionally, some of the candidates' stakeholders spoke only Spanish. We identified Spanish-language interviewers and volunteers who translated surveys from English to Spanish. We gave voice to a stakeholder group previously neglected. Feedback from our candidate interviews sited this effort as an exemplarity behavior of living our espoused values.

Finally, interview protocols were determined by the Leadership Team to be deficient in addressing the award criteria for *Honor the Environment*. Accordingly, questions were raised and the protocols were modified, supporting another example of changing methodology in alignment with our espoused values.

### *Ethical Decision Making*

One basic challenge imposed by the structure of the system was to develop a process that would effectively guide the Leadership Team in making the right choices when ethical dilemmas arose. We intended to apply Rooney and Hopen (2004) approach to ethical problem solving. A practical approach, their methodology was to ‘define the problem, identify potential causes of problem, determine & verify root cause, develop a list of potential solutions, and determine what activities must be enlisted’ (Rooney & Hopen, 2004, p. 21). We determined that this course of action, integrated with a stakeholder perspective, would meet the objectives of this Leadership Team.

We recognized that to be consistent in the ethical application of decision making practices we needed to define behavior that a team consensus would honor. What was not acknowledged at the onset of team formation was that consistency in application was a skill honed by continual practices and scrutiny. Subconscious action kept us familiar with the prescribed tenets, but time constraints undermined the development of this skill and compromised team behavior. When stakeholder views were in conflict, we chose the higher priority stakeholder. Often our analysis was implicit and not articulated. As critical decisions and ethical dilemma’s arose, we operated from our deep understanding of our GRID and the prioritization of key stakeholder issues. By internalizing our values, reflecting the alignment of our behavior and our values, we were able to quickly move to implementation of our decisions.

However practical our approach, our intentions were not met. In our attempts to *Strive for Justice* we maintained the ideal that we would share equal voice and hold one another accountable for living by the norms stipulated in our espoused values. The reflection process pointed to frequent episodes where we refrained from commenting on specific issues, deferring to, and trusting the expertise and direction of others. We are now confident that we would have commanded an equal voice if we had not deferred. Furthermore, we suspect but don't know if the same ethical decisions would have resulted.

### **Conclusions**

#### *Universal Principles*

A team committed to leading by espoused values should start with a group discussion with all Leadership Team members defining the values important to the team and those of their stakeholders. Open dialogue ensures shared understanding.

A team must rely upon trust and defined common values when executing a project with limited resources, fixed timeframe and dynamic scope. Shared understanding of those values must be achieved along with some excess team capacity to equally distribute the last minute tasks. Allow scope changes to the project only when the changes align with the values of the organization. Acknowledge system constraints and organizational roles when attempting to work in a shared leadership team and set expectations appropriately.

Conscious and ongoing discussion by the Leadership Team of acceptable and ethical treatment of all stakeholders is necessary to ensure consistent operating principles. Deeper reflections using a tool such as the Ladder of Inference is essential in fostering substantive dialogue about values in action.

*Learning from Experience*

We understand the value of journaling and reflecting for lasting change in behavior. Stating espoused values and living the stated values is extremely difficult; however, with peer support and team encouragement, behavioral change occurred. We learned from internal focus that we gravitate towards some ideals while unintentionally drifting away from others.

Are we justifying the prioritization of values only to reframe our failure in veering from our intent? We postulate that there may be a synthesis of the Kant and Utilitarian theories that combines the values of both the organization and stakeholders. We believe that this prioritization of values was a matter of contextual judgment. Individual self interests may have been ignored at times, but the illumination from the spotlight on our utilitarian judgment still cast light on the Leadership Team's individual values. Included in the self interests owned by the Leadership Team would be the desire to complete the project which gives way to meeting the overall objectives--whatever it takes.

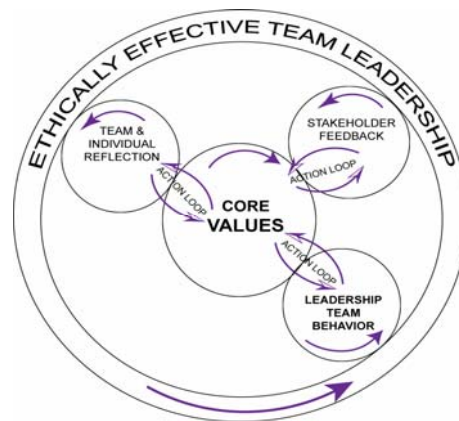
Francis Daley suggests the stages of ethical development of an organization parallel that of an individual (Daley, 1999). Literature suggests three stages: behavioral, developmental, and strategic. The behavioral stage meets the legal, regulatory and mandatory requirements. The Project process met the mandatory test of rigor and objectivity. The developmental stage seeks to give leaders the tools to recognize and resolve ethical dilemmas while the strategic stage allows the feedback mechanisms, and developing codes of conduct. The intended result of this action research study was to determine if the deliberate application of defined ethical practices would enhance the leadership effectiveness of the Leadership Team; it was not the strict adherence to a moral compass. The Leadership Team incorporated deliberate values into the framework of the

management process ensuring a venue for the on-going evolution of ethically effective Team Leadership.

## Recommendations

### *Leading by Espoused Values*

A conceptual model of the study (see Chart 1) demonstrates how team leadership may be driven by ethically effective practices. This epicyclical formation shows team leadership as a self-propelling engine with core values as a shared center gear. As the Values hub gear begins to turn, the orbits of the Action gears (Stakeholder Feedback, Team & Individual Reflection, and Leadership Team Behavior) turn in kind. The rotating motion of the Action gears are sustained by the double loop learning (action loops) which propels the Ethically Effective Team Leadership constructs. A forward motion is sustained by all three action gears driving the project to completion through core values.



**Chart 1 Ethically Effective Team Leadership**

### *Future Study*

We recommend using the global tenets authored by John Dalla Costa, in ‘The ethical imperative: Why moral leadership is good business (1998)’ when undecided about the

organizations' values, or code of conduct. Additional action research may consider quantitative project results of conscious ethical treatment of stakeholders in terms of project productivity, cost, timeliness, quality along with stakeholder satisfaction.

Appendix A<sup>1</sup>

<b>Stakeholder</b>	<b>Be Honest</b>	<b>Be Fair</b>	<b>Strive for Justice</b>	<b>Respect Dignity</b>	<b>Honor Environment</b>
<b>Selection Committee - Executive Director of Ethics</b>	Deep level of research & rigor; Intellectual honesty; Firewall; Transparency; Objectivity in reporting; Process integrity.	Objectivity; Consistent rating & reporting; Consistent researcher process.	Out of scope for our project.	Meet deliverable dates; Honor their time commitment.	Provide double sided-printed reports;
<b>Researchers / Document Analyst - Student Researchers 20+</b>  <b>Researcher / Interviewer - Volunteers - 25 +</b>	Honest regarding time commitment; Clarity of role, participation & deliverables.	Treating all researchers equitably; Allow for differences in workload across Teams; Access to schedule & contact information & escalation procedures; Clear contracts of course assignment credit.	Creating balance in team selection to acknowledge skill differences; All should be open to the ideas of others avoiding any/all personal biases.	Respect time commitment they made; Respect the experiential learning; Recognition & celebration of work; Respect skill levels of researchers.	Encourage minimal printing; 2-sided printing,
<b>Candidates - 5 Businesses 5 Non-profits 5 Individuals</b>	Honest regarding time commitment; Full disclosure of process;	Provide good benefits; Protection of confidentiality of company info; Clear about their commitment.	All should be open to the ideas of others avoiding any/all personal biases.	Honor inherent vulnerability of candidacy; Respect time commitment they made; Meet on time.	Offer e-processes of document submission.
<b>Leadership Team 2 Program Managers - Thesis researchers, EIB Director, Faculty</b>	Be honest; "I can't/don't know"; Speak openly;	Create shared understanding; Keep commitments, but acknowledge life constraints.	All voices count with equal weight; Encourage & support; Strive for an even table; Hold each other accountable for living by these norms.	Listen respectfully; Respect for whole person; Respect for other life commitments;	Bring own printing; Provide e-copy of docs for meetings.

<sup>1</sup> Derived from material of John Dalla Costa, *Ethical Imperative: Why Moral Leadership is Good Business* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1998).

## Appendix B

1. Researcher Results – Qualitative questions for teams
2. Researcher Survey Responses – Open responses from teams
3. Leadership Team Survey Results – Qualitative questions for Leadership Team
4. Leadership Team Survey Responses – Open responses from Leadership Team

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## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup>Immanuel Kant believed human beings possess certain moral rights and duties regardless of utilitarian benefits. Kant's Categorical Imperatives: First imperative, action is morally right only if reasons for the action are reasons that all should implore to act upon in a similar situation, including universalizability and reversibility. Second imperative, respect each person's freedom by treating them as they have consented to be treated and allowing them to choose their pursuits (Velasquez, p. 100). In addition, Kant states that people should never be used as a means to an end; they are in and of themselves an end (Durant, p. 100).

<sup>2</sup> Utilitarian Theory states that actions and policies should be evaluated on the basis of benefits and costs that the action imposes on society. As long as the benefit is greater than the moral harm, the choice is the best solution.

<sup>3</sup>The thesis research is the end project of the Master of Science Organizational Leadership and Ethics program at the university and is required of students during their last two terms of the curriculum.

<sup>4</sup> The Project Office manages the work effort on a given project including planning, costs controls, communications, resource allocation, and managing task completion to plan.

<sup>5</sup> The Ethics in Business Awards is conducted by a Catholic university in partnership with a non-profit organization recognizing 3 profit organizations, 3 non-profit organizations and 3 individuals in the community excelling in ethical business practices.

<sup>6</sup> Charlotte Roberts, "Can we Talk?" *Journal for Quality & Participation*, 21 vol. 4 (1998): 24-29. The Ladder of Inference was used. At the first rung of the ladder, teams tend to imbed assumptions within their logic and tightly integrate assumptions into their conclusion. The next rung of the ladder is 'walked down' to uncover the basis for the assumptions and the deeply rooted beliefs grounding the assumptions. The bottom rung of the ladder is the evidence supporting the opinions. It is at this rung shared meaning is obtained.