Ethical Imperatives in Community Engagement

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Abstract

As the impetus for community engagement (CE) grows in higher education, it is imperative that such growth takes place within a sound ethical framework. While research-related ethics and norms are well developed, there is now a need for the development of ethical guidelines to underpin CE initiatives. We begin by framing the discussion of ethics within policy and theoretical frameworks underpinning CE in higher education in South Africa. Core concepts and values emerging from these frameworks, such as social responsibility, Ubuntu and interconnectedness, are important starting points for ethics in CE. As CE involves the exercising of leadership by universities and community partners, we explore key ethical concepts to underpin established frameworks for governance and leadership, such as the King IV report. We highlight core ethical principles such as sustainable development, integrity, and accountability. We further consider that value propositions must not narrowly focus on value to stakeholders, but also to broader systems. The discussion then narrows to the application of ethics to the specifics of CE. We apply the "four principles" of Beauchamp and Childress (non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, and autonomy), considering each of these principles in turn. We discuss their application in practical terms to university CE initiatives. Finally, we consider the way forward in relation to the integration of these ethical imperatives into higher education CE policies and processes. Recommendations include: the inclusion of ethical frameworks in CE policies of universities; the establishment of ethics committees/forums to guide CE; and the need to heighten ethical consciousness among CE practitioners.

Keywords: *Ethical imperatives, Community Engagement, partnerships, higher education, systems theories*

Introduction and context

Discussions on ethics in higher education institutions are usually concerned with research where the rights and welfare of individual participants are considered. Ethics is also a key consideration in community engagement (CE) that may include both individuals and

communities. Kotzé et al. (2002) explain that we cannot claim to know what is good for the community, but rather we must know about them. There are broader ethical standards and expectations that must be considered where the ethical considerations are applied to the community. The social justice lens demands meaningful engagement with communities when it concerns matters that affect their lives.

CE, as one of the three pillars of higher education, is promoted as a transformation imperative for South African universities (DOE, 1997). As a South African Higher Education mission, CE was intended to strengthen democracy, citizenship, and the fostering of a commitment to contribute to the common good of citizens (Mohale, 2023). In response, various universities established entities and structures to manage and coordinate CE in its many forms, including Service-Learning (curricular-based), and volunteerism (co-curricular) programmes. Both these forms of CE incorporate reflective activities as part of their practices.

Ethics of Reflection in CE

Critical and structured reflection is an essential learning activity in CE. Reflection on experiences can take many forms, including the telling of stories on the CE experience and through relating current experiences to prior knowledge, perceptions, and historical events. It is common for lecturers and researchers to use digital storytelling (DST) in CE-related assessments and projects without a full understanding of the ethical challenges. Gachago et al. (2021) propose some general assumptions about DST and how these differ when practiced in the higher education context which are: voluntary participation/right to withdraw; support/skilled facilitators; do no harm; reciprocity; dialogue and equal engagement across generations; and representation. These assumptions should be considered when embarking on DST, particularly for CE, and especially as external university partners are involved in CE projects.

Ethics in CE partnerships

Ethical considerations are integral to the development of sustainable partnerships and relationships in CE. These partnerships can include community-based organisations, government representatives, funders, and so on. Depending on who has ownership of, for example, the most resources, the partnership can become a site where power is wielded unethically, leading to unethical practices. As advocated in this paper, CE project partners, including university staff and students, must invest in applying ethical principles promoted by policy guidelines and ethical frameworks.

Philosophical and theoretical framework for Community Engagement (CE)

Community Engagement (CE) embraces a plethora of theories and philosophies, particularly those in the social sciences. For the purposes of this discussion, systems theories and the philosophy of Ubuntu are critical to an understanding of the ethical imperatives required in CE. Many definitions for the Ubuntu philosophy exist which range from manners, social etiquette, and the principles of humanity. The Ubuntu philosophy can be traced back to the Netchar Maat, an ancient holy belief, which has seven cardinal virtues: Truth, Justice, Propriety, Harmony, Balance, Reciprocity and Order (Scheepers, 2019b; Koka, 2002; Broodryk, 2006). Applying the Ubuntu philosophy to CE allows for the realisation and awareness of ethical principles as it acts as an ethics compass for CE project and partnership activities.

The Ubuntu philosophy

Archbishop Desmond Tutu spoke of Ubuntu as the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity. In the definition below from The South African White Paper on Welfare (1997, p.12), Ubuntu is officially acknowledged as:
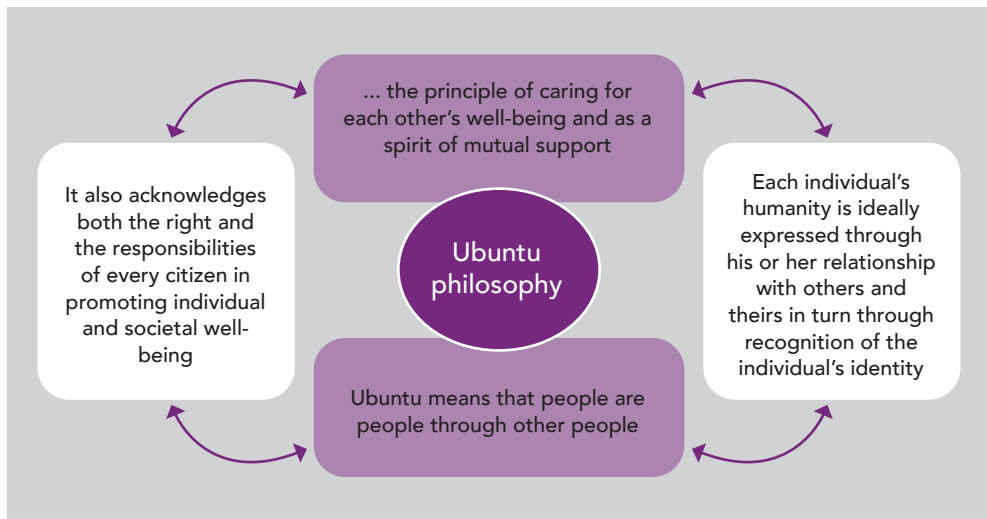
These values of Ubuntu are the cornerstone philosophy of CE as it emphasizes servant leadership, care, mutuality, humanity, and civic responsibility. It is important that CE leaders and practitioners understand that Ubuntu is a philosophy that conscientises leaders to the interconnectivity between humans and the responsibility that all humans have towards

each other. For CE this is an important consideration as it shapes engagement, partnership and relationship building, which is an important aspect of CE. The systems theories allow for a theoretical context for realisation of the Ubuntu philosophy within CE practices.

Systems thinking and its relevance for CE

Systems theory posits that humans exist in a system that is interconnected (Hendry & Seidl, 2002; Luhmann, 1995). This theory is relevant for both CE practitioners, who implement CE projects and programmes, and CE researchers, as CE calls for an interconnected system of many diverse components. The integrated CE system can bring about change as the strength lies in the combination of diverse skills, knowledge and competencies. A previous study by CE practitioners indicated that students receive guidance during experiential learning experiences in Service-Learning which leads to the strengthening of the relationships with communities and service partners through the integration of active citizenship activities and the integration of social awareness in the curriculum (Harrison et al., 2020). Drawing connections between the achievement of learning outcomes for students as per the curriculum and aligning them to the identified objectives of the CE project as per the agreement with community and government partners, are critical. This engagement requires due diligence regarding ethical imperatives and power sharing between participants and project partners.

Understanding CE partnerships

CE partnerships can create cohesive systems by aligning policies, strategies, aims and objectives of government, communities, and universities, preventing duplication and wastage. Developing communities of practice emanating from CE project partnerships can contribute to the development of creative responses to societal challenges within the context of a rapidly changing world (Scheepers, 2022; 2019a). Partnerships can be understood as an interrelated system of diverse individuals engaging within a communication system. Luhmann's (1995) "episode" is used to explain a series of communication activities in a particular social system which provides a context for engagement with partners. According to Hendry and Seidl (2003), an "episode" is a component of all social systems. In episodes, mechanisms are applied to create discursive spaces where engagement can occur and where reflective practice is encouraged. Luhmann's (1995) theory of change argues that episodes are relevant to partnerships as they create spaces for engagement and dialogue (Scheepers, 2019a). Factors which are external to the partnerships can affect or hamper the episodic processes. Strategic outcomes, as posited by Roos and Von Krogh (1996, p.55) are dependent on "who talks to whom, why they talk, what they talk about, and when these conversations take place". Factors which impact episodes include selection of sites, themes, and even time and duration of engagement. Knowledge generation within these discursive spaces are a critical consideration for CE project partners and participants.

Ethical Knowledge Generation Spaces in CE

Gibbons (2006) argues for an approach to knowledge generation where universities are not the only owners of knowledge anymore. Ways of engagement in the form of quintuple helix partnerships, comprised of society, academia, government, and industry, have shifted for universities towards more collaborative and inclusive approaches. Traditionally universities positioned themselves as the main proprietors within the knowledge space. When all knowledge types within CE partnerships is not acknowledged, unethical practices and unsustainable CE projects could prevail. Therefore, universities should recognise knowledge systems and resources that communities bring to CE projects.

Boyer's Scholarship of Engagement

Boyer's Taxonomy for the Scholarship of Engagement is comprised of (1) research, teaching, integration, and application scholarship that (2) incorporate reciprocal practices of civic engagement into the production of knowledge (Mtawa et al., 2016). This taxonomy is used to explain those practices which stretch across disciplines and across research, teaching and CE where scholars engage with communities (Barker, 2004). Due consideration should be given to the scholarly activities of CE where ethical imperatives can be incorporated. Boyer (1996) further explains four dimensions of engagement being i) scholarship, ii) integration, iii) application and most importantly for this study, iv) the scholarship of teaching. With the scholarship of teaching, there are blurred lines between traditional teacher and learner to include a learning community which is inclusive of government, community, students and university staff (Boyer, 1996; 1990). Partnerships can be understood as "knowledge based collaborations in which all partners have things to teach each other, things to learn from each other, and things they will learn together" (Holland & Gelmon 1998, p.5). CE collaborative partnerships can act as catalysts for change and locations where knowledge is produced and exchanged through interdisciplinary and intercultural engagement and dialogue.

The benefits of Socratic Dialogue for CE

Socratic Dialogue provides an additional useful framework to deepen ethical considerations related to CE. Project partners and participants may find it useful to consider the Benefits of Socratic Dialogue for CE which are presented as:

- Improvement of Environment and Communication where a safe space for engagement is created to facilitate open communication and mutual respect and where there is no judgement.
- Epistemological Improvement where personal statements regarding assumptions are clarified. Knowledge is advanced through building an understanding of the situation from your own and other's perspectives leading to improved ability to analyse, reflect and investigate, and to self-learn.

- Personal Growth is achieved as people are empowered by being listened to, communication and expressiveness is improved, and self-knowledge increases leading to an increased understanding of what motivates us and others. Humility and courage are reinforced.
- Ethical Improvement occurs when there is consciousness of responsibility over own actions and comprehending the impact of our actions.
- Relational Improvement due to consideration of others and capabilities to understand empathy for others leading to stronger co-operation to work towards a common goal.
- Organizational Improvement due to developing a common meaning which strengthens teams, organisational relationships and cooperation between people. Decision-making processes are improved, becoming democratic, more informed and symmetrical.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on: González & Fonseca, (2019); Bennett et al., (2015, p.159).

CE project partnerships often occur across disciplinary boundaries within the university and externally within communities which calls for a different approach.

The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches

Transdisciplinary approaches rely on team members sharing roles and crossing disciplinary boundaries to collaborate and integrate team members' expertise to provide more efficient service (Bruder, 1994). Knowledge sharing and exchange between partners is proposed by Pitso (2014) and further the person-centred approach by Du Plessis & Van Dyk (2013) is advanced where the voices of the community are heard. A framework for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary co-creation of the knowledge castle can guide partners who work in CE inter-and trans-disciplinary contexts (Mauser et al., 2013).

- Phase 1: Co-design of the research – or CE project/engaged research project
- Phase 2: Co-production of knowledge – CE implementation/generate and exchange knowledge
- Phase 3: Co-dissemination of results – Sharing CE project product/outputs/artefacts with everyone

Adapted by researchers from (Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, 2013 in Mauser et al., 2013).

Although this framework is aimed at research activities, the concepts can be adapted to CE engaged research practices and projects. However, there are many other important policies and guidelines that can assist practitioners with CE.

Policy milieu for Community Engagement

CE practices in higher education institutions are guided and framed by global, national, and regional policies and guidelines for example:

- The Talloires Declaration (1990).
- The African Union Agenda (2063).
- Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997). Department of Education.
- White Paper for Social Welfare (1997). Department of Welfare (former).
- National Research Foundation Engaged Research Framework (2022). Department of Science and Innovation.
- Integrated Development Plans of Municipalities.

The above list is not exhaustive, and universities shape their own vision and strategic frameworks based on their own context.

University vision, mission, and policy

Universities are also guided by their respective visions, missions, and policies. These all lay the foundation on which CE in higher education is conceptualised and executed. Universities have an ethical responsibility to respond to the challenges facing society. The Education White Paper 3 on Higher Education Transformation (1997) legislates the participation of universities in the development of society through programmes, research activities and CE projects. University policies, strategies and guidelines shape CE practices and therefore are critical to the shaping of the agenda in partnerships with external partners.

Sustainable Development Goals

Most project activities are aligned to the achievement of the seventeen United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the South African National Development Plan, with its strategic imperatives and objectives. The South African Constitution stands resolute on the attainment of human dignity, equality and the pursuit of human rights and freedom for all citizens (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Local and regional strategic imperatives and objectives like the Integrated Development Plans of local municipalities and the Batho Pele Principles bind community engagement practitioners to these imperatives.

Principles of Engaged Research

In 2022, the Department of Science and Innovation and the National Research Foundation published an Engaged Research Framework for universities as a guide to more ethical and inclusive research practices involving external university partners. The five principles guiding the framework are explained below:

Table 1: NRF Principles of Engaged Research (NRF, 2022, pp.15-16)

Principle	Definition
1. Active citizenship	Engaged Research is driven by the active citizenship of researchers and research institutions for the common good of humanity, through (co)production of socially inclusive and robust knowledge that is anticipatory, inclusive, responsive, and reflexive to the needs, challenges, and aspirations of society. Unlocking this active citizenship of researchers and research institutions requires integrated resourcing and capacity development approaches.
2. Reciprocity	Engaged Research approaches that are guided by principles of reciprocity for mutual benefit, genuine and equal standing amongst all actors, and pursuing a knowledge (co)production approach that builds capacity and capability in communities along the research value chain, towards a strengthened knowledge democracy. These principles are informed by a shared philosophy of Ubuntu, which incorporates the values of trust, honesty, empathy, and accountability
3. Trans- and Inter-disciplinary knowledge production	Engaged Research encourages trans- and interdisciplinary knowledge (co)production driven by researchers from diverse academic disciplines while also being cognisant of the need for active transformation towards inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development. This will foster a systematic, multi-perspective approach that will enhance Engaged Research towards more impactful deliberations between researchers and communities.
4. Ethics and sustainability	Engaged Research is governed by ethical standards that are applicable across academic disciplines; relevant to the social engagement processes throughout the research lifecycle; and act towards the intent of beneficence (do good) and non-malfeasance (do no harm) within the interdependent dimensions of a triple bottom line, including people, planet, and profit. Engaged research seeks to ensure the sustained longevity and transferability, across multiple contexts, of the desired beneficial impact of research, while ensuring that all participants, through a process of informed consent, have an unconditional right of withdrawal.
5. Relationship building	Engaged Research requires relationship and partnership building (initiated prior to research being conducted and is sustained downstream of knowledge production) over an often-extended period towards a long-term and future-oriented vision. Engaged Research requires capacity building throughout the full research value chain, which is retained as a basis of future engagement.

The change in the discourse of Higher Education in relation to societal partnerships heralds a transformation trajectory for universities nationally. The link between ethical philosophies, and the Vision and African aspirations for 2063 is evident in the call by the African Union. These seven aspirations indicate the discourse of sustainability, integration, respect, humanity, peace, justice, security, and resilience which is so prevalent in CE and which is gaining traction within the higher education landscape, policies, discourse, and strategies (African Union Agenda, 2063). The values and principles of ethical leadership are most relevant for CE.

Imperatives in ethical leadership

The King IV Report on Corporate Governance™ espouses values for ethical, responsible and effective leadership including ethical principles such as treating others as you would like to be treated and doing what is right even when no one is watching. The Bill of Rights enshrined in the South African Constitution affirms the values of freedom, equality and human dignity (Republic of South Africa, 1996). "These ethical values can be used in community engagement to guide decision-making, conduct, the relationship between organisations, stakeholders, and broader society" (Ferguson, 2019, p.176). All CE practitioners must be regarded as ethical leaders who consider ethical values when involved in community engagement projects. Individual ethical behaviour should additionally reflect the values and ethics of the organisation they represent. What are values in ethics? The researchers suggest that the following definition: "Values inspire, motivate and engage people to discharge obligations or duties" (Schroeder et al., 2019, p.13) is appropriate to CE. Values in ethics in the context of CE such as Transparency; Fairness; Accountability; and Competence are discussed below:

Transparency

Transparency in the way CE partners exercise roles and responsibilities. Transparency implies making visible and disclosing information, intentions and behaviour to all engaged in the CE project. Turilli & Floridi (2009, p.105) argue that "transparency is a pre-condition for either enabling or constraining other ethical principles". In CE the project leader is tasked to ensure that information is disclosed upfront in a meaningful and truthful manner so that it can be understood by all. This information should disclose any risks and/or benefits to the participants and their environment. Any concerns should be mentioned upfront and any change in the project communicated openly.

Fairness

Fairness by adopting a stakeholder-inclusive response. Schroeder et al. (2019, p.20) describe four types of fairness: "Fairness in exchange, where there is equity between the parties; Distributive fairness, sharing of scarce resources; Corrective fairness, which rights a wrong; and Retributive fairness, applying a sanction appropriate for the wrong". Fairness may be considered when selecting partners for the CE project, especially when there may be a tangible benefit to the community partner.

Accountability

Accountability by being willing to provide answers for areas of responsibility. Accountability is an important construct for enhancing ethical leadership. It involves self-accountability by introspecting on one's beliefs and feelings, and self-awareness by reflecting and evaluating your own performance and behavior and that of others (Ghanem & Castelli, 2019, p.5). A CE project leader is accountable for the actions and behaviour of the rest of the CE project

team. A self-accountable project leader that acts with integrity and honesty will earn trust and inspire the rest of the project team. An accountable project team's primary concern and focus must be on protecting the rights and the interests of the community.

Competence

Competence implies having sufficient knowledge, skills, and acting with due care and diligence when performing tasks; and acting with integrity and good faith (Adhikari et al, 2020, p.6). Ethical competence is acquired through gaining knowledge and experience (Hemberg & Hemberg, 2020, p.1256). CE projects in higher education rely on academic staff to plan, guide and lead CE projects with students. Academic staff are often discipline-specific subject experts (for example, Engineering) and may lack the broader leadership competencies required for CE. The types of leadership competencies needed to manage and oversee CE projects may include community collaboration, relationship and network development, project management and organisational awareness. CE projects require a supportive organizational environment that can coordinate and sanction projects within the higher education institution to ensure that the potential competency leadership gaps are filled before the engagement.

Sustainable development is a key outcome of ethical leadership when engaging in community engagement. Sustainable development is recognizing that higher education institutions are an integral part of the societal landscape. There needs to be corporate social responsibility and stakeholder inclusivity to ensure that the present needs are met without compromising the ability to meet future community engagement project's needs. An integrated approach considers society, the economy, and the environment as equal to create sustainable value.

Shared value proposition

Knowledge creation is not the sole purview of academics and learners. "The global network has produced knowledge in different ways by different people and students should respond ethically to the knowledge of others before formulating their own position" (Osman and Petersen, 2013, p.3). The value proposition in Table 2 denotes how CE extends from the primary stakeholders, that being the student, the lecturer and the community, to the higher education institution.

The CE experience for the student shifts the focus away from books and lecturers as the source of knowledge, to learn through and from the shared life experiences of less formally educated, often older members of the community. This privileged transformative learning experience must be guided by ethical principles. The learning institution benefits by having graduates that are aware of their ethical obligations to society. There is a moral and ethical duty for the lecturer to develop learners beyond the narrow content driven disciplinary outcomes. CE provides the opportunity for learners to develop a sense of more ethical citizenship by responding to the daily issues facing many communities (poverty,

unemployment, crime, etc.) (Osman and Petersen, 2013, p.12). The higher education institution will benefit from supporting staff engaged in CE.

CE projects become meaningful and sustainable when communities are given co-ownership and can identify with the project goals. "This requires the learners and lecturers to immerse themselves in the community and accept that there will be reciprocal learning" (Du Plessis & Van Dyk, 2013, p.62). The higher education institution benefits from becoming a resource to the community.

Table 2: Shared Value Proposition. Source: Authors' construction

Stakeholders	Value for Stakeholders	Value for Higher Education Institution
Students	Meaningful life experiences	Enhance the learning opportunities outside the walls of the classroom
Lecturers	Satisfaction of attaining educational goals	Engaged, motivated university employees
Communities	Take ownership and derive meaningful benefit from the engagement	Reputation; brand value; trust; access to communities

Ethics Application to CE Projects

A useful framework to apply when thinking through ethical considerations at a level of planning and executing community engagement projects, is that of Beauchamp and Childress's "four principles" – non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, and autonomy (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). Although these principles were developed in the context of medical bioethics, their value as guiding ethical principles has been recognised more broadly in a variety of concepts. Gillon (2003, p. 308) described the generality of the application of these principles as follows:

> "[T]he four principles should also be thought of as the four moral nucleotides that constitute moral DNA – capable, alone or in combination, of explaining and justifying all the substantive and universalisable moral norms of health care ethics and I suspect of ethics generally!"

Non-Maleficence

Non-maleficence refers to a moral obligation "not to inflict harm on others," and is strongly associated with the latin maxim "primum non nocere" – first, do no harm (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001, p. 113). Where one's actions create risk towards others, this moral obligation finds expression in the creation of a legal duty of care. Legal culpability may arise where one's actions caused harm, and one failed to foresee that harm and/or failed to take adequate steps to prevent it, in circumstances where a reasonable person would

have done so. When planning and implementing community engagement initiatives, effective risk management is therefore both an ethical and a legal imperative. This entails a deliberative process of: (a) anticipating and assessing risks, (b) planning to avoid such risks, and (c) actively mitigating residual risks that cannot be entirely avoided or prevented.

Ideally, these steps should be documented in a risk mitigation plan for each project, which can be referred to and supplemented, as necessary. A risk mitigation plan should ideally include a matrix in terms of which individual risks are classified and scored based on (a) the likelihood of the harm taking place, and (b) the probable severity of the harm in the event of it occurring. The scoring, based on a combination of both criteria, enables the prioritisation of risks for purposes of attention and resource allocation. Such a plan provides both an important guide to activities, as well as a key piece of evidence of due care having been taken as a defence against potential liability in the unfortunate event of the occurrence of harm. The nature of potential harm could be physical, psychological, social, economic, or environmental. In thinking through potential risks, it is important that risks are considered not only to individuals, but also to communities, institutions, the public and the environment.

Beneficence

The ethical principle of beneficence demands that not only are we ethically required to avoid causing harm to others, but we must also positively act for the benefit of others or, worded differently, to "help others further their important and legitimate interests" (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001, p. 166). To act with beneficence, we must work towards achieving the highest possible benefit to others, after weighing up the costs, harms, and benefits of our actions.

This principle requires that the conceptualisation and implementation of community engagement initiatives must be done with an awareness of the need to ensure that all stakeholders affected thereby enjoy the highest possible benefit from it. To put this into action, planning a community engagement initiative should involve mapping participating and affected stakeholders and endeavouring to optimise the net benefit/value-add to each stakeholder. Win-win relationships should be sought, and without a clear net benefit to a stakeholder, the terms should be reconsidered and potentially restructured.

The principle of beneficence also requires that we endeavour to additionally add value to the economy, the environment, and society in general. These broader benefits, as well as the benefits to specific stakeholders, should be sustainable as far as possible to optimise value-add into the future.

Justice

The concept of justice encapsulates both principles of fairness and "distributive justice," which refers to "fair, equitable and appropriate distribution determined by justified norms that structure the terms of social cooperation" (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001, p. 226). In

the context of community engagement, the principle of justice accordingly dictates that we act with fairness in dealing with all stakeholders.

It also demands that the extensive resources invested by communities in such initiatives (including local knowledge, skills, time, facilities, and networks) are recognised and acknowledged, and that there is a commensurate investment of resources from the higher education institutions engaged in such initiatives. Failure to do so is unjust, and can result in exploitation, abuse, resentment, and a breakdown of trust between institutions and communities. This point needs to be impressed on all involved in the CE process at universities, including management, staff and students.

Autonomy

The last of the four principles is that of autonomy. Beauchamp and Childress (2001) state that autonomy presupposes existing conditions of liberty (independence from controlling forces) and agency (capacity for intentional action). Respect for autonomy requires not only a respectful attitude, but respectful action too. This entails acknowledging the decision-making rights of others and, in some cases, acting positively to enable others to act autonomously by creating conditions conducive to the exercise of autonomous choice and developing agency among others. In the context of CE, the principle of autonomy accordingly demands that we –

- respect the intrinsic worth of every stakeholder and participant in the initiative.
- recognise the power imbalances that exist, and that we are intentional about addressing them; and
- create spaces and apply tools which promote agency, rather than entrenching institutional power.

As an example of application of this principle, standardised "partnership agreements" developed by institutions for community organisations to sign to formalise partnerships tend to negate the agency and autonomy of community partners. We propose that partnership arrangements start with a blank page and that agreements are allowed to emerge from discussion and joint planning processes – a process we refer to as "radical conversational consensus."

The process is conversational, in the sense that agreement emerges from conversation between the partners. It is radical, both in the sense that it may be a significant departure from current practice, but also because of its transformational power to build agency, mutual respect, and trust.

The transformational power of reaching consensus through conversation is illustrated by the experimental research of Sievers et al (2020). They found that the neural activity of members of groups became more aligned after conversation, with distinctive patterns of alignment reflecting the unique discussion of the group. The power of conversation to

achieve consensus and alignment between stakeholders in CE processes should therefore not be underestimated.

Recommendations and conclusion

The Higher Education sector should be cognisant of ethical challenges within the context of CE projects, programmes and partnerships. Relevant approaches in pursuit of ethical CE should be considered as critical for universities. The recommendations and concluding discussion are based on the above review of the various sections highlighted in this article and the experiences of the authors in the CE field. The recommendations below can contribute to enhancing the ethical stances and practices of future CE within universities:

- Universities should continue to look at strengthening and building on existing frameworks and guidelines to foster more ethical approaches to engagement like the new National Research Foundation (NRF) Engaged Research Framework.
- There is a need for universities to revisit and transform policies that are self-serving and that do not allow spaces for negotiation and discourse for all project participants.
- Policy gaps should be identified and addressed by universities to ensure that ethical principles in CE practices are maintained.
- CE Partners should be involved in CE policy development, frameworks and guidelines.
- Universities should heed the call for consciousness to "do no harm" – not just for the university, but also for all project participants by applying Beauchamp and Childress's "four principles" which are non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, and autonomy (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001).
- CE practitioners and researchers should explore frameworks like: Transdisciplinary and integrated approaches which support ethical considerations and more equitable engagement between the university and its partners.
- An option for universities would be to establish CE Ethics committees to process CE project applications for alignment with ethical standards. This committee could also advise and support CE applicants and should include external university partners like government and communities.

The building of ethical partnerships between universities and their partners will strengthen the sustainability of the project and the partnership. One approach could be posing pertinent questions regarding ethical approaches and practices for CE such as:

- How can we institutionalise ethical approaches for CE?
- How can we integrate ethical CE principles and approaches into the curriculum?
- Which policies are required at the university to ensure ethical compliance?

Ethical values and leadership principles as espoused in the King IV Report on Corporate Governance™ are clearly relevant for CE practitioners, programme and project leaders. Any unique ethical dilemma that arises during a project for which there are no guidelines will require the CE project team to consult and seek professional advice if time and circumstances allow. An immediate response to an ethical dilemma that arises during a CE project will require the project team to be guided by the "four principles" to make the best decision. The CE team can:

- consider practical responses to ethical dilemmas which may arise during the planning, implementation and evaluation of a CE project.
- agree with partners on CE ethical guidelines prior to the project which can help to provide immediate answers to ethical dilemmas that may arise in the field during the implementation of the CE project.

Applying ethical principles in CE as the authors propose can be challenging for the university and for its partners. Building ethical partnerships requires time, additional competencies within CE project teams, consciousness of power dynamics and a commitment to the transformation of systems and policies that are solely biased towards the interests of the university. Meaningful and ethical engagement calls for an understanding and awareness of the ethical imperatives in CE as argued by this article. Striving towards the building of sustainable relationships within CE quintuple helix teams, which are guided by sound ethical principles, can lead to true and authentic engagement between universities and their societal partners.

In conclusion, the consideration of ethical imperatives is strongly advocated together with the associated theoretical and philosophical underpinnings for CE partnerships and relationships so that all participants are recognised and included in decision-making, conceptualisation, implementation, and reflection of CE initiatives. This requires a conscious effort by universities to create policies and practices which speak to ethical imperatives.

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