IntegratedEthics® (IE) Journal Activity

PLANNING GUIDE


Overview
This journal activity provides a venue for reflection, discussion and inquiry about the practice of ethical leadership in your organization. While reading “Managing to be Ethical: Debunking Five Business Ethics Myths,” by Linda K. Treviño and Michael E. Brown, participants should consider how the authors’ observations fit with their own opinions and beliefs about ethical behavior at work, and reflect on the key questions in the participant handout. At the journal meeting, these key questions will be used as the basis for collegial discussion about the ethical environment and culture in VHA.

IE Journal Activity Format
Journal activities typically take 45-60 minutes, and are suitable for “lunch and learn” settings or other short venues. Optimally, a journal activity is both the result of prior activity, i.e., reading and reflection, and the catalyst for further activity, as shown in the RADIUS\(^1\) format below.

RADIUS
Read the article critically.
Ask yourself the key questions.
Discuss the questions and follow-up actions with colleagues.
Inquire into IE program resources for help resolving ethical issues.
Use what you have learned.
Sustain collaboration with others in ethical practice in your facility or VISN.

In preparation for leading a journal activity, the leader should follow the first two steps of RADIUS like any participant, reading the article critically and asking the key questions at the end of this Leader’s Guide. The discussion leader should also be committed to following up — and supporting participants in following up — on the last three steps.

\(^1\)Adapted from the RADICAL model described in the Annals of Family Medicine Journal Discussion. [http://www.annfammed.org/AJC/](http://www.annfammed.org/AJC/)

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Guide for Discussion Leaders

Objectives for the Journal Activity
• Provide an opportunity for staff to reflect on their own thinking and behavior with regard to ethical practices in their work
• Familiarize staff with resources available to them in their local IE program.
• Foster collaborative discussion among staff to improve the ethical environment and culture in your facility.

Logistics

Participants
Journal discussions are open to any staff members who wish to participate.

Preparation
At least two weeks before the meeting:
• Choose a journal discussion leader and plan a time to prepare them for leading the discussion.
• Work with your local library to get a copy of the article. Your library staff can assist you in determining the best way to access the article while following copyright permission requirements. Ensure that staff can easily access the participant handout for the meeting.
• Reserve a meeting space. Note: if you plan on addressing the supplementary question (No. 4, on last page of this Guide), get a room with a whiteboard or obtain a flipchart easel.
• Announce the event and make sure all in the facility are aware of it.

A day or two before the meeting:
• Confirm the journal event in another announcement, and remind participants to bring their participant handouts with them.
• Make extra copies of the participant handout and bring to the meeting.

After the meeting:
• Summarize notes generated during brainstorming and share them with participants.
• You may also choose to write a brief summary that can be included in a facility article, local newsletter or daily report.
• This summary can help participants who were unable to join the discussion learn about the activity and encourage them to participate in future IE events.
• If ideas are generated that might be considered for implementation across the facility, the IE Council could be briefed for consideration.
Roles

Discussion Leader
- Initiate the meeting and set the tone.
- Facilitate an open, collegial and relevant discussion.
- Moderate the discussion and ensure that all participants who want to join the discussion have an opportunity to do so.
- Keep the discussion on track and on topic. However, it is not necessary to cover all of the key questions.
- Encourage participants to seek information about the IE program at the facility.
- Follow up on ethical concerns shared during the discussion.

IE Staff
- Give participant handouts to those who need them.
- Act as a timekeeper, if the discussion leader has delegated this task.
- Track who speaks next, if the discussion leader has delegated this task.
- Take notes on questions, comments or suggestions that require further action.
- Follow up on topics that require further action.
- Record how many participants indicate an interest in attending another journal discussion, and any suggestions made about improving the activity.

Suggested Ground Rules

Who Speaks When?
Typically, a discussion among a group of six or fewer participants, seated around a table or in a circle, is self-facilitating. For larger groups, it may be helpful to ask participants to raise their hands when they want to speak. If needed, IE program staff can jot down the order in which hands go up. The discussion leader may need to intervene from time to time if one person is dominating the discussion or if the discussion goes off track. In those instances, the discussion leader may want to say, “Let’s hear from someone else on this,” or “Let’s go back to the question.”

Timing
The discussion leader should start the meeting promptly and give guidance at the beginning about how long each question will be discussed. The discussion leader is responsible for moving the discussion from one question to the next when the allotted time is up. The discussion leader may delegate timekeeping responsibilities to the IE program staff in the room or ask for a volunteer timekeeper from the participant group.

Questions About the IE Program
When participants ask for more information about the IE program at the facility, the leader may call on the IE program staff in the room for a brief response. However, the journal club activity is not meant to be a question and answer session about IE. If a brief response isn't feasible, the leader should ask the IE program staff to make a note of the question and respond to it later.
**Participant Suggestions for Improving the IE Program**
The IE program staff attending the meeting will note any suggestions for improving the IE program, along with the names of the people who express an interest in following up on those suggestions. Review the notes with the participant group at the end of the session.

**Leading the Journal Activity**

*Introduce the Session and Set Expectations (5 Minutes)*
- Welcome the participants to the journal club discussion.
- Introduce yourself by name and ask other participants to do the same. (IE program staff should mention their IE roles when introducing themselves.)
- Direct participants’ attention to the meeting objectives on the first page of the handout and quickly read through them.
- Explain your role as the leader of the journal discussion:
  - Facilitate an open, collegial, and relevant discussion.
  - Moderate the discussion and ensure that all participants who want to join the discussion have an opportunity to do so.
  - Keep the discussion on track and on topic.
  - Encourage participants to seek information about the IE program.
  - Follow up on ethical concerns shared during the discussion.

*Discuss the Key Questions (40-50 Minutes)*
- Read the initial statement and the accompanying first question and invite responses.
- If participants don’t offer a comment, refer to the discussion leader notes (if applicable) for prompts to use.
- When time for the question runs out, get the group’s attention and say something like, “I’m afraid we are out of time on this question. Any last thoughts before we move on?”
- If the group wishes to continue talking about the question, ask where the time will come from. Do participants wish to reduce the time spent on the remaining questions or perhaps eliminate a question altogether?
- Repeat this process for the remaining question sets.
Key questions:

**Myth 1: It’s Easy to Be Ethical**
The authors begin by debunking the idea that it is easy to be ethical, emphasizing that ethical decisions are complex and require moral awareness to address the complexities and the multistage process.

- How often do you see ethical challenges or questions underestimated or minimized?
- How can we promote moral awareness in our work areas?
  - Example: What can you say to describe a situation when someone asks you to document in minutes of a meeting that he was present in a meeting when he was not?
- What are your thoughts about the five stages or levels of moral reasoning?
- Can you give examples of communications, memos or statements at different levels?

**Myth 2: Unethical Behavior in Business Is simply the Result of “Bad Apples”**
The next section challenges the “bad apples” myth, provides a number of private sector examples, and specifically discusses the phenomenon of obedience to authority.

- How might this apply to our work settings?
- Without giving specifics, give an example of the “obedience to authority” phenomenon?
- What activities help us lead employees toward ethical behavior?

**Myth 3: Ethics Can Be Managed Through Formal Ethics Codes and Programs**
The federal government and VHA have significant resources dedicated to ethics codes and programs. Yet recent events indicate that in spite of all of these resources, things can still go wrong.

- What have we learned from corporate America, and what have we learned from VHA?
- Do formal codes and programs have an impact? If so, are they enough?
- How do organizations follow through to support ethics codes and programs?
- What are examples of formal programs in VA?
- How can we help leadership support formal ethics programs?

**Myth 4: Ethical Leadership Is Mostly About Leader Integrity**
Perhaps the greatest challenge we face in promoting ethical leadership relates to this myth.

- Without naming names, have you heard of leaders who have resisted doing the ELSA or other leadership exercises on the grounds that it is not necessary because they are ethical?
- How do we convey that “being ethical” and “being a leader” does not mean that one is necessarily an "ethical leader?"
• What did you think about the grid with one axis representing levels of Moral Person and another showing levels of Moral Manager?
• Can you think of times when you have been an ethically silent leader, or failed as an ethical leader in spite of high ethical standards, for failing to engage in ELSA-type behaviors?

**Myth 5: People Are Less Ethical Than They Used To Be**
The authors cite recent polls indicating that people believe senior corporate executives are less ethical than they used to be.
• What are your thoughts?
• For those of you who have been with VHA for 10 or more years, please share your experiences. Are you seeing a change?
• What is behind this myth?

The authors close the article with Guidelines for Effective Ethics Management. This is a good opportunity to compare VHA’s initiatives and to look for affirmation (“continue to do this”) and opportunities (“do more of this”).

**First: Understand the Existing Ethics Culture**
• Are we doing this?
• How else might we do it?

**Second: Communicate the Importance of Ethical Standards**
• Does this sound familiar?
• What EL Compass Points are consistent with this statement?
• How do we do this in this facility? Give examples.

**Third: Focus on the Reward System**
• How can we reward ethical behavior?
• What are we learning in VHA with respect to performance measures and management systems?

**Fourth: Promote Ethical Leadership Throughout the Firm**
This guideline addresses much of the content in Myth 4.
• What are we doing to help ethical people in leadership become ethical leaders?
• How can we help them make ethical values visible?
Conclude the session (5 min.)
When there are only five minutes left, inform participants that time is almost up. If anyone objects that they haven’t had a chance to express an idea or concern about the practice of ethics in the organization, ask the group if they agree to let that person speak for a minute or two. (People will usually agree, if the facilitator has shown an ability to keep to the allotted time so far.)

Second Half of Radius Model
Remind participants (and yourself): the second half of the RADIUS model focuses on action.
Pledge your support for staff action in these areas:
Inquire into IE program resources for help in resolving ethical issues.
Use what you have learned.
Sustain collaboration with others in ethical practice in your facility or VISN.

Follow-up on Questions, Comments, Suggestions
If participants have made suggestions about improving ethical practice at the facility, ask the IE program staff in the room to read out the suggestions (from their notes).

Close
Thank participants for a good discussion (and good suggestions, if any). Ask who would like to attend another journal activity, and how the meeting structure might be improved, if at all.