
ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Most people don't have a problem choosing between doing something that is right and something that is wrong. The difficulty lies when you are faced with circumstances when laws, principles and values conflict such as:

- **Moral uncertainty – not knowing how to act**
- **Choices between two or more conflicting right courses of action (truth vs loyalty or raising social standards vs profitability)**
- **Choices between courses of action that all have adverse and often unintentional effects**

An ethical decision making framework will to help you make a decision you can be comfortable with and can defend even when faced with a situation where there is no right answer.

Define the problem

- Get the facts – history, background and details of the case. What facts are unknown?
- Don't jump to conclusions
- Who has a stake in the outcome? Do some stakeholders have special needs that will affect the outcome? Are there stakeholders to whom you have particular obligations? Have you consulted the stakeholders?
- Have you defined the problem accurately? How would you define the problem if you were in the other side of the fence?
- What are the ethical issues and principles at stake?

Who are the stakeholders?

- Who are the primary stakeholders who will be directly affected?
- Who will be indirectly impacted by the situation?
- Identify what the stakeholders value and what their preferred outcomes are
- Why are they stakeholders? Try looking at things from their perspective

Identify alternative solutions

- Identify at least three options (try to avoid a dilemma of either/or)
 - Think about the problem from others' perspectives
 - Are there colleagues you can approach for a different perspective?
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Evaluate the alternatives

- Who could be positively or negatively impacted because of your decision?
- What are the risks – the probability that the consequences will happen?
- What are the limitations to your scope for decision making? eg legal, corporate rules, cost constraints
- Will your position be valid over a period of time?
- Could you disclose your decision without fear?
- Which option would produce the most good and the least harm?
- If everyone's needs cannot be met, will the outcome ensure all parties are treated with dignity?
- Which option is fairest to the parties involved?

Some tests to help your thinking:

Harm – which option does the least harm?

Publicity – would I want my choice to be published in the press or social media?

Defensibility – could I defend this decision to my employer?

Reversibility – would I still think this was the best option if I was affected by it?

Virtue – what would I become if I chose this option most of the time?

Professionalism – what would the CIH think of this choice?

Colleagues – did I test this with my colleagues and what did they say?

Organisation – would my employer approve of this choice?

Make a decision

- Test your decision against likely outcomes
- What are the practical constraints?
- What is the worst case scenario?
- What actions can you take to ensure your preferred option will deliver the best results?

Evaluate the decision

- Does this decision uphold the ethical principles important to the circumstances?
- Is it fair?
- What is your intention in making the decision?
- How did your intention compare with the likely results?
- How can you ensure you have more support in the future?

Excuses:

- I know it's wrong but my line manager does it
- I'm protecting the business
- It's legal so it must be right
- Everyone is doing it
- I'm not personally gaining from it so it can't be wrong
- I can still be objective
- It's just part of the job
- It doesn't hurt anyone
- I'm just fighting fire with fire
- It's for a good cause