# Education Directors Acting as an Agent for a Transformation: A Case-based Investigation

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## Abstract

Education is a moral endeavour aimed at improving society. The education directors of the College were supposed to lead the way in implementing the changes by acting ethically. Regretfully, in certain instances, they face criticism for their immoral actions. Thus, this research article aims to investigate how well college education directors function as agents of change in the direction of transformative ethics. Using the interpretivism paradigm and the narrative inquiry approach, the lived narratives produced by four governmental college education directors from three distinct regions of the Bagmati province—Lalitpur, Kathmandu, and Bhaktapur—were purposefully chosen. We used in-depth interviews to determine how administrators felt about the ethical phenomena in light of the developments. Additionally, it shows ethical sensitivity, a fundamental component of a flexible society with sensible people. It implies that treating others with kindness and respect empowers them to consider change. Humanity is the primary source of ethical development, after which everything shifts simultaneously. This discovery clarified the role that ethics plays in bringing about improvements. It disseminates ethical knowledge, values, and expertise throughout the community, college, and individuals.

*Keywords:* ethics, education directors, modifications, procedures, moral administratorship

## INTRODUCTION

Education is a moral endeavour aimed at improving societal well-being and navigating the complex process of societal transformation. Consequently, education

directors (college administrators) are expected to uphold ethical standards and a sense of responsibility to drive necessary changes within themselves and the broader community. According to Starratt (2004), genuine changes can only arise from their ethical character and associated responsibilities. True transformation necessitates individuals to internally acknowledge the need for change, as coercion or deceit are ineffective. This inner acknowledgment is nurtured by the ability to discern between right and wrong and good and evil within specific contexts. Hence, the ethical conduct and accountability of college administrators are crucial for nurturing ethical competence among individuals and within the College and its surrounding community. By fostering an ethical culture within the College, administrators inspire collective advancement. Consequently, they are perceived as catalysts for promoting transformative ethics, leading to positive societal change.

Ethics represents an introspective examination of individuals' beliefs, encompassing underlying convictions, assumptions, principles, and values that underpin a moral lifestyle (Starratt, 2004). It pertains to standardized capabilities for distinguishing right from wrong. The college principal, recognized as a sanctioned agent of change (Cherkowski et al., 2015), is responsible for establishing and perpetuating a moral and ethical environment within the College. An agent, as defined in contemporary public administration literature, is an individual acting on behalf of another person, typically called the principal (Garofalo & Geuras, 2006). Bandura (2001) asserts that an agent deliberately takes action to effect change on behalf of others. Consequently, college Administrators emerge as significant contributors to the transformation and evolution of colleges (Harris et al., 2017). The literature reveals instances where some college administrators are involved in unethical practices within their institutions (Arar, 2016). Even within the context of Nepal, the ethical integrity of principals is not held in high regard (Bhattarai, 2015). Based on this literature, it is evident that college administrators still need to gain competency in ethical conduct. Moreover, there exists a paradoxical perception of college administrators. While they are respected as creators of an ethical atmosphere and are expected to exemplify ethical practices, they are also criticized for their unethical behaviour. Given this contradictory scenario, it raises the question of how colleges can expect effective changes from their education directors (administrators) and their administratorship.

This paper aims to investigate the ethical conduct of college administrators as

they navigate the challenges of effecting change within their lived experiences. Additionally, it seeks to uncover the underlying ethical dynamics driving change, as embedded within the narratives shared by college administrators. This paper endeavours to shed light on the realm of educational ethical administratorship, addressing the existing gap in the current landscape as advocated by Barkhordari et al. (2017) and other researchers. Furthermore, it aims to provide valuable insights for individuals seeking to enact sustainable positive changes within colleges and society.

## Literature Review

The role that education directors play in promoting change inside educational institutions has drawn a lot of attention in recent years. Directors of education are essential in determining the mission and long-term course of colleges and universities, particularly during periods of fast transformation and changing educational environments. Based on case-based research, this review of the literature attempts to investigate how education directors function as change agents.

Education directors hold pivotal roles in supervising the execution of educational policies, promoting creativity, and propelling organizational transformation in educational environments (Smith and Iversen, 2018). In order to effectively navigate the opportunities and challenges brought about by changing student demographics, educational techniques, and technology breakthroughs, their leadership is crucial. According to the notion of transformational leadership, strong leaders encourage and inspire their subordinates to reach greater standards of performance by creating a common vision and objectives (Mukonza and Swarts, 2019). Teaching strategies, student results, and overall institutional success can all be positively impacted by education directors who possess transformational leadership skills. According to García-Martínz et.al (2021) case studies offer insightful information about the tactics used by education directors to promote change inside their organizations. Through the examination of real-life situations, scholars can pinpoint optimal methodologies, obstacles encountered, and insights gained from triumphant transformation endeavors spearheaded by educational directors (Harris et.al, 2023). Education directors have the ability to influence an educational institution's culture by their choices, behaviors, and methods of communication (Hwang and Choi, 2019). Education directors may build an atmosphere

that supports sustainable change by encouraging a culture of creativity, cooperation, and continual improvement.

Education directors must work in tandem with stakeholders like instructors, parents, students, and community members to ensure that their educational reform projects are successful (Gunathilaka, et.al, 2022). Creating solid alliances based on mutual respect and objectives in common can increase the effectiveness of change initiatives. For the purpose of evaluating their influence and fine-tuning tactics for further advancements, education directors must measure the success of their transformative projects (Yang, et.al, 2023). Evaluation frameworks facilitate the capturing of results pertaining to institutional performance, community participation, staff satisfaction, and student achievement.

## Methodological Approach

Interpretivism paradigm and narrative inquiry approaches have been employed for exploring the lived experiences of college education directors in promoting transformative ethics.

### Philosophical Foundational of the Study

This study used a narrative inquiry approach within the interpretive research paradigm. In this paradigm, the nature of reality is understood as how each participant perceives and interprets their experiences. Therefore, the researcher entered the participants' lived world to comprehend the phenomena from their perspective. The participants' beliefs, values, and associated social actions served as the source of knowledge, as interpreted through their own narratives. The knowledge generated stemmed from the meaning derived from these experiences.

### Sample Selection and Data Collection

The study discusses the deliberate selection of four government directors of college education from various Bagmati province regions. This method, on the other hand, enables a thorough examination of many viewpoints. Eight college education directors, or administrators, were first deliberately chosen from three distinct districts. But because their stories were so complex, by the time the study was over, only four

individuals remained. To enable participants to explain their experiences in-depth and clearly, examining many facets of their experiences, in-depth interviews were held on multiple dates. Additionally, the study aimed to understand the attitudes and beliefs of participants through thick descriptions of their lived world. The narratives were generated through informal conversations and probing questions tailored to the needs of the participants, allowing the researcher to delve deeper into the subjective world of their experiences. These narratives were presented in storytelling to capture the authenticity of the participants' perspectives.

**Research Design**

The study involved several procedural steps, including recording, transcription, and translation (from Nepali to English) of various stories, from which only four were selected for analysis. These stories were categorized under three themes. Subsequently, the researcher analyzed, interpreted and made meaning of these stories to construct an understanding of each theme. Based on these understandings, insights were formulated regarding administrators' perceptions and practices for change. These insights were then discussed and developed within the framework of three paradigms of ethical administratorship during the theoretical discussion. The study's knowledge was derived from the researcher's perspectives, as well as the "given voice" of the participants, with support from perspectives on ethical administratorship. Only after integrating these perspectives did the study conclude with new knowledge on the perceptions and practices of educational administrators regarding change. The conclusion was based on the researcher's reflections as a narrative researcher, synthesizing the insights gained throughout the study. Our knowledge is characterized as justified and true, rooted in the beliefs and experiences of our participants. We prioritize understanding how participants perceive and navigate their values. Throughout the meaning-making process, we maintained consistency between the information from their stories and our reflections, ensuring a holistic understanding. We centred our exploration around the participants' perceptions and practices, connecting the dots to their experiences.

We were diligent in considering the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework of temporality, sociality, and place for each story, ensuring the quality of our exploration. As researchers of ethical issues, we upheld our ethical responsibilities to our

participants and their narratives. We informed participants about the study's significance, purpose, and procedures, obtaining consent and permission to use their narratives as research data. Respecting their personal, professional, and social dignities, we prioritized confidentiality, using pseudonyms to maintain privacy and prevent harm to their social, economic, physical, and emotional well-being. Ethical considerations were the central essence of our academic research, grounding the entire study process (Bowen et al., 2019). We committed to using the collected opinions for this research project and upheld honesty in drawing meaning from the data.

## Discussions as Interpretation and Analysis

The paper emphasizes the importance of ethical phenomena in driving transformative change in educational leadership.

### Ethics and Change

Ethics, characterized as the conscious reflection of moral beliefs, is central to nurturing individual human qualities. It pertains to concerns about human character, behaviour, and the associated mental and social phenomena (Becker, 2017). Ethical knowledge empowers individuals to discern the right action and act accordingly. A strong sense of ethics can enhance innate human qualities such as love, care, respect, honesty, integrity, compassion, and equality. When individuals feel secure, valued, and free, they are more inclined to embrace new ideas and strategies for effective change. In this context, a humanist and democratic orientation is the foundation for promoting change (Burnes & By, 2012). Ethics facilitate the integration of relationships among people (Ouma, 2017), fostering trustworthy relationships that empower individuals to recognize and pursue the need for change. People will likely contemplate and pursue new changes once they identify better possibilities. In this regard, ethics serve as a guide in distinguishing between what is right or wrong and good or bad (Northouse, 2021). Therefore, the ethical development of individuals motivates and directs them towards the right path for embracing new changes.

### College Administrators as a Change Agent

College administrators are respected and expected to serve as exemplary icons of ethical standards. As creators of morally upright individuals (Dhakal & Koirala, 2005),

their role modelling sets the tone for ethical expectations and standards (Gini, 2004). These ethical standards empower individuals and foster an environment conducive to moral growth. Starratt (2004) further argues that cultivating a mindset of ethical and moral capacity is essential for a sustainable future, a capacity that effective administrators can instil. Administrators are not merely drivers of the values, beliefs, and ethics within the college community; they are architects of society itself (Eyal et al., 2011). Endowed with positions of authority, administrators attract attention from individuals eager to learn from their practices (Yukl, 2013). Administratorship involves social influence, placing administrators at the centre of various societal networks. Consequently, administrators' actions, decisions, and behaviours impact both the College and society. Thus, administrators are viewed as role models of ethical conduct, modelling ethical behaviour for the community and as essential catalysts for effective change (Ouma, 2017; Wahid et al., 2018). In this context, Burns and By (2012) write:

> Administrators can only attain sustainable and beneficial change for their organizations if they operate ethically and embrace ethically compatible approaches to change. These approaches should address their individual (egoistic) needs and generate utilitarian outcomes that benefit most stakeholders.

Hence, principals serve as sources of motivation to discern right from wrong and act ethically. The entire persona of administrators carries ethical responsibilities to foster the improvement of college members and the community. Therefore, they are expected to conduct themselves according to the ideologies of human decency. Ethical administrators enforce rules and norms within their colleges and uphold ethics such as care, justice, equality, and respect. College administrators should transcend mere technical efficiency, viewing administratorship as a moral endeavour that serves the humanity of the college community. As a change agent, the principal is responsible for navigating the demanding landscape of the College and society. For college administrators, change represents opportunities for personal growth and advancement for the institution (Juharyanto, 2015). Generally, change is perceived as chaotic and problematic. To overcome this perception, college administrators must balance the personal commitments of college members and the organizational commitments of the institution. The personal commitments encompass three dimensions: economic well-being, health, and individual responsibility. On the other hand, organizational commitments entail policies, authority structures, goals,

limitations, and personal and professional responsibilities. Finding equilibrium between these two realms is crucial for effective change management.

## Ethics of Responsibility as Theoretical Referent

The narrative is analyzed through three among four different domains of responsibility in educational administration, as suggested by Starratt (2005).

### *Responsibility as a Human Being*

In this domain, college administrators consider the ethically humane course of action, recognizing every individual's intrinsic dignity and inviolability.

### *Responsibility as a Citizen and Public Servant*

Educators act as citizens who prioritize the common good over personal benefit or favouring one person at the expense of others. As public servants, educators are entrusted with providing essential services to the community.

### *Responsibility as an Educational Administrator*

Administrators aspire to transform the College from a bureaucratic organization governed by rules and regulations into an intentional, self-governing community. As administrators, they have access to organizational structures and processes that significantly impact teaching and learning. These structures and processes are not ethically neutral; they must be managed with ethical considerations.

## Unwrapping the Narratives and Discussion

As narrative inquirers, we aim to immerse ourselves in the lived experiences of principals, seeking to understand their perspectives from within their world. Participants in our study are currently serving as college principals, bringing a wealth of experiences from various leadership positions such as vice-principal, academic coordinator, and department head. By delving into their experiences and narratives, we strive to gain insights into the challenges, successes, and unique perspectives shaping their educational leadership roles.

## Responsible as a Human Being

At the foundation of the ethics of care, we recognize that human qualities such as love, respect, sharing, honesty, and transparency are essential for the healthy

development of inner realization. Individuals' emotional, psychological, physical, financial, and social needs are interconnected, so when one need is adequately cared for, it positively impacts the others. In a caring atmosphere, college community members can build their confidence to embrace new perspectives. As we delve into the experiences, let us walk alongside Ms. Naina Rai (pseudonym), aged 32. Ms. Rai is characterized by her humility, compassion, soft-spoken nature, and clarity in communication. Her pleasant personality and transparent demeanour may be attributed to her 11 years of experience in administrative roles as a coordinator, vice-principal, and principal. To shed light on her approach as a caring administrator, she shares the following narrative:

> About ten years ago, I encountered a situation where a guardian refused to clear the dues of college fees, citing their child's victimization during a political conflict in the country. The Guardian approached me loudly, advocating for their rights, political privileges, power, and more. Instead of taking immediate action, I listened attentively to the Guardian. I respected them as a valuable college community member and invited their input and assistance in establishing a funding system for needy students, addressing their demands constructively. Since that event, the Guardian has remained actively involved with the College, contributing to fundraising and welfare activities. Fortunately, this collaboration has become one of the highlights of our College's initiatives.

After reflecting on this narrative, we understand that college principals play a crucial role in fostering respectful relationships with guardians through productive communication. They give proper attention to the voices of others, listening, respecting, and valuing trust, which serves as motivational pipelines for initiating change. People must exhibit delicacy and diplomacy in their interactions, as everyone deserves respect and dignity (Starrat, 2005). By adopting a caring, loving, and empowered attitude, principals can effectively navigate upcoming challenges, enabling people to change through their consciousness. Care is essential for reducing anxiety and managing the complexities within the student body (Bhattarai, 2019). Furthermore, the ethics of care, justice, and empowerment are fundamental virtues that promote the most entire and most profound humanity within the community (Brown, as cited in Bessette & Chan, 2006). Therefore, the responsibility of college administrators as human beings is the primary foundation for transforming ethics within the college community.

## Responsibility as a Citizen and Public Servant

Entering into the realm of ongoing experiences of my second participant, Mr Ram Pun (pseudonym), aged 43, we realize that the willingness to serve beyond one's authority is also a responsibility of administrators. Mr. Pun demonstrates a solid commitment to student welfare, embodying the characteristics of a responsible citizen. He has been leading the College for over eighteen years. With a soft and respectful demeanour, he shares his narrative:

> In 2013 A.D., I spontaneously allocated funds from the College's budget to assist a student diagnosed with kidney problems. Considering the student's impoverished family background, I acted without following institutional procedures. As a result, I faced scrutiny from the college management committee, leading to considerable stress and turmoil. However, amidst this challenging time, I experienced moments of profound beauty that I had never encountered before. I felt a sense of peace and tranquility wash over me, as if something good had stirred within my soul. Despite the adversity, I breathed easier and felt more energized than ever before. My compassion towards the student contributed to this newfound sense of calm. Unfortunately, the student passed away, but the impact of this event remains a lasting source of inspiration. His parents, moved by the assistance provided, have since become volunteers at a charitable organization, demonstrating a sincere commitment to social responsibility.

From this reflection, we glean that the primary responsibility of college administrators lies in serving and nurturing the people and society, prioritizing humanity over institutional rules and policies. Regulations cannot solely drive education but must be imbued with compassion and empathy. Administrators demonstrate their charitable qualities and collaborative motives, fostering a caring and empowering atmosphere conducive to change. They exhibit the courage to navigate the balance between personal and organizational responsibilities for the sake of ethical transformation. As institutions chartered by the state, colleges are mandated to serve the people's interests (Starratt, 2005). Thus, administrators are expected to function as public servants.

## Responsibility as an Educational Administrator

An education director cannot solely focus on adhering to rigid rules but must also

prioritize the rights and equity of individuals. It is imperative to uphold the rights of students and create an environment where they feel valued as equals. This approach fosters students' self-awareness and enhances the institutional culture by revealing a system of ethical values. With this perspective in mind, we delved into the experiences of Mr Dev Rai (pseudonym), a towering personality in college leadership, aged 36. Mr. Rai possesses a pleasing personality coupled with confidence. He is an adept listener and has demonstrated maturity beyond his early forties. With twelve years of experience in various leadership positions across different colleges, Mr Rai emphasizes that actual ethical administrators must have the courage to take personal risks and make alternative decisions for fairness and equity. To elaborate on this point, he shares:

> *Three years ago, I faced a dilemma that haunted me for six months, but now I take pride in my decision. No one, not even my wife, could share my turmoil with me. During the middle of the academic session in 2073, our academic department proposed the termination of a female teacher whom I knew personally. It was tough for me to agree to this decision, knowing that she was the sole breadwinner for her struggling migrant family. I was torn between prioritizing the quality standards of the College or acknowledging her harsh reality. Every day, I saw her face filled with happiness and excitement, unaware of the impending change in her career. I was caught between two opposing sides, feeling fearful and unsure of what step to take for justice. Ultimately, I chose to respect her rights and arranged for her to continue teaching at another college with utmost respect. She remains unaware of the hidden realities, my internal dilemmas, and my involvement in her transfer. I hope this remains undisclosed in the future as well. My position as principal compelled me to decide, but my conscience disagreed with it. Therefore, I had to devise alternative strategies to ensure fairness and justice prevailed.*

The responsibility of educational administrators extends beyond mere management to encompass a transformational ethic (Coleman, 1982). This narrative underscores that principals bear equal responsibility for the College, its stakeholders, and society, serving as community architects who are keenly aware of what lies ahead (Starratt, 2004). Every word and action of administrators shapes the future, preserving the emotions and dignity of individuals. Balanced decisions are essential to navigating

diverse realities among followers, and administrators strive to seek alternative solutions to maintain harmony and foster progress. Effective educational administrators reject a one-size-fits-all approach and prioritize guiding individuals toward ethical decision-making (Gross & Shapiro, 2013). They aspire to transform the College from an organization bound by rules, regulations, and roles into an intentional, self-governing community. Educational administrators challenge college members to transcend self-interest in pursuing higher ideals, urging them to embrace something heroic (Starratt, 2005).

## Implications, Findings, and Conclusions

After extracting meaning from the narratives, it becomes evident that ethics is intertwined with multiple realities and possesses inspirational strength for driving change. At the core of administrators' responsibilities lies a commitment to humanity, which lays the foundation for an ethical environment conducive to change. Attributes such as love, affection, respect, and compassion exemplify the ethics of care while embodying public servant qualities such as sharing, serving, helping, and balancing further contribute to fostering change. These qualities of administrators reflect their concern for the well-being of individuals, colleges, and the public. Moreover, these attributes speak to our identity—what we are and can become (Freeman & Steward, 2006). Recognizing the identity of individuals fosters a trustworthy relationship between principals and students, serving as a motivational foundation for the transfer of ethics. Administrators prioritize cultivating an ethically sound climate within their colleges, emphasizing the importance of fostering trust and ethical behaviour among all community members.

All approaches to change aimed at transforming ethics are rooted in the ethical competencies of administrators, fostering human capacities for growth. When individuals are empowered to develop their intellect, they can embrace new thoughts and practices, facilitating change. Administratorship and change go hand in hand toward a common destination, but college administrators must be courageous to uphold ethical responsibilities. Ethical knowledge holds little value if it does not drive towards change. Treating individuals as human beings is foundational in fulfilling ethical responsibilities towards transforming ethics. As change agents, college principals exhibit a strong and clear intention to integrate their head, heart, and hand in nurturing the College and society

through ethical standards in their leadership. However, significant gaps exist between the perception and practice of ethical principles among administrators, necessitating further study. These discrepancies highlight the need for ongoing examination and improvement in ethical practices within educational leadership.

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## Code Availability

Not applicable.

## Ethical Statement

### Ethics Approval

We obtain verbal permission from our supervisor to conduct study, even though we do not require ethics approval as researchers from University Grant Commissions and Kathmandu University's School of Education. After learning about the rumors circulating among governmental college administrators, we would want to investigate and talk about the best ways to handle academia through study.

### Informed Consent

We did not require the signed informed permission form because the research is based on the reflections of the three authors.

### Animal Welfare

There was no animal experimentation in this study.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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*Data Sharing Is Not Applicable*

We do not analyze or generate any datasets because our work proceeds within a theoretical approach.

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