**Personal Code of Ethics: Leading with Purpose**

**Foundation of Personal Code of Ethics**

I was raised in a home of matriarchs who always welcomed and helped others in their community. My grandmother and mother are kind individuals, and their home has always been the center of gatherings for family and friends. As I grew up, being kind and of service to the community were key values that shaped me. While in college, I often found myself leading initiatives, becoming part of clubs in service to marginalized communities, and trying to do good both in and out of the university community.

As I reflect on my executive leadership journey, I have found that my career has had a parallel reality in two distinct ways. The first is working in nonprofits that provided services in urban communities that needed to address complex challenges with limited resources. The second is acquiring the expertise of what service organizations and community leaders need to strategically develop and implement to sustain the solutions they seek to implement quality services that can yield the transformational change they aspire their clients to experience. These realities led to an interest in organizational management. They resulted in 15 years of service as an organizational management consultant in Girl Scouts of the USA and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, providing support to their local affiliates across the northeast/mid-Atlantic regions, Guam, and Puerto Rico.

My values, experiences, and career choices shape my code of ethics. They are rooted in pragmatic approaches driven by altruistic values to drive the transformational changes that stakeholders seek to improve their lives and those in their communities. As I learned about ethical frameworks, I discovered that the intersection of pragmatism and altruism best defines the ethical model and construct I build my leadership style and model. It becomes the foundation of how I interact with the world and grapple with the many community challenges I am committed to identifying and solving in collaboration with key stakeholders, community, and business leaders.

**The Intersection of Pragmatism and Altruism**

Altruism is an ethical standard focused on an individual helping others, whatever the personal cost. It is the ultimate love for our neighbors. (Johnson, 2018). The moral standard focuses on selflessness, compassion, empathy, and the drive to help someone. Although altruism provides a moral compass for how I show up in situations, as a process person and a leader who believes in systems, altruism provides a moral compass but does not guide how to create solutions to help the individuals I seek to help.

While I am always inclined to help others, I also believe that help should support the person beyond my immediate act. Instead, the help should allow them to sustain the initial help to be self-sufficient and provide a transformative long-term solution. To that end, I am drawn to pragmatic practices, which use philosophy and scientific methods to solve practical problems (Johnson, 2018). Because these are such different ethical standards, I needed to understand how their practical practices intersected with my leadership style and model.

**Understanding Altruism**

Both biological and psychological factors influence altruism. Biological altruism focuses on the proximity of genetics being the primary motive for altruism—for example, a one-cell organism protecting its offspring to survive and reproduce. The reciprocity occurs because of the desire to help those genetically connected to survive and continue to exist. Hamilton and Darwin influenced the study of biological altruism.

Psychological altruism tries to explore intent. According to Piccinini and Schulz (2018), there are two types of psychological altruism to explore. The first is focused on classical psychology altruism, which is likely to play a significant role in animal psychology. This classic approach embraces both biological and psychological altruism. They provide a natural order to reproduce while including a shared, learned, and adaptive behavior to benefit the helper and the one being helped, like parents with their children. There is a benefit in caring for and teaching our children to be healthy, thriving individuals. The family benefits, and the child learns to care for those close to them.

The second type of altruism is known as non-classical altruism. This altruism is focused on "the ultimate altruistic desires from egotistic sources, primarily reward-based learning" (p.64). non-classical altruism lives between egotism, deciding when helping has self-benefits and classical altruism. This type of altruism is "less cognitively demanding than egotism and more flexible than classical altruism" (p. 64). As a result, it is more adaptive and considers conditions for reciprocity or reward (Piccinini and Schulz, 2018). Although individuals may have expectations of their decision to be altruistic, the act may still be altruistic because the rewards and reciprocity may not come immediately, if at all. Often, they are expectations created in the hopes that when the actor is in need, the recipient will provide in kind.

As a scholar-practitioner, I have seen the biological and psychological approaches collide and the Hamilton Rule come to life. Adults who volunteer to become youth mentors are rarely connected to the young person they mentor. They often do not even share similar cultural, economic, or academic experiences; therefore, the desire to do good and the hope of reciprocity need to be high. In the years that I have done this work in the mentoring movement, I often hear most all mentors say they have learned more and gotten more out of the mentoring relationship with their mentees than they believe they have given.

**Understanding Pragmatism**

Pragmatism embraces the process of inquiry and deliberation without particular principles guiding the outcome (Johnson, 2018). This open-ended process demands that individuals engage in the process of solution strategies with a sense of curiosity, a growth mindset, and a willingness to explore different strategies and adjust as they learn. It embraces being responsive to the complexity and nuances that challenges may present (Johnson, 2018).

Pragmatism is often thought of as a scientific method. According to John Dewey (1859-1952), the scientific method could be applied to solve the human dilemma; therefore, the need for a hypothesis and testing that hypothesis applies to the approach (Johnson, 2018, p.155). Testing the hypothesis through innovative solutions can be risky as it can be fraught with failure. However, pragmatists engage in a creative mental process known as dramatic rehearsal (Johnson 2018, p. 155). Engaging in this process allows for analyzing, combining, and recombining ideas and data from different perspectives to determine the best solution and process before testing. To accomplish this, leaders must have the psychological safety to reflect and deliberate on one another's ideas, suggestions, and processes.

**Connecting Altruism and Pragmatism**

As I analyzed the connections between the practices of innovators, the pragmatist process, and the moral compass of altruism, I discovered that I embrace pragmatic altruism as a framework for my code of ethics. So what are the factors that drive the process of pragmatic altruism? When faced with a challenge to help others, we use the five discovery skills innovators consistently exercise, associating, questioning, observation, experimentation, and networking, to ideate and create different strategies and solutions to solve a problem to help others (Dyer, 2009).

Since many of these solutions impact individuals and can not be tested in a lab, dramatic rehearsals or "pilots" allow testing to determine the best solution. For those solutions to work, they must also be tested against the moral value it will actually help and not harm the intended recipient directly or unexpectedly. The solutions must then meet the altruistic code of ethics. It must include Compassion, Equity, and Spaces of Joy.

George R. Price created a mathematical theory of the phenomenon based on Hamilton's theory, Hamilton's Rule. The rule "states that altruism will be favored by selection when *rb- c > 0*, where c is the fitness cost of the actor, b is the fitness benefit to the recipient, and r is the genetic relatedness between the actor and recipient" (Kurzban et al., 2015, p. 576). This equation allows for a couple of factors to be identified and determined. "It can describe when altruism will be favored but also any other trait. Both *b* or *c* can be positive or negative, and so Hamilton's rule also predicts when selfish, spiteful, or mutually beneficial traits will be favored" (Kurzban et al., 2015, p. 576).

**My Code of Ethics**

My personal mission statement is "*To live a life of joy that makes a* ***positive*** *difference in others' lives while giving and receiving love, laughter, and adventures.*

There are some key moral principles guiding my personal code of ethics. They include:

***Fiduciary Responsibility:*** Be a good steward of the financial, intellectual, and in-kind resources available to the organization or community I lead to ensure that the implementation of innovation has the support needed to glean the desired outcome.

***Respect and Dignity:*** Respect for the community members, stakeholders, and the team supporting the work done to help others. Creating cultures of psychological safety where everyone feels they have a voice and healthy deliberation can occur to reach the shared vision. Treating the individuals you are trying to help with dignity and respect allows for solutions identified to be thoughtful and nuanced to include essential variables that only those most affected by the challenge can share and understand.

***Mentoring:*** Understanding the power of my position and my obligation to pay it forward by sharing what I have learned and the network I had built while activating this social capital to help others in similar positions when I started my career.

***Compassion and Empathy:*** Lived experiences can define how a person sees the world. Although I may not share those experiences, I must actively listen, be genuinely curious, exercise cultural humility, and try to understand others' perspectives. Kindness, compassion, and empathy are essential attributes I bring to my leadership style.

***Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging:*** Conitnuouisly educating myself to understand the culture, history, and background of those that work in the organization and we serve through our work. This effort strengthens the partnerships and helps me develop mutually respectful relationships. Having a growth mindset that allows for continual curiosity and exploration allows me never to assume everything about another individual's experience or background. Setting a tone for everyone to have humility and try to understand those different than themselves help create spaces of inclusion and belonging.

**Conclusion**

This personal code of ethics provides me a moral compass to ensure the solutions I am a part of developing benefit the recipients more than the actors and stay true to our commitment of ultimately partnering and including those I am helping in changing the circumstances which created the hardship. Although this makes helping people a more complex challenge, as it is not focused on the immediate solutions but on the long-term changes and shifts that need to occur, the solutions created have more significant impacts. For me, this aligns with "the heights" Badaracco (2018) describes in the book Good Struggle when we are grappling with the last enduring question, "Why have I chosen this life?". The reciprocity and reward come in the journey of resolving the challenge, collaborating with other talented individuals, and discovering a new way to see the challenge or the world.

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