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Public Service Ethics in a Virtual Environment

Presented to Los Angeles County Management Council
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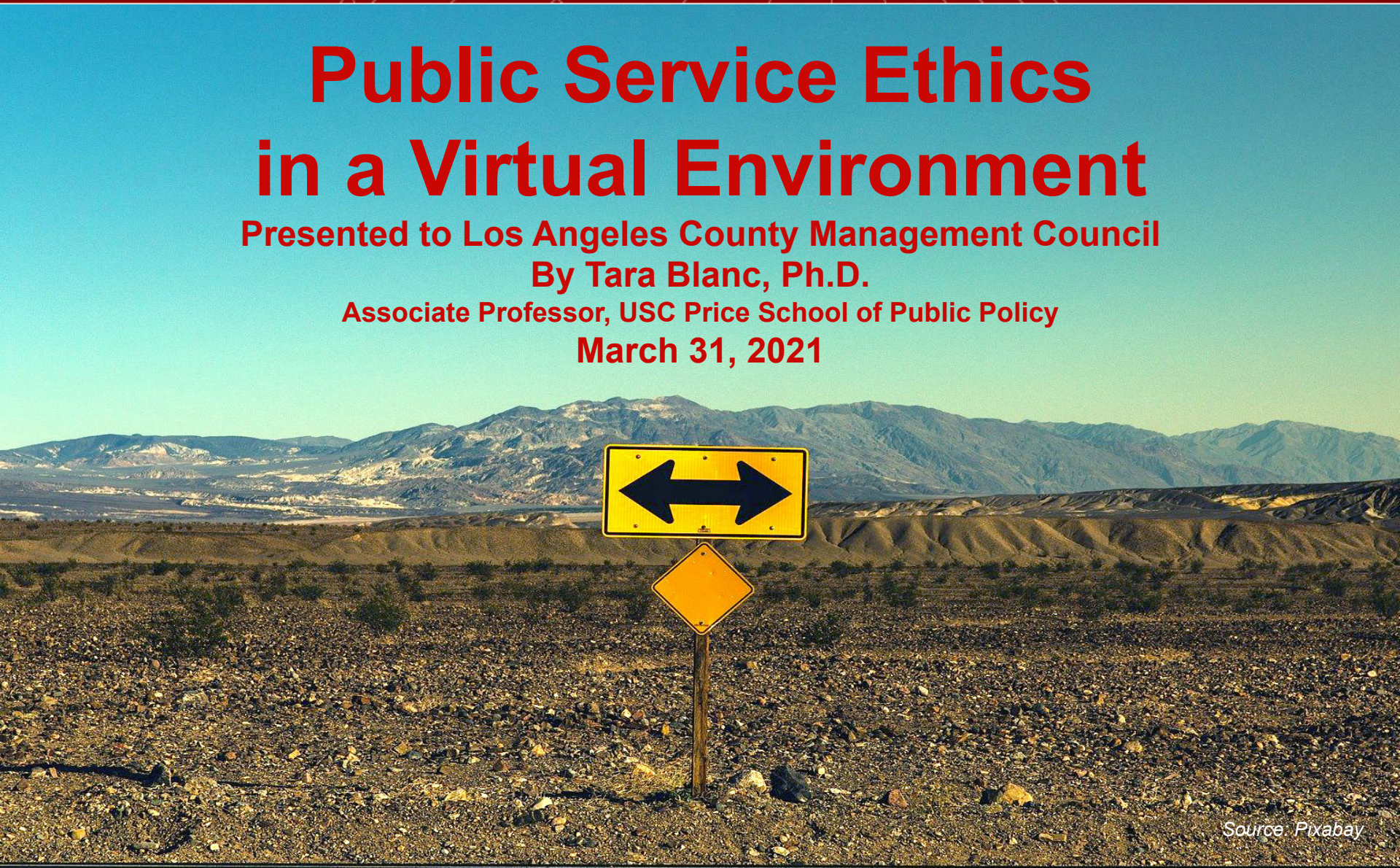

Source: Pixabay

Introduction

- Carrying out the public's work is fraught with everyday ethical dilemmas
- The pandemic has driven a change in how we conduct the public's business
- These changes have raised a whole new set of ethical dilemmas, particularly in terms of moving to a virtual environment

Ethics in a virtual environment

- A matter of manners
- How open are meetings?
- Who gets access?
- The pros and cons of technology
- How transparent are we?

Source: Pixabay

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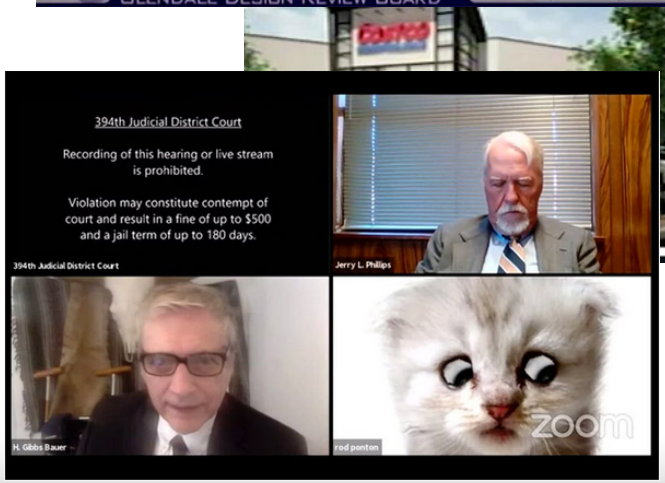
A matter of manners

- **Would you do that in an in-person meeting?**
- **Does the lack of proximity change behavior?**
- **Who's in control?**

Source: LA Times/ MyGlendale via YouTube



Source: New York Times

Source: CNN

How open are meetings?

- Who gets to participate?
- Who has the mute button?
- How does an open meeting law apply?
- Potential for abuse of power?

Source: Pixabay

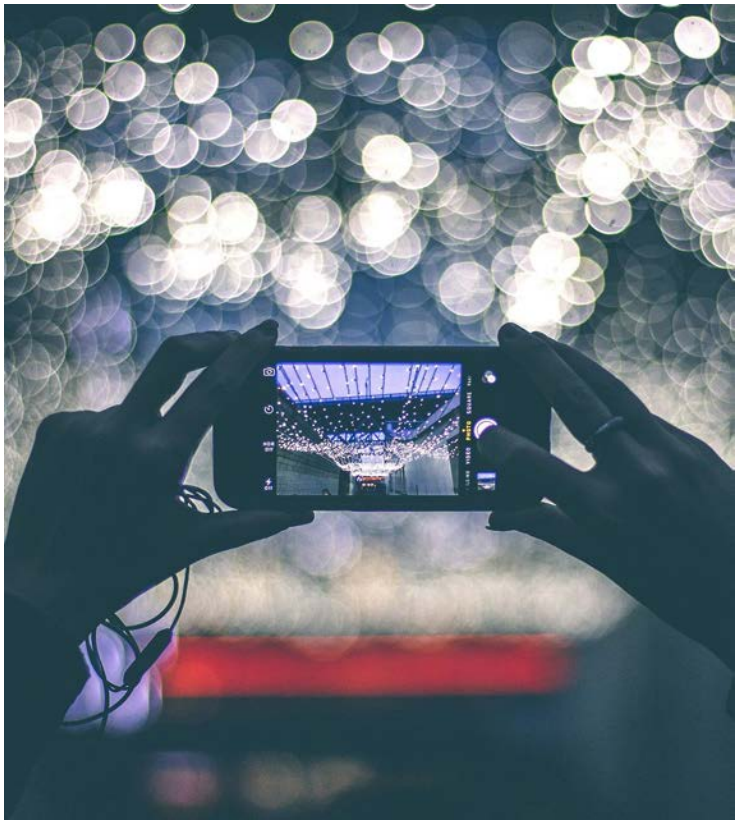
Who gets access?

- Who does – and does not – have a computer or telephone?
- What about people with sight or hearing issues?

Source: Pixabay

The pros and cons of technology

- Limits on capacity
- Accommodating those with disabilities
- Security ("Zoombombing")
- Life of recordings
- Does recording impact behavior?



Source: Pixabay

How transparent are we?

Source: Pixabay

- What do we mean?
- More or less scrutiny?
- More or less information?
- Impact on trust

The ethical perspective

- **Many approaches to addressing the unique issues of online meetings**
- **Figuring out the "right thing to do"**

Source: Pixabay

What is "ethics?"

- Ethics refers to rules of personal conduct of a person or members of a profession.
- There are three aspects to ethics:
  - Discerning right from wrong
  - Committing to do what is right
  - Doing what is right

Source: Pixabay

What is "public service ethics?"

- What do we mean?
- Why is it important?
- Whose responsibility is it?
- The conundrum of "administrative ethics"

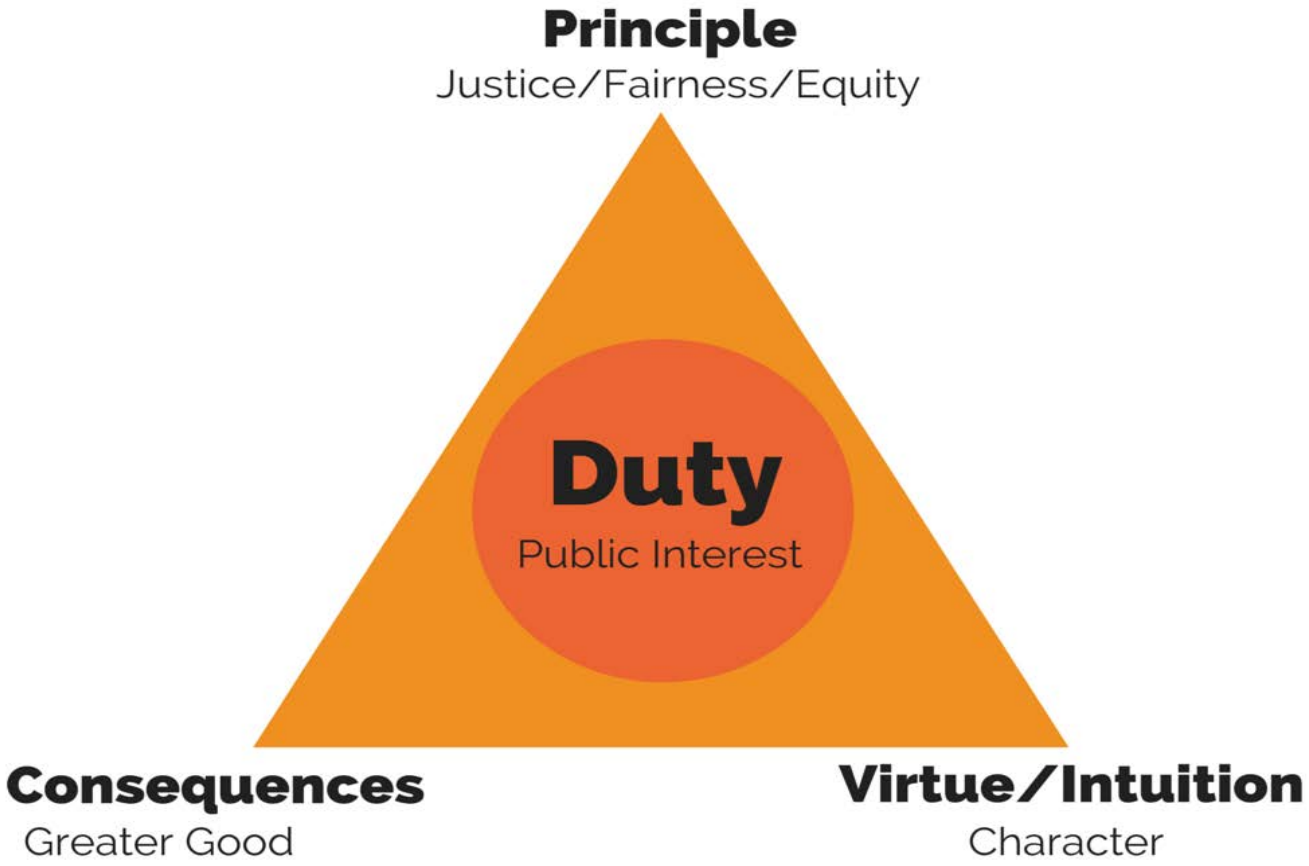
Source: Pixabay

How do we think about ethics?

- Common sense
- Philosophical perspectives
  - Deontological view (Kant)
  - Teleological view (Mill)

Source: Pixabay

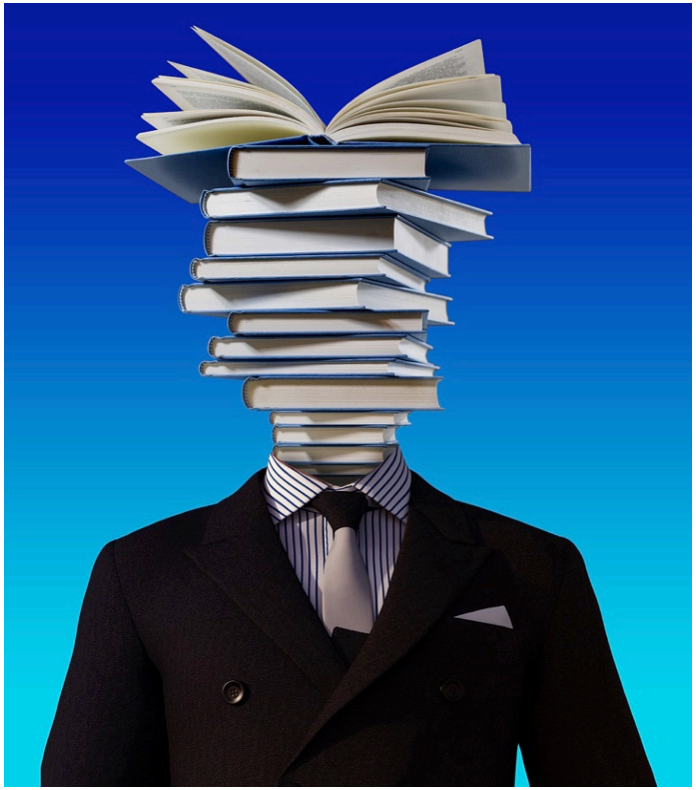
The Ethics Triangle



Source: The Ethics Primer/J. Svara

Applying theory to practice

- **How do we apply what we know in the abstract to the everyday ethical dilemmas we face in the "real-world" online environment?**



Source: Pixabay

Minding our manners

- Moderating virtual behavior
- Getting past the "distance"
- Leading by example

Source: Pixabay

Getting everyone their 'say'

- Ensuring voices are heard
- Determining limits
- Meeting law changes in a pandemic
- The responsibilities of power

Source: Zoom

Ensuring access

- **Breaking barriers to participation**
- **The agency's role and responsibility**

Source: Unsplash

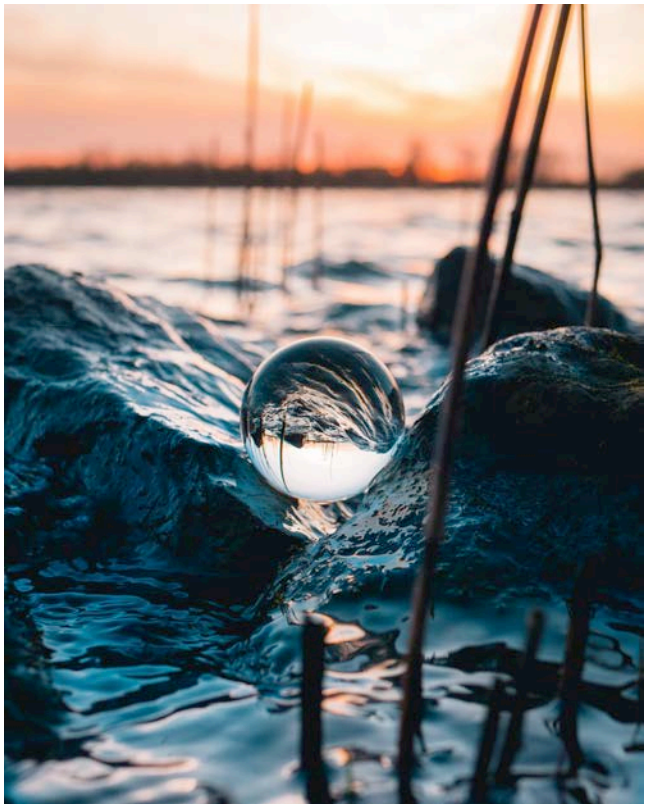
Tackling the tech issue

- Enough ‘seats’ in the meeting
- The tech side of access
- Ensuring safety
- The recording effect

Source: ThisisEngineering RAEng on Unsplash

Maintaining transparency

- Legal and beyond
- The trade-offs
- A matter of trust



Source: Tim Huyghe on Unsplash

The bottom line

- **Practices may change but the duty to serve the public interest remains**
- **Keeping the public interest at the center of all our decisions helps us find our way**

Source: Henning Witzel on Unsplash

Questions and comments?

Thank you!

Many thanks to the Los Angeles County Management Council for the invitation to talk with you, and to all of you for participating today.