**Using the Potter Box to Understand Organizational Decision-Making**

During the tumult of the 1960s, Harvard University theology doctoral student Ralph Potter observed the growing concerns over the build-up of nuclear weapons and saw an ethical quagmire. His exploration of the ethics of nuclear weaponry in his 1965 dissertation led to the formation of what is now called the Potter Box. Just as Potter used this rubric to reach

conclusions about nuclear weapons policy, we, too, can follow these steps to determine

ethical courses of action in organizational behavior.

Christians, Fackler, Rotzoll, & McKee (2001) provide an effective introduction to the

four dimensions of the Potter Box – definition, values, principles, loyalties – and

construct action steps. The authors are careful to caution that the steps – usually applied

in a systematic order – are a linked system, a circle, or an organic whole and not a

random set of isolated questions. The action steps include: Providing an empirical

definition, identifying values, appealing to ethical principles, choosing loyalties, making

a particular judgment or policy, and finally, providing feedback.

In this presentation, I will show how the Potter Box was used for a semester-long project in a business class to examine the 2017 problems facing Uber. The value of the Potter Box in examining what happened to Uber is 1) to provide insight into the role ethics plays in business decisions, but even more to 2) examine the role the corporate culture plays in how businesses balance their values and their loyalties to their various stakeholders. Students concluded at the end of the semester that Uber’s culture worked while it was a start-up, but as it became a more mature company, its culture was increasingly problematic and needed to change. The role of this model and project for the teaching of organizational behavior is discussed.